



Planning for Agriculture in Virginia

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American Farmland Trust

Saving the Land that Sustains us by

- Protecting Farmland
- Advancing sound farming practices
- Keeping farmers on the land



PLANNING FOR AGRICULTURE IN VIRGINIA



- Fact sheets
- Planning checklists
- Data & other resources
- Local success stories
- And more!



FREE TOOLKIT



Primary Audiences

- Planners
- Local officials
- Farmers and community residents
- Agricultural service providers



Guided by an Expert Advisory Committee

- Melissa Allen, John Marshall Soil and Water Conservation District
- David Blount, Virginia Association of Planning District Commissions
- Detrick Easley, Halifax County
- Katelyn Jordan, Virginia Farm Bureau
- Joe Lerch, Virginia Association of Counties
- Ann Mallek, Albemarle County
- Elli Travis, Virginia Tech Center for Economic and Community Engagement
- Stephen Versen and Lyndsie Young, Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission

The Website has Five Tabs with Side Navigation



The screenshot shows the homepage of the American Farmland Trust's website for the 'Planning for Agriculture in Virginia' toolkit. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for 'VISIT AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST', 'FARMLAND PROTECTION DIRECTORY', and 'CONTACT US'. Below the navigation is the American Farmland Trust logo and a search bar. The main title 'Planning for Agriculture in Virginia' is displayed over a background image of a rural farm landscape. A descriptive text block explains the toolkit's purpose: 'The Planning for Agriculture in Virginia Toolkit helps local leaders, planners, and citizens support the future of agriculture—Virginia's leading private industry. It offers guidance through fact sheets, profiles, data and supporting resources, and presentation slides. The toolkit explains why planning for agriculture matters and provides practical tools to protect farmland, strengthen farm viability, and promote conservation.' Below this text are five navigation tabs: 'Why and How' (selected), 'Farmland Protection', 'Agricultural Viability', 'Conservation Agriculture', and 'MORE' (with a right-pointing arrow icon). The bottom of the page features a decorative graphic of a farm silhouette and the text 'American Farmland Trust'.

- » Why and How
- » Farmland Protection and Thoughtful Growth
- » Agricultural Viability Through Farm-Focused Economic Development
- » Conservation Agriculture
- » Additional Resources

An aerial photograph of a landscape featuring a large body of water, likely a river, with a shoreline that includes a mix of green fields and dense forest. The fields are organized into various agricultural plots. A prominent blue rectangular overlay contains the title text.

Why & How to Plan for Agriculture



Why Plan for Agriculture?

*Virginia's Largest Private Industry,
Agriculture Offers Unparalleled Value*

- Economic
- Environmental
- Fiscal
- Food security
- Heritage
- And more ...



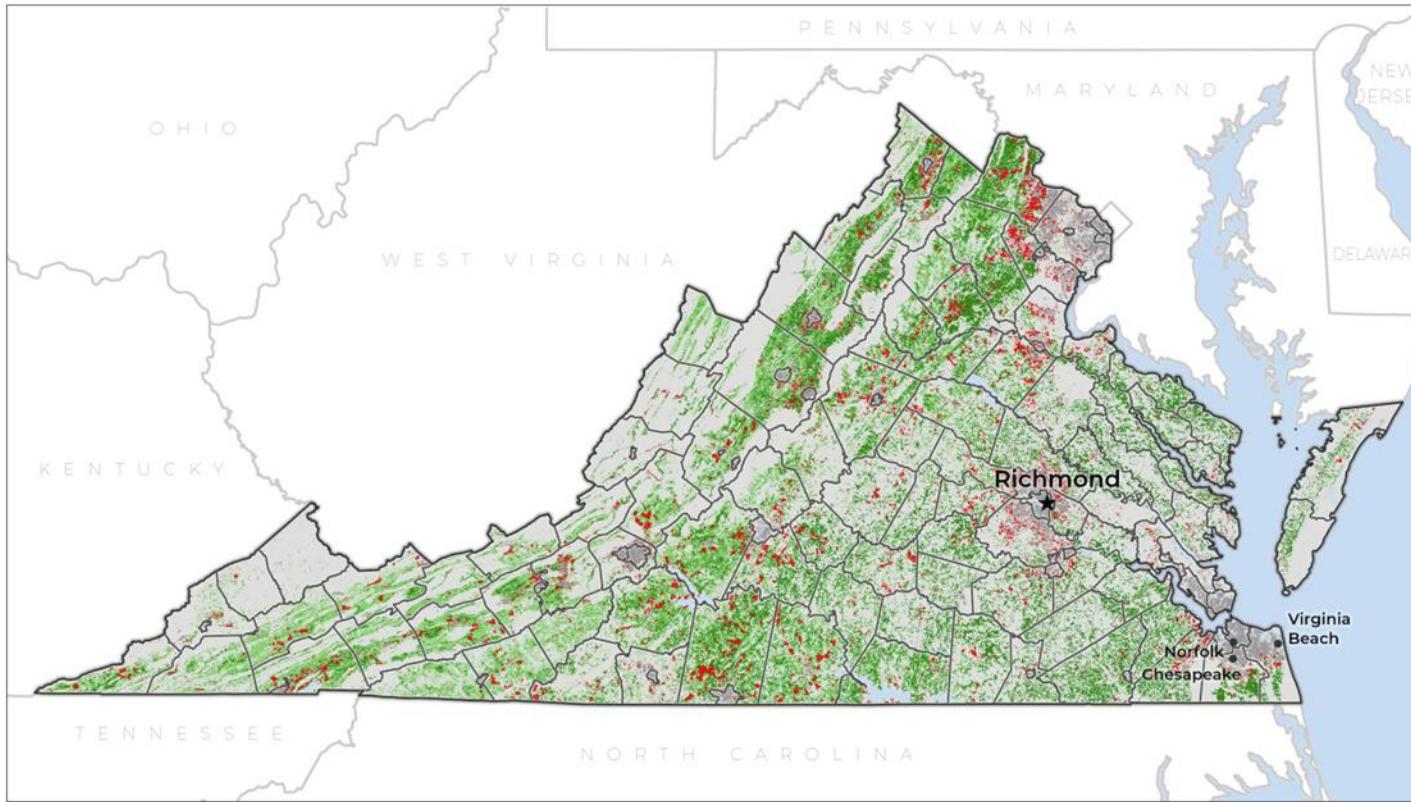
Despite these Values, Virginia's Farms Face an Uncertain Future

