



Virginia LFPA: Expanding Economic Opportunity for All

Agriculture is Virginia's largest private industry and includes more than 41,000 farms in the Commonwealth – 97% of which are family-owned. It contributes \$82.3 billion annually to the state's economy and provides more than 381,800 jobs. Virginia's agricultural production is one of the most diverse in the nation and exports total more than \$5 billion annually. Many Virginia commodities and products, including apples, pumpkins, and turkeys, rank in the top 10 among all U.S. states.

Despite the industry's significant economic strength and productivity, food insecurity is around 8.1% meaning that over 704,000 Virginians - including more than 164,000 children - worry about where their next meal will come from on any given day.

Recognizing the need to find ways to both maintain the vitality of the agriculture industry and get fresh food to people experiencing hunger, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) signed a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) under the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program (LFPA).

By the Numbers

\$12.6 million total LFPA allocation for buying produce, meat, seafood, and other locally produced products from socially disadvantaged Virginia farmers (from 2022-2024)

Over 100 local producers reached and 100,000 individuals provided fresh, healthy food in the first year

Over 300,000 pounds of food from local farmers distributed to families in need through agencies, schools, churches, universities, and food pantries

Virginia's LFPA program is managed by a robust network of partners, including Appalachian Sustainable Development, 4P Foods, Lulus Local Food, New Community Vine & Fig, and Virginia Community Food Connections. Lulus Local Food led the charge for the Virginia LFPA in 2023, working with food hubs and farmers markets to connect local farmers with 15 food pantries, a dozen churches, school districts, and universities to reach more than 100,000 people in need in Virginia. This spotlight focuses on Lulus' subaward activities within the Virginia LFPA in 2023.

“The LFPA grant allows me to exponentially benefit my community because it ensures I have the revenue to make it sustainable beyond what my micro farm can normally handle. It is just what the people need in the face of rising costs and the lower quality, heavily processed foods becoming all that many can access as a result. It’s a rising tide that lifts all ships.” - Justin Upshaw, Essential RVA Microgreens

Common Objectives Keep Partners Aligned

Given the number of partners involved in implementing the Virginia LFPA program, the community created a set of four common objectives to help guide their work. These are:

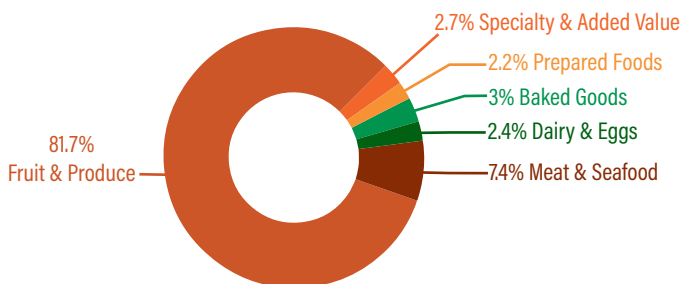
- Increase purchases of local foods, focusing on underserved farmers and producers, creating a network that provides fresh local foods to food insecure individuals.
- Expand the reach of food distribution programs and ensure that the program provides for the needs of all food-insecure Virginians.
- Create lasting partnerships between socially disadvantaged farmers, producers, and agencies that distribute food to reach those most in need, including people in previously underserved communities.
- Develop a more equitable food distribution program that both provides for food insecure individuals and includes farmers representing Virginia’s diversity.

Lulus Local Food identified farmers markets and food hubs working with producers in south central Virginia with these objectives as their North Star. Reaching communities that had not previously been served was a top priority, as prior to LFPA there were significant wait lists for pantries trying to access food from the largest state food bank. Of the food delivered to individuals in need, nearly 80% was sourced from farmers in south-central Virginia. The program also expanded its offerings beyond just fruits and vegetables and provides a complete selection of items, including dairy, meat, eggs, and culturally relevant items and prepared goods. This helps children and families access complete and nutritious meals and helps farmers and producers diversify their product offerings.



