



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY

Office of Working Lands Preservation

Annual Report

*A program of the Virginia Department of Forestry
previously administered by the
Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
as The Office of Farmland Preservation*

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Overview	4
Accomplishments	6
Administering PDR Matching Funds	6
Providing Technical Assistance and Education on Farmland Preservation	6
Virginia Farm Link Program	7
Virginia Agriculture License Plates	8
Virginia Century Farm Program	8
Appendix 1 – Status of Local Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Programs	9
Appendix 2 – FY24 Allocations for Local Programs	10
Appendix 3 – Acres Protected with State PDF Matching Funds	10
Appendix 4 – Presentations and Outreach Activities	11
Appendix 5 – Article 2.1: Office of Working Lands Preservation	12

Executive Summary

Commencing on July 1, 2024, as mandated by Virginia Code § 10.1-1119.2 (see Appendix 5), the Office of Farmland Preservation's (OFP) duties were transferred to the Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF). This formed the newly named Office of Working Lands Preservation (OWL).

This annual report highlights the key achievements of both the former OFP and the current OWL during the period of Dec. 1, 2023, to Nov.30, 2024.

Significant accomplishments for OFP and OWL during this reporting period include the following:

- ◆ Continued to work with key agriculture, conservation, and government partners to refine the allocation process for state matching funds to local purchase of development rights (PDR) programs;
- ◆ Allocated \$875,000 in Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24) state matching funds to six local PDR programs;
- ◆ Worked with local Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) programs to permanently preserve 43.049 acres (one easement) of working farm and forest land. OFP provided \$40,528.16 of the \$150,500.00 total purchase price and transaction costs paid for this easement;

Extended FY 2024 agreement with Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) to reimburse VCE for workshops it conducted to help farm families and professional service providers transition farms and farming operations.

- ◆ Continued collaboration with the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation (VFBF) on the management of the Certified Farm Seekers Program and continued improvements to the Virginia Farm Link website and database; and
- ◆ Completed transfer of responsibilities from OFP to OWL at DOF.

Overview

Section 10.1-1119.2 of the Virginia Code requires the State Forester to submit a written report on the operation of OWL to the chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources and the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources by Dec. 1 of each year.

The following are the specific powers and duties of OWL as established in § 10.1-1119.2 of the Code of Virginia:

1. To develop, in cooperation with the Department of Small Business and Supplier Diversity, the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation, the American Farmland Trust, the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation, the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, the Virginia Association of Counties, and the Virginia Cooperative Extension, (i) model policies and practices that may be used as a guide to establish local purchase of development rights programs; (ii) criteria for the certification of local purchase of development rights programs as eligible to receive grants, loans, or other funds from public sources; and (iii) methods and sources of revenue for allocating funds to localities to purchase agricultural and forestal conservation easements;
2. To create programs to educate the public about the importance of farmland and forestland preservation to the quality of life in the Commonwealth;
3. To provide technical, professional, and other assistance to farmers on matters related to farmland and forestland preservation;
4. To provide technical, professional, and other assistance to local governments interested in developing additional farmland and forestland preservation policies and programs. Such policies and programs shall include (i) use value assessment and taxation pursuant to §§ [58.1-3230](#) and [58.1-3231](#); (ii) transfer of development rights pursuant to Article 7.1 (§ [15.2-2316.1](#) et seq.) of Chapter 22 of Title 15.2; (iii) agricultural and forestal districts pursuant to Chapter 43 (§ [15.2-4300](#) et seq.) of Title 15.2; and (iv) establishment of local lease of development rights; and
5. To administer the Virginia Farm Link Program established pursuant to § 10.1-1119.4.

In addition, the Office administers the allocation of state matching funds to local PDR programs:

“State grants shall be distributed to local purchase of development rights programs under policies, procedures, and guidelines developed by the Office of Farmland Preservation. In general, for each \$1 in grant moneys awarded by the Office, the applicable local purchase of development rights program of the county or city shall be required to provide a \$1 match. However, as part of these policies, procedures, and guidelines developed by the Office, the Office shall include incentives that recognize and encourage counties and cities participating in use value taxation pursuant to Article 4 (§ [58.1-3229](#) et seq.) of Chapter 32 of Title 58.1.”

