A new campaign for local, sustainable food

Clean Farms, Healthy Virginia

From the first pint of strawberries in June, to the juicy tomatoes and crunchy cucumbers of summer, down to the last crisp red apple of fall, the abundance of a farmers market is unrivaled. But fresh food that’s been grown close to home shouldn’t only be found on a special trip to the market. Though there are now 185 farmers markets across the state—from Norfolk to Roanoke—much more remains to be done to expand Virginians’ access to fresh, local food. That’s why Environment Virginia joined the effort to support local, sustainable farms, and not giant agribusinesses—in the next version of the Federal Farm Bill.

We can change the way we farm

Our leaders can do much more to expand opportunities for sustainable farmers that don’t pollute our air and water. Today, most of the food sold in supermarkets and restaurants comes from factory farms. Fortunately, by creating infrastructure that allows local farmers to compete, we can change the way we eat in Virginia.

“As Congress rewrites the Farm Bill this summer, we have a critical chance to reform the ways Virginia grows, delivers and consumes food,” said Sarah Bucci, summer campaign director for Environment Virginia. “But we need massive public support to create distribution access for small, sustainable and local farms.”

In Virginia, runoff and spills from factory farms contribute to massive fish kills and unsafe swimming conditions in the Chesapeake Bay and waters across the state. Much of this pollution comes from massive factory farms, which house hundreds of thousands of chickens and spray huge amounts of pesticides on fields. Virginians acutely experience the side effects of factory farming—here, lax regulations on large factory farms have created a haven for polluters.

“We need to remember the environmental price of the food we buy,” added Bucci. “Our senators should support the sustainable operations—not agribusiness companies—in the next Farm Bill.”

take action

Visit our website to urge Sens. Jim Webb and Mark Warner to support small, local farms like this one:

www.EnvironmentVirginia.org
It’s summer, and that means the college students and other members of my team will soon be knocking on your doors, wearing our signature blue T-shirts.

After all, Environment Virginia’s first goal is to bring the voice of the average Virginian to bear in the decisions that impact the state’s air, water and open spaces. And the more time we spend talking to you, the more effective we are.

Last year, for instance, our canvassers gathered thousands upon thousands of signatures, urging our leaders in Washington to slash the air pollution that shrouds the views at Shenandoah National Park. Months later, Virginia’s senators voted to uphold new limits on the thick pollution that flows across state lines.

With your support, I believe we can keep winning for the environment.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Ouzts, Regional Director

On the verge of a clean water victory

When you ask Virginians about their favorite part of Virginia, many will say the Chesapeake Bay. Between opportunities to swim, sail and fish, the Bay draws both Virginia residents and tourists by the million every year.

But despite their popularity, our waterways are not nearly as protected as they should be and once were. Thanks to two polluter-driven Supreme Court decisions in the last decade, nearly 60 percent of our streams—including many that feed into cherished waterways like the Chesapeake Bay, more than 20 million acres of wetlands, and 117 million Americans’ drinking water may no longer be protected by the Clean Water Act.

Thankfully, at the urging of Environment Virginia and our national federation, Environment America, last April the Obama administration proposed new guidelines to restore protections to many of America’s waterways, including those smaller waterways that feed and filter the Bay.

How to build a better, greener Virginia

American families could cut the global warming pollution from buildings by 30 percent and save about $450 every year on their heating bills by 2030 if we invest in energy efficiency today.

These findings were included in “Building a Better America,” a report released on March 8 by the Environment America Research & Policy Center staff, along with the U.S. Green Building Council, local and state leaders, architects, builders and public health advocates.

In December, the Obama administration announced the Better Buildings Challenge, which includes 60 chief executives, mayors, university presidents and labor leaders. The leaders have committed to invest nearly $2 billion of private capital into energy-efficiency projects to upgrade the performance of office, industrial, municipal, hospital, university, community college and school buildings.
Our first-ever greenhouse gas rules

EPA moves to cut carbon pollution from power plants

On March 27, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency proposed limits on carbon pollution from new power plants. If passed, they will be the first nationwide limits on the largest single source of the carbon pollution that fuels global warming.

