



# Principle 1: Conserve Natural and Scenic Assets

## Importance of Farming and Forestry

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If any region should appreciate its farming and forestry assets, it is the Shenandoah Valley. The region reigns as the state’s agricultural powerhouse, while its extensive hardwood forests provide timber products, jobs, and a strong base for recreation and tourism.

**Economic Value:** The direct economic impacts of this “working landscape” are significant. Nearly 15 percent of jobs in Virginia and almost 12 percent of economic output can be attributed to agriculture. The VCC region contains four of Virginia’s top five agricultural counties (see Figure 1-1). With agricultural receipts of \$833,676,000 in the latest census, the region accounts for 36 percent of state agricultural receipts (see Figure 1-2).

Statewide, forest products rank first in market value of crops and the industry accounts for 1 in 6 manufacturing jobs. Forest harvests in the region brought in \$18.4 million in receipts in 2000. Forestry drives the economies of many rural and mountainous VCC communities that have limited economic opportunities.

These forestlands also make immense but largely unmeasured contributions to the environment, particularly cleaner air and water. Culturally, farms and forests are what residents identify with and what draw visitors who come for history, scenic beauty, and recreation.

**Value of Environmental Benefits:** Virginia’s forests provide tremendous

benefits filtering out pollutants. The Virginia Department of Forestry estimates that forests provide over \$900 million of air pollution abatement each year, based on conservative estimates of what it would cost to remove the same quantities of five major pollutants through alternative means.

**Value from Tourism, Recreation, and Wildlife:** Backpacking, hiking, camping, forest viewing, and other forest-related recreation generated \$1.34 billion in spending by visitors, according to the Virginia Tourism Corporation’s 1997/98 Visitor Survey. Millions more were spent by Virginia residents and visitors traveling less than 100 miles. In addition, the 1996 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation calculated that \$1.68 billion was spent on wildlife-related activities associated with the forests of Virginia. History also draws tourists. Many sites, like the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields, rely on an agrarian landscape.

#### *Top Ag Products in the Region*

- Poultry*
- Cattle*
- Dairy*
- Sheep*
- Hay*

Figure 1-1.  
**Virginia's Leading Agricultural Counties**

Rank	County	Gross Receipts	Percent of State Total
1	Rockingham	\$438,100,000	18.7%
2	Augusta	138,700,000	5.9
3	Page	115,200,000	4.9
4	Accomack	84,800,000	3.6
5	Shenandoah	73,000,000	3.1
VCC Region		833,676,000	35.6
Virginia		\$2,343,000,000	100%

Source: Agricultural Census

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### Quick Facts: Agriculture

In 1997, the date of the last Agricultural Census, the Valley region had 7,250 farms and 1.26 million acres in farming (see Figure 1-3). These figures represent a loss since 1987 of 80 farms and nearly 50,000 acres\* (49,922 acres, or 3.4%). During this 10-year period, the value of farm products rose 65%, from \$505,087,000 to \$833,676,000. Livestock and poultry made up 93% of that value.

These figures demonstrate the high economic importance of farming in the Valley region and also indicate some intensification of operations.

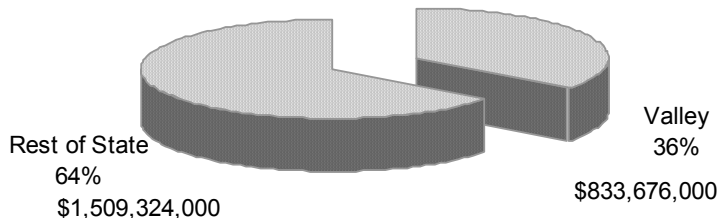
### National Importance of Valley Agriculture

Rockingham County is number 1 in the region, in the state, and in the U.S. in turkey production. Augusta County is ranked 6<sup>th</sup> in the nation in turkey production. Frederick County is ranked 18<sup>th</sup> in the nation in apple production.

Nearly 50% of the farmland lost was in the counties of Rockingham and Shenandoah. More than two-thirds of the farmland loss was in just three counties (Augusta, Rockingham and Shenandoah). These are three of the top five agricultural counties in the state.

Figure 1-2.

### Valley Region Leads Virginia Agriculture



Source: 1997 Agricultural Census, Value of Agricultural Products

### Livestock and poultry made up 93% of regional agricultural receipts in 1997.

Figure 1-3.

### Selected VCC Region Farm Indicators

	Farms	Acres Farmed	Avg. Farm Acres	Market Value Ag Products
1987	7,250	1,313,154	179	\$505,087,000
1997	7,330	1,263,232	174	\$833,676,000
Change	(80)	(49,222)	(5)	up 65.1%

Source: Agricultural Census

\*The loss of farms and farmland may be higher than indicated by the Census. Many new farms qualified by virtue of a change in the data gathering in 1997 to more aggressively qualify farms and the effect of inflation (the long-standing minimum of \$1,000 in agricultural product receipts is easily met, for example, by hobby farms, such as running several horses, or those receiving conservation reserve payments). Because the Census shows a single net figure, an influx of part-time "farms" can mask, to an unknown degree, a loss of full-time or more actively managed farms. (See "Understanding the Ag Census" in the Appendix for more explanation.) Land cover data (described in Chapter 2), also show a greater decrease in farmland (103,400 acres between 1982 and 1997).



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### *Quick Facts: Forestry*

Both the volume and value of timber harvests in the VCC region rose between 1986 and 2000. The VCC region is predominantly hardwood and this is reflected in timber harvests. In 2000, 93.5% of harvest value was for hardwood, up from 81.7% in 1986. Pine, however, is the dominant wood product for the state.

Rockbridge County, with \$4,768,665 in forest harvest receipts in 2002, was the top forestry county in the region. It ranked 21<sup>st</sup> in the state overall, but was 3<sup>rd</sup> in hardwood receipts. Alleghany County (\$2,455,358), Botetourt County (\$2,201,892), and Highland County (\$2,067,195) also are strong forestry counties. The lowest volumes were in the northern Valley. These statistics show that those upland counties that may not be as fertile and productive for farming can be quite productive for growing timber.

**Trends:** Every county in the region experienced an increase in both volume and value of forest harvests in the 15-year period between 1986 and 2000. Total volume increased, particularly in sawtimber, but not by nearly as much as the dollar value, which rose an astounding 425 percent (not adjusted for inflation) to nearly \$18.4 million.

**National Forests:** An estimated 25 percent of the forestland in the region

is contained in national forests. Harvests from the George Washington and Thomas Jefferson National Forests have declined precipitously (by 76.2% between 1998 and 2002) and likely will remain at low levels.

**New Decline in Forest Area:** After 75 years of forest area increase in Virginia, forest area is now declining statewide. Compared to previous centuries, when forest land was lost through clearing for agriculture (1700s and 1800s) and then railroad logging (early 1900s) in the mountains, urbanization is now the main converter of forest land in Virginia. For the VCC region, preliminary Forest Inventory data indicate forest loss of 16,500 acres between 1992 and 2002. See the related discussion in Chapter 2 on changes in land cover.

#### *Top Forestry Counties in the VCC Region (2002)*

*Rockbridge County  
Alleghany County  
Botetourt County  
Highland County*

*The County Information Sheets that follow give more agricultural and forestry statistics. See also Sector Trends (starting on p. 28).*