

8. RESTRUCTURING PLAN FOR VIRGINIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

On October 7, VCE announced a blueprint for moving forward with plans to reorganize itself, customizing the delivery of its programs to respond to continued reductions in state funding. In the 2010 budget bill, \$5.5 million was eliminated for VCE and their administration was specifically directed to restructure and consolidate local offices.

Currently, almost 200 Extension agents and 100 support staff are scattered across the Commonwealth in 106 cities or counties. In addition, there are 80 more specialists that work in Blacksburg and the Agricultural Research Stations.

VCE intends to migrate to a new business model with Extension agents clustered around a "business center" that serves a 3 to 5 county region. Support staff in local offices will be repurposed or moved to a business center. Localities will be given choices about their level of participation. Each county will be given an option to house one agent locally to meet their unique needs that will be funded in partnership between VCE and the locality. Localities may also opt to add additional local agents paid for in full by local resources. By clustering counties, all agents in the region, regardless of office location or program discipline, will work together to deliver programs across the region.

They anticipate creating 22 regional business centers statewide. Over the course of the next few months (prior to May 2011), VCE intends to work with local governments to assess their local needs, develop specific county groupings, staffing needs and business center locations.

While they're spinning this the best that they can, on the surface, it appears to be another of many cost shifts from the Commonwealth to the localities. It sounds eerily similar to VDOT's new model. One thing I'm confident of - a strong local presence by VCE will cost us substantially more in the future.

I'm attaching a copy of their talking points and a 12-page summary of their Restructuring Plan – at this writing, I have not yet been contacted by our District Director to discuss it.

NO ACTION REQUIRED: I am, however, interested in your feedback.