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For Immediate Release
**Feasibility Study for a shared-use Agricultural Enterprise Center
in the Shenandoah Valley Begins**

The Agricultural Enterprise Center Feasibility Study will determine if a certified, commercial, shared-use facility in the central Shenandoah Valley is possible, practical and viable. If brought to fruition, this multi-use facility is expected to support the region's many small to mid-size agricultural businesses and entrepreneurs by expanding market reach and reducing some of the risk and burden of facility building by any one operation.

The study region includes the seven counties of Augusta, Bath, Highland, Page, Rockbridge, Rockingham and Shenandoah and the five cities of Buena Vista, Harrisonburg, Lexington, Staunton and Waynesboro and has over one million acres of farm land, and 6,312 farms.

Led by the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission (CSPDC), the study will identify what components will be the most successful and beneficial to local farmers, explore physical locations for a facility, and structure a comprehensive business plan to be used for future implementation. Potential uses include a commercial kitchen, food lab/testing kitchen, flash freeze facility, training space for smart-ag classes and seminars, packaging and distribution operations, and business planning resources. An eight-member Study Team comprised of potential Ag. Center users and representatives of businesses and organizations who support local food production will provide vital assistance to the CSPDC and consultant throughout the duration of the study.

“As the leading agricultural County in the state, Rockingham supports studying the feasibility of an agricultural enterprise center that serves small to medium sized farmers,” says Rockingham County Assistant Administrator and Ag. Center Study Team member, Casey Armstrong.

“Agriculture is the Valley’s number one export and if this is a need for farmers in our County then we support addressing those needs.”

Out of fourteen highly qualified applicants representing firms from across the country, New Venture Advisors (NVA), an agriculturally focused firm based out of Chicago, Illinois was selected to conduct the study. NVA specializes in strategy consulting for food system planning and infrastructure development and is expected to complete the study by May 2021.

“A shared-use facility such as the Agricultural Enterprise Center would remove some tremendous expenses and challenges met by new and growing food businesses in the Shenandoah Valley. It also has the potential to encourage growth in value-added products and bridge the distribution gap between source and finished goods,” says Staunton-based chef and Lundch restaurant owner, Mike Lund.

The Agricultural Enterprise Center Feasibility Study is funded through the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP) grant and a GO Virginia Enhanced Capacity Building grant. Out of 215 applications to LFPP, this project was one of 42 that was awarded funds; it was the only project funded in Virginia

The CSPDC will be seeking input from farmers, stakeholders, buyers and food aggregators for the Agricultural Enterprise Center Feasibility Study. The online survey will be available mid-September through mid-October and will be collecting information on current market trends, facility needs, distribution concerns and more. Please go to CSPDC’s [project website \(https://www.cspdc.org/aecfs/\)](https://www.cspdc.org/aecfs/) for more information and to participate in the survey.