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Developing a value-added Virginia economy

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At Virginia Tech, the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and Virginia Cooperative Extension continue to pioneer the technologies and community-building skills that develop strong economies while strengthening the local quality of life and community infrastructure.

Virginia communities want economies that can provide new jobs to attract and retain an educated citizenry, an environment that can provide access to affordable health care, and a high quality of life for families. In order to build this type of economy, a progressive infrastructure must be developed and in place. The prosperity of a region depends on the productivity of all its entrepreneurs, businesses, and industries, as well as its community leaders working together and competing globally. Through its statewide educational delivery system, Extension is in the unique position to develop a mechanism that creates this framework.

Extension is using its ability to leverage the college's research and knowledge base with other regional and community entities throughout Virginia to develop Innovation Communities. These communities will emphasize economic development based on the assets and needs of communities. The foundation of this development will be collaboration among entrepreneurs, local businesses, industry leaders, trade organizations, local and state governments, Virginia Tech researchers, and Virginia Cooperative Extension.

The faculty in these communities will work with local collaborators to identify economic clusters that have the potential to advance the image, growth, development, and profitability of new products and technologies, as well as services for the community. Each community will serve as a catalyst for transition from existing declining commodities

and industries to an economy based on knowledge, information services, biotechnology, and environmental and applied technologies.

The communities will be strategically located across Virginia at existing sites where Virginia Tech, the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (including the Agricultural Experiment Station and Virginia Cooperative Extension), and the Virginia Tech Outreach and International Affairs offices/centers are already established. The communities will also provide space where local meetings can be held, as well as electronic access to experts, educational opportunities, or other learning experiences.

As potential new cluster initiatives are identified, agricultural and natural resources worker skill levels and education—along with the housing, childcare, and transportation needs for these new ventures—will be studied. In addition, these clusters will investigate ways that entrepreneurs and established businesses can link to Virginia Tech and other state agencies in order to access a broader customer base. This collaborative structure will allow individual companies and entrepreneurs to broaden their ability to succeed and be part of a larger, overarching organization.

The decisions made by Innovation Community leaders and the actions they take will profoundly shape the future of the commonwealth for the next decade and beyond. For more information about these communities, contact the office of the director of Virginia Cooperative Extension at 540/231-5299.

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