2020: Working Towards a Better Agricultural Future

A turn of the calendar calls for revision of individual ideals and new goals to avoid any complacency we may have fallen into over the holidays. Business organizations typically use end of the year to honestly reflect on the previous 12 months. For state agencies, we must continue to find ways to better serve the people of our great state, as well as, implement new policies which save taxpayers’ dollars. My staff and I typically come into the new year with many goals but reviewing all of those would require a multi-page document. Instead, let’s touch on a few priorities for the WVDA in 2020.

Our Veterans and Warriors to Agriculture Program saw a lot of success this past year, most notably through the agro-therapy project with the Woody Williams VA Medical Center. To expand on these types of training opportunities, the WVDA is working with higher education partners to develop what will be known as the Veterans Education and Training Series (V.E.T.S.). Beginning in the Spring of 2020, the training series will be offered in abbreviated sessions throughout the state. They will cover various topic areas eventually leading to certification upon completion. The goal is to deliver a successful veteran training series that continues to benefit our service men and women.

The Department is working with our livestock producers to modernize our state’s industry. This includes providing animal identification readers to each livestock market in West Virginia, which is part of a federal mandate to enhance disease traceability by 2023. The good news is West Virginia is further along than many states ensuring the quality of the beef coming from our cattle farmers will remain high.

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We are also working on bringing changes to the graders program which includes training more field staff and extending their responsibilities at no additional cost to the taxpayers. To protect an industry that brings in hundreds of millions of dollars each year to our state, we must work on enhancing the resiliency of our herds. Tapping into new international markets, as well as expand local opportunities, requires protecting the reputation our cattle farmers have worked so hard to establish.

Supporting the FFA community in West Virginia is crucial to our State’s future. With record numbers of memberships over the last two years, we must ensure the resources are available for these future leaders. This includes bringing Cedar Lakes, the home of WV FFA, into the twenty-first century. The Department has worked tirelessly with the Ripley community to preserve this facility, but much more must be done. We also must work on getting vocational agriculture teachers in every school that has student interest. FFA is no longer training future farmers but the next leaders of our country. It is time we do everything possible to support these vital programs.

Over the past three years, I am extremely proud of everything my staff has accomplished. My administration came in with a positive attitude that was not going to accept complacent tendencies of the past. We listened to our staff, filled much needed positions, promoted or recruited the right people into leadership roles and have worked with the Legislature to correct erroneous regulations. Despite all that has been accomplished, we know the work isn’t done. In 2020, we promise you we are working towards a better Agricultural Future. We hope you all will join us on this journey.

Kent A. Leonhardt
West Virginia Commissioner of Agriculture

The West Virginia Department of Agriculture protects plant, animal and human health through a variety of scientific, regulatory and consumer protection programs. The Commissioner of Agriculture is one of six statewide elected officials who sits on the Board of Public Works.

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