In establishing OFP, the General Assembly created a program to address two challenges that threaten the future viability of Virginia’s agriculture industry sector. The first of these challenges is an aging farm population coupled with the difficulty young prospective farmers face when seeking to enter the profession. The average principal farm operator in Virginia is 58.5 years of age, and 37 percent of principal farm operators are aged 65 or older. There are five times as many producers over the age of 65 as there are under the age of 35. According to the American Farmland Trust (AFT), nationwide, 371 million acres of agricultural land owned by aging landowners is expected to change hands over the next 15 years.

The second challenge relates to the continued loss of farm and forest land to developed uses in Virginia. In 2020, AFT released a report entitled “Farms Under Threat: the State of the States” that analyzed nationwide data to determine the total loss of agricultural land. Nationally, between 2001 and 2016, 11 million acres of

farmland and ranchland were converted to urban and highly developed land use (UHD) or low-density residential land use (LDR). UHD represents what is typically thought of when discussing development – the urban and suburban creep surrounding established urban centers. LDR represents the conversion of agricultural land to large-lot housing development. AFT’s analysis found that LDR often leads to UHD development. In addition, AFT created the Nationally Significant farmland designation to identify the most productive, versatile, and resilient land for sustainable food and crop production. AFT found that between 2001 and 2016, 4.4 million acres of Nationally Significant land were converted to UHD and LDR land uses.

In Virginia, 339,800 acres of agricultural land were converted to UHD or LDR land uses between 2001 and 2016. Significantly, 80 percent of that conversion (272,900 acres) was to LDR land use, which fragments the agricultural land base and limits the production, marketing, and management options for the remaining working landscape. Agricultural land located in LDR areas in 2001 was seven times more likely to convert to UHD by 2016, indicating the importance of land use policies that help keep working landscapes intact. Notably, these data do not include the growing threat of conversion to non-residential development, including utility-scale solar, which is a growing industry in Virginia.

These data illustrate a decreasing amount of farmland available for agricultural use in Virginia over time, which has the potential to adversely impact the agricultural industry and Virginia’s economy. Agriculture remains Virginia’s largest industry. AFT estimated that the farmland converted between 2001 and 2016 into UHD or LDR land uses in Virginia was sufficient acreage to generate \$164 million in annual revenue, not including income derived from agritourism activities. This loss also results in increased fragmentation of the remaining farm and forest land. Farmers and foresters will continue to face increasing threats as land prices increase and fragmentation expands.

In 2004, DOF initiated the Forestland Conservation Program to develop and hold open-space easements on forestland properties. By the conclusion of FY24, DOF held 229 easements on 97,669 acres across Virginia. Approximately 54% of the properties under DOF easement include agricultural operations in addition to forestland. DOF also has a longstanding partnership with VCE to offer the Generation NEXT program to landowners seeking education about the tools and practices to best ensure their properties will remain in production and in family ownership. With the creation of OWL within DOF, Virginia now has a unified resource for landowners and localities seeking assistance on all matters related to the conservation of the Commonwealth’s farms and forestland.

Accomplishments

The following are the accomplishments of OFP and OWL during Dec. 1, 2023, to Nov. 30, 2024:

Administering PDR Matching Funds

Since its establishment in 2007, OFP staff has worked with local governments, farm and conservation organizations, and other interested parties to establish local PDR programs, which compensate landowners who permanently preserve their land by voluntarily placing a perpetual conservation easement on the property. Twenty-two (22) local PDR programs exist to date in Virginia, seven of which have some level of current local funding available (see Appendix 1).

OFP worked with key stakeholders to develop a two-part certification process for the use of state PDR matching funds. The first part was a certification of the amount of local matching funds that the locality had available for its PDR program. The second part was an application to certify the elements of the local PDR program based on *A Model Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program for Virginia* developed by the State Farmland Preservation Task Force in 2005.

During FY24 state matching funds grant round, OFP allocated \$875,000. Localities had until Nov. 13, 2023, to submit their fiscal and program certification forms. Six localities met the fiscal and certification deadline for FY 2024 funding. These six localities certified that they had a total of approximately \$33.7 million in non-state funding (\$9.6million in FY24 and \$24.1million from previous years) available to match state funds. The allocations for FY24 were awarded to localities in January 2024 (see Appendix 2).

Localities have up to two years from the execution of the Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) to close on approved agricultural conservation easements. Typically, localities are afforded a six-month extension to complete and document approved agricultural conservation easements. To mitigate potential disruptions during the transition from OFP to OWL, localities with unspent FY 2022 funds will be granted an additional extension. In 2022, the standard IGA template was amended to allow a year-long extension of funds if the funds are committed to an easement purchase also leveraging funding from the National Resources Conservation Service Agriculture Land Easement program. PDR managers requested this change as a result of sometimes lengthy delays during the federal review process.

