

# **An In-depth Look at Virginia Cooperative Extension's History**

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This document was made from the textual content of the timeline for ease of search. Pictures and media can be found within the [interactive timeline](#).

## **Pre 1800's: The Early History of Virginia Agriculture**

The land, currently known as Virginia, has always thrived with agricultural activity. The land currently known as Virginia, has always thrived with agricultural activity. As early as the 1100s, Native Americans mastered plant breeding and cultivation with corn from Mexico and mixed culture agriculture with the well-known “three sisters” (corn, squash and beans). From 1606, when colonization began, to today agriculture in the state has grown and adapted to the new challenges and opportunities which have arisen.

## **1800-1850s: The Agricultural Revolution and Agricultural Fairs**

While an agricultural revolution was at hand, there were few educational opportunities to learn and study how to become a successful farmer. Sharing information broadly was difficult, however the organization of county, in 1819, and state, in 1854, fairs created one such place to share agricultural information and host friendly competitions.

## **1855: Michigan State Agricultural School**

In 1855, Michigan authorized the creation of a state Agricultural school with the goal of educating common people in both classical studies and practical knowledge. The Agricultural College of the State of Michigan was created and opened to students in 1857. The success of the college encouraged the continued effort to pass the Morrill Act and have federal land grants to fund higher education in every state.

## **1861: The Education of Slaves, Free Blacks and Mulattos in Hampton, Virginia**

Going against the 1831 law forbidding education to slaves or free blacks, Mary Peake, a free Negro, taught a class on September 17, 1861. The class was held underneath a simple oak tree, now known as the Emancipation Oak since it was where the first southern reading of the Emancipation Proclamation occurred (1863), located at what is now Hampton University.

## **1862: Morrill Land Grant Act**

Through the Morrill Land Grant Act, 30,000 acres of Federal land was given to each state to be sold and the proceeds used to create a land-grant institution. The goal was to educate the industrial class in both classical and scientific studies as well as agricultural and mechanical arts. Enrolling the working class, and dedicating scholarly resources to solving practical problems, revolutionized the university system.

**1862: U.S. Enabling Act**

The U.S. Enabling Act created the Department of Agriculture with the purpose of collecting and distributing agricultural related information nationally. Virginia Cooperative Extension would become an agency of the United States Department of Agriculture.

**1865: 13th Amendment**

The 13th Amendment, added to the U.S. Constitution in 1865, abolished slavery, thereby formally ending Virginia's major agricultural labor force.

**1868: Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute**

Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute (later Hampton Institute) was founded in 1868 to provide industrial education and experience for African American students. In 1872 it was provided one third of the federal funds from the Morrill Land Grant.

**1872: Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College**

Once Virginia was readmitted to the Union (1869), higher education institutions began competing in a lengthy struggle, named the "War of the Colleges," to earn the provisions stated in the Morrill Land Grant Act. In 1872, Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College (now known as Virginia Tech) received two thirds of the funds for its founding. The institution would later become home to agricultural extension and demonstration work.

**1872-1906: Booker T. Washington**

After receiving an education at Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, Washington taught others and established the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute. Additionally he had a part in establishing the agricultural extension program for the state of Alabama.

**1877: Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services**

The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, established in 1877, assists Virginia agriculture by providing consumer protection and advocating for environmental stewardship.

**1882-1887: Hatch Act**

The Hatch Act provided funding for the creation of experiment stations at land-grant institutions. Experiment stations perform production and operation research to provide farmers with scientific data about the most effective methods in their industry.

**1882: Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute**

In 1882 Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute (now Virginia State University) was founded and over a year later, in 1883, the institute finally opened. The institute was the nation's first fully state-supported, 4-year institute of higher education for African Americans. In 1902 the name was changed to Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute.

**1890: Second Morrill Land Grant Act**

The Second Morrill Land Grant Act expanded legislation and called for the creation and funding of black land-grant institutions in each state. Hampton Institute, established in 1868, received these 1890 funds for Virginia until 1930.

**1904: Virginia's first Farmers Institute was Organized**

The Virginia Farmers Institute was part of a national flurry in the development of agricultural leadership institutes. Organized in 1904, Farmer's Institutes provided up-to-date information about farming techniques to gentlemen-farmers. Like experiment stations, the information which resulted from the Institutes' work was very beneficial but was not easily accessible or known to the common farmer.

**1906: Seaman Knapp**

Seaman Knapp created the idea of demonstration work, teaching low-income farmers how to become more profitable and self-sustainable by demonstrating the new findings from Experiment Stations. By allowing farmers to see first hand how beneficial scientific farming could be, it spread the knowledge beyond the well-educated members of society. His successes provided a basis for what would eventually become extension agents.