Virginia lost 18% of its farms between 2012 and 2022.

The remaining farms are tested by many things, especially:

- › Competition for land
- › Aging Farm Population
- › Extreme weather events

AGRICULTURAL LAND CONVERSION 2001-2016



Conversion of agricultural land to UHD and LDR land uses

Farmland* that is:
Above state median PVR**
Below state median PVR

Urban areas
Federal, forest,
and other lands

*Farmland is composed of cropland,
pastureland, and woodland associated
with farms.

** Our productivity, versatility, and resiliency
(PVR) index helps identify high-quality
agricultural land (see page 2).

Virginia is Losing its Agricultural Land Base

- Between 2001 – 2016 Virginia converted 340,000 acres of farmland to developed uses
- Most of the development occurred on the state's most productive, versatile, and resilient soils

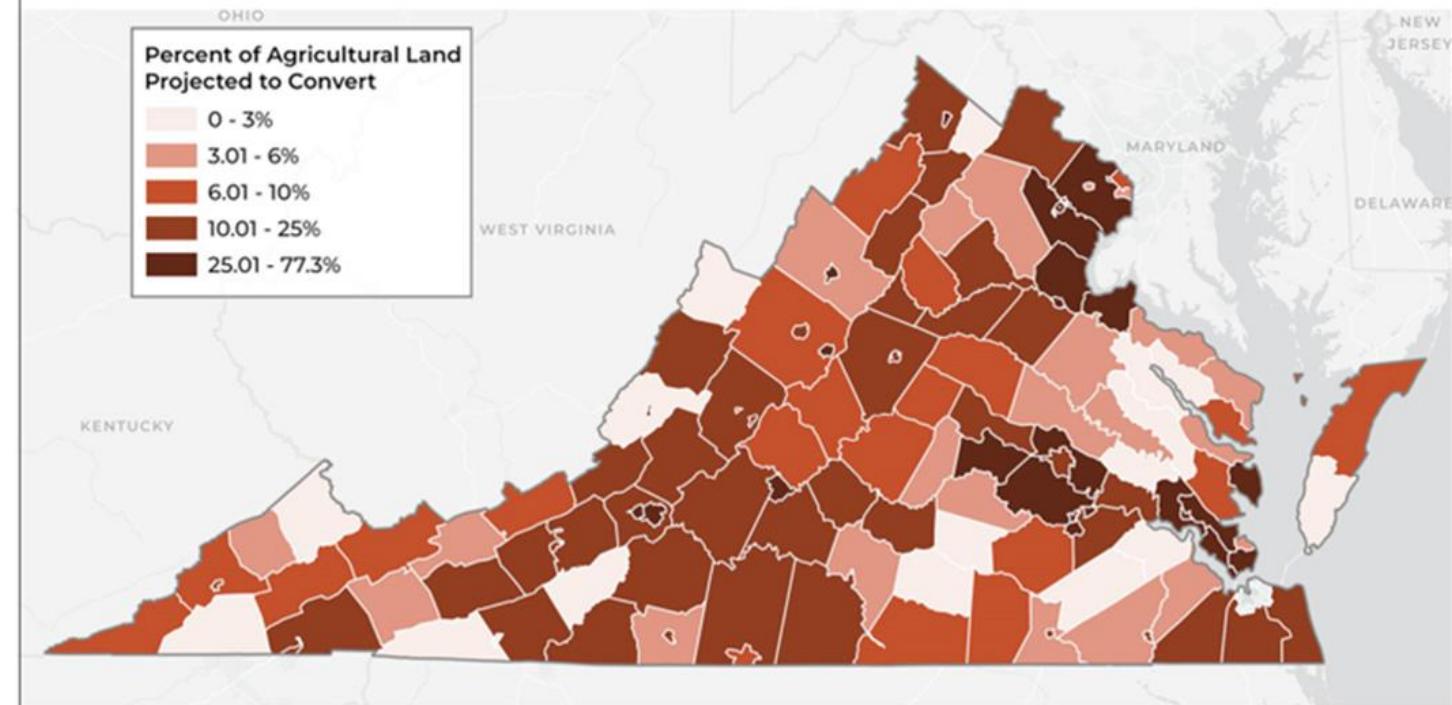


Development Pressures are Increasing

- ▶ Scattered, large-lot residential development
- ▶ Utility-scale solar arrays
- ▶ Warehouses
- ▶ Data centers

