

## **July 12, 2022 Directors Report**

On June 27, 2022, I participated in a Food and Nutrition Security Roundtable. Tom Barkin President and CEO of the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond and his colleague, Renee Haltom did a fact-finding tour of our region with the intent to learn more about our status with Nutrition and Food Security. This roundtable discussion including other representation from Virginia Community Capital, 4P Foods, Virginia Federation of Food Banks, Southern Virginia Vegetable Packing, LLC. Browntown Farms, VA Dept. of Education, Office of School Nutrition Programs, VA Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Sciences, VA Food Access Investment Fund and Ms. Alfreda Reynolds. They were informed of the Agriculture task force created by the IDA Board of Directors 4 years ago. We explained our efforts for Agri-Tourism, and the many alternatives to traditional tobacco farming we are working on, including Controlled Environmental Agriculture, Organic Farming and Produce shipping and distribution. Alfreda Reynolds pointed out that all our public school students receive free lunch along with other accommodations. We discussed lack of access to fresh fruits and vegetables I spent a lot of time updating them on the Organic Agriculture Project and on some of the IDA's, Towns and County projects along with some of our intended projects. Our region has struggled with nutrition and food security and Mr. Barkin was very interested in the plans of the Economic Development team. Members of the Agricultural Task Force were on the panel including Alfreda Reynolds and Herb Brown. Lawrenceville hosted the event at the former Southern States Building. Everette Gibson and Kim Martin worked on Sunday to get the room set up.

Let me share with you the comments of Tom McDougal president of 4P foods who also sat on the panel

***Everette, Mike,***

***Wanted to drop a quick note to say "thank you" for hosting today. Since our first connections, I have appreciated and admired the way you and your team welcome people into your community. The thoughtfulness in the food, the setup, the gift bags, the conversation... all of it. It is true hospitality and as I learn more about what Leadership looks like, I see it embodied in everyone I have interacted with in Brunswick County. Today was just another example of that, so please do pass along my gratitude to Alfreda, Laverne, Kim, and everyone else that is helping to make things happen. I feel blessed to be playing a small part in what feels like a very big moment of positive change.***

***More to come! And thank you again.***

***With gratitude,***

***Tom***

I participated in the Tobacco Growers roundtable, held in South Hill Virginia as well. The panel included experienced tobacco farmers and Agriculture expert Dr. David Reed. It was a very valuable opportunity to listen to the issues that face Tobacco Farmers and other farmers. My take away from that panel is that our Tobacco Farmers who produce the best tasting tobacco in the world face stiff international competition. China for example is sourcing tobacco from countries other than the United State, and as of the date of the round table have not contracted for tobacco this year. Costs such as labor, fuel and fertilizers continue to rise. The cost of fuel is up over 100%. The lack of local labor was a key part of the question and the cost of H2A temporary workers visa programs.

At the conclusion of the round table, I asked the participants to stay for a few minutes after Tom Barkin left. This discussion lasted almost 30 minutes. During this discussion, I learned of efforts that failed to provide profitable alternatives to raising tobacco. My takeaway from this panel and the subsequent conversation was that farmers are willing to grow produce or other crops. All they require is buyers who will quickly get them paid when they deliver their product. In the case of some farmers, education and training would help with the change. I think education along with explained standards would also help farmers understand expectations. I know that Agriculture was our past, our present and must be our future.

### **Chamber**

I met with the Brunswick County Chamber Board of Directors let them know that the IDA is willing to help them as they seek a new director. Ray Thomas is the current President of the Chamber of Commerce. After years of incredible service, Wendy Wright has resigned as Director to pursue other opportunities. The IDA has budgeted money as part of community development