**1906: First Extension Agents**

William C Stallings, appointed by Seaman Knapp on November 12th 1906, was the first county agent serving a single location, Smith County, Texas. On the same day Thomas M Campbell was appointed by Booker T. Washington as an extension agent to serve in a cooperative manner within Alabama by traveling with a Jesup Wagon, which served as a movable agricultural education center. The work these two men did, set the precedent for future extension agents jobs.

**1906: T.O. Sandy**

Thomas Oldham Sandy was chosen to be the first state agent in Virginia. Teaching the scientific farming practices he already used on his own farm, Sandy served as a traveling agent and exhibited the Knapp method of demonstration across the state. Known as the father of demonstration work among white farmers in Virginia, Sandy chose assistant demonstration agents to continue to spread his work.

**1906: J.B. Pierce**

John Baptist Pierce became the first African American farm agent in Virginia, after attending Hampton Institute from 1898-1902, and grew to be the district agent for Negro demonstration work in Virginia and the Carolinas. Teaching the live-at-home method of being a self-sustaining farmer, Pierce wanted to help increase yields so that even the lowest income farmer was able to live at home and educate their children.

**1906: Pure Food and Drug Act**

The Pure Food and Drug Act was created in response to the unhealthy practices occurring in food production facilities. The Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 prohibited the sale of altered food and drugs in interstate commerce and led to the nation's first consumer protection agency, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

**1907: F.S. Farrar**

One of T.O. Sandy's chosen assistants, Fernando Southall Farrar, was a leader for the Corn Club movement in Virginia. In Chesterfield and Dinwiddie counties he enrolled boys to grow corn on their family farm using the new techniques they learned and to compete for the largest harvest. The boy's knowledge spread to their families and increased crop yields.

**1908: Congressional Agricultural Schools**

Within Virginia 11 Congressional District, Agricultural Schools were created with the purpose of providing agricultural education at the secondary level. Extension programs become closely tied with these schools with faculty participating in summer demonstration work, completing agriculture focused research, or leading youth activities. Typical extension work and teaching or land-grant philosophy can be seen in these secondary schools.

**1910: Ella Agnew**

Ella Agnew became the first home demonstration agent in the United States, and first woman field worker in the U.S. Department of Agriculture. She created Tomato Clubs for girls, similar to the Corn Clubs for boys, with additional lessons about canning and storing goods. Home demonstration work and agricultural education for women grew out of her work.

**1913: Lizzie A. Jenkins**

Lizzie A. Jenkins was the first African American home demonstration agent in Virginia. She organized clubs and supervised Jeanes teachers who spent summers traveling to homes to teach skills such as canning, sewing, and gardening. By visiting homes Jenkins was able to tailor her programs to focus on what families needed most, leading to incredible community improvement.

**1914: Smith-Lever Act**

The Smith-Lever Act made agricultural demonstration work a part of the educational mission of land-grant institutions throughout the United States, establishing the Cooperative Extension System. It was required that colleges focus on persons not attending colleges, and instead spread the information they produced with the community, which expanded education to the general public.

**1914: Appropriation Act**

To finance Extension work Virginia created the Appropriation Act which set up funds to offset Smith-Lever appropriations. Additionally, county Boards of Supervisors were authorized to provide for salaries and other costs of County Extension Agents. The cooperative financing illustrates the growing partnership between federal, state, and local governments to work towards solving agricultural problems.

**1914: Joseph D. Eggleston**

Joseph D. Eggleston became president of Virginia Polytechnic Institute in 1913. Eggleston had a passion for Knapp's demonstration method and oversaw the transfer of the administration of Virginia's demonstration work from Burkeville, established in 1907, to VPI. In 1914 he was named the first director of, what would become, Virginia Cooperative Extension and served until 1916.

**1915: Demonstration Trains**

Demonstration trains were a popular project conducted by Extension with the Norfolk and Western railroad. The train traveled with agents who spoke, and exhibition cars which showed machinery, farm products, and livestock. Demonstration trains reached areas of Virginia which previously knew nothing of extension work and its benefits.

**1916: Jesse M. Jones**

Jesse M. Jones served as the first full time director of Agricultural Extension for Virginia from 1916 to 1919. Jones led the effort to tailor extension work to best contribute to the war effort during the World War I years through special programming and partnership with other community efforts. He also is known for presiding over the first club meeting for African American boys at Hampton Institute in 1915.

