



*VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE AND
CONSUMER SERVICES*

**ANNUAL REPORT ON
THE DELIVERY OF SERVICES TO
SENIORS AND ADULTS WITH
DISABILITIES**

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Commissioner**

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INTRODUCTION

HB 110 (2006) amended Code of Virginia § 2.2-5510 to require that each state agency include in its strategic plan “an analysis of the impact that the aging of the population will have on its ability to deliver services and a description of how the agency is responding to these changes.” The bill provides further that “(b)ased on guidance from the Secretary of Health and Human Resources, each agency shall report by October 1 of each year to the Governor and to the General Assembly its progress for addressing the impact of the aging of the population in at least five specific actions.”

The mission of the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) is to promote the economic growth and development of Virginia agriculture, encourage environmental stewardship and provide consumer protection. In furthering that mission, the following strategic goals were included in the 2004-2006 agency strategic plan:

- Goal #1: Enhance opportunities for the growth and profitability of the Virginia agriculture industry.
- Goal #2: Ensure a safe and wholesome food supply.
- Goal #3: Provide agricultural and consumer protection services which support economic growth, encourage environmental stewardship and meet consumer needs.
- Goal #4: Increase Agency services and productivity through new technology, e-government applications, work processes and procedures, and training.
- Goal #5: Provide services which prevent or minimize the impact of emergency agricultural infestations, animal disease outbreaks, food borne illness outbreaks, and natural and manmade disasters.

The reporting requirements contained in guidance provided by the Secretary of Health and Human Resources called for state agencies to review policies and programs for their impact on senior citizens and adults with disabilities. During the 2006 fiscal year (FY 2006), changes in current programs and services provided by VDACS have had minimal impact on this target population. While all programs and services are suited to serve all citizens, an analysis of VDACS programs and services revealed that only the Divisions of Marketing and Consumer Protection provide the most general direct services to seniors. Additionally, it has been determined that at this time, the other programs and services with which VDACS is tasked with providing do not require the clustering of clients by age groups or disability. Rather, all of VDACS’ programs and services are available to all individuals regardless of age or disability. The aging of the population and adults with disabilities will have no significant impact on the continued ability of VDACS to provide services.

SERVICE DELIVERY ANALYSIS

Division of Marketing:

The Division of Marketing provides support to the state's varied agricultural community by enabling producers and processors to locate the best markets for their products domestically and abroad. The Division of Marketing is made up of the following units:

- Sales and Market Development
- Direct Marketing
- Office of Commodity Services
- Office of International Marketing
- Livestock Marketing Services

As VDACS continues to enhance opportunities for the growth and profitability of the Virginia agriculture industry, the Division of Marketing advances the agency's outreach to Virginia's citizens. Given that the average age of Virginia farmers is 58, a portion of the clients for VDACS marketing services are over the age of 65; however, no statistics are kept on the age ranges of VDACS marketing clients. The current estimate is that 10% of the clients that the Division of Marketing works with are over the age of 65. The trend in Virginia agriculture is that farmers are increasingly retiring or ceasing operations by the time they reach 65 as competitive pressures increase.

Customers for Virginia food and agricultural products reflect the demographics of the society as a whole. Senior citizens have been more interested in the quality of their diets and respond well to learning about the nutritional and economic benefits of fresh, local Virginia food. These nutritional trends are communicated to Virginia producers through a variety of outlets -- producer meetings, one on one consultations, articles, etc.

VDACS marketing services are utilized by active commercial producers of Virginia food, agricultural and forest products. Marketing services and counseling are readily available to senior citizens from the VDACS marketing staff located in Richmond and from six regional offices. From farmers wishing to sell from the back of their pickup to commodity scale producers, to individual businesses; any producer wishing to market agricultural products produced or harvested in Virginia has full and complete access to VDACS marketing staff. Recent trends in Virginia production agriculture, for example buy-out programs in tobacco and changes in peanut marketing and government loan programs have resulted in increased numbers of older Virginia farmers choosing to retire. These trends have been manifested by a declining number of senior citizen farmer clients for marketing services.

VDACS Division of Marketing actively participates in the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition program in conjunction with the Virginia Department for the Aging. This U.S. Department of Agriculture program supplies low income senior citizens with vouchers that are redeemable at local Virginia farmers markets to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables. This program has been tremendously successful in Virginia from both the perspectives of the senior citizen clients who enjoy fresh, local produce and by the farmer vendors who enjoy increased sales of their products.