Land values have soared: up 32% just in the past 5 years

Percent of Agricultural Land Projected to Convert in Virginia by Locality: Runaway Sprawl Scenario, 2016-2040



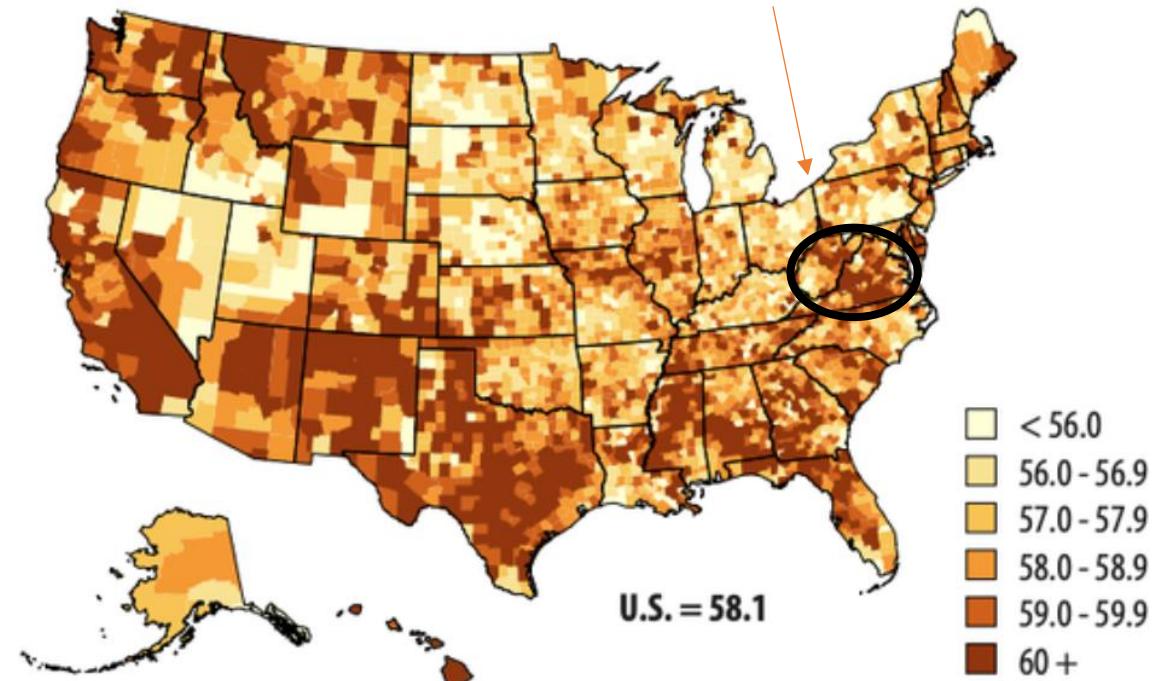
This map shows the percentage of farmland loss projected for each locality under American Farmland Trust's "Runaway Sprawl" scenario. MAP BY CASEY MITCHELL, AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST



40% of Virginia's Farmers are 65 or older, 8% are Under 35 – Who will Farm in the Future?



Average Age of Producers by County, 2022



Climate Change

- Extreme hurricanes, floods, and droughts already have caused major crop losses, livestock impacts, and destruction of agricultural infrastructure in the Commonwealth
- Resulting in hundreds of millions of dollars of damage to Virginia's farms
- Hurricane Helene alone caused over \$125 million in damage to Southwest Virginia alone





A Failure to Plan is a Plan to Fail!

Planning for Agriculture
is an asset-based
process that is driven by
community engagement
– especially by engaging
the farm community



Planning for Agriculture

Protects Farmland & Promotes Smart Growth

Supports Ag Viability Now & for the Future

Encourages Conservation & Sound Farming Practices

Sustains Community Health & Wellbeing





American Farmland Trust

PLANNING FOR AGRICULTURE IN VIRGINIA

Is Your Community Farm Friendly?

A Checklist to Gauge Local Support for Agriculture in Your Community



DOES YOUR COMMUNITY...

Protect farmland and promote thoughtful growth

... address agriculture in your comprehensive plan and/or other community plans?

YES NO

... support agricultural and forestal districts?

YES NO

... allow use-value assessment?

YES NO

... purchase development rights on farmland?

YES NO

... allow transfer of development rights?

YES NO

... mitigate the impacts of utility-scale solar siting on farmland?

