

*Be Welcomed. Be Successful. Be Home.*

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# AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY CLUSTER STUDY

2025 Update

Department of Economic Development

Campbell County, Virginia

# Executive Summary

This Agriculture Cluster Study examines national, regional, state, and Campbell County trends and challenges regarding local agriculture. The background section outlines the disadvantages faced by smaller farms and explores the national issues that have contributed to the imbalance between costs and revenues, which have particularly affected smaller farming operations.

The regional section focuses on the Mid-Atlantic, analyzing both the challenges and opportunities that are prevalent throughout the region. It strives to balance these factors. The Virginia and Campbell County sections delve into state and local issues, highlighting the resources available to support farmers. Both state and local governments are actively assisting farmers through a variety of programs, which are outlined in this report.

Agriculture, one of the most traditional and valued industries, has been facing new challenges due to rising costs, unpredictable weather patterns, shifts in consumer preferences, and the stress caused by the decline of smaller farms as larger operations increasingly dominate the marketplace. The viability of farmland is further threatened by urbanization and industrialization. Data confirms a continued decline in the overall acreage dedicated to farming.

Despite these challenges, the Mid-Atlantic region—particularly Virginia and Campbell County—has made significant efforts to counter these downward trends and uplift farmers. With fertile soils, moderate weather, and many long-standing farms, the region is well-positioned to benefit from various programs designed to help farmers remain viable.

Emerging ideas and initiatives may also help mitigate these challenges. Food hubs serve as valuable platforms for aggregating smaller farms, enhancing their competitiveness in the marketplace. Educational farms are engaging younger generations in agriculture, while loan and grant programs from the USDA and other governmental bodies offer crucial financial relief to farmers.

There are also favorable trends for farmers who can access growing markets. The demand for fresh, local foods continues to rise, presenting a significant opportunity across the region. Additionally, diversification of crops and livestock has helped some communities navigate the fluctuations of the marketplace.

Campbell County is well-positioned to continue its strong farming traditions. With good soil, moderate weather, and a diverse agricultural base—including crops, dairy, and cattle—along with a pro-agriculture local government and support from both local economic development officials and the Cooperative Extension Service, the county is well-equipped to support both new farms and its many "Century Farms."

Several farms are even experimenting with new approaches such as organic farming. In addressing the aging farming population, we also explored strategies to engage younger generations, ensuring a sustainable path forward for future farmers.

Our recommendations aim to assist Campbell County in building upon its solid agricultural base and stable economy. Key recommendations include facilitating the establishment of a food hub that offers collective strength and market access, as well as creating an education farm to provide hands-on agricultural training for people of all ages.

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# Background and Overview

Between 2012 and 2022, farming in the United States underwent significant transformation. Data from the 2017 and 2022 Census of Agriculture reveal a trend toward larger farms that increasingly rely on advanced technology to manage their operations efficiently.

A key driver of these changes has been the substantial rise in agricultural productivity, enabled by technological advancements across all areas of farming inputs. While this surge in productivity has been beneficial in some ways, it has indirectly contributed to the decline of smaller farms. As production increased exponentially, prices dropped, making it more difficult for smaller operations to remain competitive. In contrast, larger farms have been better positioned to adopt and leverage new technologies, further solidifying their dominance in the industry.

## Agriculture in the United States

### Productivity Growth

Farm productivity has increased significantly over the past several decades, enabling food to be produced more cheaply and in greater abundance, even as the population has grown. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Economic Research Service (ERS) uses a formula known as [Total Factor Productivity](#) (TFP), which accounts for all the inputs and outputs in agricultural production. This metric shows notable increases in productivity since 1948. The chart on the following page illustrates this growth.

TFP measures the amount of agricultural output produced from the combined set of land, labor, capital, and material resources employed in farm production. If total output is growing faster than total inputs, then the total productivity of the factors of production (i.e., total factor productivity) is increasing.

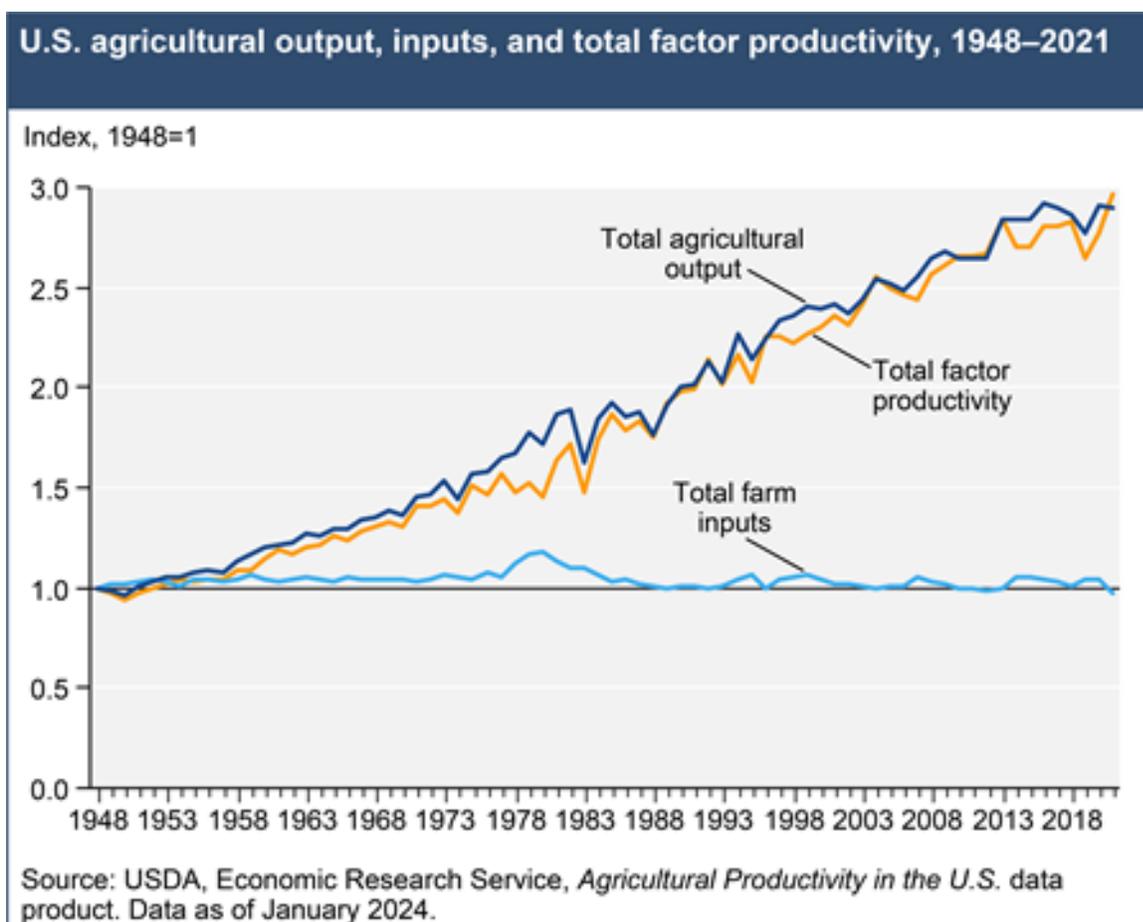
Since World War II, rapid technological advancements have played a major role in boosting productivity, which led to overproduction and, consequently, a drop in farm produce prices. This issue has disproportionately affected smaller farms compared to larger operations.

The ERS report highlights improvements in fertilizers, pesticides, and labor efficiency as key contributors to the overall rise in productivity. However, the report also notes a decline in both land quality and availability, suggesting that urbanization and industrialization are diverting valuable agricultural land for other purposes.

“ ... total factor productivity—growing at 1.49% per year on average over 1948–2021—allowed farm output to grow 190% above its 1948 level.”

