



Elevate Rural Workforce Development and Employment



Accomack County • Big Orange Frame

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“Where the rubber meets the road is workforce development.”



Statement of Governor Ralph Northam at the Governor’s Summit on Rural Prosperity, 2019

Overview

Employment status is a determining factor in a person's ability to access resources that impact health. These resources may include educational opportunities, healthy food, health insurance, the inclination to seek routine preventive medical services, and benefits that provide for long term stability such as retirement benefits. Employees rely on employers to provide a living wage, the minimum amount of pay needed to meet basic needs in a particular community, as well as health insurance and other benefits. Employers are motivated to provide employees with the

means to support themselves and their families in order to maintain a reliable workforce and run a profitable operation. A healthy economy is sustained by a healthy workforce; the two work hand-in-hand.

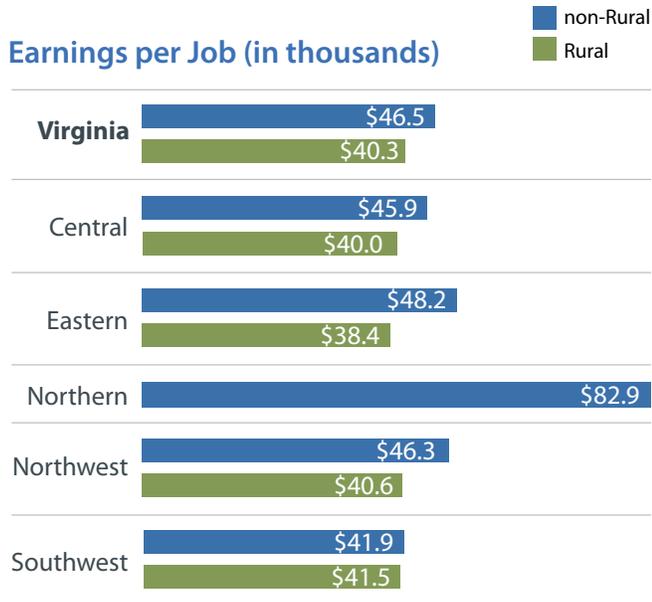
Ideally, all who seek employment would have jobs and rural workforce participation would be no different than that in urban areas. Rural Virginia boasts a variety of thriving industries including agriculture, forestry, technology, tourism, healthcare, education, state and local government, fishing, hatcheries, manufacturing, retail, and customer service. A focus on industry diversity, continuing education, professional training, recruitment, and retention contributes to the improvement of the overall quality and health of a workforce. Organizations in rural Virginia continue to address these issues in order to create a workforce that supports its community and results in economic resilience.

Employment and Earnings in Rural Virginia

| Industry Sector | Employment | Total Earnings | Earning per job |
|--|------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Government and government enterprises | 83,742 | \$5,240,201 | \$62,576 |
| Retail trade | 53,773 | \$1,419,966 | \$26,407 |
| Manufacturing | 50,174 | \$2,938,104 | \$58,558 |
| Health care and social assistance | 49,853 | \$2,282,113 | \$45,777 |
| Accommodation and food services | 32,279 | \$681,814 | \$21,123 |
| Other services (except government and government enterprises) | 31,234 | \$984,755 | \$31,528 |
| Construction | 27,331 | \$1,235,105 | \$45,191 |
| Administrative and support and waste management and remediation services | 25,770 | \$738,804 | \$28,669 |
| Farm earnings | 20,670 | \$102,489 | \$4,958 |
| Professional, scientific, and technical services | 19,578 | \$1,068,485 | \$54,576 |
| Real estate and rental leasing | 16,386 | \$217,162 | \$13,253 |
| Transportation and warehousing | 15,649 | \$762,168 | \$48,704 |
| Finance and insurance | 13,112 | \$477,624 | \$36,426 |
| Wholesale trade | 10,544 | \$629,017 | \$59,656 |
| Educational services | 7,289 | \$276,575 | \$37,944 |
| Forestry, fishing, and related activities | 5,719 | \$214,734 | \$37,547 |
| Information | 3,905 | \$179,391 | \$45,939 |
| Utilities | 3,694 | \$564,297 | \$152,760 |
| Management of companies and enterprises | 2,970 | \$228,224 | \$76,843 |
| Mining and support (less oil & gas) | Censored | \$341,262 | NA |
| Arts, entertainment, and recreation | Censored | Censored | NA |

Source: US Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2018. Author Calculations for Earnings per Job. Includes data for both employees and proprietors, and includes the value of salaries, proprietor's income, and benefits.

