Virginia Cooperative Extension

September 2022

VCE and VAES are experiencing several leadership transitions, as follows:

- Dr. Michael Gutter, Associate Dean for Extension & State Program Leader for 4-H Youth Development, Families and Communities for the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences at the University of Florida has been named as the next Associate Dean and Director of Virginia Cooperative Extension. Dr. Gutter’s appointment begins on November 1, 2022.

- Dr. Robert N. Corley, III, Associate Vice Provost for Academic Affairs at Virginia State University, is serving as the Interim Dean of the VSU College of Agriculture following the retirement of Dr. M. Ray McKinnie.

- Dr. Brian Bond has been named as the incoming Associate Dean for Extension, Outreach, and Engagement in the Virginia Tech College of Natural Resources and Environment. Dr. Bond has served as a professor and extension specialist in the area of wood products in the Department of Sustainable Biomaterials since 2002. He started his academic career as an extension specialist in forest products at the University of Tennessee, Department of Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries in 1998. Dr. Bond’s extension, research and teaching program focuses on improving the sustainable use and manufacturing of wood products. He has over 20 years of experience in wood drying, sawmill performance, and the wood product performance (flooring, furniture, etc.). During his career, Dr. Bond developed a strong interest in leadership and teaching students about leadership roles in natural resources. In addition to his roles as Associate Dean, Professor, and Extension specialist Dr. Bond is Director of the College of Natural Resources and Environment Leadership Institute.

- Dr. Saied Mostaghimi, H.E. and Elizabeth F. Alphin Professor and Director of the Virginia Agricultural Experiment Station (VAES), has announced his plans to retire in April 2023 following 38 years of service to the Virginia Tech College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and Virginia Ag Experiment Station. Together, Virginia Cooperative Extension and VAES are known budgetarily as Agency 229.

Selected programmatic highlights:

- Virginia Cooperative Extension has been charged under HB894 Section 3 with developing a map or repository of prime farmland in consultation with relevant and necessary state agencies to assist localities with solar project siting considerations. An initial report on the development of the project is due to the Governor and General Assembly by December 1, 2022. Thus far four meetings of the HB894 Section 3 workgroup (1) and subcommittee (3) have been held and the team is making very good progress.
Turf and landscape workshops have been held this year providing technical plan writing assistance to turf and landscape nutrient management plan writers in the private and public sectors. Attendance included many nutrient management planners in Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and private planners. Topics in these workshops included: soil testing, updates from VT Soils Lab notes, matching N-P-K needs with guidelines in Virginia Nutrient Management Standards and Criteria, required elements and expectations of a NMP, and sports field and golf course plan writing. Speakers in these workshops included faculty from Virginia Tech, Virginia Cooperative Extension, private sector consultants, and the Department of Conservation and Recreation. Continued diverse collaboration in future turf and landscape programming is expected in trying to obtain mutual goals of the partner agencies and stakeholders. Virginia Tech and Virginia Cooperative Extension faculty also contribute to nutrient management programming short courses in which the session’s cover soil science, soil fertility, organic nutrient sources, and turf and landscape production. Helping students without previous training in understanding how nutrients react and interact when applied to the soil and also prepare students for the core component of the turf and landscape certification exam. Another collaborative program is Healthy Virginia Lawns in which Master Gardener Volunteers in individual Cooperative Extension programs directly help guide the individual home owner into responsible nutrient management by producing nutrient management plans and educational opportunities.

Congratulations to Saunders Brothers, Inc. for earning the 2022 Swisher/Sunbelt Southeastern Farmer of the Year State Winner from Virginia. Saunders Brothers, Inc. will now compete for the title of “Regional Winner” which is awarded annually at the Sunbelt Ag Expo in Moultrie, GA. (The Swisher/Sunbelt Farmer of the Year Program nomination and judging processes are administered through VCE at the state level).

2022 was the 100th anniversary of State 4-H Congress. Virginia 4-H State Congress is the premier, statewide annual 4-H event for outstanding 4-H teens and adult volunteer leaders. Its mission is to provide competitive and non-competitive educational experiences to Virginia teens and the adults who work with them, helping them to develop life skills and leadership abilities to become contributing citizens in their communities. This was also the 96th anniversary of the Virginia FFA State Convention. FFA makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education. Both the 4-H and FFA programs are administered through Virginia Cooperative Extension.

Faculty member profile: Dr. Benham works with state and federal agencies and citizens to develop watershed management plans that, when implemented, reduce the level of pollution in surface waters. He also works with homeowners reliant on private water supplies (wells, springs, and cisterns) to empower them to better care for and maintain their private water supply systems to improve the quality of their drinking water while protecting groundwater quality, a shared resource.