



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2025.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: _____

Program Title: _____

Program Category: _____

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: _____

Title: _____

Department: _____

Telephone: _____ Website: _____

Email: _____

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: _____

Title: _____

Signature: *Keltie Hein*

**Virginia Association of Counties
2025 Achievement Awards Submission**

Project Title: Canning for a Cause: A Collaborative Approach to Food Insecurity and Cannery Use in Bedford County

Executive Summary

In 2024, Bedford County launched an innovative, collaborative initiative that reimagined the role of local infrastructure, wildlife management, and public health to tackle rural food insecurity. A multi-agency collaboration—including the Bedford Community Health Foundation, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Hunters for the Hungry, the Central Virginia Health District, and Bedford County Parks & Recreation—came together to produce and distribute shelf-stable venison and vegetable stew to food-insecure residents.

This effort revitalized the underutilized New London Cannery, one of only a handful of public canneries remaining in Virginia, and brought it back to life as a vital link in the local food system. Over 1,400 quarts of nutritious shelf-stable meals were distributed to local food banks, powered by 105 volunteers contributing nearly 560 hours over the year. The project addressed multiple community needs—wildlife overpopulation, lean protein access, food preservation education, and cannery awareness—and inspired replication in other regions.

The Bedford County Canning for a Cause initiative exemplifies the spirit of innovation, cross-sector collaboration, and community impact celebrated by the VACo Achievement Awards.

Award Narrative

Project Development

The concept began with a conversation between the Bedford Community Health Foundation (BCHF) and Hunters for the Hungry, which had long operated in Bedford County to process and distribute donated venison. Recognizing that food banks often lack access to lean proteins, BCHF and its partners explored how they could transform this resource into a complete, ready-to-eat meal.

The project quickly expanded with the involvement of Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE), the Central Virginia Health District (VDH), Bedford County, and local food advocates. VCE specialists developed a scalable, safe venison stew recipe, while BCHF provided a little over \$3,000 in seed funding. Hunters for the Hungry contributed 835 pounds of processed venison, and grant funds covered vegetable purchases and canning supplies. Volunteers were trained in safe food preservation techniques by VCE and conducted multiple off-season canning sessions at the New London Cannery to process and can the meals.

Problem Solved

This initiative addressed several interrelated challenges:

1. Food Insecurity: As of 2023, over 700,000 Virginians—8% of the population—were food insecure. Rising food costs and limited access to lean proteins placed stress on food pantries. This pilot project delivered just over 1,400 quarts of nutritious, shelf-stable stew to at least eight food relief organizations, including shelters and ministries across Bedford County.

2. Cannery Underuse: The New London Cannery has a rich history as a cornerstone of local food preservation and community self-reliance in Bedford County. Established decades ago, it was once a bustling hub where residents processed homegrown produce, meat, and other perishables into shelf-stable goods. As one of only 11 public canneries remaining in Virginia, it stands as a rare and valuable community asset. Over the years, however, usage has waned due to changes in food distribution networks, home food processing habits, and general public awareness.

Currently managed by Bedford County Parks & Recreation, the New London Cannery typically operates seasonally, providing resources and facilities for individuals and organizations interested in canning. The canning project described here brought new visibility and purpose to the facility, opening it outside of its usual operational calendar and demonstrating its renewed value for emergency food production, education, and long-term food system resilience.

3. Wildlife Management: By aligning with recent updates to local deer harvest regulations, the initiative offered hunters an ethical, productive outlet for their harvests, while reducing agricultural damage and automobile collisions caused by deer overpopulation.

4. Public Engagement and Education: Over 105 volunteers were engaged and trained in food safety, low-acid canning, and community service, generating nearly \$19,000 in in-kind value to the effort.

Innovation, Collaboration, and Impact

This project showcases several unique innovations and collaborative strengths:

- Cross-Sector Innovation: The program aligned public health, agriculture, conservation, and education goals into a single, replicable model that leverages local assets (wild game, a public cannery, and volunteer networks) to tackle systemic food challenges.

- Partnership Synergy: The initiative brought together government (Bedford County), nonprofits (Hunters for the Hungry, BCHF), state agencies (VCE, VDH), and multidisciplinary volunteers in a seamless, outcome-focused partnership.

