

**VIRGINIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION & AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION
(Agency 229)**

Capital Project Budget Amendment Proposal

Planning the Improve Agricultural Research and Extension Centers project

	<u>2024-25</u>	<u>2025-26</u>
Additional Funds Requested:		
General Fund	\$1,500,000	\$0
Nongeneral Fund	\$0	\$0

The Agricultural Research and Extension Centers (ARECs) Improvement project is slated to renovate 21,600 GSF of dilapidated facilities and construct 44,000 GSF of modern research facilities at the Eastern Shore and Southern Piedmont ARECs. The project's purpose is to ensure that researchers are equipped to continue the research and outreach expected by the Commonwealth's agricultural businesses and stakeholders. This request is for a \$1.5 million planning authorization to design the \$25.2 million project through the preliminary design phase.

Virginia Cooperative Extension and Agriculture Experiment Station research directly supports agriculture, the state's largest private industry, accounting for one in every five jobs, providing an economic impact of \$82.3 billion annually, generating more than 381,800 jobs in the Commonwealth, and creating \$43.8 billion in value-added impact. The industries of agriculture and forestry together have a total economic impact of over \$105 billion and provide more than 490,000 jobs in the Commonwealth. Every job in agriculture and forestry supports 1.6 jobs elsewhere in Virginia's economy.

The Eastern Shore AREC's faculty, staff, and students serve to create, integrate, and disseminate knowledge to stakeholders utilizing innovative technologies to improve vegetable, grain, oilseed, and fiber crop production and sustainability, protect land, air, and water resources, as well as foster undergraduate and graduate education through applied and basic research coupled with experiential learning and community outreach. Research includes eliminating foodborne human pathogens in packing houses, conversion of chicken litter ash into comparable phosphorus fertilizer sources, and decreasing weed pressure using new, innovative modes of actions including usage of drones and robotics. Concepts explored include horticultural cropping systems, soils and nutrient management, as well as vegetable disease epidemiology, all widely considered to be crucial areas of research in maximizing both farming efficacy and resource efficiency. To ensure that the Eastern Shore remains a leader in commercial agriculture production, it is essential that new, state-of-the-art applied research is conducted that is relevant to local large and small-scale farming operations.

The Southern Piedmont AREC (SPAREC) near Blackstone, Virginia conducts strong commodity-oriented research and Extension programs to provide information and technology to the

agricultural industry. The SPAREC is the only AREC in Virginia that conducts research and provides recommendations on all aspects of best management practices to tobacco producers who have experienced unprecedented challenges to profitability. This service has been instrumental in retaining tobacco as a top commodity in Virginia, with \$215 million in exports in 2022. Effective integration of the region's tobacco, soybean, livestock, and timber production can lead to economic prosperity and enhance the quality of life of Virginians, especially those in the region with more than 35% underrepresented population. In recent years, significant investments have been made to recruit new faculty, researchers, and graduate and undergraduate students and to obtain state-of-the-art equipment to facilitate research and outreach; the limited and aging infrastructure remain a significant constraint to the further growth of the AREC. The ongoing research and outreach efforts on specialty crops, crop rotations, and pest and disease management are geared toward maximizing farmers' profitability and generating opportunities for small-acreage producers to succeed.

To ensure the continued success and support of the departments' critical research which directly contributes to a significant portion of the economy for the Commonwealth, this capital project request is for a General Fund appropriation to design the renovation of 21,600 gross square feet and construct 44,000 gross square feet of new office, research laboratory, field support, and field storage spaces at the Eastern Shore AREC in Painter, Virginia and the Southern Piedmont AREC in Blackstone, Virginia.

This request is for authorization and funding to plan the Improve ARECs capital project. The total project planning budget request is \$1.5 million and the funding plan calls for General Fund support. If the Commonwealth of Virginia is not positioned to support the planning costs of the project at this time, the university requests authorization to fund the \$1.5 million cost with nongeneral funds to complete design work through preliminary designs internally and in accordance with the state's cost review process.