In other words, increases in productivity put a bite on smaller farms, and gave an advantage to larger farms.

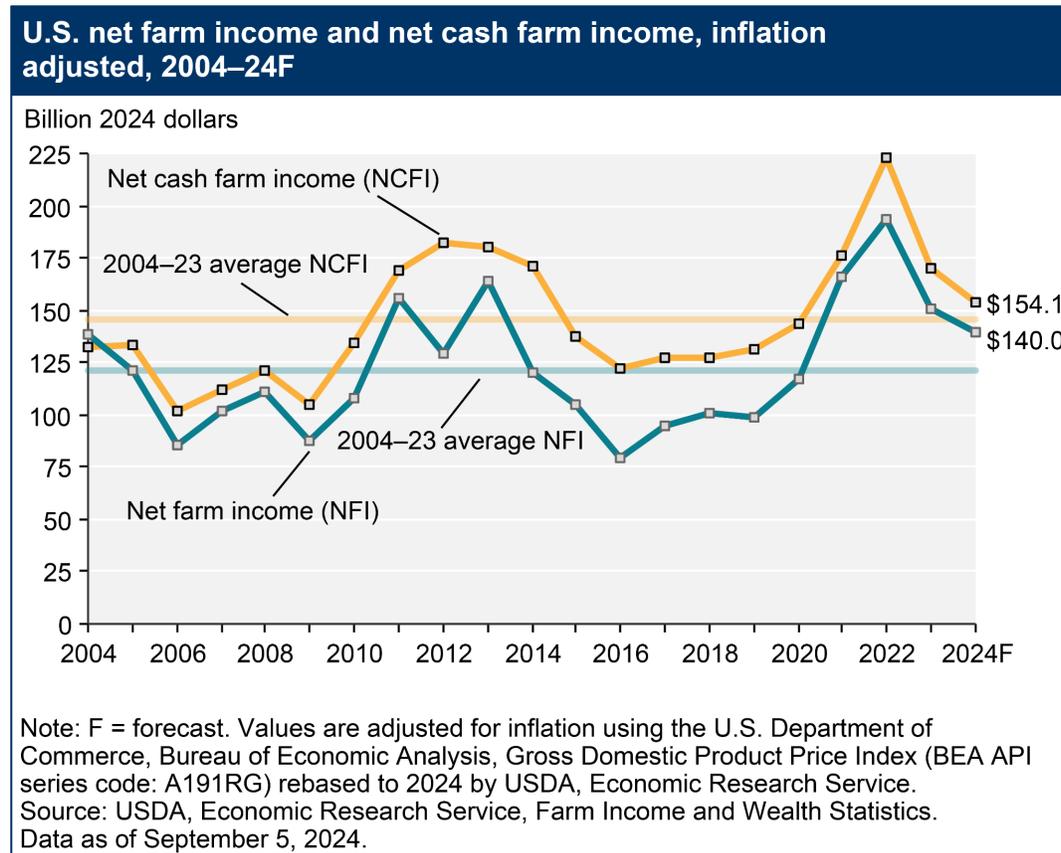
Agriculture in the U.S. faces a range of challenges, including shifting weather patterns, pressure from housing and commercial development, evolving consumer preferences, and a financial strain as rising costs outpace sales revenues. Small farms, in particular, have been in decline for generations, impacted by factors such as trade wars, severe weather, falling commodity prices, political influences, and the growing dominance of corporate farming. This shift toward large-scale operations is increasingly driven by technology and economies of scale, rather than traditional farming practices.



## Decreasing Revenue

According to the [2024 Farm Sector Income Forecast](#) produced by the USDA, net farm income reached a record high in 2022 at \$182.0 billion, but fell to \$146.5 billion in 2023. Net farm

income is forecast to decrease further in 2024, to \$140 billion. Similarly, net cash farm income peaked at \$210.1 billion in 2022., but fell to \$166.1 billion in 2023 and is projected to decrease to \$154.1 billion in 2024.



Overall, farm cash receipts are forecast to decrease by \$9.8 billion in 2023 to \$516.5 billion in 2024 in nominal dollars. This loss is mostly due to a decrease in receipts for corn and soybeans (10%), but conversely, total animal/animal product receipts are projected to increase, which makes up for some of the loss (7.1%).

[AgWeb Farm Journal](#) paints a more dismal picture, stating that the USDA’s current net farm income forecasts show a \$90 billion plus drop between 2022 and 2024 when adjusted for inflation, making it the largest dollar value loss that agriculture has seen since the depression.

### Increasing Farm Debt

Although farm sector equity is expected to rise 5.3% in nominal terms and farm sector assets are forecast to increase 5.2% in 2024, Farm sector debt is forecast to increase 4.2% and working capital is expected to fall 4.2% in 2024 relative to 2023. This, combined with the decline in total income in recent years, has caused farmers to burn through their liquidity and

working capital, forcing them to consider leveraging their equity by refinancing debt, according to [AgWeb Farm Journal](#).

## Fewer Farms

Since 1981, the [U.S. lost the equivalent of every farm](#) in the Dakotas, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Nebraska, and Oklahoma. Due to the aforementioned challenges of higher costs, rising debt and industry consolidation, the number of farms declined and the average size of farms increased.

As the number of farms decreases, larger producers with greater resources are better equipped to withstand rising expenses, climate change, and other challenges. Farms with sales of \$5 million or more, although representing less than 1% of all farms, accounted for 42% of total agricultural sales, according to an article in [agriculturediver.com](#).

Nevertheless, there appear to be opportunities for overall growth in the U.S. agriculture industry. [J. Scott Angle](#) suggests that states east of the Mississippi River, particularly in the Southeast, may play a growing role in future food production.

Speaking before the House General Farm Commodities and Risk Management Subcommittee, the dean and director of the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences emphasized that climate change, geopolitical challenges, and environmental factors indicate the eastern U.S. will need to produce more food in the coming years.

He highlighted that with rising populations and increasing nutritional demands, global food production will need to double by 2050. As reforestation could reduce available farmland, the output per acre will also need to double by mid-century to meet these demands.

## Industry Shifts

### *Sustainable Agriculture*

A positive trend shaping the agriculture industry is the growing movement toward [sustainable farming](#), which offers a way to address many of the challenges currently facing the nation's farmers. Sustainable agriculture in the United States focuses on practices that promote environmental health, economic profitability, and social equity. This approach encourages methods such as crop rotation, reduced chemical use, water conservation, and maintaining soil health, all while supporting local economies and improving food security. By adopting these practices, farmers can mitigate the impacts of rising costs, climate change, and resource depletion, creating a more resilient agricultural system for the future. By incorporating

sustainable agriculture practices, farmers can leverage new technologies and also attract consumers to choose to support sustainability.

Many farms are exploring sustainability as a way to generate additional revenue and positive PR for their products. In a [2021 Pork Industry Sustainability Report](#) produced by We Care, they state:

*“Sustainability and continuous improvement are at the core of our commitment to deliver the safest, highest quality pork supply in the world.”*

Locally, Debbie Gagon of [Seeds of Faith Farm](#) in Brookneal refers to her vision as “self-sustaining, organic practice farming that serves both her family and community”. A few other farms that have a vision for sustainable agriculture in Campbell County include [Allgood Farms](#), [MysticPine Farm](#), [Puckette Farms](#), and [Rockin’R Wagyu Farm](#), who has installed solar panels on his property.

## *Organic Farming*

Organic farming has deep roots in the United States, originating in the late 1940s with small experimental plots and evolving into large-scale farms producing surplus products sold under a specialized organic label. Initially, organic certification was managed by over 40 private organizations and state agencies, each with its own standards for growing and labeling. This variability spurred farmers to advocate for consistent regulations, leading to the establishment of the National Organic Program (NOP) in 1990. This standardized system created clearer guidelines for organic production and labeling, allowing farmers to reach consumers with assurances of quality and consistency.

