

Regional Update

A Monthly Report of Activities on the Eastern Shore of Virginia

December 2005

NEW FOOD POLICY COUNCIL STUDIES FOOD PRODUCTION, MARKETING, AND AVAILABILITY

In September and October, the ANPDC held four public meetings to solicit citizen feedback on the current state of agriculture, food access, and food security for the Eastern Shore of Virginia. These meetings were part of a project funded by USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (SARE) to develop a Regional Food System Policy.

A successful policy would serve as a roadmap to create stronger links between farmers and local markets, improve food security and access to locally produced food, and enhance

downtown revitalization by capturing a portion of the estimated \$125 million in food dollars that leave the Shore every year. A successful policy would also create opportunities for self-employment by growing or processing food for local consumption.

As a result of these initial meetings, several attendees expressed interest in forming a new regional food policy council to work on the goals set out by the SARE grant. The group welcomes participation from all interested citizens and hopes to involve many more people in its work.

The first task of the new food policy council will be to study the Shore's current agricultural system. Study will involve the use of standard data such as the US Census of Agriculture and state resources, but it will also involve ways to make new connections between agencies, nonprofits, churches, and businesses so that people can talk about food and health in a new context – the context of “local food.” An article on the Food Policy Council's initial research will appear in *Shore Outdoors*, an annual insert prepared by RC&D for distribution in the Eastern Shore News. Look for it in the near future. The council's next step is to conduct a survey about where citizens buy their food, what they buy, how they view growing their own food, whether they travel off the Shore to buy food, why they do, and to gauge interest in buying more locally grown or processed foods.

The next Food Policy Council meeting is scheduled for Thursday, December 8, from 5:30 – 7:30 p.m. at the ANPDC, 23372 Front Street, Accomac. All interested citizens are welcome. Contact Barbara Schwenk, by email at bschwenk@easternshore.org or call 757-787-1247 x115 for further information.



BROADBAND = PROSPERITY = REVENUE

Broadband – why does Virginia’s Eastern Shore need it?

Many of us still consider “the Internet” to be merely a pleasant distraction or fun place to “surf.” That is what it started out to be, but it’s not that now. It is rapidly becoming the sole conduit for moving every kind of information there is: financial, sales, design, competitive, military/defense, homeland security, medical and emergency services. Studies have shown that the economy of a region which gains widespread broadband internet access expands exponentially.

Because it moves almost ALL information, the Internet and high-speed access to it is rapidly becoming an absolute necessity for prosperity everywhere. It has become as necessary as electricity and running water to the economy of every nation in the world. In 2001, the United States ranked 4th in broadband penetration. Between 2001 and 2003, we slipped to 13th place, and in 2004, we slipped again to 16th place. The countries that far outstrip us in broadband penetration are France, most of Europe, and South Korea (which offers 100 Mbps universal coverage for \$45 per month). Most of Virginia’s Eastern Shore has only 0.03 Mbps dial-up access for \$19.95 per month—not exactly a bargain—and that speed is totally inadequate for anything except casual “surfing.”

In addition, the future of all communications media is digital. TV, radio, phone, and film will all be digital within 10 years, and access to all of it will be through high-speed Internet.

There will be no “rural high-speed Internet connectivity” program from our federal government the way there was rural electrification in the 1930’s. There-

fore, rural communities need to look elsewhere and think creatively to make this necessity available to its citizens. Also, high speed Internet access will not be delivered to rural communities anywhere by any for-profit organization because they can’t afford to provide it at a marketable cost.



Broadband on the Shore

The Commonwealth of Virginia, Accomack County, Northampton County and Mid-Atlantic Broadband Cooperative are partnering to bring a backbone fiber optic cable along the Eastern Shore. The Department of Housing and Community Development is also interested in this work.

The Lower Shore Broadband Cooperative out of Worcester, Maryland is discussing last mile solutions with Accomack and Northampton. Accomack with support from Northampton is planning a tower survey for a broadband rollout plan.

Groundwater Committee’s Annual Report FY2005

The Groundwater Committee conducted several activities under the leadership of Chairman Wanda Thornton and Vice Chairman Suzanne Wescoat. The Committee reviewed and tracked Ground Water Withdrawal Applications and Permits and ground water use trends. They also continued their work with the USGS and the Eastern Shore of Virginia Ground Water Model.

Several ground water protection measures were implemented. A new Ground Water Webpage has been created by the Committee’s consultant and it is located at www.a-npdc.org. The Committee also assisted the Soil and Water Conservation District in producing the Shore Outdoors Ground Water Supplement for the Eastern Shore News. Other activities include the development of the Ground Water Awards Program and two Household Hazardous Waste Collections, where over four tons of material was taken off the Shore to be disposed of properly or reused.

The Committee’s consultant also monitored ground water quality data. Although most of the permitted facilities on the Eastern Shore do not show evidence of saltwater intrusion, some facilities have elevated chloride concentrations although the cause of this is unknown. The facilities are Eastern Shore Seafood, NASA Goddard Island, and YMCA Campground at Silver Beach. There is saltwater intrusion in the Town of Cape Charles, as predicted by the Town’s Withdrawal Permit work.

For a copy of the report, contact Elaine Meil at (757) 787-2936.

Annual Holiday Reception December 15th

The Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission, Accomack-Northampton Housing and Redevelopment Corporation, Accomack-Northampton Regional Housing Authority, Eastern Shore of Virginia Regional Partnership and Eastern Shore of Virginia Public Service Authority will host their Annual Joint Holiday Reception on Thursday, December 15th. The Reception will be held this year in the Special Events room at the Shore Financial Corporation Headquarters Building in Onley.

**Accomack-Northampton Planning District
Commission
23372 Front Street
P.O. Box 417
Accomac, Virginia 23301**

PSA Notes

After several changes which extended the time required to assume operational responsibility for the project, the ESVPSA and Bayview Citizens for Social Justice, Inc. are completing the final steps necessary to transfer the operational responsibilities to the Authority. The way has been cleared for the surveyor to accomplish the additional work necessary for the completion of the transfer plat which is necessary for legal counsel to create the transfer deeds. During this interim period, the Authority has been keeping close watch on the operations of both the drinking water and sewer components of the project. It is hoped that these final legal matters can be completed and that the transfer will occur prior to April 2005.



How to Contact the A-NPDC

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