MARKET BRIEF
NEW RIVER VALLEY AGRICULTURE & TOURISM CONSORTIUM BRANDING

A. OBJECTIVE
The New River Valley Agriculture and Tourism Consortium is interested in developing a regional brand identity for agritourism activities and farm products. While speaking to agritourists and local residents, the regional brand will encourage stakeholders to cooperate in building strong experiences and a larger agritourism economy.

B. AGRITOURISM MARKET
The Code of Virginia, in § 3.2-6400 defines “agritourism activity” as “any activity carried out on a farm or ranch that allows members of the general public, for recreational, entertainment, or educational purposes, to view or enjoy rural activities, including farming, wineries, ranching, historical, cultural, harvest-your-own activities, or natural activities and attractions. An activity is an agritourism activity whether or not the participant paid to participate in the activity.”

While the Code of Virginia defines agritourism by limiting it to activities on farms or ranches, agritourism for marketing purposes is expanded to include festivals and markets that might not be on farms, but where customers can interact with farmers and producers.

According to the USDA’s 2012 Census of Agriculture for Virginia, the agritourism and recreational services industry is thriving in Virginia. The number of farms offering some form of agritourism activity increased by 42% from 2007 to 2012, and income increased by $2.3 million dollars over the same time period.

The counties comprising the New River Valley are largely reflective of this trend — the number of farms offering agritourism activities or services increased by 27% in Montgomery County, 400% in Giles County, and 61% in Floyd County; income earned by agritourism activities or services increased by $318,000 in Montgomery county, $18,000 in Giles County, and $454,000 in Floyd — though Pulaski County struggles (the number of farms offering agritourism activities or services fell by 75%; income was unreported in 2012).
According to a study published by Iowa State University about agritourism in Iowa, agritourists tend to skew female (55%), live in non-urban areas (67.8%), are largely Caucasian/white (93.69%), and nearly 83% have a high school diploma or bachelor’s degree.

The same study tells us that more than two-thirds (69%) of survey respondents are willing to drive up to 50-miles to reach an agritourism destination (30% of respondents are willing to drive 51+ miles, and 1% aren’t willing to go at all).

Though Iowa certainly isn’t the NRV, parallels can be drawn since the demographic make-up of Iowa is similar to that of the NRV.

Based on this assumption, we have divided the potential market into local New River Valley residents, people who live outside the four counties, but within an hour’s drive, and out-of-area visitors. This brings the entire possible market size for agritourism activities to be about 560,000 (local population plus area population within a one-hour drive plus potential area visitors; see chart below), about half of whom are out-of-area visitors. The market size for the brand will be larger, as the products grown in the region can be branded and are sold beyond these borders.

We filtered the local and 1-hour-away residents by their probable interest in such activities and arrived at a permanent market group of more than 75,000.
TRENDS, FORECASTS, PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Eat local: The green trend in consumer preference to buy local and eat local is an important factor for regional agricultural enterprises. Consumers and restaurants are increasingly interested in foods with local sources.

Direct-to-consumer marketing of products has emerged as a way for producers to capitalize on the increased interest in local foods found across the United States. Farm stands, CSAs, U-Picks, Farmers Markets, Roadside Stands, Food Hubs, have all emerged as viable methods of selling directly to the consumer. These direct to consumer sales, often referred to under the umbrella of “local foods,” have an impact on the greater food economy in a region as well.

Foodie: There is a growing trend of persons cooking and enjoying the subtle flavors of food. These people tend to seek out fresh and distinctive foods both at home and when dining in restaurants.

Homesteading: Millennials have been leading a movement they call homesteading, in which participants are more involved in preparing food, clothes, and furnishings themselves. This has increased people interested in canning, preserving, and growing their own food.

Continued growth of organic eating: The ranks of vegetarians and individuals interested in feeding their families organic and fresh foods provides an opportunity for local producers to engage with them.

C. AGRICULTURE OFFERINGS IN THE NEW RIVER VALLEY

1. OVERVIEW
The New River Valley comprises 1,458 square miles in the counties of Montgomery, Giles, Pulaski, and Floyd.

These counties are located between the Blue Ridge and Appalachian Mountain Ranges in Southwestern Virginia. The largest town in each county are Blacksburg (Montgomery), Pulaski (Pulaski), Pearisburg (Giles), Floyd (Floyd), and the City of Radford (City of Radford). The region is serviced by two major interstate highways, I-81 connecting Knoxville, Tennessee and Roanoke, Virginia, as well as I-77 connecting Charleston, West Virginia and Charlotte, North Carolina. The region is home to two large state universities: Virginia Tech, a land-grant university, and Radford University.