During the reporting period, \$40,528.16 in state matching funds from the Virginia Farmland and Forestland Preservation Fund (the Fund) were used in part to permanently protect 43.049 acres (two easements) in partnership with local PDR programs. The total purchase price and transaction cost paid for these easements was \$150,500.00. Since the program's inception in 2007, a total of \$13.3 million in state matching funds from the Fund have been used in part to permanently protect 14,993 acres (116 easements) in partnership with 16 local PDR programs (see Appendix 3).

Since assuming the responsibilities of the office, DOF is currently in the process of allocating to local PDR programs the \$875,000 available for the FY 2025 grant round. Localities have until Nov. 22 to submit their fiscal and program certifications.

Providing Technical Assistance and Education on Farmland Preservation

Since the establishment of OFP in 2007, staff has been asked to provide technical assistance to local and state governments, agricultural and conservation organizations, individual landowners and farmers, and others interested in learning more about farmland preservation in Virginia. The recent transition of OFP to OWL presents an opportunity to reevaluate approaches to stakeholder engagement and reach a wider audience.

The following outlines efforts by OFP and OWL to provide technical assistance and outreach on farmland preservation issues from Dec. 1, 2023– Nov. 30, 2024:

Workshops/Presentations: OFP and OWL delivered five workshops/presentations to a wide variety of audiences. Topics included PDR programs, farmland preservation tools and techniques, conservation easements, the Virginia Farm Link program, the Century Farm program, future programming for OWL, onboarding of new staff, and Generation NEXT (see Appendix 4).

Outreach: Following the transition of OFP to OWL, OWL staff conducted outreach to partners including VFBF, the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, Virginia Cooperative Extension, and Virginia's United Land Trusts (VAULT) to gather input and ideas for future programming.

Committees: Former OFP staff represented VDACS as a member of the VLCF (Virginia Land Conservation Foundation) Interagency Taskforce, which is administered by DCR. Former OFP staff provided updates to the grant manual, reviewed and scored all of the Farmland category grants, and presented the projects recommended for funding to the VLCF board on November 21st, 2024.

Website: For the remainder of its existence, OFP provided updated information on its website at: <http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/conservation-and-environmental-farmland-preservation-tools.shtml>. The website provided information on the office as well as the issues and challenges related to the loss of Virginia's working farms and forest lands. It currently includes links to the websites, program ordinances, easement templates, and other materials for many of the 22 local PDR programs and the two local transfer of development rights programs currently established. OWL is currently developing web resources to maintain the functions referenced above.

Landowner phone calls/e-mails: OFP and OWL communicated with numerous landowners and farmers interested in understanding the range of options for permanently protecting their land. OFP and OWL also fielded numerous calls and e-mails from farm owners and farm seekers interested in the Virginia Farm Link program and the Virginia Century Farm program.

Virginia Farm Link Program

The office is charged with administering the Virginia Farm Link program. Pursuant to Virginia Code § 3.2-202, the purpose of the Virginia Farm Link program is to do the following:

“...provide assistance to retiring farmers and individuals seeking to become active farmers in the transition of farm businesses and properties from retiring farmers to active farmers. Such assistance shall include, but not be limited to, (i) assistance in the preparation of business plans for the transition of business interests; (ii) assistance in the facilitation of transfers of existing properties and agricultural operations to interested buyers; (iii) information on innovative farming methods and techniques; and (iv) research assistance on agricultural, financial, marketing, and other matters.”

The cornerstone of the Virginia Farm Link program is the accompanying website. In 2020, VDACS and VFBF entered into a partnership to update and expand the Farm Link website. In order to develop a strategy for a revised website, VFBF and OFP staff called all active farm owners and farm seekers in the database and asked a series of questions. Surveys were also sent to the following groups: Farm Link users who are not currently active but had used the system within the past year, VFBF producer members, VCE agents, and student agriculture organizations at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg.

In fall 2021, with the assistance of a contracted third-party web developer, the new Virginia Farm Link website was launched at virginiafarmlink.org. Since the official launch date of Dec. 1, 2021, VDACS and VFBF promoted the website in multiple forums both in-person and virtually. Since the launch, hundreds of individuals have signed up to be Farm Seekers and, as of the time of this report, there are thirty-seven (37) active farm listings. This is a substantial increase in the number of active accounts, particularly in the available farms category, indicating that the website redesign and targeted outreach have led to greater interaction and engagement.

