

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

Capital Project Budget Amendment Proposal

**Planning for the Improve Southern Piedmont Agricultural Research and
Extension Centers project**

	<u>2024-25</u>	<u>2025-26</u>
Additional Funds Requested:		
General Fund	\$0	\$700,000
Nongeneral Fund	\$0	\$0

The Agricultural Research and Extension Centers (ARECs) Improvement project is slated to renovate 7,600 GSF of dilapidated facilities and construct 19,000 GSF of modern research facilities at the Southern Piedmont AREC (SPAREC). 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 \$700,000 planning authorization for the Southern Piedmont 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 Southern Piedmont AREC near Blackstone, Virginia was established in 1974 and conducts strong commodity-oriented research and Extension programs to provide information and technology to the agricultural industry. Programs enhance the economic viability and environmental stewardship of tobacco, forage crops, beef cattle, small fruit, and other field and specialty crops.

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. While the research and extension activities in applied forage have been engaging regional livestock producers, SPAREC's effort in integrating trees and livestock grazing (known as silvopasture) is not only contributing to the preservation of natural resources but also to Virginia's livestock, hay, and forestry production, valued at more than \$1.5 billion in exports and cash receipts in 2022 (VDACS, 2022). 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. The SPAREC is also a regional leader in community engagement and agritourism support by organizing regionwide events to showcase research activities, farm operations, and laboratory facilities to the general public and a wide range of partners (~3,000 visitors in 2022). The SPAREC's diverse programs provide ample opportunities for training the next generation of agricultural educators and practitioners to serve the Commonwealth of Virginia.

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 renovate the 7,600 gross square feet and construct 19,000 gross square feet of New lab, AREC Support Services Complex, short-term residential facility for research and new smart greenhouse at the Southern Piedmont AREC near Blackstone, Virginia

This request is for planning authorization and funding for the Improve the Southern Piedmont AREC's capital project. The total project budget request is \$700,000 and the funding plan calls for General Fund support.