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## Urban Ag Conference and Community Expo To Have Veteran Focus

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**Charleston W.Va.** -- The West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA) is partnering with West Virginia State University (WVSU) Extension Service on a Veterans and Warriors to Agriculture tract at the West Virginia Urban Agriculture Conference & Community Expo. The conference will be held on WVSU's campus May 3 – 4.

“The WVDA is working with supporting partners to find ways to increase opportunities for farmers throughout West Virginia. Part of this focus is on workforce development to tackle the growing age gap for farmers nationwide,” said Commissioner of Agriculture Kent Leonhardt. “Veterans are a perfect target audience to meet agriculture’s future labor needs.”

During the Urban Agriculture Conference & Community Expo, the WVDA and WVSU Extension Service will offer a class on small orchards. The class will cover backyard orchards, fruit production and orchard maintenance. In addition, the WVDA will have a booth featuring WV Grown, the state’s branding program for agricultural products, and the WVDA Veterans and Warriors to Agriculture program. Commissioner Leonhardt will be in attendance to discuss specific projects geared towards veterans.

“This partnership between WVSU Extension Service and the West Virginia Department of Agriculture forwards our joint mission of service to veterans transitioning into agriculture as a career,” said Dr. Annette Ericksen, assistant program director for agriculture and natural resources with WVSU Extension Service. “In addition, the backyard gardening and youth programming offerings during the new community expo portion of the event also provides support and education to military families.”

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In addition to the veteran focus, the West Virginia Urban Agriculture Conference & Community Expo is expanding its audience focus by creating tracts for community members interested in back yard and hobby gardens. The overall goal of the conference is to enhance sustainable food systems, cultural diversity and environmental stewardship in support of healthy lifestyles and economic security for West Virginia residents through education, technical assistance, public and private partnerships and community engagement.

The event is free to attend but individuals and participants are encouraged to register at: <http://urbanagwv.com/registration/>.

For more information, contact Annette Ericksen at [annette.ericksen@wvstateu.edu](mailto:annette.ericksen@wvstateu.edu).

*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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