- Scalability and Replication: Inspired by Bedford's success, the Central Virginia Health District partnered with the Piedmont Health District to replicate the model in Farmville, producing an additional 1,292 quarts. Plans are underway in Bedford County to expand the project to include fruits and vegetables in 2025.

- Community Engagement and Sustainability: By increasing public awareness of the New London Cannery, this project lays the foundation for sustained community use and future preparedness in times of crisis or food system disruption.

- Emergency Preparedness and Response: In response to the devastating impacts from Hurricane Helene, many of the same collaborators involved with Canning for a Cause, processed 1,000 pounds of apples into apple sauce that were donated by Gross Orchard, a long-standing Bedford County orchard. The 700 cans of finished goods were shipped to impacted communities across Southwest Virginia and North Carolina as part of the response and recovery efforts via Gleaning for the World.

- Future Focused: Hunters for the Hungry has had a long-standing community presence in Bedford. In partnership with the Bedford County Agricultural and Economic Development

Advisory Board, who was created to aid in sustaining and enhancing Bedford's rural economy, Hunters for the Hungry was able to secure over 30,000 pounds of donated venison for the 2024 season (a 75% increase over 2023) with a renewed focus on population control to alleviate deer damage to agricultural products. A portion of which will be donated to the next canning event.

Conclusion

The Canning for a Cause initiative is a bold and thoughtful approach to solving rural food insecurity while revitalizing a historic county asset. Bedford County's leadership in blending policy, infrastructure, and public engagement demonstrates a model of innovation that is both deeply local and widely replicable. Through strategic collaboration, this project serves as a blueprint for how counties can creatively align their resources to meet the complex, evolving needs of their communities.

This special initiative not only demonstrated the cannery's critical value in emergency food processing but also showcased its potential role as an educational, economic, and food security resource moving forward. As a result, future plans include expanding community access, launching preservation workshops, and integrating the cannery more intentionally into Bedford County's broader food system.

Write Up on the Community Cannery and Project

https://issuu.com/bedfordcountyvagovernment/docs/bedford_county_community_connection_-_fall_2024/s/58262521

Media Coverage

<https://www.wdbj7.com/2024/07/31/bedford-volunteers-prep-cans-venison-stew-fight-food-insecurity/>

<https://www.wfxrtv.com/news/outdoors-bound/love-in-a-can-donated-venison-is-turned-into-meals-for-hungry-families/>

Various Project Photos and Samples of Social Media Engagement







bedfordcountyparksrec 28w
What a year it's been for the New London Cannery! Our Parks & Rec staff worked hard to revive this historic facility this year.

Here is a look at some big accomplishments in 2024:

- 🥫 Use of the Cannery four times to create a venison stew for local food pantries (including one this week!)
- 🥫 Use of the Cannery two times to create applesauce to send to hurricane victims (thanks to a generous donation from Gross Orchards)
- 👥 Worked with New London Academy to host an interactive field trip for students
- 🥫 Approximately 3,000 cans produced total in 2024, including residential produce/goods

Gross Orchard donated 1,000 lbs apples



bedfordcountyvaparksrec • Follow



Original audio



bedfordcountyvaparksrec Edited • 38w

Exciting day at the New London Cannery!

🍏 Thanks to the generous donation of 1,000 pounds of apples from [@grossorchard](#), we've turned these beautiful fruits into fresh, homemade applesauce!

👉🍏 Even more incredible? [@gleaningfortheworld](#) is partnering to distribute this applesauce to flood-impacted communities in Southwest Virginia and North Carolina. 🙏❤️ Grateful to be part of something so sweet!

[#newlondoncannery](#)

[#bedfordparksandrec](#) [#floodrelief](#)



Hunters for the Hungry - Virginia

Public



In a two day effort, [Hunters for the Hungry - Virginia](#) was able to join forces with Bedford County Parks & Recreation, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Central Virginia Health District, Bedford Community Health Foundation. During this time, we were able to can 415 cans of venison stew at The New London Cannery, that will go back into our community to help fight hunger! See less