The [National Organic Program](#) (NOP), a USDA marketing program within the Agricultural Marketing Service, sets marketing standards for organic products. Its mission is to develop national standards for marketing organically produced agricultural products, facilitate commerce in fresh and processed organic foods, and assure consumers that these products meet consistent standards. Under the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990, the Secretary of Agriculture established a National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances, identifying synthetic substances that may be used and non-synthetic substances that are prohibited in organic production and handling. This consistent regulatory framework provides organic farmers with valuable information and statistical consistency but also introduces limitations and additional paperwork that some may prefer to avoid.

With rising popularity, organic farming in the U.S. has shown significant growth. Certified organic land used for crops and livestock has [more than doubled](#), growing from 1.8 million acres in 2000 to 4.9 million acres in 2021. New regions, such as the Appalachia and Delta areas, are joining the organic farming movement, and an increasing number of retailers are

now carrying organic products. The rise in Federal support for USDA projects focused on organic research — increasing from \$3 million to \$50 million over the past two decades — underscores the growing recognition of organic farming’s value.

Yet, pursuing organic certification is a complex decision for farmers, presenting both substantial benefits and significant challenges.

### **Challenges of Organic Certification:**

- **Transition Period:** Farmers face a lengthy transition period for [certification](#), as land must be free from prohibited substances like synthetic pesticides for at least three years before harvest to qualify as organic. During this transition, farmers cannot market their products as organic, potentially missing out on premium prices that might offset their investment.
- **Risk of Contamination from Neighboring Farms:** Organic farms situated close to conventional farms face challenges from potential pesticide drift, which can threaten their organic status. To manage this risk, many organic farms create [buffer zones](#), adding another layer of complexity and cost to certification.
- **Certification Costs:** The certification process can be [costly](#), encompassing application fees, annual renewals, and inspection fees. For small operations, these expenses can pose a financial burden, ranging from hundreds to thousands of dollars, depending on farm size and scope.
- **Administrative and Record-Keeping Requirements:** Farmers must maintain [meticulous records](#) of their practices, input usage, and adherence to organic standards, requiring additional time and resources. For many, this paperwork can be burdensome, particularly for those with limited administrative support.

### **Benefits of Organic Certification:**

Access to Premium Markets: [Certified organic products](#) can command higher prices and open opportunities to sell in regional, national, and international markets eager for organic goods.

Environmental and Health Benefits: Organic practices contribute to [environmental sustainability](#) by enhancing soil health, reducing chemical runoff into waterways, conserving energy, and increasing biodiversity, helping build a foundation for long-term farm viability.

Consumer Trust and Brand Transparency: Certification [provides consumers with confidence](#) that products meet rigorous standards, potentially boosting customer loyalty and enhancing the farm’s reputation. With rising consumer interest in sustainable products, this trust factor is increasingly valuable.

Financial Assistance Programs: Farmers can access [USDA programs](#), such as the Organic Certification Cost-Share Programs, which reimburse eligible operations up to 75% of certification costs, alleviating some financial challenges associated with certification.

In sum, organic certification is a double-edged sword. While the process involves extensive commitments in time, compliance, and finances, the advantages of market access, environmental benefits, and enhanced consumer trust make it a valuable opportunity for many. As organic farming continues to grow in popularity, the potential for a rewarding transition to certified organic production is increasingly within reach.

### *Buy Fresh, Buy Local*

A 2021 article in [Amber Waves](#) states that local and regional food systems provide significant income for many farmers, which supports rural communities and small-scale farmers in particular. Data from the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service shows that sales of local edible farm products in 2017 totaled \$11.8 billion, up from \$8.7 billion just two years earlier.

The trend continues. According to a 2023 consumer survey by [The Packer](#), 44% of consumers polled said they were buying more locally grown produce than a year ago. Wealthy consumers were most likely to answer “yes” to the question, and 60% of consumers with kids at home also increased their purchases of locally grown produce.

Whether it’s a farmers market, on-site farm store, farm stand, pick your own, or a mobile market, consumers are more health-conscious and want to reap the health benefits of buying locally grown foods.

Farmers markets, in particular, provide city dwellers and suburban residents with direct access to fresh, locally grown food. These markets vary in size, the number of booths, and the range of merchandise they offer. While many focus primarily on fresh produce, some also feature prepared foods, local artisans, and even nearby businesses like fresh food chains (e.g., Great Harvest Bread), which bake goods fresh on-site or the night before.

Farmers markets offer local producers not only a direct sales opportunity but also a chance to build relationships with their customers, particularly if they participate regularly. These markets also have several positive impacts:

- Offer local farmers a direct channel to sell their products to consumers
- Foster personal connections between producers and customers
- Provide insight into consumer preferences through face-to-face interactions
- Contribute to the local tax base
- Attract visitors, potentially boosting local tourism

## Regional and Local Agriculture

[Agriculture is Virginia's largest private industry](#). The industry has an economic impact of \$82.3 billion annually, providing more than 381,800 jobs in the Commonwealth, and \$43.8 billion in value-added impact.

In addition to its tangible benefits such as farm cash receipts and jobs, agriculture provides many [intangible benefits](#). These include recreation, tourism, wildlife habitat, biodiversity, flood mitigation, improved water quality and soil stabilization.

### Agriculture Tourism (Agritourism)

[Agritourism](#) offers visitors an enjoyable and relaxing way to experience local farms, whether for a weekend afternoon or after work, attracting those who appreciate fresh, locally sourced food. Agritourism can have a meaningful impact on both farms and the broader county economy by encouraging visitors to spend money while engaging with agricultural activities. Some examples include pumpkin picking, corn mazes, pick-your-own operations, petting zoos, demonstration farms, winery tours, and more.

An exploration of the [Economic and Fiscal Impacts of Tourism](#) revealed agritourism as a growing sector of the Virginia economy. In 2015, Virginia's agritourism sector generated approximately \$2.2 billion in total economic activity, contributing \$1.2 billion in value-added effects to the state's GDP. This activity supported around 22,151 full-time equivalent jobs and accounted for roughly \$839.1 million in wages and salary income. Additionally, agritourism created approximately \$134.7 million in state and local tax revenues.

When including off-farm markets, restaurants, and festivals in the economic analysis, the total economic impact of Virginia's agritourism sector rises by 40% to \$3.0 billion.

The top reasons Virginia farm businesses engage in agritourism are to generate additional income, market their products, and share their way of life with others. Visitors are drawn to agritourism venues for a variety of reasons, including bonding with family and friends, educational experiences, outdoor enjoyment, entertainment, proximity, and the opportunity to purchase fresh food, beer, cider, or wine.

In addition to boosting farm revenue, agritourism has the potential to expand local tax bases, create new employment opportunities, and provide educational experiences for the public. It also plays a key role in preserving agricultural lands and fostering the development of agricultural business enterprises.

## Funding for the Future of Farming

Virginia takes a [proactive approach](#) to supporting its farmers through various programs, which are either state-funded or offered in partnership with the USDA and agencies such as the Farm Service Agency. However, Virginia's farmers still face challenges unique to the Mid-Atlantic Region.

## Weather Changes

Weather patterns are increasingly unpredictable in the Mid-Atlantic region, creating significant challenges for current farming operations and affecting forecasts for the coming years. Major storms and droughts have become more frequent and severe, regardless of whether they are attributed to climate change.