The Certified Farm Seeker (CFS) program, which was developed in 2012 in collaboration with the VFBF's Young Farmers group, continues to operate in its current form. The CFS program helps farm seekers develop a farm

business plan and resume and demonstrate on-farm experience by using five curriculum modules (whole farm planning introduction, business, land acquisition and tenure, marketing, and on-farm experience) that were developed by the Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition Project. The program was designed to help all levels of beginning and experienced young farmers who are looking to farm or expand their farms.

Prior to the transition, OFP extended funding for farm transition workshops designed to help farm families and their service providers transition farms and farming operations to the next generation.

Virginia Agriculture License Plates

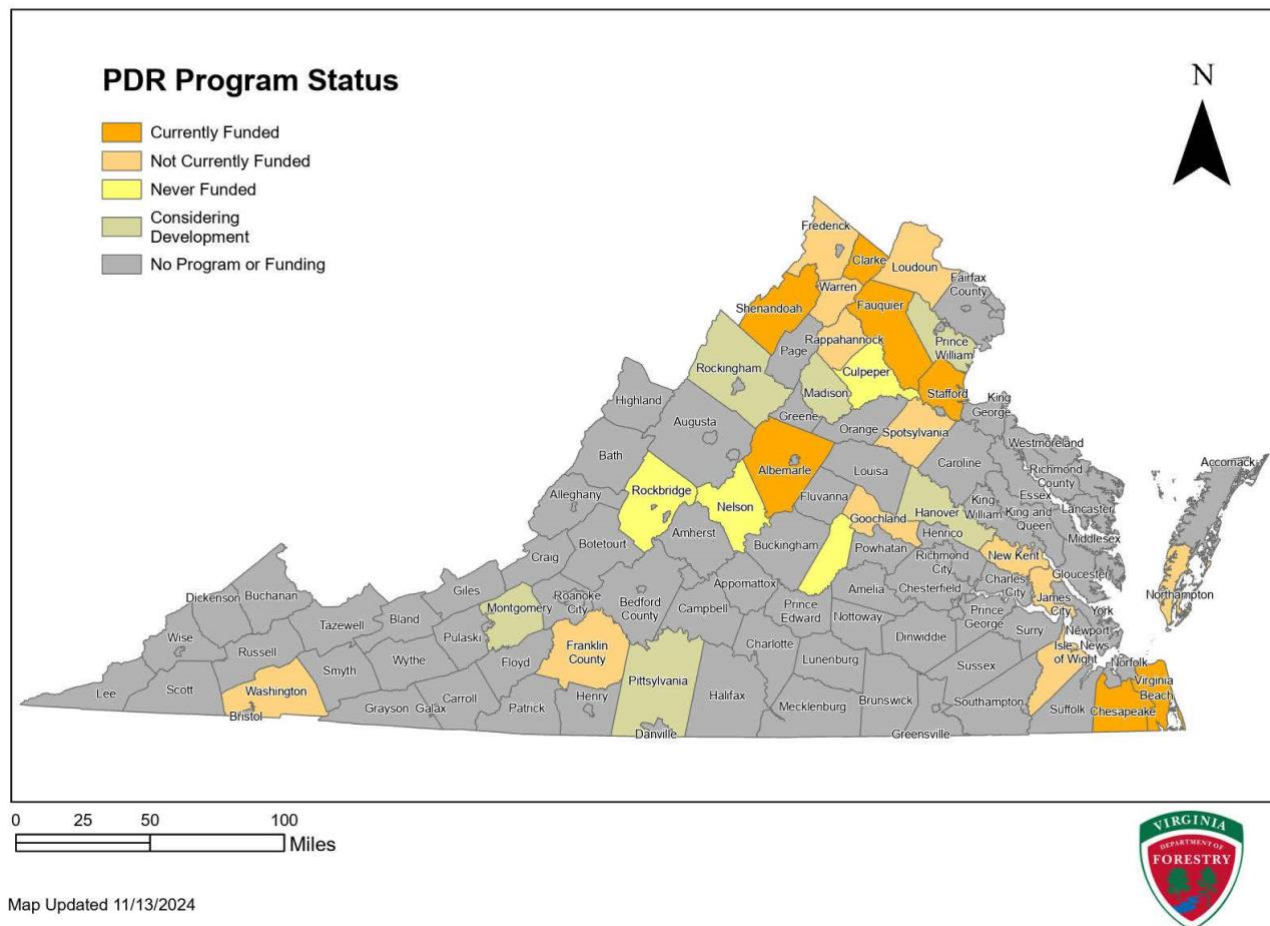
Chapter 653 of the 2004 Acts of Assembly established a new revenue-generating license plate for supporters of Virginia agriculture. As established in Virginia Code § 46.2-749.102, the annual fee for the Virginia agriculture plate is \$25 in addition to the prescribed fee for state license plates. For each \$25 fee collected in excess of 1,000 registrations, \$15 is credited to a special non-reverting fund known as the Virginia Agricultural Vitality Program Fund established within the Department of Accounts. The revenue generated by this fee is paid annually to the office and to date has been used to fund projects primarily related to the Virginia Farm Link program.