2. AGRICULTURE IN THE NEW RIVER VALLEY
In the mountainous New River Valley, agriculture occupies 38% of the land. The region has a total of 2,251 farms. Regionally, the agricultural population is aging and the average aged farmer is 57. In 2007, 58% of farmers relied on an off-farm job as their primary source of income. While the agriculture landscape is dominated by grass grazing animals and steep forests, acreage in forages and forestry continue to grow. In the New River Valley, beef and forestry/timber are the largest agriculture sectors, generating more than $60 million annually.
As shown in the figure, the amount of farms in each county has fluctuated slightly without major decreases or increases between 2002 and 2012. Floyd County continues to contain the most farms even after experiencing decreases over the ten-year period. Giles County contains the least amount of farms but is not far behind Pulaski County.

*USDA Agriculture Census of Virginia
All counties experienced an increase in product value between 2007 and 2012 but the value of Pulaski County products significantly increased during this time period. Floyd County averages higher, due to its higher percentage of crop production.

*USDA Agriculture Census of Virginia
The size of the farms within each county has only slightly changed over the past ten years. Pulaski and Montgomery counties have experienced increase in farm size during recent years. Pulaski has consistently contained the largest farms while Montgomery County’s farms have only recently caught up to the size of Giles County farms.

*USDA Agriculture Census of Virginia
3. AGRICULTURE PRODUCTS IN THE NEW RIVER VALLEY

While dominated by mountains, valleys, and a hilly plateau, the New River Valley region has a variety of microclimates where a wide variety of agricultural plants and animals can thrive. The US Department of Agriculture lists a variety of hardiness zones for crops, from 5B to 7B. This enables many fruits, berries, vegetables, roots, grains, and nuts to be grown, with the exception of tropical plants, such as citrus fruits. The region is in a rain shadow created by the mountains of West Virginia and its rainfall amounts are among the lowest in the state. The region is at the edge of two very divergent climate patterns, rainfall and temperatures are inconsistent year to year, leading to frequent droughts and crop failures.

Virginia averages about 70% of its agricultural sales based in livestock and 30% based in crops; the corresponding NRV averages are 77% of NRV’s agricultural sales in livestock and 23% in crops. The NRV is home to the 7th largest cattle population in Virginia. Livestock makes up the majority of market sales in every county. Currently, the only USDA certified meat processing facility is located in Giles County.

The top crops for the NRV are: forage land (for livestock), hay, corn, wheat, rye, fruits and vegetables, cut Christmas trees, sod, nursery stock, and short rotation wood crops. Floyd County averages much higher earnings per farm than the rest of the NRV due to their higher percentage of crop production.

The Virginia wine industry is growing and is in search of more grapes being grown in the state. Grape production is not a major enterprise in the New River Valley, but is considered a growth product and strongly encouraged. While land in the region is suitable for grape production, the acreage seems to be below the tracking level of official statistics at the time of this latest Census. There has been a response of the area’s producers to the increased demand for locally produced wine grapes. Conversations with Extension Agents familiar with the region suggest that since the Census there has been a significant increase in vineyard plantings, with increases in vineyard plantings in throughout 2013. In 2014, when the consultant surveyed growers, Montgomery County producers planted approximately nine additional acres, Pulaski planted five, and Giles producers planted 10 acres.

4. STAKEHOLDERS

Farmers

According to the Virginia Employment Commission, there are 31,648 farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural managers. This number is forecast to decline nearly 30% to 22,336 by 2022. The average age of local farmers is 57 and 30% of farmers are age 65 and older. The average 2012 income per farm is $41,000. 90% of farms in Virginia are owned by families or individuals. Less than 16¢ per consumer dollar spent on food goes back to the farmer.

Agriculture-related operations

- Restaurants that use a majority of locally-grown foods
- Grocers (large scale and small/independent)/farm stands
- Food Hub/Food Innovation District (system to connect farmers, businesses, and consumers)
- Farmers Markets
- Nurseries and greenhouses
- Food and ag-related commodity producers
Government Agencies and NGOs
• Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development
• Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
• Montgomery County
• Giles County
• Pulaski County
• Virginia Office of Farmland Preservation
• Floyd County
• City of Radford
• Town of Christiansburg
• Town of Blacksburg
• Virginia Tech
• Virginia Cooperative Extension
• USDA
• Virginia Farm Bureau
• New River Valley Planning District Commission
• National Committee for the New River
• New River Valley Health Consortium
• Community Foundation of the New River Valley
• New River Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization

2. AGRITOURISM ACTIVITIES IN THE NEW RIVER VALLEY
Agritourism opportunities have been expanding in the New River Valley. With a stronger emphasis and greater cooperation, this can continue to grow. Generally, agritourism activities fall into three core categories:

Farm-based, which includes activities like hay rides, horseback riding, bird-watching/wildlife viewing, special events, photography, painting, farm/ranch work experience (roundup, branding, haying, fencing, calving, etc.), u-pick operations for fruits, vegetables, Christmas trees, corn mazes, wagon rides, children’s camps, seeing and feeding farm animals, hunting and fishing (guided or unguided), snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, off-road motorcycling, mountain-biking, school and educational tours, tour of farm or ranch operation, on farm/ranch get-a-way. Local examples include Sinkland Farms; Joe’s Tree Farm; U-pick berry picking at Crow’s Nest; Doe Creek apple picking; Buffalo & More; and Spikenard Farm & Bee Sanctuary.

Food-based, which includes activities like harvest and food festivals, farmers’ markets, winery tours and tastings, microbrewery visits, food processing site visits (cheese, jam, cider). Local examples include the Blacksburg, Christiansburg, and Pearisburgs farmers markets; area wineries, like Beliveau Estate, Attimo, and Chateau Morrissette; Bull & Bones and The River breweries; Due South BBQ; The Palisades; and Draper Mercantile Blue Door Cafe.

Heritage-based, which includes activities like county fairs, historical museums, agricultural history sites, pioneer settlements, rodeos, and livestock shows. Local examples include Smithfield
Plantation; the Wilderness Trail Festival; Summer Solstice Festival; the New River Valley Fair; Floyd Country Store; and Steppin’ Out.

**Some specific examples:**
- Beliveau Estate Winery
- Attimo Winery
- West Wind Winery (Wythe Co)
- Buffalo & More (Riner)
- Cut your own Christmas Tree farms
- Mountain Lake Resort & Restaurant (Giles)
- Newport Convenience Store (Giles)
- Thornspring Farm (Pulaski)
- Draper Merc. Blue Door Café (Pulaski)
- Farriss’ Vineyard
- Floyd Eco Village
- Floyd Farmers Market
- Floyd Country Store
- Spikenard Farm & Bee Sanctuary (Floyd)
- Steele’s Blueberry (Newport)
- Doe Creek
- Giles County Farm Bureau Coop
- Grant’s Grocery (Narrows)
- Foggy Bottom Vineyard
- Gary Midkiff (berries & fruit-Rich Creek)
- Spruce Run Tree Farm (Newport)
- Palisades Restaurant
- Black Hen Restaurant
- Ganoe’s Organics (Narrows)
- Sugar by Suzanne
- Jean Lucas – Goat Farm

**D. AGRITOURISTS IN THE NEW RIVER VALLEY**

**LOCAL**

The New River Valley has a population of about 179,000. Population growth is expected to be between 7 and 8% over the next couple decades, which is smaller than Virginia’s 10% and the national growth of 16%. While its residents’ educational achievements (24% with a bachelor’s degree or higher) is lower than in Virginia (32%) and the United States in general (26%), their English speaking skills are much higher, with less than 1% speaking less than well, compared to 2.6% in Virginia and 4.6% throughout the country.

The New River Valley has a smaller percentage of people in the working and family-rearing ages of
25-64 (46%), compared to the rest of Virginia (55%) and the country in general (53%). There is a significant, disproportionate percentage of college-aged population.

The Valley has a median adjusted gross household income of $56,568 (2007) and a cost-of-living index of 94.4.
According to a study published by Iowa State University about agritourism in Iowa, over two-thirds (69%) of agritourists are willing to drive up to 50-miles to reach an agritourism destination (30% of respondents are willing to drive 51+ miles, and 1% aren’t willing to go at all). Though Iowa certainly isn’t the NRV, parallels can be drawn since the demographic make-up of Iowa is similar to that of the NRV. Given this, we have identified 17 counties/cities within the NRV and the surrounding area that make up the Consortium’s core local audience that reside either in the NRV or within a one-hour drive.

Counties/cities in the core local audience
To further define who is most likely to be interested in the Consortium’s offerings, we employed a demographic, consumer behavior, and geographic audience segmentation platform that gives us insight into the likes, dislikes, lifestyles and purchase behaviors of the residents of these 17 counties. We identified 16 of the platform’s 66 segments contain characteristics befitting of an agritourist. In the NRV, 25,514 residents fall into one of these 16 segments; in surrounding areas, 50,984 residents fit the bill:

**Big Fish, Small Pond (Upscale Older without Kids) — 12,695**  
Older, upper-class, college-educated professionals, the members of Big Fish, Small Pond are often among the leading citizens of their small-town communities. These upscale, empty-nesting couples enjoy the trappings of success, including belonging to country clubs, maintaining large investment portfolios, and spending freely on computer technology.

