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Commissioner of Agriculture Announces 2019 Legislative Priorities

Charleston W.Va. -- Today, West Virginia Commissioner of Agriculture Kent Leonhardt announced his priorities for the 2019 Legislative Session. These priorities were developed by Commissioner Leonhardt, as well as staff at the West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA) who have been working with partners and lawmakers to identify polices to grow and enhance agriculture in West Virginia. In addition, the WVDA will be asking for several improvement packages through the budgeting process including a general appropriation for upgraded laboratory facilities.

“This will be our third legislative session, and I believe the most prepared we have been to make significant policy changes. We know agriculture can be an economic driver for the state but some of the Department’s code hasn’t been updated since the 1920s,” Commissioner Leonhardt said. “All of our priorities seek to modernize rules and regulations or provide more tools to our agribusinesses.”

The most significant initiatives are the re-passage of two bills vetoed in 2018, the Capital Improvement Fund (HB 4166) and the Ag General Counsel Bill (SB 322). New priorities include the transfer of Grade A milk regulation from DHHR to the WVDA, modernization of auctioneer code, development of an agriculture investment fund, the creation of a farm-to-school pilot project and the transfer of the West Virginia Division of Forestry to the WVDA.

“We have done our due diligence to identify strategies to grow our agricultural industries. This includes the development of a strategic plan for agriculture. We hope the strategic plan and our own initiatives will put us on the right path to growing agriculture in the state,” Leonhardt said.

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In 2018, the WVDA, in conjunction with the West Virginia Farm Bureau, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, West Virginia Conservation Agency, WVU Extension Service, WVU Davis College of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Design and West Virginia State University Extension Service conducted an economic impact study to evaluate barriers to growth, as well as rising sectors in the agricultural industry. A public survey, combined with the results of several stakeholder meetings held throughout the State will be used in the development of the strategic plan. A draft plan will be released to lawmakers during session, with a final plan to be released in March 2019.

“We know agriculture has a place in West Virginia’s future. It is time we start taking agribusinesses seriously,” Leonhardt said. “By working with our partners, we have come up with a cohesive vision and strategy that will grow, not hinder, agriculture in the Mountain State.”

In addition to the agenda Commissioner Leonhardt has laid out, he will also be supporting several initiatives led by other organizations. This includes civil asset forfeiture reform, “Food Freedom” legislation, Right to Farm modernization and efforts to help source local products through West Virginia institutions.

For a full list of priorities click [here](#). For questions, contact Crescent Gallagher at 304-558-3708 or cgallagher@wvda.us

*Note – all priorities associated with this release represent only Commissioner Leonhardt’s views and are not to be associated with the Agriculture Advisory Board and/or its steering committee.

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.