YES NO

... have zoning that prioritizes agriculture and guides things like setbacks and buffers?

YES NO

... have urban development areas?

YES NO

Support agricultural viability

... incentivize new and expanding agribusinesses?

YES NO

... invest in community food or other processing facilities?

YES NO

... have a "Buy Local" or other promotional campaign?

YES NO

... allow retail marketing and/or value-added processing on farms?

YES NO

... support farm to school or other institutions?

YES NO

... have reasonable regulations regarding agritourism?

YES NO

... encourage agricultural leadership so farmers are represented in local decision making?

YES NO

... have clear guidance on things like accessory uses, farm labor housing, renewable energy, etc.?

YES NO

Advance conservation agriculture

... support your local soil and water conservation district?

YES NO

... have policies to encourage composting?

YES NO

... guide solar siting on farmland?

YES NO

... adopt an individually tailored program to protect water quality?

YES NO

... provide resources to encourage on-farm conservation?

YES NO

CLEAR FORM

Adapted from New Hampshire Coalition for Sustaining Agriculture and UNH Cooperative Extension's
"Is Your Town Farm Friendly?... A Checklist for Sustaining Rural Character"

PLANNING FOR AGRICULTURE IN VIRGINIA



Farmland Protection & Thoughtful Growth



Comprehensive Plans & Zoning

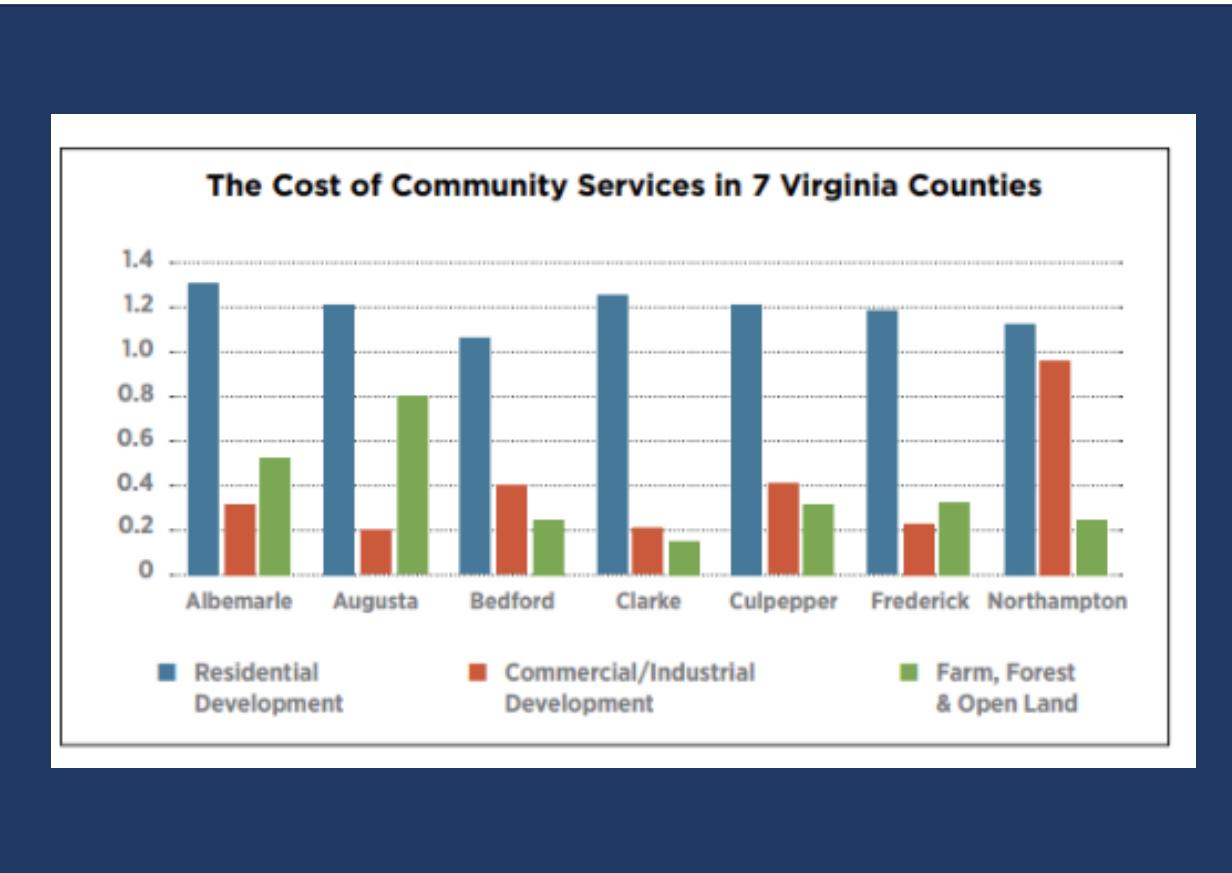
- » Comp Plans serve as the foundation for local policies like zoning
- » Zoning to protect farmland:
 - » Defines agriculture as the preferred land use
 - » Limits activities that interfere with commercial farm production
 - » Sets standards for accessory and ancillary uses
 - » May or may not regulate lot size