**1916-1918: World War I Programs**

County agents were mainly focused on keeping up with the food production demands that the war brought, but also were assigned the tasks of selling Thrift Stamps and helping organizations such as the Red Cross or the Y.M.C.A. Home agents assisted by leading

home improvement projects, encouraging the creation of backyard gardens, and assisting in emergency work such as sewing bandages and caring for the sick.

**1916: Movable Schools**

Movable schools were demonstration lessons taught by agents who moved between locations with their equipment; common topics covered in schools were horticulture, home economics, packing, dairying, and general agriculture.

**1917: Smith-Hughes Act**

The Smith-Hughes Act developed vocational education programs prior to college in fields such as agriculture, home economics, and industrial trades. Another effort to open young minds to the possibility of scholarship and agriculture overlapping.

**1917: John R. Hutcheson**

John R. Hutcheson served as Assistant Director of the Virginia Agricultural Extension Service from 1917 to 1919, after which he became the Director, a position which he held until 1944. After his time as head of Extension he became President of Virginia Tech from 1945-1947.

**1918: Boys and Girls Clubs Unite**

In 1918 extension policy was created that encouraged the consolidation of boys and girls clubs into a single organization, known as agriculture and home economics clubs, in order to make it easier on agents and to be able to achieve more. In 1920 these became known as 4-H clubs standing for Head, Heart, Hands, and Health.

**1915-1923: First Virginia State Short Courses**

Short Courses were organized to instruct and recognize 4-H members and their leaders. The first short course for girls was held in 1915 at Harrisonburg Normal School, for boys in 1917 at VPI, and for African American 4-H members was at Hampton Institute in 1923.

**1920: Hampton Land Grant Status Transferred**

The land grant institution established by the second Morrill Land Grant Act was transferred from Hampton Institute to Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute (now known as Virginia State University) in 1920. The 1890 funds were transferred from Hampton Institute in 1930.

**1922: 4-H All Stars**

The 4-H All Stars program was created as an opportunity to recognize leadership, service, and accomplishment. Being named a 4-H All Star has been the highest honor of

the 4-H organization since 1922. All Stars give back service to 4-H through program planning, implementation, evaluation, reporting, fundraising and speaking on behalf of the organization.

**1923:** Virginia Homemaker's Association

Virginia Homemaker's Association, also known as Virginia Federation of Home Demonstration Clubs, The Virginia Extension Homemakers Council, and now the Virginia Association for Family and Community Education, served to educate the community on topics such as family life, health, and women's issues. Since 1923 this organization has provided opportunities for women leadership development and a growing sense of community.

**1925-1928:** Agricultural Youth Education Organizations

Future Farmers of Virginia was founded at Virginia Tech in 1925, growing into the Future Farmers of America in 1928. New Farmers of Virginia, later renamed New Farmers of America, was founded by Virginia State College in 1927 as an alternative to all-white Future Farmer organizations. These agricultural clubs were organized for boys and existed within the public school system.

**1928:** First Owned and Operated 4-H Club

The Jamestown 4-H camp was created to serve the campers in the district, and served as an example for the construction of future district camps. Having a 4-H educational center, or camp, allowed for permanent and proper accommodations for campers, volunteers, or leaders to meet and host programs. There are now six 4-H Educational Centers in Virginia.

**1929:** The Great Depression

The Great Depression led the Extension to making new programs and coordinating different efforts in order to cater to the changing demands. These include working with the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) to work on soil fertility with crop rotation education for the Tennessee river watershed, cooperation with the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) to bring electricity to farms, and engineering solutions to dairy barn construction and water availability.

**1932:** Home Demonstration Agents and the Great Depression

Home Demonstration Agents adapted to the new demands of the Great Depression by focusing programs on home gardens, canning, storage of food, and production of clothing. 4-H and home demonstration clubs additionally contributed by taking on special relief projects.

**1933: Agricultural Adjustment Act**

The Agricultural Adjustment Act was created as a relief program for the Great Depression. Extension services were put in charge of implementing the program, which consisted of giving support payments to farmers who stopped production of certain crops such as cotton, tobacco, corn, and hogs.

**1938: Maude E. Wallace**

In 1938 Maude E. Wallace became assistant director of Extension in charge of home demonstration work, a position she held until 1958. During her time she grew home demonstration work in Virginia to a new level of effectiveness and efficiency, developing the Virginia Federation of Home Demonstration Clubs to be the largest organization of women in Virginia at the time, and worked to enable women in Extension to get paid equal to men.

**1942-1945: World War II Programs**

Production quotas were created by the Department of Agriculture to produce enough to feed the war effort, and Extension worked to find and educate farmers about the best way to reach those demands. Extension also helped through the collection of scrap metal, refocusing programs on conservation, and assisting the Red Cross.