As scientists, doctors and other experts have been warning us for years, cutting this carbon pollution is critical because global warming will bring everything from dirtier air and more deadly heat waves, to more devastating floods and extreme weather.

In the Path of the Storm

In the weeks before the EPA’s historic announcement, Environment Virginia released a report documenting why action to cut carbon pollution and tackle global warming is needed. The report, “In the Path of the Storm,” found that 9 out of 10 Virginians live in cities or counties that were hit by at least one weather-related disaster from 2006-2011.

We also launched an interactive map, available at www.EnvironmentVirginia.org, where citizens can see state-by-state and even county-by-county records of which weather-related disasters hit when, and then take action in support of EPA carbon pollution limits. The report and map received extensive press attention, including stories in The Washington Post and USA Today.

The real battle began after the EPA’s announcement, as utilities, coal companies and other corporate polluters began spending millions to convince the Obama administration into thinking that we can’t afford to adopt these commonsense standards.

We know that we can’t afford to not adopt carbon pollution standards for power plants, so Environment America and our allies launched an unprecedented push to educate and mobilize citizens here in Virginia, and in Pennsylvania and Ohio—all states we knew would end up in the spotlight this election year.

Our on-the-ground organizers are gathering tens of thousands of public comments in support of the standards, holding press events to help raise the profile of the issue, and reaching out to public health groups and local environmental groups to demonstrate broad support.

If all goes well, the EPA is expected to finalize these carbon pollution standards for new power plants by the end of 2012, and begin developing standards for existing coal-fired power plants in the near future as well.

Scare tactics

Through paid ads and armies of lobbyists within Congress, the polluters are trying to scare the American public and the Obama administration into thinking that we can’t afford to adopt these commonsense standards.

This April, Councilwoman Dede Smith, Dr. Greg Gelburd, Environment Virginia’s Laura Kate Anderson and Whitney Byrd, with the Wise Energy for Virginia Coalition, joined together to celebrate the fifth “birthday” of Massachusetts vs. EPA, the 2007 U.S. Supreme Court decision allowing the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to set public health standards for carbon dioxide and other pollutants.

The birthday party-themed event came just a week after the EPA proposed historic limits on industrial carbon pollution from new power plants on March 27.

Coal-fired power plants are the largest single source of carbon pollution in the U.S., yet there are currently no federal limits on this pollution from power plants.

The event today highlighted the importance of cleaning up carbon pollution to protect the health of Virginia’s children. Carbon pollution fuels global warming, which leads to poor air quality that triggers asthma attacks and other respiratory problems.

Doctors, nurses, scientists and other health experts say that carbon pollution and global warming are particularly dangerous for children because global warming makes smog pollution worse, which triggers asthma attacks and permanently damages and reduces the function of children’s lungs.

Visit Environment Virginia’s website to read more about our clean air campaigns.
Environment Virginia

Our mission

We all want clean air, clean water and open space. But it takes independent research and tough-minded advocacy to win concrete results for our environment, especially when powerful interests stand in the way of environmental progress.

That’s the idea behind Environment Virginia. We focus exclusively on protecting Virginia’s air, water and open space. We speak out and take action at the local, state and national levels to improve the quality of our environment and our lives.

18 million lbs. of toxics dumped into waters

Industrial facilities dumped over 18 million pounds of toxic chemicals into Virginia’s waterways, the second-most in the nation, according to a new report released this March by Environment Virginia.

The report, “Wasting Our Waterways” also reveals that 226 million pounds of toxic chemicals were discharged into 1,400 waterways across the country. The New River saw the most toxic pollution in the state, with over 12 million pounds dumped into its waters. More than 1.1 million pounds were discharged into the James River, and over 370,000 pounds were dumped into the Shenandoah River.

“Virginia’s waterways are a polluter’s paradise right now. Polluters dump 18 million pounds of toxic chemicals into Virginia’s lakes, rivers and streams every year,” said Laura Kate Anderson, field organizer with Environment Virginia. “We must turn the tide of toxic pollution by restoring Clean Water Act protections to our waterways.”

take action

Visit our website, and thank President Obama for moving to update the Clean Water Act.