

WEST VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Kent A. Leonhardt, Commissioner • Joseph L. Hatton, Deputy Commissioner



2019 Legislative Agenda

Capital Investment Fund:

The WVDA moved to its current home the Gus R. Douglas Agricultural Center at Guthrie, in the 1980s. To keep up with current innovations, maintain the Department's accreditation, and protect the West Virginia food supply, Commissioner Leonhardt is asking the Legislature to create a new fund to be used to update and maintain the Guthrie laboratories.

Ag General Counsel Bill:

For the WVDA to better serve the people of West Virginia, the Commissioner of Agriculture must have the flexibility to employ necessary personnel to better assist agriculture industries and move the Department forward. This bill will clarify the authority of the Commissioner to hire necessary personnel, including a general counsel, to perform needed duties of the Department. The Commissioner remains the only executive officer without the authority to retain his own general counsel.

Other Priorities:

- Transfer of Grade A Milk – the Joint Task Force on Milk Rules and Regulations will propose legislation to transfer full authority to regulate milk to the West Virginia Department of Agriculture. Currently, authority is split between Grade A (DHHR) and Grade B (WVDA).
- Auctioneer Code Changes – West Virginia Code has not been updated to reflect changes that have arisen within the auctioneering profession, most notably online auctions.
- Purchasing Exemption/Surplus Property for Farm Account and Rural Rehab – WVDA will be seeking exemptions from Surplus Property solely for items purchased with federal dollars, or for programs that are designed to be self-sustaining, such as the institutional farms or the Rural Rehabilitation Loan Program, to bring efficiency and expediency to the use of these dollars.
- Agriculture Investment Fund – Modeled after Tennessee and Virginia, these will be funds dedicated to micro loans for capital and scaling projects for West Virginia agriculture-based businesses.
- Farm-to-School Pilot Project – If passed, this project will create a grant program to help schools source more products from West Virginia farmers.
- Tax Incentive for Agriculture-based Businesses – This would establish a tax incentive for businesses that use natural gas produced in West Virginia. The incentive would be in the form of a credit on income or corporate net income tax.
- Transfer of Division of Forestry to West Virginia Department of Agriculture
- West Virginia Farm Bill
 - Seed law modernization
 - Removal of the fee for feeding garbage to swine
 - Equine code clean up
 - Farmers market code clean up
 - Agritourism code clean up

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Partner Initiatives:

- Right to Farm Modernization – Partnering with the West Virginia Farm Bureau
- Civil Asset Forfeiture Reform – Partnering with AFP, ACLU, Citizens Action Group
- Food Freedom Act – Partnering with the Institute for Justice
- Coyote Management Bill (2018, SB 141) - Initiative of Senator Sypolt
- Rabies Code Changes/Penalties for Animal Wellbeing – led by West Virginia Board of Veterinarian Medicine
- West Virginia Fresh Food Act (2018, HB 2566) – Initiative of Delegate Thompson
- Pollinator License Plate Bill (2108, HB 4487) – Initiative of Delegate Lovejoy.

Budget Requests:

- General Fund Appropriation - \$50 million for repair of the Guthrie Laboratories
- Spending Authority – Repairs to Food Distribution Center in Ripley
- Spending Authority/General Fund Appropriation – Upgrades to Cedar Lakes Conference Center
- General Fund Appropriation – Personnel Needs
- Spending Authority – Capital Improvement Fund
- \$1 million line-item to support West Virginia Grown
- \$750,000 to cover administrative costs to take on additional TEFAP food