Virginia Century Farm Program

In October 2010, OFP was assigned the administration of the Virginia Century Farm program, which honors and recognizes those Virginia farm families whose land has been in the same family and actively farmed for more than 100 years. As of November 15, 2024, there are now 1,580 certified Century Farms on record since the beginning of the program in 1997.

Appendix 1 – Status of Local Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Programs

Status of Local Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Programs



Appendix 2 – FY24 Allocations for Local Programs

FY24 Allocations for Local PDR Programs			
Locality	Local Funds Available (As of Nov. 2023)	Previous State Funds Remaining (As of Nov. 2023)	FY24 State Funds Awarded
County of Albemarle	\$0.00	\$75,619.00	\$0.00
City of Chesapeake	\$2,771,066.30	\$175,000.00	\$165,400.00
County of Clarke	\$231,757.00	\$266,834.95	\$165,400.00
County of Fauquier	\$3,866,129.00	\$329,070.00	\$165,400.00
County of Shenandoah	\$48,004.21	\$142,000.00	\$48,000.00
County of Stafford	\$1,233,019.20	\$331,476.00	\$165,400.00
City of Virginia Beach	\$25,569,311.00	\$175,000.00	\$165,400.00
TOTAL	\$33,719,286.71	\$1,494,999.95	\$875,000.00

Appendix 3 – Acres Protected with State PDF Matching Funds

As of Nov. 15, 2024

Acres Protected with State PDR Matching Funds					
Locality	Easements	Acres Protected	*Local Funding	*State PDR Funding	*Other Funding
Albemarle County	17	2,829.51	\$2,850,255.20	\$2,101,799.89	\$0.00
City of Chesapeake	4	212.36	\$1,707,449.87	\$578,329.98	\$0.00
Clarke County	43	3,342.69	\$1,416,943.24	\$1,416,940.73	\$3,248,973.50
Fauquier County	16	4,277.43	\$2,867,060.07	\$2,284,815.43	\$100,000.00
Frederick County	1	89.75	\$5,000.00	\$130,027.00	\$260,000.00
Goochland County	1	500.93	\$155,623.50	\$155,623.50	\$0.00
Isle of Wight County	3	585.40	\$1,794,862.79	\$1,547,744.21	\$0.00
James City County	5	476.16	\$1,775,974.11	\$994,967.24	\$0.00
Northampton County	3	637.25	\$139,578.10	\$139,578.10	\$1,376,000.00
Rappahannock County	2	343.23	\$157,431.00	\$156,666.00	\$0.00
Shenandoah County	2	308.87	\$100,000.00	\$100,000.00	\$525,000.00
Spotsylvania County	2	115.70	\$93,072.65	\$93,072.65	\$147,500.00
Stafford County	7	528.35	\$1,625,631.92	\$1,606,170.18	\$180,000.00
City of Virginia Beach	8	534.40	\$2,849,768.61	\$1,887,987.43	\$0.00
Warren County	1	50	\$64,745.00	\$64,745.00	\$0.00
Washington County	1	161.24	\$41,000.00	\$41,000.00	\$190,426.00
TOTAL	116	14,993.27	\$17,644,396.06	\$13,299,467.34	\$6,027,899.50
*Includes easement purchase price and in some cases incidentals such as surveys, title insurance, appraisals, reasonable legal fees, etc.					

Appendix 4 – Presentations and Outreach Activities

*Dec. 1, 2023 to Nov. 30, 2024

*Note: The activities outlined here were carried out by staff members who previously worked in OFP, as well as current staff members of the newly formed OWL.

