

# Potomac State Offers New Degree

## *Sustainable Agriculture*

Once upon a time, West Virginia farmers didn't have to worry much about where their crops and animal products would sell. Local butchers took their meat, small corner markets ordered up crates of vegetables and fruits and milk arrived on your front steps from the dairy down the road. A lot has changed and Potomac State College of West Virginia University is changing with the times as well. The college in Keyser, WV, is offering a new, two-year associate of applied science degree in sustainable agriculture entrepreneurship or SAGE for short.

Potomac State Plant Sciences Professor Donna Ballard, Ph.D., stresses today's agriculture students need to know more than just how to raise a cow or grow corn. "To be a successful farmer, you have to be able to do a lot of things, including marketing your product."

The SAGE curriculum is based around basic business skills: business communications and accounting, as well as horticulture, agronomics and animal production of food. They'll also explore marketing different products.

"Food production systems are the largest food trend coming through agriculture at this time. It includes everything from safe food supplies to Farm-to-Table and the local movement," says Ballard. "We want to update our program so students can enter all those new areas of agriculture."

Those accepted into the program will be doing a lot more than just textbook learning. SAGE is a hands-on degree. Much of that work will take place at a college-owned food hub. Potomac State and the Mineral County Development Authority are working together and hope to finalize a location for a food hub in the near future.

"The food hub is designed to help students learn how to market and distribute agriculture products specific to the region. We want students thinking outside the box," says Ballard. "We hope to make connections to local farmers and bring them in as suppliers."

Students will have the opportunity to work on marketing those agriculture products to local chefs and restaurants, businesses looking for quality food and companies searching for specialty products grown in the Eastern Panhandle.

Graduates of the program will be able to start their own agribusinesses, from working in a large city with a project like rooftop beehives to taking over the family farm. The options are endless.

"Everybody likes to eat. They have to get their food from somewhere," stresses Ballard. She says SAGE graduates will be able to market their own agriculture goods or work for someone else selling theirs.

Potomac State President Jennifer Orlikoff says the SAGE degree has tremendous potential to move farming forward. "I think that because we are in the heart of some great agricultural opportunities, this is a good program to have in place to help our future farmers be successful and make money farming."

"Our goal is to get students into the production field as quickly as possible. When they graduate with this degree, we fully expect them to go out into the workforce," says Ballard.

The SAGE program will be able to accommodate 20 to 25 students for the fall 2017 semester. If the demand is there, a plan is in place to expand. The college is currently working on creating a four-year bachelor of applied science degree in sustainable agriculture entrepreneurship by the fall semester of 2018.

Those interested in applying to the SAGE program can contact Potomac State College's Enrollment Services Office at 304-788-6820 or [go2psc@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:go2psc@mail.wvu.edu).