A future outlook is provided by [MARISA](#) (Mid-Atlantic Regional Integrated Sciences and Assessments), a NOAA Climate Adaptation Partnership team that collaborates with Mid-Atlantic communities to enhance resilience to climate change through improved data, place-based decision support, and public engagement. According to their assessment, several key trends have emerged:

- Average temperatures for the summer of 2024 were 0–4 degrees Fahrenheit above normal across the Mid-Atlantic region, making it a few degrees warmer than summer 2023, which was the first season since 2018 with temperatures largely below normal.
- Precipitation patterns varied widely, with some areas receiving only 50–75% of normal rainfall, while others experienced over 150% of typical precipitation levels.
- By mid-century, the Mid-Atlantic region could see a nearly 190% increase in the average number of days with temperatures exceeding 90 degrees Fahrenheit (rising from 16.5 days to 47.7 days). Under a high-emissions scenario (SSP3-7.0), this number could climb by over 300% (from 16.5 days to 68.1 days) by the end of the century.

## Loss of Farmland

Following the national trend, larger farms are a growing proportion of the farms in the Mid-Atlantic region, including Virginia. In the most recent 2022 [Agriculture Census](#), Virginia showed a decrease in the number of farms, but an increase in average acreage per farm.

Across the region, farmland is being threatened by commercial, industrial and [residential development](#). In Virginia, one such threat that has taken over the area in just a few years is the highly controversial topic of [data centers](#).

The potential for data centers to come into the area was one of the most often mentioned concerns expressed to our team by Campbell County farmers, echoing concerns voiced by farmers elsewhere in the Commonwealth. Although many Virginia localities started out as agricultural communities with strong protections in place for their local farmers, several have not only added development, but have replaced their farm economies with other businesses such as data centers. Though the increased tax revenue and jobs are appreciated by many, farmers are unable to stem the flow of development and are concerned that current protections in place may not be enough.

Despite Virginia's long standing farming traditions, some of the most intense urbanization, suburbanization, industrial and commercialization pressures are spreading from northern Virginia into surrounding areas.

## Getting Product to Market

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture summarizes the greatest challenges faced by family and small farms:

*More than 90% of farms in the U.S. are classified as small, with a gross cash farm income of \$250,000, or less. These farms, most of which are family-owned and operated, confront considerable challenges due to current trends, such as increased movement into cities, an aging population, farm consolidation, and changing weather patterns.*

Additionally, the U.S. food system is currently dominated by large industrial players that have the resources to access both national and international markets. These larger operations wield significant influence with shippers, processors, and suppliers, causing a number of problems for smaller producers here in the Mid-Atlantic region. At many processing plants, smaller farmers are often placed at the end of the queue, sometimes waiting over a year for their products to be processed, while larger farms may be serviced within weeks. This shortage of processing facilities, particularly abattoirs, continues to limit the growth and efficiency of smaller producers.

# Agriculture in Campbell County

Given the trends at the state, regional, and national levels, it comes as no surprise that farmers in Campbell County are facing the same challenges as the rest of the country. These include rising costs, market prices that fail to cover expenses, shifting consumer preferences, advances in technology, unpredictable weather, and a decline in younger generations taking over family farms or starting their own.

One of Campbell County's greatest strengths in agriculture is the diversity of its industry. Everyone we spoke with emphasized two key points: the diversity of the agricultural sector and the county's strong support for farming. The county produces a variety of fruits, crops, and livestock, offering opportunities for balance within the industry. When one sector experiences a downturn, another may thrive. For example, while dairy prices are currently struggling, beef prices are on the rise.

According to the [2022 Census of Agriculture County Profile for Campbell County](#), farm-related income saw an increase in 2017 but experienced a significant decline between 2017 and 2022. While farm-related expenses were slightly lower in 2017, they rose again by 2022, even as income continued to drop.

Despite this, both farm size and sales grew in the medium to large categories during the same period, highlighting the persistent tension between rising costs and declining revenues. This trend also underscores the ongoing shift toward larger farms at the expense of smaller operations.

Agriculture is both Campbell County's heritage and a key driver of its local economy. Generations of agricultural producers have been deeply rooted in the community, and their commitment remains strong. In partnership with the Campbell County Cooperative Extension and other regional and statewide organizations, Campbell County Economic Development plays an active role in connecting local farm businesses to various programs and funding opportunities to ensure continued profitability.

The 2022 Agriculture County Profile states that 98% of farms in Campbell County are family farms. The county is also home to 39 "[Century Farms](#)," which have been owned or operated by the same family for over 100 years. These farms uphold Campbell County's rich agricultural tradition and history. The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services honors their legacy by recognizing them with signs and other forms of public acknowledgment, and the Governor further commemorates this achievement with a certificate.

Campbell County's share of sales by type reveals that the majority of farms are livestock, poultry, and associated products (74%) while the other 26% are a variety of grains, oilseeds, dry beans and peas, hay, and other crops. Cattle farming generates the greatest revenue, both in meat and milk; grains and forage crops (hay/haylage) generate the greatest crop revenue.

Equestrian-related ventures make up a small but unique segment of agriculture in Campbell County, most notably [Trinity Appaloosa Farm](#), located in Brookneal. [Hat Creek Equestrian](#) and [Campbell Ranch](#) (who also offers boarding) offer a wide variety of activities such as riding lessons, camps, clinics and horse shows. Including these farms in tourism marketing will draw new revenue to the area and provide the opportunity to bring new businesses to the area, such as tack shops and other horse-oriented retail shops.

DeVault Family Vineyards in Concord is a successful "destination" winery that has a number of amenities to attract visitors. Connecting the winery to additional points of interest in the northernmost part of the County can be mutually beneficial to those involved in the collaboration. In addition, because the climate and soil in the area are well-suited for vineyards, finding ways to promote the area to winemakers may draw additional wineries to the area.

## Campbell County Supports Farmers

Campbell County offers one of the most comprehensive and robust support systems for farmers in the Lynchburg region. A key advantage is the strong collaboration between the Campbell County Department of Economic Development and the Unit Coordinator Extension Agent for Agriculture and Natural Resources. In discussions including more than 20 local farmers, there was a general consensus that Campbell County has a farm-friendly government. Research, combined with discussions with both farmers and local officials highlighted the most valuable forms of support available to farmers in the region. These include:

- Tax breaks, most notably the exemption from personal property tax on farm-used vehicles and farm animals (farmers were unanimous in showing their appreciation for this help)
- Encouragement of agricultural tourism, including a ["Checklist" of Agritourism ideas](#) farmers can download
- Promotion of farm tours
- Fully funding an additional role to support the Agricultural Extension Program, essential to bridge economic development and agriculture in Campbell County. This position would ensure farmers have representation in county planning, align

agricultural needs with economic initiatives, and advocate for resources that support sustainable growth while preserving local farming.

- Leadership in securing a 2021 grant from the Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission that allowed for limited grants to individual farmers. The program was facilitated by Campbell County, includes 20 counties, and received additional funding in 2023.
- Helping farmers, along with the Agricultural Extension Agent, connect with resources such as State and Federal grants
- Working in collaboration with Lynchburg Grows on farm support programs
- Making business assistance programs like Start Small Campbell, Campbell Connects (which facilitates networking) and low-interest loans such as CLIMB (from the IDA) available to farmers.
- Participation in the Total Commodity Program 1995-2023 providing payments direct to farmers totalling \$14.1 million 28 years, funded largely by the Tobacco Regional Revitalization Fund, as well as CoronaVirus Assistance Funds and other federal programs
- USDA Service Centers designed to be a single location where customers can access the services provided by the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Rural Development agencies.
- An active [4-H Club in Rustburg](#) at the Campbell County Extension Office supported by Campbell County Virginia Cooperative Extension staff in collaboration with Virginia Tech. This club connects with youth throughout the county in school and after school with programs focused on a wide range of agriculture-related topics.
- Workshops put on by the Agriculture Extension Service and the Campbell County Department of Economic Development
- Frequent acknowledgement and information on farms, including spotlights, news, and accomplishments on their economic development website
- Making information available on how to buy/sell a farm, as well as available opportunities to market a farm.