- ◆ Collaborated with VCE to host a Generation NEXT Workshop focused on conservation tools. OFP staff provided insights into the Virginia Century Farm program, Virginia Farm Link, and Purchase of Development Rights programs (March 7, 2024).
- ◆ Convened a stakeholder group with representatives from VCE, VFBF, and Virginia Outdoors Foundation to discuss the development of OWL within DOF and its potential (June 25, 2024).
- ◆ Presented at the VAULT agency retreat in Charlottesville, Virginia. The newly formed OWL convened with conservation professionals and partner organizations to gain insights for its future direction and development (Oct. 8, 2024).
- ◆ Organized and attended a retreat to discuss Generation NEXT and its relationship to OWL. Explored possibilities for team collaboration in marketing and promotion, discussed incorporation of farm transition planning, and determined next steps for 2025 programming (Oct. 16, 2024).
- ◆ Attended and presented at the Virginia Land Easement Acquisition Partnership (also known as VLEAP) meeting in Charlottesville, Virginia. Discussed ongoing OWL transition and solicited input from partnering organizations (Oct. 18, 2024).

Appendix 5 – Article 2.1: Office of Working Lands Preservation

§ 10.1-1119.2. Office of Working Lands Preservation established.

- A. The Office of Working Lands Preservation is established in the Department of Forestry under the supervision of the State Forester.
- B. As used in this article, unless the context requires a different meaning:
 - "Fund" means the Virginia Farmland and Forestland Preservation Fund.
 - "Office" means the Office of Working Lands Preservation.

2024, cc. [10](#), [146](#).

§ 10.1-1119.3. Powers and duties of the Office; Virginia Farmland and Forestland Preservation Fund.

- A. The Office shall have the following powers and duties:
 - 1. To develop, in cooperation with the Department of Small Business and Supplier Diversity, the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation, the American Farmland Trust, the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation, the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, the Virginia Association of Counties, and the Virginia Cooperative Extension, (i) model policies and practices that may be used as a guide to establish local purchase of development rights programs; (ii) criteria for the certification of local purchase of development rights programs as eligible to receive grants, loans, or other funds from public sources; and (iii) methods and sources of revenue for allocating funds to localities to purchase agricultural and forestal conservation easements;
 - 2. To create programs to educate the public about the importance of farmland and forestland preservation to the quality of life in the Commonwealth;
 - 3. To provide technical, professional, and other assistance to farmers on matters related to farmland and forestland preservation;
 - 4. To provide technical, professional, and other assistance to local governments interested in developing additional farmland and forestland preservation policies and programs. Such policies and programs shall include (i) use value assessment and taxation pursuant to §§ [58.1-3230](#) and [58.1-3231](#); (ii) transfer of development rights pursuant to Article 7.1 (§ [15.2-2316.1](#) et seq.) of Chapter 22 of Title 15.2; (iii) agricultural and forestal districts pursuant to Chapter 43 (§ [15.2-4300](#) et seq.) of Title 15.2; and (iv) establishment of local lease of development rights; and
 - 5. To administer the Virginia Farm Link Program established pursuant to § 10.1-1119.4.
- B. State grants shall be distributed to local purchase of development rights programs under policies, procedures, and guidelines developed by the Office. In general, for each \$1 in grant moneys awarded by the Office, the applicable local purchase of development rights program of the county or city shall be required to provide a \$1 match. However, as part of these policies, procedures, and guidelines developed by the Office, the Office shall include incentives that recognize and encourage counties and cities participating in use value taxation pursuant to Article 4 (§ [58.1-3229](#) et seq.) of Chapter 32 of Title 58.1.
- C. There is hereby created in the state treasury a special nonreverting fund to be known as the Virginia Farmland and Forestland Preservation Fund. The Fund shall be established on the books of the Comptroller. The Fund shall consist of all moneys appropriated to it by the General Assembly and such moneys as may be made available from any other source, public or private. All moneys shall be paid into the state treasury and credited to the Fund. Interest earned on moneys in the Fund shall remain in the Fund and be credited to it. Any moneys remaining in the Fund, including interest thereon, at the end of each fiscal year shall not revert to the general fund but shall remain in the Fund. Moneys in the

Fund shall be used solely for the purposes of carrying out the provisions of this article. Expenditures and disbursements from the Fund shall be made by the State Treasurer on warrants issued by the Comptroller upon written request signed by the State Forester.

