VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE AND
CONSUMER SERVICES

Report on the Response of the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to the Impact of the Aging of Virginia's Population

Todd P. Haymore
Commissioner

October 25, 2007

Pursuant to legislation enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services submits this report of its progress in addressing the impact of the aging of Virginia's population.

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Executive Summary

HB 110 (2006) amended § 2.2-5510 of the Code of Virginia to require that each state agency include in its strategic plan "an analysis of the impact that the aging of the population will have on its ability to deliver services and a description of how the agency is responding to these changes." HB 2624 (2007) further amends § 2.2-5510 to require each agency to report its progress in addressing the impact of the aging of the population by November 15 of each year to the Department for the Aging, according to guidance established by the Secretary of Health and Human Resources.

During fiscal year 2007, changes in current programs and services provided by the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) have had a minimal impact on seniors. While all VDACS programs and services are designed to serve all citizens, an analysis of VDACS programs and services revealed that only the Division of Marketing and Division of Consumer Protection provide direct services to seniors. For example, VDACS Division of Marketing staff has partnered with the Virginia Department for the Aging and local Area Agencies on Aging to implement the United States Department of Agriculture grant funded Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP). The program targets low income senior citizens in eleven Virginia counties and seven cities who meet the criteria of being 175% below the poverty level who with $40.00 worth of seasonal food check allotments can purchase locally produced fresh fruits, vegetables and cut herbs from 143 farmer vendors. The 2007 USDA grant is $365,075. VDACS' responsibility is to certify Virginia farmers to participate in the program by determining that applicants produce sufficient quantities of product to exchange for senior food checks.

Other examples of VDACS services to seniors that are being provided by the Division of Consumer Protection include the following:

1. Virginia Department for the Aging: The Virginia Department for the Aging (VDA) is a charter member of the Consumer Affairs Advisory Committee. This committee's members communicate the views and interests of Virginians on issues related to the agency's consumer education and fraud prevention programs. Office of Consumer Affairs (OCA) staff interacts frequently with counselors at the Center for Elder Rights, which is housed in VDA.

2. Virginia Department of Social Services (DSS), Division of Community and Volunteer Services: OCA staff routinely partners with DSS to provide educational sessions at retirement communities and events aimed at seniors.

3. TRIAD: TRIAD is a cooperative effort between the Office of the Attorney General, local law enforcement and senior groups that is designed to educate and assist senior citizens on issues of crime and fraud. OCA is a frequent participant at regional and statewide TRIAD events.

The programs and services provided by VDACS do not require the clustering of clients by age groups or disability. Rather, all of VDACS' programs and services are available to all individuals of the Commonwealth regardless of age or disability. The aging of the population and adults with disabilities will have no significant impact on VDACS' ability to continue providing these services.

VDACS recognized that it is facing the challenge of losing to retirement between now and fiscal year 2008 many of our long-tenured staff in key positions. The agency is currently taking several steps to address this issue. Through traditional training programs, cross training assignments, temporary duties, language and cultural sensitivity training and, where possible, mentoring programs that hire a replacement employee prior to a current employee retiring, the agency is preparing to maintain its current level of service. The impact of the aging workforce is not expected to affect VDACS' ability to deliver services to Virginia citizens.

Agency Description

VDACS is responsible for administering over 60 laws and more than 70 regulations relating to consumer protection and the promotion of agriculture. VDACS' mission is to promote the economic growth and development of Virginia agriculture, encourage environmental stewardship and provide consumer protection. In furthering that mission, the following strategic goals were included in the 2006-2008 agency strategic plan:

Goal #1: Enhance opportunities for the growth and profitability of the Virginia agriculture industry.

Goal #2: Ensure a safe and wholesome food supply.

Goal #3: Provide agricultural and consumer protection services that support economic growth, encourage environmental stewardship and meet consumer needs.

Goal #4: Increase Agency services and productivity through new technology, e-government applications, work processes and procedures, and training.

Goal #5: Provide services that prevent or minimize the impact of emergency agricultural infestations, animal disease outbreaks, food borne illness outbreaks, and natural and manmade disasters.

VDACS is organized into four units: the Commissioner's Office, Division of Animal and Food Industry Services, Division of Consumer Protection, and Division of Marketing. The agency employs about 498 employees who work in and out of the Department's several field offices; in the agency's five regional diagnostic animal health laboratories located in Warrenton, Lynchburg, Ivor, Harrisonburg, and Wytheville; at an international office in Hong Kong and at the VDACS headquarters in Richmond.