**1942: Victory Garden Program**

The Victory Garden Program advocated for each rural family to raise enough food to feed themselves and their livestock, Extension formed the State Extension Garden Committee to promote the effort. Victory Gardens were so successful that they spread to urban areas as well.

**1943: Farm Labor Bill**

The Farm Labor Bill passed in 1943 assigned the job of supplying farm labor to the Agricultural Extension Service. In order to do so, Extension recruited anyone from convicts to school youths. Extension additionally took advantage of the system of Virginia county agricultural boards which were made up of community leaders.

**1945: Leander B. Dietrick**

Leander B. Dietrick served as the Extension Director in 1945 and continued until he was named the Dean of Agriculture, a position he held from 1952 to 1962. Under his leadership women gained more recognition and improved conditions, additionally, 4-H membership increased greatly.

**1945: Homemakers Organizations**

Future Homemakers of America and New Homemakers of America were established as segregated home economic student organizations for girls. In 1965 these two organizations merged, in 1974 males were allowed to join, and 1999 the name was changed to Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA).

**1947:** 100-Bushel Corn Club and the Corn War

Inspired by the original Corn Clubs, pamphlets instructing farmers how to produce 100, or more, bushels of corn per acre were published by the Extension agency. The program was open to both youth and adults and attempted to show how useful Extension research could be. The growing interest led to Virginia challenging North Carolina to a friendly Corn War to see which state could produce more. Virginia ended up winning both years.

**1962:** William H. Daughtrey

William H. Daughtrey served as Director of Extension from 1962 to 1966. Throughout his career he was involved in Extension in many different ways, assistant agronomist, district agent, and Assistant Director. A critical role he served in was the administration of the Agricultural Adjustment Act within Virginia from 1933 to 1939.

**1964:** The Civil Rights Act

The Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964 and prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin in federally assisted programs which included the Cooperative Extension system and land-grant colleges. Within the next year the Virginia Extension service had integrated their offices and programs.

**1965:** William E. Skelton

William E. Skelton served as the Dean of the Extension Division from 1965 to 1976. Under his leadership the Extension Division was formed which incorporated the Cooperative Extension Service, Technical Services, and General Extension programs such as 4-H and home economics clubs. With the new organization, leadership also changed establishing Associate Deans to help run divisions of Extension.

**1966:** First Racially Integrated 4-H Boys and Girls

The first racially integrated 4-H Boys' & Girls' Short Course is held at Virginia Tech. The name was changed to State 4-H Congress the following year.

**1968:** Donaldson Brown Center for Continuing Education

The Donaldson Brown Center for Continuing Education was built to provide on-campus housing for adults to stay in when attending short courses, refresher classes, or conferences at Virginia Tech. Having a place for community members to get access to

education allowed for higher knowledge and college resources to be available to all individuals.

**1969: Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program**

The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) was created in 1969. The program, carried out by Cooperative Extension and land-grant universities, focused on educating individuals about food resource management, nutrition, food safety, and dieting in order to address economic, obesity, and food insecurity challenges.

**1977: William R. Van Dresser**

From 1977 to 1982, William R. Van Dresser served as the Dean of the Extension Division. During his time the organizational structure of leadership was changed, additionally he advocated for continued professional development of faculty and staff within Extension.

**1979: Virginia State University**

After being renamed again in 1946 to Virginia State College, in 1979 the institution was renamed a final time to Virginia State University (VSU). The current day Virginia Cooperative Extension service is composed of the land-grant institutions Virginia State University and Virginia Tech.

**1981: Mitchell R. Geasler**

Mitchell (Mitch) R. Geasler served as acting director of the Extension Division from 1981 to 1982, and director from 1982-1989. In his time the position title was changed to Dean of Extension and Continuing Education.

**1988: Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act Passed**

Enacted by the Virginia General Assembly in 1988, the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act and its ensuing program was designed to improve water quality in the Chesapeake Bay. Balancing the economic development plans as well as water quality improvement called for cooperative effort between state and local government agencies.

**1989: James F. Johnson**

James F. Johnson served as acting director of Extension from 1989 to 1990, then as director from 1990 to 1992. During his time as head of Extension there was a 21 percent budget reduction, but he successfully guided the organization through and saw to a major organizational renewal.

**1990: Virginia Master Gardeners Association**

The Virginia Master Gardeners Association was formed in 1990 in order to address state level horticulture needs instead of just those issues at a community level. One project this association took on was writing to Governor Wilder to encourage the drawback of the cuts to the Extension budget. The organization is open to all individuals who complete the VCE Master Gardener program, which teaches about home landscapes, vegetable gardening, and more.

