



RAPPAHANNOCK-RAPIDAN FOOD POLICY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes – March 21, 2017

Members Present:

Linda Blair	Orange County Representative
Kirsten Dueck	Health Sector Technical Advisory Member
Michelle Edwards	Chair and RRRC Liaison Member
Clyde Firman	Consumption Sector Technical Advisory Member
Kenner Love	Rappahannock County Representative
Jessica Palmer	Farmland Preservation & Conservation Technical Adv. Member
Ray Pickering	Fauquier County Representative
Rebecca Sheffield	Culpeper County Representative
Ken Smith	Production Sector Technical Advisory Member
Susan Vidal	Madison County Representative

Members Absent:

Taylor Richardson	Education Sector Technical Advisory Member
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Vacant:

Processing and Distribution Technical Advisory Member

Guests:

Charlotte Cole	Culpeper Economic Development Advisory Commission
Steve Cook	Virginia Department of Health
Courtney Layman	The Spark Mill
Sarah Milston	The Spark Mill
Pam Smith	Cool Lawn Dairy/Moo Thru
Carl Stafford	George Washington Carver Agriculture Research Center
Roger Williams	George Washington Carver Agriculture Research Center

Welcome and Introductions

The meeting was called to order by Michelle Edwards, Chair, and introductions were made. Ms. Edwards noted that a quorum was present.

Regional Food Branding Results and Recommendations

Sarah Milston, The Spark Mill

Ms. Edwards introduced Sarah Milston of the Spark Mill, the marketing firm subcontracted to conduct the regional local food branding study funded by the Path Foundation and the Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission (RRRC). In order to develop brand recommendations, Spark Mill staff conducted three stakeholder interviews and two public input sessions, one in Culpeper and one in Warrenton. The Spark Mill staff also analyzed the results of the consumer survey that RRRC conducted, to which 182 people responded. The link to the online survey was distributed via email to RRRC distribution list and via a Facebook ad.

Ms. Milston distributed copies of her final report (see attached), then provided an overview, including the study's key results and recommendations for the brand name. The recommended brand names include the following:

1. Red Clay Raised
2. Fresh from the Foothills
3. Tween Rivers Grown (based on the region's agri-artisan trail name)

Ms. Milston noted that Asheville, NC's local food campaign used the name Foothills Fresh. However, the website appears to be defunct with many broken links and outdated content. Ms. Edwards asked for any questions from attendees on the study, but asked that comments be saved until the open discussion, which would come later in the agenda.

Ray Pickering asked whether these recommended brand names were presented to attendees at the public sessions for their input. Ms. Milston replied no, the brand names were developed after the input sessions. Attendees were asked to describe the region, its customers, and what they were looking for in a brand. Additionally, the consumer survey included a list of words respondents were asked to pick from to describe the region. Ken Smith noted that twelve survey respondents wrote in "Fresh" for that question, which is meaningful.

Mr. Smith went on to state that Piedmont is a name people in the region relate to and feel emotion for. He expressed his surprise and disappointment that Piedmont was not part of any of the recommended brand names. Ms. Milston noted that Piedmont was considered and is listed under "Other Options Considered," but Spark Mill staff felt the term was overused and geographically too broad compared to the five-county region.

Carver-Piedmont Agricultural Institute Update

Carl Stafford, George Washington Carver Agriculture Research Center (GWCARC)

Carl Stafford delivered a presentation updating the Council on GWCARC's progress (see attached). Highlights included soybean and hops field trials, construction of hi tunnels and irrigation lines, as well as purchase and donation of equipment for both the agriculture and commercial kitchen aspects of the project. Kenner Love asked if the facility will have equipment to dry the hops. Becky Sheffield replied no, but Virginia Tech has a hops drier that can be used and there may be others as well. Mr. Love noted that distance from field to drier is important, because hops' flavor quickly degrades.

Ms. Sheffield also noted Stone Soup food service training classes will be coming up from May to June in Orange, and Master Food Volunteer Training begins in late-April.

Discussion of Branding Study Recommendations

Ms. Edwards opened the discussion by outlining the potential pros and cons of each recommended brand name in the opinion of RRRC staff, then asked attendees for their opinion. The council's discussion agreed with staff opinion that a geographically-based name should be chosen, since survey and input session feedback indicated that knowing where their food comes from is very important to consumers. Piedmont, Foothills and Blue Ridge were discussed as possible geographic identifiers, with Blue Ridge quickly discarded as being more frequently used on the opposite side of the mountains.

After hearing no one speak in favor of any of the recommended names and many against, Ms. Edwards distributed a list of alternative names that include either "Piedmont" or "Foothills" (see attached). Piedmont was preferred over Foothills by all who joined in the discussion, because attendees felt that the region was much more frequently identified as the Piedmont by the general public. While technically both geographic identifiers extend beyond the region, Council members expressed confidence that marketing could help solidify the region's already strong identity as the Piedmont in Virginia. Additionally, using Piedmont leaves room for adjacent localities in the food system to join the brand in the future.

After further discussion, council members chose their top four names and a vote was taken. The results were as follows:

- Piedmont Grown – 0
- Piedmont's Finest – 0
- Purely Piedmont – 5
- Piedmont Fresh – 4

Note: Mr. Love abstained.

Mr. Smith made a motion to designate "Purely Piedmont" as the brand name for promotion of the region's locally-grown food, and Ms. Sheffield seconded the motion. Upon voting, the motion was unanimously approved.

Future Meeting Scheduling and Agenda Development

After discussion, Ms. Edwards stated that the next meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 23, 2017, at 6:30 pm in the RRRC Conference Room. Food Policy Council meeting materials will be available on RRRC's food system webpage at www.rrregion.org/foodsystem.html.