In carrying out its responsibility for representing the concerns and interests of agriculture, VDACS works in cooperation with Virginia State University, Virginia Tech, and the Virginia Cooperative Extension Service on research, education, and marketing projects.

Service Delivery Analysis

1. To the extent such data is available, the number of persons who received services from the agency in the past fiscal year who fell into each of the following age ranges: 65-74; 75-84; and 85 and older. If the agency can provide data that compares such numbers to numbers of senior citizens served in the past, please do so. If the agency lacks specific information about the numbers of senior citizens it serves, but has other evidence indicating that it is serving more or fewer senior citizens than it has in the past, please describe the basis for that estimation.

   All programs and services administered by VDACS are available to all individuals of the Commonwealth regardless of age or disability. VDACS does not maintain specific information about the number of senior citizens it serves. The programs and services with which VDACS is tasked with providing do not require the clustering of clients by age groups.

   VDACS does not find any evidence that the department is serving more or fewer senior citizens than it has in the past.

2. Identify the agency services that are utilized by senior citizens 65 and older in significant numbers. Indicate whether the agency has the capacity at present to serve all interested seniors or whether the demand for certain services exceeds the agency's capacity. If so, does the agency maintain waiting lists for services?

   For the fifth year, VDACS' Division of Marketing has partnered with the Virginia Department for the Aging and local Area Agencies on Aging to implement the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) grant-funded Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP). The program targets low income senior citizens in eleven Virginia counties and seven cities who meet the criteria of being 175% below the poverty level who with $40.00 worth of seasonal food check allotments can purchase locally produced fresh fruits, vegetables and cut herbs from 143 farmer vendors. The 2007 USDA grant is $365,075. VDACS' responsibility is to certify Virginia farmers to participate in the program by determining that applicants produce sufficient quantities of product to exchange for senior food checks.

   Marketing staff routinely participates in industry outreach meetings with Virginia food, agricultural and forest products producers. Virginia's aging population is now a major driver of food production and utilization trends. Customers for Virginia food and agricultural products reflect the demographics of the society as a whole. Senior citizens have become more interested in the quality of their diets and respond well to learning about the nutritional and economic benefits of fresh, local Virginia food. These nutritional trends are communicated to Virginia producers through a variety of outlets including producer meetings, one-on-one consultations, articles, etc. Successful food producers take these trends into consideration and VDACS marketing staff stays updated on these trends in the food industry.

The department has the capacity at present to serve all interested seniors who qualify for this USDA-sponsored program. Currently, there is no need for the agency to maintain a waiting list for this service.

3. Identify current agency programs, specifically designed to serve seniors 65 and older, that fall into any of the following six categories: Health Care/Wellness; Education; Public Safety; Recreation; Financial Security (including Housing); and Transportation.

   The Division of Consumer Protection (DCP) is comprised of four offices: Consumer Affairs, Pesticide Services, Plant and Pest Services, and Product and Industry Standards. All services provided by DCP can be accessed equally by all citizens, regardless of age or disability. Services provided by DCP do not require the clustering of clients by age groups. Division staff strives to administer assigned consumer protection laws, environmental protection laws, and regulations in an impartial and consistent manner in order to educate and provide for the overall public safety of citizens in the Commonwealth.

   The Office of Consumer Affairs (OCA) conducts educational outreach efforts that seek to help consumers make more informed decisions in the marketplace. Some of those efforts are aimed at seniors and are conducted in partnership with other agencies and organizations, including the following:

   Virginia Department for the Aging: The Virginia Department for the Aging (VDA) is a charter member of the Consumer Affairs Advisory Committee. This committee's members communicate the views and interests of Virginians on issues related to the agency's consumer education and fraud prevention programs. OCA staff interacts frequently with counselors at the Center for Elder Rights, which is housed in VDA.

   Virginia Department of Social Services (DSS), Division of Community and Volunteer Services: OCA staff routinely partners with DSS to provide educational sessions at retirement communities and events aimed at seniors.

   TRIAD: TRIAD is a cooperative effort between the Office of the Attorney General, local law enforcement and senior groups that is designed to educate and assist senior citizens on issues of crime and fraud. OCA is a frequent participant at regional and statewide TRIAD events.