Other Virginia Policies to Protect Farmland and to Promote Thoughtful Growth

- Use Value Assessment
- Agricultural and Forestal Districts
- Purchase of Development Rights
- Transfer of Development Rights
- Urban Development Areas



Cost of Community Services Studies



On average, across 7 Virginia counties

- Farm, Forest and Open lands received 42¢ of public services for every \$1 paid in taxes and fees
- Residential land uses received \$1.20 of public services for every \$1 paid in taxes and fees
- Like other commercial and industrial land uses, local revenues from working and open lands help offset the cost of services to residential development





Mitigating Utility Solar on Farmland

- ▶ Since 2016, ~40% of Virginia's utility-scale solar construction occurred on farmland
- ▶ To lessen the impacts, mitigation plans are required for projects that disrupt more than 10 acres of prime soils
- ▶ DEQ is developing regulations to implement requirements



Several Codes Rule Local Authority Siting Solar Arrays

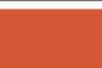
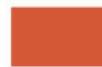
- Must be consistent with state policy
- Provide reasonable siting criteria including for buffers and setbacks
- Limit noise
- Address decommissioning

Farm property owners may install solar panels to serve their own energy needs so long as they comply with local zoning and design requirements



Agricultural Viability

Change in Market Value from 2017 to 2022

Market Value of Agricultural Products Sold and Government Payments				
Economic Class	Number of Operations 2022	Number of Operations 2017	Change	
Less than \$25,000	28,879	33,038	-14%	
\$25,00-\$50,000	3,466	3,524	-2%	
\$50,000-\$99,999	2,110	2,182	-3%	
\$100,000-\$249,000	1,552	1,723	-11%	
\$250,000-\$499,999	879	972	-11%	
\$500,000-\$999,999	811	876	-8%	
\$1,000,000-\$2,499,999	796	677	15%	
\$2,500,000-\$4,999,999	351	162	54%	
\$5,000,000 or more	151	71	53%	
Total	38,995	43,225	-11%	

Data derived from the 2022 Census of Agriculture–State Data, Table 2: Market Value of Agricultural Products Sold Including Food Marketing Practices and Value-Added Products: 2022 and 2017.

Zoning to Support Farms

Agritourism

Composting

Farm Labor Housing

Retail Marketing

Value Added Processing

Signage



Programs and Policies to Support Agricultural Viability

- Agriculture & Forestry Industry Development Fund
- Agritourism laws
- Community Food Processing
- Farm to School programs
- Virginia FarmLink
- Right to Farm Act





Agricultural Development and Marketing Support

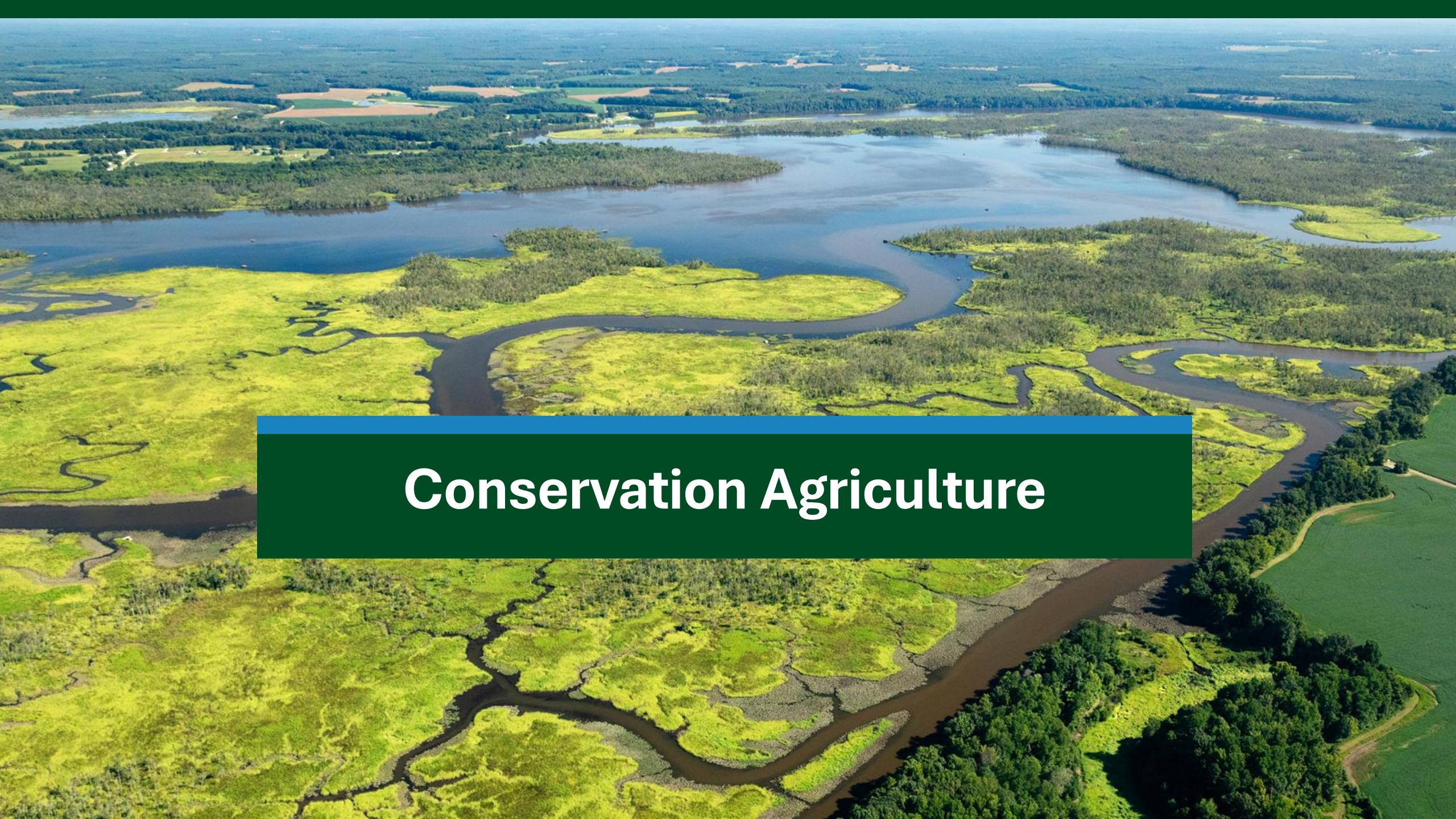
- VDACS Division of Marketing and Development
- VA Food Access Investment Fund
- Local government support



