

VBOC Expands Services to Veteran Farmers



Members of the 2017 Veteran Farmer Reserve Program at Arcadia Farm.

Earlier this year, Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC) Director, Charles McCaffrey, had the opportunity to spend time with 25 Veteran farmers at Arcadia Farms at the historic Woodlawn Estate in Alexandria, VA. The Veteran Farmer Reserve Program (<http://arcadiafood.org/?q=veteran-farmer-program>) is for those Veterans interested in exploring agriculture without committing to a full-time training program. This 12-month program meets one weekend a month, with an additional commitment of 40 hours of hands-on farm work at Arcadia. Reserve Farmers receive hands-on training at Arcadia's expanding farm; visit working livestock, greenhouse, organic and other farms on field trips; and receive classroom instruction on topics ranging from pest

control to marketing and farm business planning.

The U.S. agriculture sector extends beyond the farm business to include a range of farm-related industries and agriculture supported economies. Agriculture and agriculture-related industries contributed \$985 billion to the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) in 2014, a 5.7-percent share. The output of America's farms contributed \$177.2 billion of this sum—about 1 percent of GDP. The overall contribution of the agriculture sector to GDP is larger than this because sectors related to agriculture—forestry, fishing, and related activities; food, beverages, and tobacco products; textiles, apparel, and leather products; food and beverage stores; and food service and drinking places—rely on agricultural inputs in order to contribute added value to the economy. Additionally, 17.3 million full- and part-time jobs were related to agriculture - 9.3 percent of total U.S. employment. Direct on-farm employment provided over 2.6 million of these jobs. Employment in the related industries supported another 14.7 million jobs. Of this number, food services and drinking places accounted for the largest share—11.4 million jobs—and food/beverage manufacturing supported 1.8 million jobs. The remaining agriculture-related industries together supported another 1.4 million jobs. Over 45% of military recruits come from rural communities - and return to those rural communities after service - so it is in the U.S. interest to enable small business ownership in rural America and for the VBOCs to provide training, counseling and access to capital to support their endeavors.



Pictured left to right, Patti Senft, Deputy Director, CPB VBOC; Mike Alston, USDA Military Veteran Agricultural Liaison; Jaime Wood and Associate Administrator Barb Carson, SBA's Office of Veterans Business Development; Charles McCaffrey, CBP VBOC Director; Lanon Baccam, Deputy Director, Farmer Veteran Coalition; and Matt Underwood, USDA - Rural Development.

Representatives from U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Small Business Administration, Farmer Veteran Coalition, and the Community Business Partnership Veteran Business Outreach Center (VBOC) met at the VBOC in Springfield, VA, on March 6, 2017. The group toured the VBOC's new facility and discussed how the VBOC can serve Veterans seeking to start or grow businesses in rural areas, including

agriculture and non-agriculture based ventures. The VBOC at CBP is one of 20 SBA VBOC grantees located across the U.S. The centers are designed to provide small business training and counseling to transitioning military service members and all era Veterans and their families.

The USDA and the SBA are interested in the business economy that services the entire agriculture space – rural and urban, ag-based and non-ag main street small town businesses. There are special business incentives for start-ups in rural areas – rural areas are also considered HUB zones. Below is a list of available resources:

USDA Vets-to-Ag Brochure: <https://www.nal.usda.gov/sites/default/files/vetsagbrochure.pdf>

USDA New Farmers/Veterans Info: <https://newfarmers.usda.gov/veterans> (Learn more about USDA's work to support the next generation of Veteran farmers and ranchers)

USDA Discovery Tool: <https://newfarmers.usda.gov/discovery> (This link helps end users narrow the scope of type of agriculture venture their interested in. It includes a quick 5-question survey and produces a list of local resources in their local area.)

Step-by-Step Process to Start Farming: <https://newfarmers.usda.gov/important-considerations> (These links literally provide step-by-step guidance to help navigate through the process to be successful in finding information, developing a farm business plan and connecting with financial & technical resources - to include the U.S. Small Business Administration.)

Bridges to Opportunity: https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdfiles/FactSheets/2017/bridges_to_opportunity_jan2017.pdf (This is a database that you can sign up for to share contacts and referrals with the USDA.)

Community Facilities Direct Loan & Grants Program: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/community-facilities-direct-loan-grant-program> (Loans and grants for this program serve rural areas with under 20,000 population.)

Farm Loan Info Chart: https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdfiles/FactSheets/2016/farm_loan_information_chart_oct2016.pdf

Microloans: [https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdfiles/FactSheets/2016/FACT%20SHEET%20-%20Microloans%20\(Revised%2002-29-16\).pdf](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdfiles/FactSheets/2016/FACT%20SHEET%20-%20Microloans%20(Revised%2002-29-16).pdf) (This is an important component in the "lending ladder" in the agribusiness space!)