



## AGRICULTURE EDUCATION & SCHOOL GARDENS

### SUMMARY:

Agriculture is the largest private industry in Virginia and plays an essential role in our everyday lives, contributing food, fiber for clothing, fuel and stewardship of the land. Farmers are biologists, chemists, engineers, makers, entrepreneurs, inventors, veterinarians and conservationists. Farming today uses advanced data collection, sensors, automated machines, biomimicry, drones and other sophisticated technologies and applications to improve predictability and increase yield and profits. Unfortunately, the farming profession is often undervalued and dismissed as low-tech or uneducated and most students only have exposure to the profession if they are enrolled in a career technical education program.

It is essential that we separate myth from reality and provide opportunities for students to learn about where their food comes from and provide hands-on learning opportunities that spark interest in agriculture to sustain this important industry and grow our next generation of farmers. At the elementary level, curriculum and work in school gardens is often run with support from the Office of Nutrition Services. Agriculture needs to be intentionally incorporated in the Standards of Learning and curriculum with professional development opportunities available for classroom teachers. Additionally, degree programs should be structured to support agriculture education students and future agriculture educators.

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**WHEREAS,** The agriculture industry plays a vital role in society by providing food, fiber for clothing, fuel, renewable resources, land management, wildlife habitat preservation, tourism and recreation opportunities; and

**WHEREAS,** Agriculture and forestry comprise the largest industry in the Commonwealth, contributing \$91 billion and more than 334,000 jobs to the economy accounting for 9.5 percent of the Commonwealth's total gross domestic product and more than half of containerized exports moving through the Port of Virginia; and

**WHEREAS,** Every job in agriculture and forestry supports 1.7 jobs elsewhere in Virginia's economy and;

**WHEREAS,** Farm to School programs and school gardens support local economic development, provide students and families with access to healthy food and provide valuable hands-on lessons in nutrition and agriculture; and

**WHEREAS,** Farming increasingly relies on advanced technology to meet consumer demand and agriculture offers more than 300 careers in areas covering Plant Science, Animal Science, Natural Resources, Food Products and Processing, Power, Structure and Technology Systems, Agribusiness and Biotechnology; and

**WHEREAS**, despite the interconnected aspect of agriculture to core science topics, high school credits in agriculture courses are considered electives and not science credits for graduation; and

**WHEREAS**, there is a shortage of teachers in Virginia and agriculture education teacher certification is difficult to obtain because foundational teacher certification courses are not offered at the undergraduate level at Virginia's land grant universities (Virginia Tech and Virginia State University) thus requiring teachers to obtain a bachelors degree in an agriculture or agriculture science field and then pursue a Masters in teaching or teach with a provisional license while working to complete agriculture coursework;

## **THEREFORE, BE IT**

**RESOLVED**, that Virginia PTA urges the Virginia Board of Education to add an Agriculture and Forestry representative to the Advisory Committee for Career Technical Education.

**RESOLVED**, that Virginia PTA urges the General Assembly to amend the Virginia Code to require the Board of Education to develop K-12 Standards of Learning and curriculum guidelines that directly incorporate agriculture education, hands-on experiences in school gardens and career technical education programs in order to support rural workforce development, agriculture innovation and informed personal choices about diet, health and the environment.

**RESOLVED**, that Virginia PTA urges the Department of Education to count high school agriculture courses as credits to fulfill the science requirements for graduation.

**RESOLVED**, that Virginia PTA urges the General Assembly to amend the Standards of Quality to fund a School Nutrition Integration and Procurement specialist for each region in order to support local economic activity and increase the quantity of locally sourced foods served in school cafeterias.

**RESOLVED**, that the Virginia PTA supports grant programs, incentives and funding that allow schools to procure and serve more locally grown foods including food grown in school gardens.

**RESOLVED**, that Virginia PTA requests that the Virginia Department of Education support Virginia Tech and Virginia State University in developing a career technical education program for agriculture education teachers.

**RESOLVED**, that the Virginia PTA requests the Board of Education amend the Facilities Standards to request that each public school provide space for a school garden when space is available.

**RESOLVED**, that Virginia PTA supports funding for Virginia Cooperative Extension services in order to provide direct training opportunities for classroom teachers who wish to expand their use of hands-on agriculture in the classroom and farm to school programs.

**January 25, 2020, Adopted by the Virginia PTA 2020 Annual Meeting Attendees**