



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: Tuesday, April 7, 2026.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your electronic entry. Contact [Gage Harter](#) with any questions.

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: _____

Virginia Cooperative Extension Franklin County Local Food Guide and Gardening Directory VACO Achievement Award Submission-Submitted by Carol Haynes-VCE

The Franklin County Local Food Guide Directory stands as a premier example of how a community can elevate agriculture as a cornerstone of its economy while fostering agritourism, strengthening small businesses, and improving food access. Spearheaded by Virginia Cooperative Extension-Franklin County, this initiative reflects visionary leadership, deep community collaboration, and a steadfast commitment to sustaining Franklin County's agricultural legacy. Agriculture is a vital economic driver in Franklin County, supporting livelihoods, preserving land, and shaping the region's identity. The Local Food and Gardening Directory plays a critical role in ensuring that this sector not only endures but thrives. By connecting consumers directly with local producers, the guide keeps food dollars circulating within the community, strengthens farm viability, and reinforces agriculture's position as a foundational element of the local economy. Since its establishment in 2011, the guide has grown into a highly valued and widely distributed publication, with more than 4,000 copies printed annually and disseminated through over 100 businesses, nonprofit organizations, and producers. This extensive reach ensures that residents and visitors alike can easily access information about local farms, farmers markets, and food-based enterprises, transforming awareness into action and support. A key strength of the directory is its ability to promote agritourism by showcasing Franklin County as a destination rich in agricultural experiences. By highlighting farm stands, markets, and locally produced goods, the guide invites visitors to engage directly with the county's farming community. This not only generates increased traffic for local producers but also amplifies the broader economic impact of agriculture through tourism, retail, and hospitality sectors. The success of the Local Food Guide Directory is the result of strong leadership

complemented by sustained community collaboration. Carol Haynes, who serves as Family and Consumer Sciences Agent, Unit Coordinator, Co-Chair of the Local Food and Gardening Directory Committee, and Co-Lead for Region 6 Farm to School, has provided significant guidance and leadership in strengthening connections between producers and consumers while advancing food systems education and community engagement. Equally critical to the success of this initiative is the dedication of the committee members, whose ongoing commitment is fundamental to the directory's effectiveness. Their collective efforts ensure the guide remains accurate, relevant, and widely utilized, and their contributions are indispensable to its continued operation. Together, this leadership and volunteer support have addressed key challenges faced by local farms, including limited marketing capacity, lack of visibility, and barriers to consumer access, while also strengthening food security and promoting healthy living across the county. The directory's success is further bolstered by strong partnerships and sponsorships. The support and sponsorship of Franklin County administrators and tourism director Kevin Tosh as a platinum sponsor, alongside organizations such as Blue Ridge Soil and Water, Rocky Mount Farmers Market, Carilion, Farm Credit, Farm Bureau Insurance, KC Farms, Melvin's Farm to Fork, Clover Hill Angus, and Billy's Slapp'n Sauce 2026 platinum sponsors, demonstrates a unified commitment to supporting agriculture and local enterprise. These partnerships underscore the shared understanding that investing in agriculture is an investment in the community's economic resilience and future. Equally notable is the extraordinary volunteer commitment behind the project. With more than 200 hours contributed annually, Gail Shepherd-Co chair and committee members—Renee Beerman, Martha Flora, Sharon Hia, Ruthe Ploskunyak, Marge Rojewski, Kathryn Scott, Dale Strickler, Mary Thurmond, and Bonnie Turner—embody the spirit of service that defines Virginia Cooperative Extension and Franklin County. All members

are certified Master Gardeners through Virginia Cooperative Extension, and several also serve as dually certified Master Food Volunteers, bringing specialized expertise that strengthens the guide's accuracy, relevance, and impact. The Franklin County Local Food Guide Directory is more than a publication—it is a strategic economic development tool, an educational resource, and a celebration of local agriculture. It highlights the indispensable role that farming plays in sustaining communities while providing a replicable model for other localities across Virginia. Through strong leadership, dedicated volunteers, and broad community support, this initiative exemplifies the mission of the VACO Achievement Awards. It demonstrates how prioritizing agriculture not only preserves a way of life but also drives economic growth, strengthens community connections, and ensures a more resilient future for all.