**God’s Country (Upscale Older with Kids) — 2,930**  
When city dwellers and suburbanites began moving to the country in the 1970s, God’s Country emerged as the most affluent of the nation’s exurban lifestyles. Today, wealthier communities exist in the hinterlands, but God’s Country remains a haven for upscale couples in spacious homes. Typically college educated Baby Boomers, these Americans try to maintain a balanced lifestyle between high-power jobs and laid-back leisure.

**Upward Bound (Upscale Middle Age with Kids) — 928**  
More than any other segment, Upward Bound appears to be the home of those legendary Soccer Moms and Dads. In these small satellite cities, upscale families boast dual incomes, college degrees, and new split-levels and colonials. Residents of Upward Bound tend to be kid obsessed, with heavy purchases of computers, action figures, dolls, board games, bicycles, and camping equipment.

**New Empty Nest (Upper Mid Mature without Kids) — 1,884**  
With their grown-up children recently out of the house, New Empty Nests is composed of upper-middle income older Americans who pursue active—and activist—lifestyles. Most residents are over 65 years old, but they show no interest in a rest-home retirement. This is the top-ranked segment for all-inclusive travel packages; the favorite destination is Europe.

**Beltway Boomers (Upper Mid Older with Kids) — 831**  
The members of the postwar Baby Boom are all grown up. One segment of this huge cohort—college-educated, upper-middle-class, and home-owning—is found in Beltway Boomers. Like many of their peers who married late, these Boomers are still raising children in comfortable suburban subdivisions, and they’re pursuing kid-centered lifestyles.

**Kids & Cul-de-Sacs (Upper Mid Younger with Kids) — 738**  
Upper-middle-class, suburban, married couples with children—that’s the skinny on Kids & Cul-de-Sacs, an enviable lifestyle of large families in recently built subdivisions. With a high rate of Hispanic and Asian Americans, this segment is a refuge for college-educated, white-collar professionals with administrative jobs and upper-middle-class incomes. Their nexus of education, affluence, and children translates into large outlays for child-centered products and services.
Fast Track Families (Upscale Middle Age with Kids) — 4,388
With their upscale incomes, numerous children, and spacious homes, Fast-Track Families are in their prime acquisition years. These middle-aged parents have the disposable income and educated sensibility to want the best for their children. They buy the latest technology with impunity: new computers, DVD players, home theater systems, and video games. They take advantage of their rustic locales by camping, boating, and fishing.

Greenbelt Sports (Upper Mid Older without Kids) — 4,324
A segment of upscale exurban couples, Greenbelt Sports is known for its active lifestyle. Most of these older residents are married, college-educated, and own new homes. And few segments have higher rates for pursuing outdoor activities such as skiing, canoeing, backpacking, boating, and mountain biking.

Up & Comers (Upper Mid Younger without Kids) — 3,924
Up-and-Comers is a stopover for younger, upper-midscale singles before they marry, have families, and establish more deskbound lifestyles. Found in second-tier cities, these mobile adults, mostly age 25 to 44, include a disproportionate number of recent college graduates who are into athletic activities, the latest technology, and nightlife entertainment.

Traditional Times (Upper Mid Older without Kids) — 11,521
Traditional Times is the kind of lifestyle where small-town couples nearing retirement are beginning to enjoy their first empty-nest years. Typically in their fifties and older, these upper-middle-class Americans pursue a kind of granola-and-grits lifestyle. On their coffee tables are magazines with titles like Country Living and Country Home. But they’re big travelers, especially in recreational vehicles and campers.

New Homesteaders (Upper Mid Younger with Kids) — 3,177
Traditional Times is the kind of lifestyle where small-town couples nearing retirement are beginning to enjoy their first empty-nest years. Typically in their fifties and older, these upper-middle-class Americans pursue a kind of granola-and-grits lifestyle. On their coffee tables are magazines with titles like Country Living and Country Home. But they’re big travelers, especially in recreational vehicles and campers.

Big Sky Families (Upper Mid Younger with Kids) — 6,921
Scattered in placid towns across the American heartland, Big Sky Families is a segment of middle-aged rural families who have turned high school educations and blue-collar jobs into busy, upper-middle-class lifestyles. Residents enjoy baseball, basketball, and volleyball, as well as fishing, hunting, and horseback riding. To entertain their sprawling families, they buy virtually every piece of sporting equipment on the market.