2024, cc. [10](#), [146](#).

§ 10.1-1119.4. Virginia Farm Link Program.

The Virginia Farm Link Program is hereby established in the Office to assist retiring farmers and individuals seeking to become active farmers in the transition of farm businesses and properties from retiring farmers to active farmers. Such assistance shall include (i) assistance in the preparation of business plans for the transition of business interests; (ii) assistance in the facilitation of transfers of existing properties and agricultural operations to interested buyers; (iii) information on innovative farming methods and techniques; (iv) research assistance on agricultural, financial, marketing, and other matters; and (v) assistance in locating conservation programs aimed at improving water quality.

2024, cc. [10](#), [146](#).

§ 10.1-1119.5. Reporting requirements.

The State Forester shall submit a written report on the operation of the Office by Dec. 1 of each year to the Chairmen of the House Committee on Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources and the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources. The provisions of this article shall not preclude local purchase of development rights programs established pursuant to the Open-Space Land Act (§ [10.1-1700](#) et seq.) from being eligible to receive grants, loans, or other funds from public sources.

2024, cc. [10](#), [146](#).

§ 10.1-1119.6. Review of capital projects and availability of working lands.

In preparing its report on each major state project, as required in Article 2 (§ [10.1-1188](#) et seq.) of Chapter 11.1, each state agency shall demonstrate that it has considered the impact that project would have on the availability of working farm and forest lands as required in § [10.1-1119.7](#), and has adequately considered alternatives and mitigating measures. The Department of Environmental Quality, in conducting its review of each major state project, shall ensure that such consideration has been demonstrated and shall incorporate its evaluation of the effects that project would have on the availability of working farm and forest lands in its comments to the State Forester and Governor. The procedures for review of highway and road construction projects established in accordance with subsection B of § [10.1-1188](#) shall include provisions requiring that the factors listed in § [10.1-1119.7](#) are considered as part of the review of each project.

2024, cc. [10](#), [146](#).

§ 10.1-1119.7. Characteristics to be considered in evaluating impacts on farm and forest lands.

- A. In preparing environmental impact reports in accordance with § 10.1-1119.6, state agencies shall consider the impact of the major state project on all farm and forest lands that:
1. Have soil classified as capability class I, II, III, or IV;
 2. Have an exceptional combination of physical characteristics for the production of food, feed, fiber, forest products, forage, oilseed, and other agricultural crops with minimum inputs of fuel, fertilizer, pesticides, and labor, and without intolerable soil erosion;
 3. Are valuable for production of specific high-value food and fiber crops, such as fruits, vegetables, and nursery crops and have a special combination of soil quality, location, growing season, and moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained high quality or high yields of such crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods;

4. Are of statewide or local importance for the production of food, feed, fiber, forest products, forage, or oilseed crops;
 5. Have been recognized under a state program such as the Clean Water Farm Award Program or the Century Farm Program or Century Forest Program;
 6. Are part of an agricultural or forestal district or are participating in a use value assessment and taxation program for real estate devoted to agricultural, horticultural, or forest use in accordance with the provisions of Article 4 (§ [58.1-3229](#) et seq.) of Chapter 32 of Title 58.1; or
 7. Make a significant contribution to the local economy or the rural character of the area where the land is located.
- B. The governing body of each locality, with the cooperation of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, may designate the important farmlands within its jurisdiction. In designating important farmlands the governing body shall demonstrate that adequate provision has been made for nonagricultural uses within its jurisdiction.
- C. As used in this article, "farmland" includes all land defined as follows:
- "Important farmland," other than prime or unique farmland, is land that is of statewide or local importance for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, nursery, oilseed, or other agricultural crops, as determined by the appropriate state agency or local government agency, and that the U.S. Department of Agriculture determines should be considered as farmland for the purposes of this article;
- "Prime farmland" is land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, fiber, forage, oilseed, nursery, and other agricultural crops with minimum inputs of fuel, fertilizer, pesticides, and labor, and without intolerable soil erosion. Prime farmland includes land that possesses the above characteristics but is being used currently to produce livestock and timber. It does not include land already in or committed to urban development or water storage; and
- "Unique farmland" is land other than prime farmland that is used for production of specific high-value food and fiber crops, as determined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It has the special combination of soil quality, location, growing season, and moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained high quality or high yields of specific crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods.

2024, cc. [10](#), [146](#).