“Our mission is to provide fresh and local foods to families and communities while contributing to the health and wellness of our future. Creating access to fresh and healthy food is the impetus for bridging the nutritional divide. We are committed and responsive to engaging, educating, and empowering small farmers to diversify and find new niche markets that build economic equity. Creating an agricultural legacy for future generations.” - Sarah Morton, Cattle Run Farm

2023 LFPA PROCUREMENT BREAKDOWN*



TOTAL 2023 PURCHASES BY PRODUCT TYPE*

Fruit & Produce	\$367,671.29
Meat & Seafood	\$33,027.85
Dairy & Eggs	\$10,794.72
Baked Goods	\$13,444.74
Prepared Goods	\$9,847.89
Specialty & Added Value	\$12,015.30
Bulk Tea & Coffee	\$2,408.63
Total	\$449,210.42

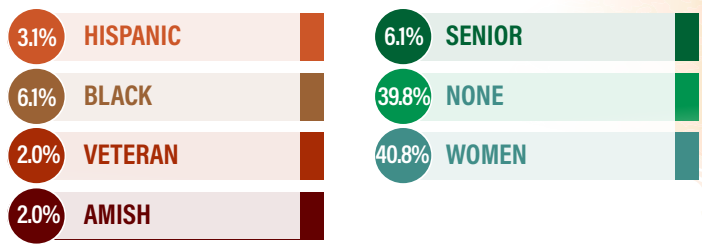
*2023 Procurement Data from Lulus Local Food



Empowering Women-Owned Business

As the Virginia LFPA program has developed, focusing on "socially disadvantaged" producers has created an opening for small to midsize farmers and producers, particularly women-owned businesses. Around 41% of all the farmers and producers participating with Lulus Local Food in the LFPA program are women-owned businesses. Virginia leads the nation in supporting women-owned agriculture producers at this level.

PERCENTAGE OF USDA-DEFINED SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED PRODUCERS PARTICIPATING IN LULUS' SUBAWARD



KelRae Farms, a food hub in South-Eastern Virginia and a woman-led enterprise, developed partnerships with dozens of women-owned businesses as a result of LFPA. These relationships have introduced new value-added products and helped small business owners expand their offerings and diversify revenue sources.

“Women play a crucial role in agriculture across Virginia. Their small businesses serve as engines of local economic development, contributing to the sustainability of our communities statewide.” - Dr. Kim Niewolny, Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation at Virginia Tech

USDA Definition - Socially Disadvantaged Producer

A Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher is a farmer or rancher who is a member of a Socially Disadvantaged Group. A Socially Disadvantaged Group is a group whose members have been subject to discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and, where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or a part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program.



Restoring Dignity to Local Families

For the farmers, contributing food hub members, and food pantries, there is more at stake than just providing sustenance - it centers on community and helping everyone find value in the food on the plate. Together the hubs, markets, producers, pantries and schools are making an impact: bringing greater health to Virginia's communities and supporting farm businesses.

"This program has been a God's send for our farmers. It means so much to all of us to have the food going to kids and people in need in our communities. We have been able to keep employees we thought we might have to let go of, and we have added jobs as a result of this work. The success of this project has stimulated our local economy. We are so grateful!" - Amy Carwile, Southside Virginia Vegetable & Fruit Growers Association.



Additional Resources

More information about Virginia's approach to LFPA can be found at www.ams.usda.gov/selling-food-to-usda/lfpacap/exec-summaries/va

About LFPA

The USDA Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement (LFPA) is a transformative federal initiative that empowers state agencies, tribal governments, and their community partners to collaboratively source and distribute food, benefiting local socially disadvantaged producers and underserved communities. With a budget of \$900M, LFPA, led by the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service's Commodity Procurement Program, aims to strengthen regional food systems, support local and regional farms, and address hunger and food insecurity through partnerships with food assistance programs. This groundbreaking program has demonstrated its potential as a powerful investment in farms and communities in a short time since its inception in 2021.