In addition to offering tax incentives for farmers, Campbell County has embraced agritourism as a strategy to expand agriculture's role in the local economy. The county encourages farmers to diversify their operations and explore new revenue streams. The Campbell County Department of Economic Development has also been enhancing [tourism development efforts](#) by securing grants from both federal and state governments. Further collaboration with local

farmers, markets, and related local and regional government agencies can help shape a cohesive brand and marketing strategy that includes local agritourism as a key component.

## Farmers Markets and CSAs

Farmers markets are essential for Campbell County's rural economy, providing farmers with accessible sales avenues, retaining local income, and fostering community ties. However, oversaturation and regional competition challenge the sustainability of these markets. The county hosts three primary markets—the Rustburg Ruritan Farmers Market, and the Brookneal Farmers Market—as well as the informal Altavista Trade Lot. Each plays a unique role in offering direct-to-consumer sales opportunities, particularly valuable for new farmers testing their products and building a customer base. Nonetheless, the proximity of additional markets just outside the county, especially the well-established Lynchburg Farmers Market, Appomattox Farmers Market, and the Forest Farmers Market in Bedford County, creates stiff competition.

Farmers are often faced with the difficult decision of which markets to participate in, with profitability varying significantly. For example, the recent Candler's Mountain Farmers Market closed due to lack of participation from both vendors and customers. Many farmers report that market selection is a strategic, sometimes uncertain process. Factors like customer turnout, accessibility, and market size influence the viability of participating. This can make it challenging for Campbell County's smaller markets to consistently attract farmers, as larger, more stable markets outside the county promise more reliable earnings.

Supporting the growth and sustainability of Campbell County's markets requires strategic planning and targeted investments to enhance their appeal to both producers and customers. Identifying ways to differentiate these markets and reduce overlap could help them better serve local farmers while preserving Campbell County's unique rural character and agricultural economy.

Puckette Farms CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) has quickly become a cornerstone of sustainable agriculture in Campbell County. Launched in 2022, this CSA has experienced significant growth, with an increasing number of members each year. It offers a convenient and consistent way for residents to access fresh, locally grown produce while supporting regional farmers. The CSA's success reflects the growing demand for local food sources and the community's interest in supporting agriculture as part of Campbell County's economic fabric.

Subscribers to Puckette Farms CSA receive a weekly produce box containing approximately 15 items of seasonal vegetables, all sourced directly from local fields. This selection changes with the seasons, ensuring that members enjoy peak-freshness, nutrient-rich produce that hasn't traveled long distances. The CSA has expanded its accessibility with four convenient pickup locations in Gladys, Rustburg, Forest, and Lynchburg, allowing members to choose a site that best fits their weekly routines. This regional reach has made Puckette Farms a key player not only in Campbell County but also in neighboring communities, promoting broader support for local agriculture.

The rapid growth of Puckette Farms CSA highlights a rising trend in community-supported agriculture within Campbell County. It exemplifies how residents and farmers can form mutually beneficial relationships that drive both economic stability and sustainable food practices. For the community, the CSA serves as an investment in local farmland and food security, helping to preserve agricultural spaces while fostering a direct connection between consumers and the farmers who grow their food.

# Campbell County Agriculture: Concerns for the future

We placed significant value on the insights provided by local "experts"—the farmers—and consulted with others knowledgeable about farming in Campbell County. Certainly, the same concerns seen regionally and nationally are present locally as well, but what follows is representative of what is currently “top of mind” for Campbell County farmers.

## Business Succession and the Need for Education

A major concern is the loss of younger generations, either due to a lack of interest in continuing the family farm or insufficient knowledge about farming. Farmers noted that public schools are offering fewer agricultural courses and struggling to retain teachers with farming expertise.

There is widespread worry, both in Campbell County and beyond, that many farms—some of which have been productive for generations—will cease to exist once the current farmers are too old to maintain them. With the average farmer in the county nearing 60 years of age, this issue is becoming increasingly urgent.

To address this, many farmers have called for expanded agricultural education, not only to build practical skills but also to help young people recognize the vital role farming plays in the community and the world.

## Loss of Farmland in Campbell County

Farmers voiced concerns that ongoing development will continue to reduce the number of farms in the county, potentially taking over some of the best agricultural land for other uses. This could further intensify the challenges faced by younger, third-generation farmers, many of whom may be unprepared to navigate the pressures of a shrinking agricultural landscape.

The American Farmland Trust’s publication, “[Farms Under Threat](#)”, discusses what farmland could look like by 2040 if historical trends continue, low-density sprawl proliferates, and farms are rapidly lost and fragmented. Their work underscores the importance of including the voices of local farmers as the development conversation continues in Campbell County.

## Financial Concerns

Retail prices for crops—and even meat—typically do not increase as quickly as the costs associated with producing them. Farmers are concerned that rising expenses for equipment, fertilizer, pesticides, land, labor, fuel, and other inputs may force many farmers out of business.

During the Agriculture Roundtable on August 9th, farmers noted that in Campbell County, a rancher would need approximately 300 head of cattle to make a full-time living. This, in turn, requires sufficient pasture land to sustain a viable cattle operation. However, the associated costs present challenges for many ranchers, which is why many supplement their income with side jobs.

The comparison between 2017 and 2022 largely reflects rising costs and declining income in agriculture. Once again, farmers in Campbell County, like those across the industry, are feeling the financial squeeze. [The data](#) highlights the growing dominance of larger farms in the county, while also underscoring the broader challenge of rising expenses and decreasing revenues that farmers face.

## Veterinary Care in the Region

The shortage of large animal veterinarians in Virginia, including areas like Campbell County and the Lynchburg region, poses significant challenges to local livestock producers. This scarcity affects animal health management and the overall agricultural economy.

This is an issue reported nationwide. The American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC) [reported in March 2024](#) that the number of U.S. veterinarians has been increasing at a rate of only 2.7% each year, leading to a substantial shortage. In 2019, there were 2,000-3,000 more open jobs than available veterinarians.

The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) has recognized the shortage of veterinarians specializing in food animals. In response, VDACS [nominated five regions](#), including Bedford, Campbell, and Amherst counties, as areas eligible for federal assistance to mitigate this issue. Campbell County, specifically, is identified as part of a three-county high priority Shortage Region for Rural Area Food Animal Medicine Practices, such as beef cattle or small ruminant animals, such as sheep or goats.

Virginia Tech's Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine is actively addressing this shortage through [educational programs](#) including a [Doctor of Veterinary Medicine \(DVM\)](#) program with a focus on large animal clinical sciences, and a [Large Animal Clinical Sciences Department](#) providing specialized training in areas such as large animal medicine, surgery, and production management. It also offers services to the community, thereby enhancing students' hands-on experience and supporting local agricultural needs. One such opportunity is a [large](#)

[animal internship program](#) designed to improve the knowledge and skills of interns in equine and food animal medicine. This program provides comprehensive training, preparing veterinarians to serve in rural and underserved areas.

## Other Issues

- The shift toward large-scale farms, often managed by business professionals rather than traditional farmers, is expected to leverage new technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence, creating advantages that smaller farms may struggle to match.
- There is ongoing concern about government regulations, particularly the time and expense involved in obtaining USDA certification for meat products. As a result, many producers opt to forgo certification, which can limit their market options and lower the prices they can command.
- Limited local grain production in sufficient quantities has forced local cattle farmers to either transport grain from other regions (incurring transportation costs and leaving them vulnerable to fluctuations in grain prices) send their livestock elsewhere for finishing.
- There is a need for more deliberate planning to protect farmland from development and prevent incompatible land uses from being placed near existing farms.
- Smaller farms face challenges in accessing distant markets, both domestically and internationally.