Agricultural Boards, Committees and Staff

- » AFD Committees
- » Farm Bureau Committees
- » Agricultural Collaboratives
- » Agricultural Development Staff

*Many ways to give farmers a voice
in local decision making*

An aerial photograph of a river system, likely the Mississippi River, showing its many loops and the surrounding land. The river is a dark blue-grey, and the land is a mix of green fields, forests, and wetlands. The image is framed by a blue border at the top and bottom.

Conservation Agriculture

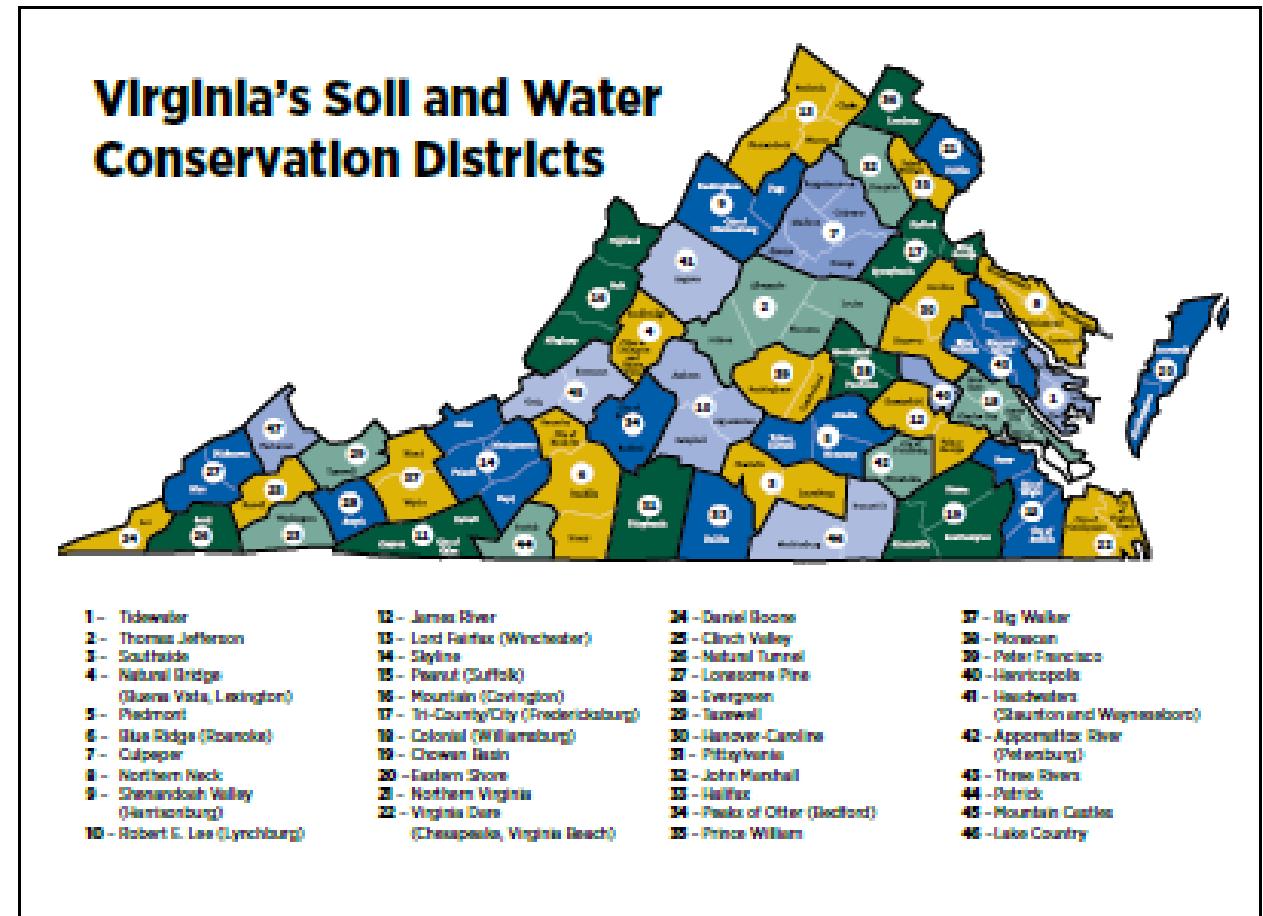


Chesapeake Bay Act

- The Act protects and improves the Bay's water quality with effective land use management
- > 80 bordering communities develop and carry out Watershed Implementation Plans
