



Glover, Darryl &lt;darryl.glover@dcr.virginia.gov&gt;

## Follow up email regarding the DCR-VSU-SFOP Outreach Project Meeting on April 5th, 2021

1 message

dei.vacde@vaswcd.org &lt;dei.vacde@vaswcd.org&gt;

Thu, Apr 8, 2021 at 12:08 PM

To: darryl.glover@dcr.virginia.gov, wcrutchfield@vsu.edu

Cc: dei.vacde@vaswcd.org

April 8, 2021

Dear Mr. Glover and Mr. Crutchfield

We wish to express our excitement and commitment to the Watershed Implementation Plan III (WIP) Item 14 and the collaboration between the Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation - Soil & Water Conservation Division (DCR-SWC) and the Virginia State University Small Farm Outreach Program (VSU SFOP). Thank you for inviting us to the introductory meeting on April 5th and allowing us to connect names, faces, and roles. As the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee of the Virginia Conservation District Employees Association (VACDE), we see this as a vital project for the furtherance of conservation in the Commonwealth and more importantly, ensuring that ALL producers are aware of and have access to the support they need to be successful, including technical assistance and cost share where appropriate.

Since the Districts are responsible for implementing the Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practices (BMP) Cost Share Program and work directly with landowners and producers, we look forward to connecting with the producers served by VSU-SFOP. To further the conversation on how the VACDE DEI Committee can help in this project, we would like to take a moment to introduce ourselves, our mission, and our goals, and what we can bring to the table as we seek equity and inclusion for ALL of Virginia's producers.

What is the VACDE DEI Committee?

- The VACDE DEI committee was created in Feb. 2020 stemming from conversations among SWCD employees about the need to increase employee understanding of diversity and inclusion issues within SWCD's and in the implementation of conservation and educational programming offered to the communities we serve.

- The VACDE DEI Committee is made up of Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Education Staff, Technical Staff, a District Manager, and VASWCD Staff. Ten active participants have been gathering at least monthly for over a year, representing SWCD Areas I, II, III, V, VI.

Over the past year, the VACDE DEI Committee has:

- Organized and held a DEI training in September 2020 for Soil & Water Conservation District Staff, Directors, and Partners as a part of a virtual Training Blitz (60+ participants, 2 Continuing Education Units (CEU's) offered, evaluation survey conducted and feedback integrated into current initiatives)

- Created a Solidarity Statement on behalf of the VACDE Board - see attachment
- Created a VACDE DEI Committee Mission Statement - see attachment
- Provided a safe space for personal development among DEI Committee members to grow and better serve their communities, including continuous in-depth discussions about current events and a group reading of "White Fragility" by Robin DiAngelo, to be expanded with other resources.

Current VACDE DEI Committee Goals:

- Offer a Train-the-Trainer workshop for VACDE DEI Committee Members to build capacity for engaging in and facilitating conversations about DEI topics
- Email a bi-monthly newsletter with DEI related resources to SWCD employees, directors, and partners

Framework for DEI Trainings:

- Ensure scheduled and future DEI trainings are accessible to all SWCD staff and directors by providing them online or making sure they do not overlap with other trainings
- Collaborate with partners to provide the opportunity for CEU credits to be earned through participation in DEI trainings

One of our DEI Committee Members (a SWCD technical staff) attended a VSU-SFOP field program held on March 24th in Warfield, VA. Even though the "Laying Plastic and Using a Seed Planter" event hosted by Browntown Farms was

cancelled due to adverse weather conditions, the SWCD staff participated in the producer's equipment demonstration and also observed opportunities on his farm for conservation practices that could enhance his operation. This experience highlighted the need for bringing together SWCD technical staff with SFOP Extension Agents who have long-standing working relationships with small-scale, limited-resource, socially-disadvantaged, and veteran producers, in order to promote successful implementation of conservation practices.

VACDE DEI Committee commits to:

- Participate in planned trainings
  - VACDE DEI Committee Members to attend the meeting at Catawba Sustainability Center (we kindly request to receive logistical details when available)
  - VACDE DEI Committee Members to attend the May 11, 2021 meeting at VSU- Randolph Farm (we kindly request to receive logistical details when available)
- Meet with the SFOP Agent Counterpart to a DEI Committee Member's SWCD
- Encourage SWCD colleagues to attend events sponsored by this pilot project
- To the best of our capacity in our roles as employees, serve as ambassadors for this initiative within the SWCD's and communities we serve
- We suggest the creation of a committee that meets quarterly to work on program goals and inter-agency communication, representing members from:
  - DCR
  - VSU
  - SFOP
  - VACDE DEI Committee
  - VASWCD Board

The VACDE DEI Committee sees an opportunity to strengthen the relationships between DCR , VSU-SFOP, and SWCD to work towards making the DCR - Small Farm Outreach Program a success. During the meeting on April 5th, there was discussion about how farmers do not know about Soil & Water Conservation Districts. This is something that we as VACDE DEI Members would like to help change. Our goal is to encourage and facilitate strengthening relationships among SWCD Staff and SFOP Extension Agents to support this program.

We hear you. We are here to support you. What can we do?




We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Grace Harwin, District Coordinator, Mountain Castles SWCD  
Mariya Hudick, Education Coordinator, Tri-County/City SWCD  
Allen Jackson, Conservation Assistant, Blue Ridge SWCD  
Bonnie Mahl, Education & Training Coordinator, VASWCD  
Kathleen Sullivan, District Manager, Virginia Dare SWCD  
Kendall Tyree, Executive Director, VASWCD  
Kathleen Watson, Education/Outreach Specialist, Northern Neck SWCD  
Chris Van Vlack, Urban/Ag Conservationist, Loudoun SWCD  
Wilfred Woode, Sr. Conservation Specialist/ CBPA WQ Specialist, Northern Virginia SWCD  
Tabea Zimmermann, Conservation Specialist I, Colonial SWCD

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### 3 attachments

-  **DEI Committee Timeline 2020-April 2021.pdf**  
116K
-  **VACDE DEI Committee Mission Statement.pdf**  
50K
-  **VACDE Statement of Solidarity 04 Aug 2020.pdf**  
65K