# Strategy and Recommendations

In examining the strengths and challenges of Campbell County agriculture, we found several areas in which programs and supports could be added or enhanced to encourage the farm sector to grow and thrive. These recommendations fall into four general categories: increasing resilience, addressing business succession and education concerns through the establishment of an education farm, helping local small farmers grow their reach via establishment of a food hub, and including the voices of local farmers in a brand and marketing strategy for the county.

## Increasing Resilience in Campbell County Agriculture

The diversity of both crops and livestock helps farmers remain resilient, providing stability in the face of national or regional emergencies or sudden shifts in consumer preferences. This approach can strengthen farms and increase their long-term viability.

[Research has shown](#) that farms with diverse crops experience more stable conditions and are better equipped to adapt to climate change compared to those focused on monoculture. This diversity not only supports the environment but also promotes a more stable economy. In Campbell County, the variety of farming practices enhances the resilience of the agricultural industry, helping it withstand challenges such as changing weather patterns, evolving consumer tastes, economic downturns, and even pandemics.

Rising consumer demand for "fresh" and "locally grown" food is another factor that benefits farming in Campbell County. With its diverse agricultural offerings, convenient highway access, and location just over an hour from major population centers, Campbell County is well-positioned to meet this demand. Within a 70-mile radius, there are at least 15 sizable communities that justify the marketing and distribution costs.

One emerging trend in the agricultural industry, including in Campbell County, is experimentation with sustainable organic farming. This shift is timely, as consumers are increasingly willing to pay a premium for organic products. However, organic farming is still in its early stages within the county. According to a Department of Economic Development profile of 14 local farms, only three are currently exploring organic practices.

One such farm is Puckette Farm, where owner Aaron Puckette has set aside 100 acres for organic farming and plans to expand further. Stephanie Miller of MysticPine Farm has committed her small acreage to "growing things naturally," though it is unclear if her practices

meet the organic standard. Another farm, Seeds of Faith in Brookneal, operated by Debbie and Paul Gagon, continues the organic work started by Debbie's father in Connecticut.

While organic farming in Campbell County is still limited, it shows potential for growth. The interest is there, but the practice has yet to gain significant traction. However, this could represent a valuable niche for the county's agricultural sector. Marketing strategies such as using the slogan "Organically Grown in Campbell County, Virginia" could help increase agricultural sales and promote further adoption of organic farming.

## Recommendations

To support increased resilience in Campbell County's agriculture industry, a series of strategic recommendations can be implemented. First, providing tax incentives or small reimbursement grants to farmers who adopt innovative farming techniques, such as organic farming, would encourage sustainable practices. The Department of Economic Development, the Treasurer, and the Extension Agent could collaborate to develop and submit a proposal to the County Administrator for review.

Additionally, incentives could be offered to farmers who diversify by introducing new crops, livestock, or techniques/technologies to their existing farms, or by launching new startup farms with products not currently found in Campbell County. This could involve adding crops not yet in rotation or expanding smaller-scale agricultural products. Agricultural extension agents, local colleges or universities with farming programs, and the Department of Economic Development would take the lead on these initiatives.

The county can play a proactive role in supporting succession planning for family farms by introducing targeted incentives designed to both preserve farmland and reduce the financial barriers that young and new farmers face. One potential solution is to expand tax rebates on county taxes, similar to incentives provided to other industries. For instance, a rebate on the Machinery and Tools tax could alleviate some of the high upfront costs associated with starting or modernizing a farm, making it more feasible for younger generations to take over family farms or begin new farming operations. This could make it easier for emerging farmers to invest in essential equipment and technologies, helping them build sustainable operations.

Additionally, the county might consider a conditional property tax reduction for land maintained as farmland, with stipulations that incentivize keeping the land in agricultural production for the next generation. By carefully structuring these incentives, the county can encourage succession within family farms without contributing to further consolidation by large

agribusinesses. These incentives, paired with agricultural education programs, would support a new generation of farmers while helping secure the future of the county's agricultural landscape.

A review panel consisting of the Extension agent, farmers, and educators would be established to assess whether farms meet the criteria for these incentives, which would then be administered by the County Treasurer. These combined efforts would help farmers innovate, diversify, and strengthen the local agricultural economy.

Performance measures are dependent on the incentive programs but may include:

- Adoption of Sustainable Farming Practices, such as the number of farms adopting innovative practices, number of acres converting to organic or other sustainable certifications
- Farm Diversification via the number of farms introducing new crops or livestock to diversify production, the variety of new crops or products added, number of new farms established, revenue growth, and increase in market opportunities
- Economic Impact including total value of tax incentives or grants distributed, growth in overall agricultural revenue, increase in farm employment and cost savings
- **Program participation and awareness:** Number of farmers applying for and receiving incentives, farmer satisfaction with the program, and community engagement through informational meetings and workshops.
- **Environmental and sustainability impact:** Reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, water conservation, increased biodiversity, and improvements in soil health and runoff reduction from farms adopting sustainable practices.
- **Collaboration and support:** Number of partnerships established, technical assistance provided, and educational programs offered to help farmers adopt innovative techniques or diversify their farms.
- **Program administration and efficiency:** Number of applications reviewed and approved, average processing time for applications and incentive distribution, and cost-effectiveness based on administrative costs versus economic benefits.

## Food Hubs and Ports: Aggregators

Many of the challenges cited for Agriculture nationally and locally, stem from the lack of control that farmers have over their rising costs, evolving consumer tastes, the challenges of technology, weather, consolidation, and the fear of impending disasters.

Many see food hubs as a possible improvement for small and mid-sized farms as they allow those farmers to have more clout in the marketplace and greater reach to markets. Many use the terms hub and port interchangeably, and they are based on the same basic principle, which is aggregating local farmers into a more inclusive, larger organization that can elevate their position through scale and partnership.

In 2019, a coalition of local, state, and private agencies collaborated to fund an [Assessment of the Mid-Atlantic Food Port Concept and Economic Impact on Rural Agribusiness](#), which appears to be the most comprehensive research available on this topic. The report was prepared by 4P Foods and the Food Works Group.

The study defines the Mid-Atlantic Region as including Virginia, Maryland, Washington, D.C., Delaware, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, West Virginia, New Jersey, and New York. It offers valuable insights into food ports and food hubs.

The purpose of exploring a food hub or food port was to assess whether these structures, through technology, aggregation, and networking, could benefit farmers and rural communities in the region. According to the USDA, a food hub is “a business or organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of source-identified food products primarily from local and regional producers to strengthen their ability to meet wholesale, retail, and institutional demand.” In contrast, food ports are larger, technology-driven entities that aggregate from multiple sources.

Food hubs, which have existed for decades, go beyond traditional distribution by offering additional services such as storage and focusing on specific markets for their suppliers. Both food hubs and food ports aim to enhance the influence of regional farmers, foster collaboration, reduce costs, and introduce new technologies and management techniques.

A food hub helps to address the case where farmers are not able to do business with large customers because they may not produce enough product to meet the needs of grocery stores, restaurants, colleges, schools, and government. Or, in some cases, where the large customers just cannot find them. Large buyers may be looking for local producers that can provide a consistent supply of locally grown food to meet their needs. A food hub can, potentially, meet the needs of farmers and buyers through aggregation, distribution, and marketing services.

Food hubs can help local farmers meet the increasing demand for volume and reliability, providing access to equipment and technologies that enable smaller and mid-sized farms to remain competitive.

## Food Hubs and CSAs

[CSAs and regional food hubs](#) are both models that connect consumers with locally produced food, but they operate differently and can complement each other when coexisting in the same area.