Elevate Rural Workforce Development and Employment



Source: US Census Bureau, ACS 5-year Estimate, 2018

Leading Practices and Approaches

Whenever possible, examples of leading practices and approaches were taken from rural Virginia communities. Otherwise, examples were gathered from localities with comparable demographic characteristics.

The Virginia Economic Development Partnership

Need addressed: Rural areas in Virginia experience low employment for a variety of reasons, one of which is the lack of economic development. More remote areas of the

Commonwealth can benefit from special assistance when attempting to help their communities thrive economically.

Approach: The Virginia Economic Development Partnership created the Rural Virginia Action Committee in 2016 to address economic disparities experienced in rural communities. This committee meets regularly to discuss opportunities for economic improvement examining which regions experience job losses due to differences in industry mix and distribution of unemployment claims.

The committee has developed four strategic opportunities for economic restoration, post COVID-19 relief-efforts. The strategies include increasing production demand for exporters, developing Virginia as a leader in technology, and making education and skills training more available to those whose employment was most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the strategies most beneficial for rural Virginia is making the most of teleworking opportunities that have arisen due to the pandemic (1).

Aside from the Rural Virginia Action Committee, the Virginia Economic Development Partnership has created other initiatives and incentives to improve Virginia's economic landscape, particularly in rural areas. Among these are the Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development Fund (AFID), the Rail Industrial Access Program, the Virginia Jobs Investment Program (VJIP), and the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority (VCEDA) which provides loans and grants to new businesses in southwestern Virginia (2).

Outcome(s): The Virginia Economic Development Partnership has worked to help elevate Virginia



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United Way of Southwest VA

economically, and has recently identified strategies to achieve that goal in the midst of the global pandemic. Additionally, its VCEDA financing program has used a percentage of Virginia's mineral severance taxes paid by the state's own natural resource industries to strengthen its economy in rural regions (3).

Virginia's Chief Workforce Advisor: Virginia Future of Work Taskforce

Need addressed: The Commonwealth of Virginia boasts that it has the top ranked workforce in the country, according to CNBC's Top States for Business 2019 report, as well as the second highest concentration of technology workers in the country. Despite these facts, Virginia still struggles to ensure its citizens find employment, especially those living in its most rural regions (4).

Approach: The Office of Virginia's Chief Workforce Advisor functions to identify job openings for Virginians. In the spring of 2019, Governor Northam announced the Virginia Future of Work Taskforce, which analyzes the changing work environment and farm placement staff policy recommendations based on its findings (5).

Outcome(s): The Virginia Future of Work Taskforce plans to provide policy recommendations to promote initiatives and policies that encourage and support working Virginians. The report will be important as the state recovers from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has left many Virginians with job instability (5).

The Virginia Employment Commission: Agricultural Labor Program

Need addressed: One of Virginia's most valuable exports is its agricultural products. Agricultural producers located in rural Virginia sometimes struggle to fill positions.

Approach: The Virginia Employment Commission created the Agricultural Labor Program, which connects agricultural producers and businesses to those searching for employment. The program utilizes the Virginia Workforce Connection system which broadcasts the availability of an open position to local regions. The program offers farm placement specialists to assist farmers with recruitment (6).

The system first advertises the jobs to the surrounding areas, and will only attempt to recruit workers from further regions or other states after all local options have been exhausted. Similarly, all US worker options must be exhausted before the system will suggest foreign, nonimmigrant workers (6).

Outcome(s): The Agricultural Labor Program enlists farm placement staff to visit even the most remote Virginia farms and businesses to assist with employment needs, connecting employers with the available workforce.

The Virginia Community College Rural Horseshoe Initiative

Need addressed: There is a horseshoe shaped section of Virginia, starting in Virginia's Eastern Shore, looping west across Southwest Virginia and circling back through the Shenandoah Valley. This region is home to more than 500,000 who do not have, at minimum, a high school education. Lack of education affects employment opportunities of those residing in this predominantly rural region.

