

WVDA PLANNING COORDINATORS REACH OUT ACROSS THE STATE

Have you ever called somewhere with a question, but have trouble finding the right person or get stuck talking to a recording? That can be frustrating, especially if you need a quick answer. That's one reason the West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA) decided to create the position of Planning Coordinator.

"I'm the boots on the ground, if you will," said Lacy Davidson.

Davidson is one of three planning coordinators with the Business Development Division at the WVDA. She focuses on the southwest part of the state. Kacey Gantzer is the planning coordinator for the northern part of West Virginia and Nathan Bergdoll covers the eastern region.

"In order for Agriculture to be the growing economy we want it to be, people have to have the capacity to grow and the ability to sell it," Davidson went on to say.

Davidson, Gantzer and Bergdoll's role is helping producers succeed. That could be a growing plan, getting products into the right market, networking or anything else a producer might need.

"I was a producer myself," said Gantzer. "People sometimes think of the department as just a regulatory entity, but I'm here to show we can help them across the board in all different types of farming."

The planning coordinators live in the areas they serve. They know what resources are available in that region, and they also have a direct line to the WVDA.

"We are a jack of all trades," Gantzer said. "We can help them source materials all the way to selling their products."

That includes, but is not limited to, marketing and production planning. Gantzer said she works with several high tunnel producers to extend their seasons and markets. All three coordinators said that is the most exciting part of their job, helping producers grow their brand.

"I love being on the ground level," Bergdoll said. "Producers are able to do just that, produce. Instead of them worrying about this and that, they can just focus on growing."

Networking is another important aspect of the job. If new producers are looking to start a business in West Virginia, coordinators can put them in touch with people who have already had success in that area.

"West Virginia is a great agricultural state. You can grow a number of different things here," Bergdoll said. "If someone is interested in growing something they never have before, I can put them in touch with other farmers who are already growing that crop."

Davidson and the other two coordinators hope their marketing and farming expertise will help all producers in their region grow their operation as much as possible and potentially get new producers up and running.

"Before this position was created, I don't think there was a lot of regional focus," Davidson said. "The WVDA headquarters are in Charleston, so some of the folks further away didn't always have a connection. This position gives producers a direct voice to the WVDA."



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