**1991: Clinton Turner**

Clinton Turner was appointed as the Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services for the State of Virginia in 1991, which made him the first African American in the nation to hold a cabinet level position in agriculture. Additionally, he studied at VSU, was a housing and structure extension agent for Virginia, and became the first African-American District Director for the Virginia Cooperative Extension Service in 1980.

**1992: William A. Allen**

William (Bill) A. Allen served as director of Extension from 1992 to 1995. During his time as head of Extension Bill led the 1995 budget restoration efforts to retain funding for the organization and keep passionate members of the community unified.

**1994: North American Free Trade Agreement**

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was implemented in 1994 and created a free trade area between Canada, Mexico, and the United States. Reduced trade barriers encouraged economic growth and increased employment, with the amount of benefit being dependent on the agricultural sector. In 2020 the agreement was renegotiated and is currently named the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA).

**1994: Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act**

The Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act of 1994 recognized 35 tribal colleges and universities as federal Land-Grants. These institutions primarily serve Native American populations that lack equal access to higher education.

**1995: Budget Restoration Project**

Virginia Cooperative Extension offices and representatives from community programs came together to write letters and express their love of the organization to convince the state government to continue providing substantial financial support to Extension services. The budget cuts did end up being reduced, but it still led to restructuring of leadership with fewer administrators.

**1996:** Clifton Clark Jones

Clifton Clark Jones served as Director of Extension from 1996 to 1998.

**1999:** J. Dave Barrett

J. David Barrett served as Director of Extension from 1999 to 2003.

**1999:** The Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission

The General Assembly of Virginia created the Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission to reinvigorate Virginia's tobacco region by compensating tobacco farmers for the declining tobacco production. Funding came from Virginia's share of the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement, an accord regarding the advertising and marketing of cigarettes, particularly towards youth, between 46 state attorney generals, 5 U.S. territories, Washington D.C., and 4 of the largest American cigarette manufacturers.

**2003:** Steven H. Umberger

Steven H. Umberger served as Director of Extension in 2003.

**2003:** Judith Jones

Judith Jones served as Interim Director of Extension in 2003. Judith also held the positions of Assistant Vice Provost for Virginia Cooperative Extension, and Associate Director of Extension for Field Operations during her career.

**2004:** Patricia M. Sobrero

Patricia M. Sobrero served as Director of Extension from 2004 to 2005. She also was a professor and coordinator of graduate study in Agriculture and Extension Education for Virginia Tech from 2004 to 2007.

**2005:** Mark McCann

Mark McCann served as Interim Director from 2005 to 2006, and Director of Extension from 2006 to 2009.

**2008:** National Institute for Food and Agriculture

The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act, also known as the 2008 Farm Bill, made the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) an agency under the USDA. NIFA still works as a partner of Cooperative Extension, NIFA helps provide leadership and fund the state level programs so that scientific research can reach the everyday farmer.

**2008:** National 4-H Science Programing

4-H has recently grown into incorporating STEM programs for youth. Since 2008 there has been the 4-H STEM Challenge, previously the 4-H National Youth Science Day, a

national event which brings together 4-H youth, volunteers, and educators to participate in hands-on STEM challenges. Some themes of these challenges have included: Mars Base Camp, Biofuel Blast, Drone Discovery, and 4-H2O.

**2009:** Rick Rudd

Rick Rudd served as Interim Director from 2009 to 2011.

**2011:** Edwin J. Jones

Edwin J. Jones became Director of Extension in 2011 and currently remains in the position, he also serves as the Associate Dean, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

**2014:** Virginia Cooperative Extension Centennial

2014 marked 100 years since the Smith-Lever act and the creation of the Cooperative Extension System. In 100 years, Virginia Cooperative Extension grew to include 107 unit offices, 11 ARECs, and 6 4-H educational centers.

**2014:** Virginia Food Desert Reports

Virginia Food Desert Reports, created with assistance from Virginia Cooperative Extension, focus on the status of food deserts, areas where people cannot access affordable and nutritious food, in the state. In the report, challenges for the deserts are identified as well as recommendations on what actions may be done to address these shortcomings so that appropriate legislation may be created.

**2018:** Jewel Bronaugh

In 2018, Jewel Bronaugh was appointed Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Bronaugh became the first female African American to serve in this position. Additionally, in 2021, she was chosen to serve as the Deputy Secretary for the United States Department of Agriculture.

**2020:** Economic Impact of Agriculture, 2020

In 2020 it is reported that \$91 billion and 442,000 jobs are generated annually in Virginia from agriculture and forestry industries. About 90% of Virginia's farms are small farms, run by an individual or family.