- They map boundaries and incorporate protection measures into comp plans and local policies

Soil & Water Conservation Districts

- Virginia authorized SWCDs in 1938 as political subdivisions of state government to conserve natural resources through outreach, education, technical and financial assistance
- Today 47 districts operate in the Commonwealth supported by state and local funds
- They deliver resources to landowners and communities for conservation planning and implementation practices



Farmer Mentor Programs

Virginia Soil Health Coalition's Virginia Farmer Mentor Network

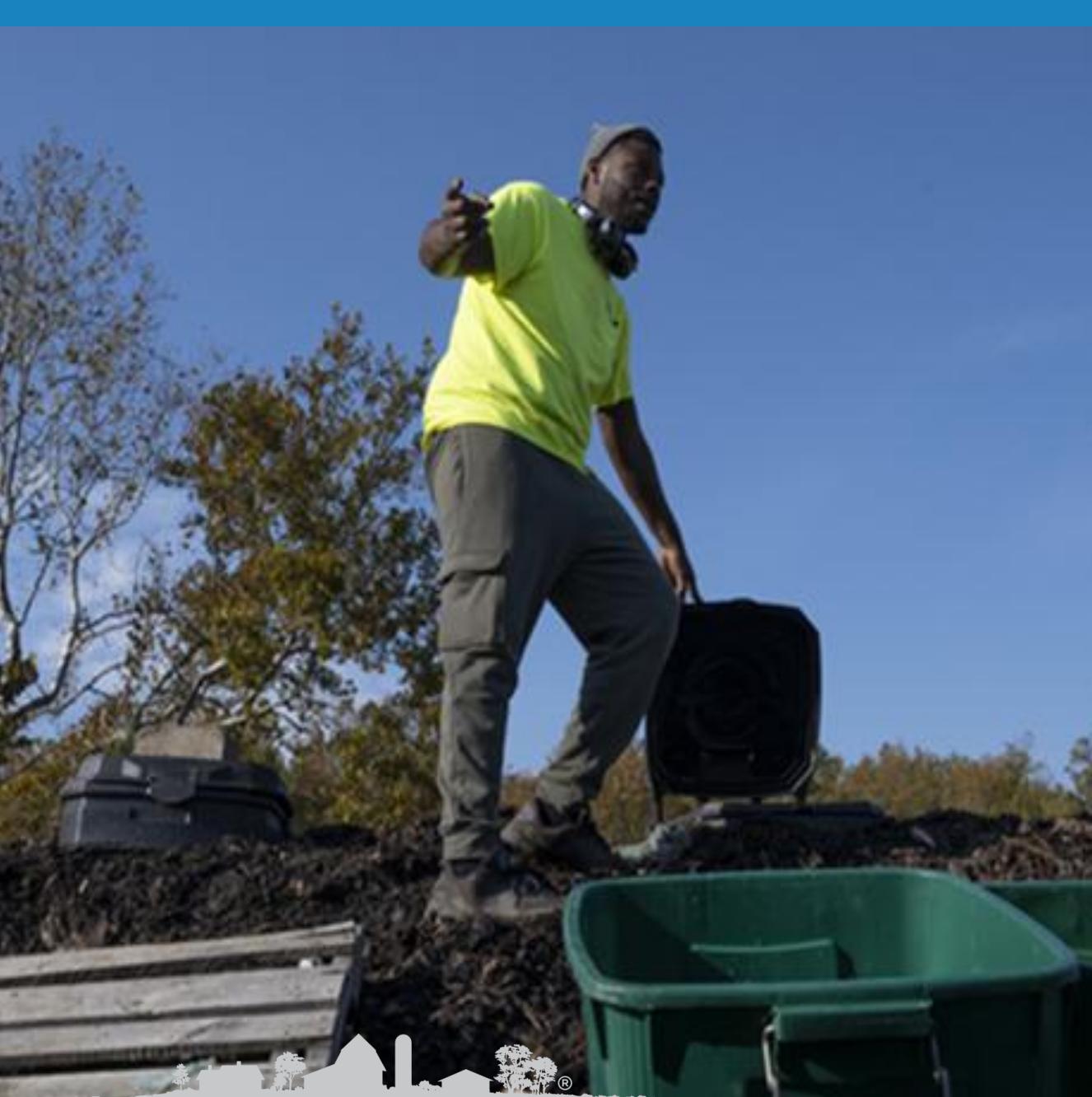
Virginia Forage and Grassland Council's Farmer-to-Farmer Mentor Program

