

For immediate release – 3/5/2012

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## **Ag Sector Can Drive Economic Development Plan**

Strasburg Workshop March 29<sup>th</sup>

WOODSTOCK, Va.— Two leaders of a successful campaign to strengthen the farm economy in Lancaster County Pennsylvania are coming to the Shenandoah Valley for a series of workshops, including one on Thursday, March 29th at 9:00 a.m. at the Strasburg Town Hall.

Scott Sheely of the Lancaster County Workforce Investment Board and George Hurst of family-owned Oregon Dairy Farm will discuss how local government, businesses and farmers can work toward a set of common goals for agriculture and economic development. The workshops are titled, “*Cultivating Comparative Advantages for Agriculture and Farm-based Entrepreneurship in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.*”

The topic is particularly timely in Shenandoah County, where a committee is developing a new economic development strategic plan and the 2005 Comprehensive Plan and vision statement calls for maintaining a robust farm economy. The new Virginia Farm to Table Strategic Plan indicates that Shenandoah County could generate an additional \$9.6 million in receipts if local households spent just \$10 a week on local farm produce and products. The challenge is to identify opportunities to grow and diversity farm businesses and expand markets for local products.

Six years ago, Lancaster County residents and officials wondered how to maintain their farm sector in the face of the escalating loss of farmland to residential and commercial development. The Lancaster County Board of Commissioners and local stakeholders sought to capture their unique advantages in both farming and farm-based entrepreneurship by making the right links with education, manufacturing, alternative energy, tourism, natural resource conservation and farmland protection.

The Lancaster County Center of Excellence was established in 2007 to support farm research and development, technology transfer, entrepreneurial activity and worker training. It provides a pipeline of new employees from school to work in the agricultural sector.

George Hurst and his family reflect one family’s efforts to innovate on their 500-cow dairy farm. Oregon Dairy Farm features manure to energy projects, such as anaerobic digestion, methane recovery and composting food waste, along with farm diversification projects like a family-friendly supermarket, restaurant, gift shop, bakery, ice cream shop and agritourism attractions. The Hurst family has been leaders in stewardship and farmland protection in Lancaster for 50 years.

The five Scott Sheely-George Hurst workshops are sponsored by Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Horse Center Foundation, Farm Credit, Page County Grown, Fields of Gold, Shenandoah County, Valley Conservation Council, Shenandoah RC&D, Augusta County, Shenandoah Valley Partnership, Luray-Page County and Shenandoah Forum.

P.O. Box 654 – Woodstock, VA 22664

## **Workshop Schedule:**

### **Lexington, VA**

Date: Tuesday, March 27, 2012

Time: 4:00 p.m. AND 7:00 p.m.

Location: Virginia Horse Center, 2nd Floor Mezzanine, 487 Maury Road, Lexington 24450

### **Augusta County**

Date: Wednesday, March 28, 2012

Time: 10:00 a.m.

Location: Augusta County Gov't Center, Smith Room West, 18 Gov't Center Lane, Verona 224482

### **Harrisonburg, VA**

Date: Wednesday, March 28, 2012

Time: 1:30 p.m.

Location: Farm Credit of the Virginias, 4646 South Valley Pike, Harrisonburg 22801

### **Page County**

Date: Wednesday, March 28, 2012

Time 6:00 p.m.

Location: Luray-Page County Chamber of Commerce, 18 Campbell Street, Luray 22835

### **Shenandoah County**

Date: Thursday, March 29, 2012

Time: 9:00 a.m.

Location: Strasburg Town Hall, Council Chamber, 174 East King Street, Strasburg 22657

Registration Deadline: Monday, March 26, 2012 at 12:00p.m.

**To register**, please call the Northern District Office at (540) 432-6029 Ext. 106 or 107.

**For more information**, please contact Eric Bendfeldt at (540) 432-6029, Tom Stanley at (540) 463-4734, or Jason Carter at (540) 245-5750, or your local Extension office.

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Shenandoah Forum is a group of Shenandoah County residents, formed in 2001, in response to the need for accurate, useful and balanced information to help meet the rising pressures of growth and development within our rural community, in a manner that maintains economic vitality, a high quality of life and our rural character. Its mission is to ensure the county remains essentially rural, preserves a healthy environment, promotes a sustainable economy, and provides a high quality of life for the people who live here. Through the sponsorship of public forums, workshops and media outreach, Shenandoah Forum [www.ShenandoahForum.org](http://www.ShenandoahForum.org) has achieved a reputation of community-building and has been recognized as a resource shaping a brighter future in not only our county, but throughout the region.

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On the web:

Shenandoah Forum: [www.ShenandoahForum.org](http://www.ShenandoahForum.org)

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