Approach: The Rural Virginia Horseshoe Initiative (RVHI) was created to address the educational attainment levels in the rural localities served by 14 of Virginia's 23 community colleges. The goals of the RVHI are to reduce the number of rural residents who lack a high school diploma and double the number of rural residents with an associate degree or higher or other college certification. Strategies employed to achieve these goals include placing full-time career coaches in rural high schools to assist lower- and middle-income families in navigating higher education options, and to awarding scholarship incentives to remove barriers to achieving success in higher education (7).

Outcome(s): The work of the Rural Virginia Horseshoe Initiative has touched the lives of many rural Virginians. RVHI intends to halve the percentage of Virginians living in the region who do not have at least a high school education.



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The initiative has goals to ensure that more than half of those residents obtain at least an associate degree or college certification, and to reach more people with their program (7).

The Virginia Rural Center

Need addressed: Rural Virginia experiences many disparities compared to more urban areas of the Commonwealth. In 2004, the Virginia General Assembly established the Center for Rural Virginia to address these inequities.

Approach: The Virginia Rural Center is a collaborative partnership of the Center for Rural Virginia and the Council for Rural Virginia, which work together on a joint mission to work with policymakers and stakeholders to create innovative solutions and expand entrepreneurial opportunities to ensure economic prosperity for all regions in the commonwealth.

The Virginia Rural Center accomplishes its goal through six double-pronged initiatives: policy development and advocacy; entrepreneurship and innovation; national trends and best practices; research and data assessment; strategic public/private partnerships; and leadership and development. Through these initiatives, the Rural Center partners with Virginia's best universities, develops leadership programs, and advocates for policies at every government level that work for rural communities (8).

The Virginia Rural Center's work in entrepreneurship and innovation assists rural areas to expand upon its citizens' talent and intellect. The center helps start small businesses and in turn creates more opportunities for employment (8).

Outcome(s): The Virginia Rural Center has worked to address the most important issues that face rural Virginia communities, like its infrastructure, access to healthcare, economic development, and job creation. It supports entrepreneurship and employs a scope substantial enough to support the other aspects that a community needs to function (8).

Opportunities for Growth

1. Increase opportunities for investment in workforce development in rural areas:

- Education and training programs that prepare young and adult workers for high demand jobs and skills within existing and burgeoning industry sectors
- Economic diversification initiatives to expand the region's job base and increase economic resiliency in case a major employer closes or relocates elsewhere
- Strategies to create community amenities, support entrepreneurship, and improve the quality of jobs in order to attract and retain workers with a range of skill sets and income levels

Elevate Rural Workforce Development and Employment

- Community development efforts focused on transportation, housing, child care, health care, and broadband that help workers and residents, particularly from low-wage sectors, access economic opportunity

2. Foster Cultural and Systematic Changes in the Public and Private Sectors

- By collaborating across the public, nonprofit, and private sectors to address regional workforce development, recruitment and retention needs can be addressed. By fostering a culture of innovation and embracing risk, potential employers and localities can reach their economic development, and community development goals.
- Potential opportunities include:
 - Facilitate student access to SNAP and other benefits at higher education institutions to meet the fundamental needs of the student
 - Create opportunities for increased employer engagement within companies/organizations
 - Ease access to affordable cost-benefit analysis
 - Provide employees educational opportunities regarding goal setting, career planning and coaching

3. Make Work Pay

- Work supports are policies and programs that help people experiencing barriers to work enter and succeed in the workforce. The most common work-supports are tax credits, child care and pathways to work, career and self-sufficiency. Many family-support



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programs, especially child care, do double-duty as work-support programs.

- Income and work supports include Medicaid, SNAP, TANF, and refundable tax credits. Reduce barriers to these support programs to help maintain a healthy workforce through times of instability
- Make efforts to increase access across work-support programs as well as ensuring immigrant access to benefits
- Increase accessibility of tax credits for working families
- Provide opportunities for career pathways education in order to retain the strong workforce in rural areas and decrease migration