Virginia No-Till Alliance's VANTAGE Farmer Mentor Program

Virginia Tech's Eastern Shore crop producers mentoring network

Virginia Tech & NRCS Integrated Conservation Agronomy Farmer Mentoring Program



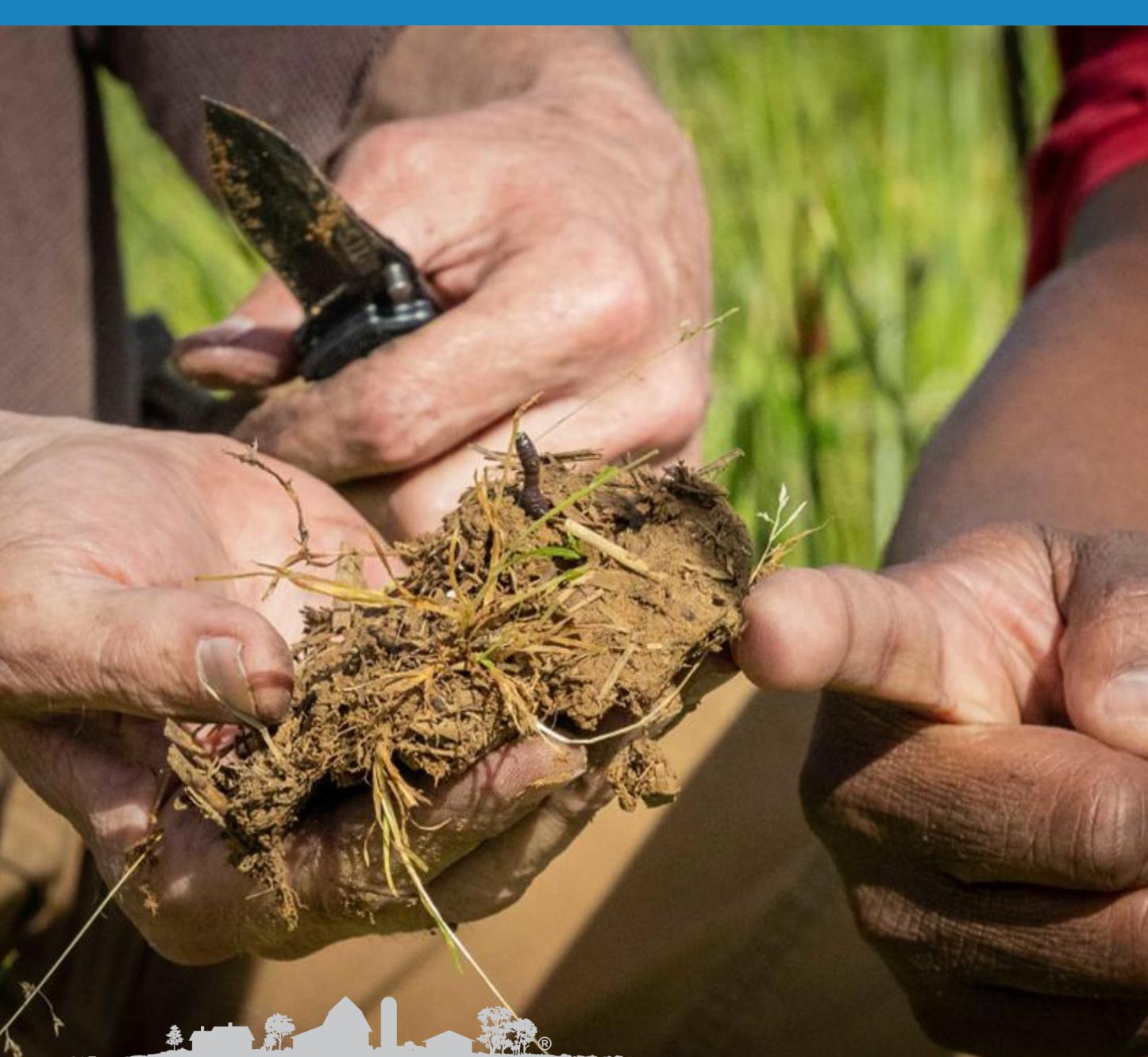


Composting

- ▶ Several state laws establish standards for handling compost and sludge to recycle organic waste and improve environmental quality
- ▶ Composting usually is allowed on farms as an accessory use
- ▶ Local governments can address setbacks, buffers, screening etc. through zoning and other local ordinances



Additional Resources



Links to Useful Resources

- Census of Agriculture Reports
- Geospatial Data
- Coop Extension County “Situation Analysis” Reports
- Presentation Slides
- Supporting Organizations



Thank You!

Check out the Toolkit at:

[**https://farmland.org/planning-for-agriculture-in-virginia**](https://farmland.org/planning-for-agriculture-in-virginia)

