

Office of the Commissioner of Agriculture
KENT A. LEONHARDT



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COMMISSIONER OF AGRICULTURE KENT LEONHARDT LAYS OUT VISION, LEGISLATIVE REQUESTS FOR 2018

Charleston, W.Va. – West Virginia Commissioner of Agriculture Kent Leonhardt spoke to members of the press Monday, January 8th about his first year in office. He talked about lessons learned and efforts to improve the West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA). Leonhardt also told the media about the department’s vision for agriculture and requests he will be making to the West Virginia Legislature in 2018.

“We learned a lot our first year in office. There was a lot issue that needed resolved, but we feel like we now have the right staff in place to help accomplish the mission of the department,” said Commissioner Leonhardt. “2017 was about building a foundation for the future.”

Leonhardt told reporters that when he came into office last January, he found a department on the brink of collapse. In order to turn the department around, Leonhardt said his administration focused on ridding inefficient practices and called for audits from the Legislature. From those reports, the department ended failed programs, sold off unnecessary equipment and improved other operations.

“The department had low morale, financial problems and no direction. No government agency can run that way and accomplish its mission,” said Leonhardt.

Leonhardt told attendees the department will conduct an economic impact study to evaluate barriers to growth, as well as rising sectors in the agricultural industry. The data will be used to develop a strategic plan for agriculture in conjunction with the members of the West Virginia Agriculture Advisory Board steering committee. Commissioner Leonhardt, Governor Jim Justice and WVU Extension relaunched this board in July of 2017.

“We know agriculture has a place in West Virginia’s future. It is time we start taking agribusinesses seriously,” said Leonhardt. “Working with our partners, we will come up with a cohesive vision and strategy to grow agriculture in West Virginia.”

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To end the press conference, Commissioner Leonhardt made several requests of the West Virginia Legislature for the upcoming session. These included: funding for the WVDA Veterans and Warriors to Agriculture program, a capital improvement fund to rebuild the WVDA laboratories, structural government changes to reduce barriers on West Virginia producers and the transfer of the Division of Forestry to the WVDA.

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