VIRGINIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION & AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION (Agency 229)

Capital Project Budget Amendment Proposal

Improve Eastern Shore Agricultural Research and Extension Centers project

	2024-25	2025-26
Additional Funds Requested:		
General Fund	$27,500,000	$0
Nongeneral Fund	$0	$0

The Agricultural Research and Extension Centers (ARECs) Improvement project is slated to renovate 14,000 GSF of dilapidated facilities and construct 25,000 GSF of modern research facilities at the Eastern Shore AREC. 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. The project received $1.5 million for planning in Chapter 2 of the 2024 Special Session I, Item C-48, Planning Pool for capital project 229-18759 and design is underway. This request is for a $27.5 million full construction authorization to complete the Eastern Shore AREC project.

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, and
- 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 the area AREC maintains its ability to conduct state-of-the-art applied research that is relevant to local large and small-scale farming operations.

In direct support of that goal, this capital project request is for a General Fund appropriation to renovate the 14,000 gross square feet and construct 25,000 gross square feet of new office, research laboratory, field support, and field storage spaces at the Eastern Shore AREC in Painter, Virginia

The project is scheduled to complete preliminary designs by the end of summer 2025. If construction funding is not authorized this Session, the project's design activity will stop, and additional construction cost escalation will accrue on top of the project's current cost estimate. This request is for authorization and funding to fully construct the Improve the Eastern Shore AREC's capital project.