This successful program, however, has been constrained by steadily declining federal allocations for Virginia.

VDACS Division of Marketing staff routinely participates in industry outreach meetings with Virginia food, agricultural and forest products producers. The aging population is now a major driver of food production and utilization trends. A key interest of consumers, driven in part by the aging U.S. population, is improved nutrition and support for local production. Also, the aging population has driven recent industry focus on decreasing portion size. Successful food producers take these trends into consideration and VDACS marketing staff keeps updated on these trends in the food industry.

Division of Consumer Protection:

The Division of Consumer Protection is comprised of four offices – Consumer Affairs, Pesticide Services, Plant and Pest Services, and Product and Industry Standards. Division staff strives to administer assigned consumer protection laws, environmental protection laws, and regulations in an impartial and consistent manner in order to:

- Maintain the integrity of transactions between buyers and sellers;
- Ensure that safe and truthfully labeled products are offered for sale to consumers;
- Protect the environment from misuse of pesticides;
- Protect the environment from plant insect pests and diseases;
- Protect endangered plant and insect species; and
- Prevent unfair competition among regulated entities

The Office of Consumer Affairs (OCA) conducts educational outreach efforts that seek to help consumers make more informed decisions in the marketplace. Some of those efforts are aimed at seniors and are conducted in partnership with other agencies and organizations, including the following:

1. Virginia Department for the Aging: The Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services established the Consumer Affairs Advisory Committee, whose members communicate the views and interests of Virginians on issues related to the agency's consumer education and fraud prevention programs. The Virginia Department for the Aging is a charter member of this committee.
2. Virginia Department of Social Services (DSS), Division of Community and Volunteer Services: OCA staff routinely partners with DSS to provide educational events at retirement communities and events aimed at seniors.
3. TRIAD: A cooperative effort between the Office of the Attorney General, local law enforcement and senior groups, designed to educate and assist senior citizens on issues of crime and fraud. OCA participates in regional and statewide TRIAD events.

OCA staff continually reviews complaint trends and ongoing consumer issues. When warranted, OCA staff works internally with the agency's Office of Communication and Promotions to issue press releases and facilitate interviews with the media on those issues having immediate significance. Quite frequently, the nature of the press releases is of relevance to seniors, such as bogus charitable solicitations and money scams.

VDACS Programs and Services Accessibility

Other VDACS programs and services outside of the Divisions of Marketing and Consumer Protection serve Virginia citizens across all age ranges and do not track specific data related to the age of senior citizens served. However, VDACS Facilities Office is charged with taking the necessary actions to make agency offices and laboratories compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). These actions also benefit our customers with disabilities or with limited mobility due to aging.

During the mid to late 1990's, the Facilities Office completed a handicapped accessibility analysis at the department's existing facilities. All alterations projects were completed in accordance with the Standards for Accessible Design outlined in the ADA. Projects were completed in the Harrisonburg Regional Office and Laboratory, the Lynchburg Regional Office, the Warrenton Regional Office, and the Ivor Regional Office and Laboratory to provide handicapped entry and /or rest room facilities as needed. Several new construction projects were funded and completed from 1992 – 1998. New laboratories were constructed in Wytheville, Warrenton, Lynchburg and new Farmers' Markets were constructed in Southwest Virginia, Southeast Virginia and on the Eastern Shore. All of these facilities were designed and constructed utilizing current ADA Standards for Accessible Design "New construction".

The new Harrisonburg Regional Laboratory and Office (currently under construction) was designed and is being constructed utilizing current ADA Standards for Accessible Design "New Construction". The building will also include a hoist system that will enable animals to be lifted into the necropsy room. This will assist both our employees and farmers who bring their animals in for examination. The Information Systems and Purchasing and Support Services Offices are also working towards the agency full compliance with Virginia's Accessibility Requirements for Electronic and Information Technology as enacted by the 2004 General Assembly and administered by VITA. Application Development staff is trained in the accessibility requirements and the necessary accessibility changes will be made as new applications are developed or current applications are modified. New electronic equipment purchases and leases will be procured or leased following the new requirements.

As VDACS carries out its mission and achieves its five strategic goals, the agency will continue to provide services to all individuals regardless of age or disability. In addition, before implementing any new policies or programs, the agency will analyze the impact of the policies and programs on seniors and adults with disabilities.