   VDACS Office of Communication and Promotions: OCA staff continually reviews complaint trends and ongoing consumer issues. When warranted, staff works with the agency's Office of Communication and Promotions to issue press releases and facilitate interviews with the media on issues having immediate significance and relevance to seniors, such as bogus charitable solicitations and scams.

4. Identify the extent to which your agency provides "consumer-oriented" publications and websites online that are designed to be "senior-friendly." If the information you

currently provide is not readily accessible to seniors, identify any steps your agency is taking to improve accessibility.

All publications produced by VDACS are “consumer-oriented” and “senior-friendly.” Copies of VDACS publications can be requested either by telephone, fax, email, standard mail or downloaded from the agency website, whichever is most convenient to the consumer.

The agency website is compliant with both the new Virginia Information Technologies Agency (VITA) guidelines and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards for Accessibility of State and Local Government Websites to People with Disabilities. One of the requirements of the VITA guidelines is that every state website have two prominent search features located in the upper right hand corner, one for the department and the other for the official Commonwealth of Virginia website. This search feature allows visitors to the VDACS website an easy way to find information specific to their needs. The search feature is in the same location on every state agency website making it easier for all segments of the population to search for items of interest.

One of the requirements of the ADA standards is to make the site usable by those who are visually impaired. A person who has difficulty reading a computer screen or who is legally blind may use assistive technology to enable them to access VDACS’ website. Visually impaired people who cannot see computer monitors may use screen reader devices that speak the text that would normally appear on a monitor. People who have difficulty using a computer mouse can use voice recognition software to control their computers with verbal commands. VDACS has successfully brought the website into compliance with both sets of standards.

5. Describe the effect that the aging of the agency’s own workforce will have on its ability to deliver services. Consider the number of retirements expected in the next two years, the effect these retirements might have (*e.g.,* loss of leadership or institutional knowledge in certain programs), how losses might be replaced (*e.g*., promotions or transfers, recruitment, use of wage staff, including retirees, re-engineering, outsourcing), and the costs or savings from the replacements (*e.g*., staff development cost, salary savings). This item might be addressed by summarizing relevant portions of the agency’s workforce plan.

   VDACS maintains demographic data on employee age and tenure and recognizes a trend in the aging of the agency's workforce. Numerous staff members have considerable years of experience and expertise in specialized programs such as animal health and welfare, plant protection, pesticides, consumer protection, marketing, economic development, policy, finance, budgeting, information systems, and human resources.

   VDACS is facing the challenge of losing to retirement between now and fiscal year 2008 many of our long-tenured staff in key positions. Currently, approximately 84

employees are eligible to retire and an additional 80 will be eligible within the next five years. VDACS median years of service, excluding prior service and purchased service, is 15.3 and the statewide median is 8.3. The agency's median age as of June 30, 2007 is 51. Approximately 238 employees are age 50 and over; approximately 100 employees have more than 25 years of state service. This state service does not include additional purchased service or prior service.

With the potential loss of so many long-term employees with institutional knowledge, documentation of processes and procedures is critical to provide historical information and resource material. Mentoring, coaching and cross training are increasingly more important. Traditional training programs are used with enhanced methods such as developmental assignments, cross training assignments, temporary duties, and language and cultural sensitivity training. Where possible, mentoring programs that hire a replacement employee prior to a current employee retiring are implemented and provide long-term cost savings. Computer training will continue to be critical as the world of technology becomes more and more fast-paced and complicated.

6. Describe any other services or programs that the agency has implemented or plans to implement in the future to address the impact of the aging of Virginia's population.

VDACS' Office of Laboratory Services (OLS) is in the process of updating the way clients receive test results to provide more options that are senior-friendly. Currently, individual lab results must be either mailed or faxed to aging and disabled individuals. A senior may have difficulty walking to a mailbox or opening an envelope. To better serve this population, OLS is in the process of converting to a new laboratory computer system that will allow clients to receive lab results in the manner that best suits them whether it is by fax, email or standard mail.

Conclusion

As the population continues to age, VDACS will continue to provide quality service to all persons accessing the services provided by the agency regardless of age. The department has already taken many steps to ensure that all age groups can easily access VDACS services, publications, and website. The department is taking steps to prepare for the replacement of the large number of employees it will lose to retirement between now and fiscal year 2008. VDACS is planning to maintain its current level of service regardless of the aging of the population or the aging of the current workforce.