### **In a CSA:**

- Consumers purchase shares of a farm's harvest in advance, providing farmers with upfront capital.
- Members receive regular boxes of seasonal produce directly from the farm.
- Direct connection between consumers and a specific farm or farms.
- Members share the risks and rewards of farming, such as crop failures or bountiful harvests.
- Typically offers produce from a single farm (or a few local farms), which may limit variety.

### **Food Hubs:**

- Businesses or organizations that aggregate, distribute, and market products from multiple local producers.
- Supply to various markets, including wholesale, retail, institutions, and sometimes direct-to-consumer channels.
- Serve as intermediaries, facilitating connections between multiple producers and consumers.
- Do not typically involve consumers in risk-sharing; they manage supply chain logistics.
- Offer a broader range of products from various producers, enhancing variety and availability.

Food hubs can provide CSA farms with additional distribution channels, helping them reach a wider customer base. Additionally, diversifying sales channels through both CSAs and food hubs can help farmers reduce financial risks associated with market fluctuations. CSAs and food hubs can collaborate on marketing, events, and educational initiatives to promote local food systems. Consumers benefit from diverse purchasing options, choosing between direct farm relationships through CSAs or the variety offered by food hubs.

There are some considerations to keep in mind to ensure a healthy environment for both a Food Hub and local CSAs. Both may vie for limited local resources, such as funding, grants, and community support, so a commitment to open communication and collaboration will be

key. Consumer education will be key to reinforce the unique identity and appeal of individual CSAs and reduce competition between the Food Hub and the CSAs for the same consumers.

In summary, while CSAs and food hubs have distinct operational models, their coexistence can be mutually beneficial. By collaborating and differentiating their offerings, they can strengthen the local food economy and provide consumers with diverse options.

We believe that establishing a food hub is a positive move for Campbell County, possibly to be joined by neighboring counties. More information on food hubs, as well as three examples of food hubs active elsewhere in the United States, are available in the Appendix.

## Recommendation

Campbell County should take an active role in facilitating the creation of a food hub. The county can serve as a catalyst by assembling a team that engages businesses, state and federal government agencies, colleges and universities, and private foundations. Campbell County's involvement could be instrumental in securing grants, loans, and investments to launch the food hub, with the goal of making it self-sustaining over time.

Leadership from Extension Service agents, the Department of Economic Development, and county officials will be essential in driving this initiative. Local colleges and universities can also play a pivotal role as partners. The initial step is to collaborate with Extension Agents and local farmers to evaluate the feasibility of the model and identify key leaders to form the core of the food hub team. Engaging local academic institutions to gauge their interest in supporting the project is another crucial step in moving forward.

Performance Measures are dependent on the program but some shorter term metrics may include:

- **Feasibility and planning:** Completion of a feasibility study, formation of a core leadership team, establishment of partnerships, and identification of a suitable location for the Food Hub, including site suitability, zoning, and infrastructure.
- **Financing and financial sustainability:** Amount of grants, loans, and private investments secured, revenue generated from hub operations, percentage of operational costs covered by self-generated revenue, and reduction in dependence on county funds as the hub progresses toward financial independence.
- **Policy and regulatory success:** Successful navigation of zoning and permitting, securing policy changes or incentives to support local food systems, and engagement with state and federal agencies for ongoing support and recognition of the Food Hub as a rural economic development model.

- **Economic impact:** Increase in local farmer participation, job creation, growth in local food sales, expanded market access for small- and mid-scale farmers, and increased local food consumption by residents, schools, or institutions.
- **Operational efficiency and services:** Volume of food processed and sold, reduction in food waste, production of value-added products, and percentage of orders fulfilled on time and efficiently delivered to buyers.

## Address Business Succession Concerns with an Agriculture Education Farm

Members of the farming community expressed a strong belief that more agricultural education is essential to encourage young people to stay in the county, take over family farms, and achieve success. While schools offer some courses and clubs, such as Future Farmers of America (FFA), there is a need for additional resources, including more time, equipment, and hands-on training.

One way to address these concerns is by establishing an Agriculture Education Farm. This farm would serve as a hands-on learning environment open to local residents interested in agriculture, with a focus on engaging young people.

An education farm offers several key benefits:

- It can inspire and educate young people about farming.
- It encourages individuals to pursue farming, whether by taking over a family farm or starting their own.
- It provides another avenue to retain young residents in the county.
- It addresses the gap in agricultural education highlighted by many participants in our discussions.
- It creates opportunities for aspiring farmers to connect with one another and learn from experienced farmers and educators.
- It can function as a farm incubator, supporting new farmers as they start their journey.

A successful example of this model can be found in Fauquier County, which launched an Education Farm in partnership with Virginia Tech and Virginia State universities. The farm is now an independent non-profit organization. It offers events, training sessions, workshops, demonstrations, and tours, funded by grants, donations, volunteers, and support from the county and the Farm Bureau.

Students involved in the farm participate in a full range of farm activities, from planting and watering to fertilizing and harvesting. Their involvement spans from planting season through harvest, after which the farm donates all the produce—tens of thousands of pounds annually—to local food banks.

## Recommendation

To support the establishment of an Education Farm in Campbell County, consider partnering with organizations like Future Farmers of America (FFA) and 4-H to identify students interested in pursuing a career in farming. This initiative would require a small plot of land, approximately 4 to 10 acres, that is suitable for crops and has space for educational instruction. Farm equipment could potentially be donated or funded through university partnerships.

The Education Farm could also serve as a Farm Incubator, helping aspiring farmers develop hands-on skills. The county should engage partners such as Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, and other local colleges for funding, collaboration, and educational support. Leadership should come from the Agriculture Extension Agents, Farm Campbell County, and other local farming organizations. Additionally, young advisors from FFA and 4-H can help shape the program. Other education farms in the state can be consulted to help get the project started.

Performance measures are dependent upon the program but may include:

- **Student engagement and education:** Number of students participating in agriculture programs, student satisfaction with the Education Farm experience, educational workshops conducted, increase in students pursuing agriculture-related careers, and number of certifications or credits earned through hands-on learning programs.
- **Partnerships and collaborations:** Number of partnerships formed with universities, local colleges, and agricultural organizations, funding or in-kind donations secured, engagement of FFA, 4-H, and other local organizations in program development, and advisory meetings held with input from FFA and 4-H youth leaders.
- **Farm output and operations:** Crop yield, number of farm incubator participants, percentage of participants who successfully start or manage their own farms, and the amount of produce donated or sold to local communities, schools, or food programs.
- **Workforce development:** Number of hands-on training sessions, participants gaining employment or internships, skills development tracked through feedback and certifications, and increased agricultural literacy among participants and the local community.

- **Community and economic impact:** Number of community members or schools visiting the farm, growth in agriculture-related businesses or farms started by graduates, economic value generated through produce sales and job creation, and increased local food production and availability of fresh, locally grown produce in Campbell County.
- **Sustainability and long-term success:** Implementation of sustainability practices, grant funding secured for operations or expansion, research projects conducted in collaboration with universities, and the farm's financial viability through income from produce sales, grants, and donations.

## Marketing

Farmers, along with business leaders, expressed strong support for the idea of "branding" the county, provided that agriculture is a central part of the brand and any associated marketing efforts. Farmers are actively working to expand their sales, reach new markets, and highlight the appeal of their locally grown, fresh produce to consumers. They would also like to play a more active role in the county's marketing initiatives and be recognized as one of the key features that contribute to Campbell County's pastoral charm.

### Recommendation

Recognizing agriculture as a vital component of the Campbell County economy, it is essential to involve farmers in the development of the county's brand and highlight the agricultural industry in the subsequent marketing efforts. Agriculture could be integrated into the overall county brand, or a separate but complementary brand could be created specifically to represent the agricultural sector, developed in collaboration with local farmers. This process should be led by the Department of Economic Development, with strong support from the Agricultural Extension Office, to ensure that the brand authentically reflects the importance of agriculture in Campbell County.

Performance measures specific to branding & marketing Agriculture in Campbell County may include:

- **Stakeholder engagement and collaboration:** Number of farmers and agricultural stakeholders involved, farmer satisfaction with the final brand, collaborative workshops held, and inclusion of diverse agricultural sectors in the branding process.
- **Brand development:** Creation of a dedicated agricultural brand, consistency of agricultural elements in the county's overall brand identity, and development of specific

brand elements for agriculture such as promotional materials, signage, and website content.

- **Marketing strategy implementation:** Number of marketing campaigns launched highlighting agriculture, marketing channels utilized, reach and engagement metrics, and number of promotional materials distributed featuring agriculture.
- **Economic impact:** Increase in inquiries from businesses, residents, or tourists, growth in agricultural tourism, increase in local agricultural product sales, and growth in new agriculture-related business startups.
- **Community awareness and perception:** Increase in public awareness of the county's agricultural importance, positive media coverage and recognition of the new brand, improved perception of Campbell County as an agricultural hub, and media outlets covering the brand launch.
- **Business attraction and retention:** Number of agricultural businesses attracted, existing businesses retained or expanded, and inquiries from outside businesses interested in partnering with or investing in Campbell County's agricultural sector due to the new brand and marketing efforts.
- **Tourism and visitor engagement:** Increase in agritourism visitors, number of agritourism-related events promoted, and growth in tourism-related revenue associated with agriculture, such as farm stays, local food purchases, and events.
- **Digital and online presence:** Increase in website traffic to agriculture-related pages, growth in social media engagement, and number of online mentions or backlinks to the county's agricultural brand from external sources.

# Appendix

## Additional Resources for Campbell County Farmers

As noted earlier, Campbell County offers a substantial incentive to farmers by exempting farm-used vehicles and farm animals from personal property taxes.

Agriculture related businesses may qualify for Start Small Campbell grants (offered by Campbell County Department of Economic Development) and for CLIMB business loans (offered by the IDA).

The [Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services](#) offers a range of programs that Campbell County farms can take advantage of, if they meet the eligibility criteria.

There are also a series of AFID (Agriculture and Forestry Industry Development fund) grants that the county is eligible to apply for in support of farmers and agriculture. These are flexible grants that cover Planning Grants, Facilities Grants and Infrastructure Grants.

The [Federal Government](#) and the [USDA](#) have a long list of grants mostly for infrastructure, environmental issues, “smart farming” and more.

Other Federal Agencies also have grants that might apply for certain types of projects, including the [Economic Development Administration](#), the [Small Business Administration](#) and the [Virginia Tourism Corporation](#).

# Creating a Food Hub

Food hubs are innovative and somewhat complex types of businesses, and they all have different missions, structures, and operating practices. A high-end overview of the steps involved include:

1. Do extensive research, visiting farms and potential partners for the endeavor. Complete a feasibility study. Explore best practices for food hubs. [Food Hubs & Values-Based Supply Chains](#) is a comprehensive link that aggregates a great deal of the available information needed to start a food hub.
2. Establish the structure, based on the needs of your likely customers and market demand. Review available resources, craft a business plan, and define your operating system. Secure funding and develop cash flow plans.
3. Price and procure the tools you will need, including a business location, food handling equipment, management software, and more.
4. Build a team with expertise in food hubs, distribution, farming, management, etc.

## Other Food Hubs in the United States

### [Riverside Food Hub, Riverside, CA](#)

The Riverside Food Hub is a pilot program intended to bring locally grown fresh food produce to our community. RUSD was awarded grant funding from the California Department of Food and Agriculture to continue to pilot the Riverside Food Hub until 2023. RUSD, along with partners at Riverside University Health System, has created a food hub that buys locally grown seasonal fruits and vegetables and sells them to restaurants, child care centers, mini produce markets, hospitals and schools that do not have access to these fresh fruits and vegetables. The Riverside Food Hub also provides nutrition education to RUSD students and students in surrounding districts. Within four years of opening in 2017, this hub had purchased over \$700,000 in produce from local growers and sold nearly \$900,000 to local institutions.

### [The High Country Food Hub, Boone, NC](#)

The High Country Food Hub is a year-round online farmers' market offering over 3,000 locally made products from 90+ High Country farmers and food entrepreneurs, including fresh produce, meat, dairy, bread, artisan foods, flowers, body care products, and plants.

Founded in Watauga County, the Hub transformed a 1,400-square-foot Agricultural Service Center into a facility with freezers, refrigerators, and dry food storage, thanks to funding from

Heifer USA and the USDA Local Food Promotion Program. In 2016, additional funding from the Town of Boone provided another freezer to meet the growing demand for cold storage from farmers, gardeners, and food banks.

The Food Hub, supported by bipartisan efforts, continues to thrive under the management of Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture, now offering educational programs, shared equipment, and assistance to help farmers reach local markets.

### [Harvest Food Hub and Kitchen, Farmington, NM](#)

**The Harvest Food Hub and Kitchen** is an innovative project by the EDA University Center envisioned as a one-stop marketplace for locally sourced food in San Juan County, where customers can shop online, subscribe to a weekly box of mixed produce, or visit the market in person. They also offer bulk and wholesale sales to restaurants, schools, and other institutions.

### [Appalachian Harvest Food Hub, Duffield VA](#)

Founded in 2000, Appalachian Harvest is one of the oldest rural food hubs in the United States. They offer produce, beef, and value-added foods such as jams, salsa, pickled vegetables and salad dressings. Appalachian Harvest is a social enterprise of Appalachian Sustainable Development, a nonprofit working to grow a stronger Appalachia.

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Walter Bass	Vesna Farrar	Adam Peak
Betty Mitchell	Todd Scott	

## **Resources consulted for this report included:**

- One-on-one interviews with 8 leading farmers in Campbell County
- An agriculture roundtable with 13 farmers
- Three interviews/meetings with the Agriculture Extension Agent for Campbell County, Todd Scott
- Interview with Raquel Kines, Interim Director of Agricultural Development in Fauquier County, Virginia
- Interviews with Nina Rezai, Director of Economic Development for Campbell County
- Review of several reports by the Economic Research Service (ERS) of the USDA (all cited in this report);

- Reports from Time Magazine, Farm Progress Foods (also cited);
- Review of the US Agriculture Census for 2022 and 2017.
- Drawing on the experience of Phoenix Advantage Partner, Miles Friedman, who spent eight years as Director of Economic Development in Fauquier County.
- Lessons learned by the authors from working with the Education Farm in Fauquier County, (administered by Virginia Tech and Virginia State Universities).
- A wide-ranging report, "An Assessment of the Mid-Atlantic Food Port Concept and Economic Impact on Rural Economic Development."

#### SOURCE OF INFO ON CSAs

<https://www.foodnetwork.com/healthy/2009/04/joining-a-csa#:~:text=Farmers%20really%20benefit%20from%20this,money%20in%20the%20long%20run.>

#### Pros and cons of Organic Farming

#### STATE OF THE PLANET

<https://news.climate.columbia.edu/2020/02/05/organic-sustainable-food/>

#### INFO ON CC FARMERS MARKETS

[https://newsadvance.com/agriculture/two-new-farmers-markets-open-in-campbell-county/article\\_7e5f2bc0-ef70-11ed-bbbd-838c71f99daa.html](https://newsadvance.com/agriculture/two-new-farmers-markets-open-in-campbell-county/article_7e5f2bc0-ef70-11ed-bbbd-838c71f99daa.html)

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