Boomtown Singles (Midscale Younger without Kids) — 6,716
Affordable housing, abundant entry-level jobs, and a thriving singles scene—all have given rise to the Boomtown Singles segment in fast-growing satellite cities. Single and working-class, these residents pursue active lifestyles amid sprawling apartment complexes, bars, convenience stores, and laundromats.
Blue Chip Blues (Midscale Younger with Kids) — 931
Blue-Chip Blues is known as a comfortable lifestyle for ethnically-diverse, young, sprawling families with well-paying blue-collar and service jobs. The segment’s aging neighborhoods feature compact, modestly priced homes surrounded by commercial centers that cater to child-filled households.

Heartlanders (Lower Mid Older Mostly without Kids) — 10,750
America was once a land of small middle-class towns, which can still be found today among Heartlanders. This widespread segment consists of older couples with white-collar jobs living in sturdy, unpretentious homes. In these communities of small families and empty-nesting couples, Heartlanders residents pursue a rustic lifestyle where hunting and fishing remain prime leisure activities along with cooking, sewing, camping, and boating.

City Startups (Low Income Younger without Kids) — 8,064
In City Startups, young to middle-aged, multi-ethnic singles have settled in neighborhoods filled with cheap apartments and a commercial base of cafés, bars, laundromats, and clubs that cater to twentysomethings. One of the youngest segments in America—with ten times as many college students as the national average—these neighborhoods feature low incomes and high concentrations of African-American and Hispanic households.

VISITORS
Many people visit the NRV each year. They may not be here with the strict intention of partaking in agritourism activities, but they may ready and willing to participate. We estimate this audience to present nearly 300,000 (see figures below) additional prospects to the agritourism market. The largest group of these visitors is people driving through the region. Although large (180,000), this group has a smaller chance of engaging.

Virginia Tech football games: 25,000/game (Virginia Tech Office of Economic Development)
Virginia Tech and Radford parents: 82,000 (student populations x 2)
Passing-through (via I-81): 180,000
Floyd-festers: 12,000 (average of recent years’ attendees)
F. COMPETITION

Nearby agritourism activities provide competition for New River Valley agritourists. However, with a large close-to-home market, the competition also includes other outdoor or active activities, and even doing nothing at all.

Other outdoor activities include sports (participating and watching), hiking, tubing, and eating out. Families looking to entertain children represent a sizable audience for agritourism. Competition for that group includes swimming, kids museums and activities, and organized sports. In addition, Roanoke and Salem beckon with their activities.

Following is a brief collection of agritourism and agricultural brands nearby:

VIRGINIA BRANDS

1. Virginia Wine
http://www.virginiawine.org

- "Discover and Taste Virginia Wines"
- lists events, learn about info, downloadable ‘passport’ to Virginia Wineries, where to buy, scenic wine trails
- Live music hosting (this is the big one), wine bootcamp, art gallery, production tours and tastings, Food and Wine Festivals, yoga and wine outings, activities where dogs are allowed, triple threat wine, cheese, and chocolate pairing classes.

2. Virginia Peanuts
http://www.aboutpeanuts.com

- “Energy for the good (the ‘o’s are a peanut sideways) life”
- Education packet for teachers, shop, recipes, merchandising guides, nutrition facts, peanut news
- Peanut crops of Virginia and the Carolinas.

3. Virginia Grown
http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/vagrown

- "Locally Known, Virginia Grown” “Farm. Fresh. Pledge!”
- Marketing services, Education packets for teachers, Farmers market listings, Social media, News, Trade events
4. Southwest Virginia Fresh
http://www.swvafresh.org

- Independent community service organization in late 2012 and a 501c3 charitable nonprofit in 2014, having been launched in 2010 as Pulaski Fresh, a local foods initiative of Pulaski County Chamber of Commerce. It is operated by a Board of Directors, which serves as primary staff, and volunteers from our Advisory Board, both of which include consumers and producers from throughout southwestern Virginia.
- Serves the entire blue ridge highlands region.
- “SO Fresh!”
- Youth in agriculture initiative, workshops, plant your own workshops, producers workshops
VIRGINIA NEIGHBORS

1. Tennessee
http://www.tnvacation.com/agritourism

- “The Soundtrack of America” “Made in Tennessee” “Taste of Tennessee” “Pick Tennessee”
- Vineyards, farmers markets, pick-your-own, farm-raised meats, Museum of Appalachia, wildflowers, gardens and arboretums, wedding destinations, corn maze and hayrides, Christmas tree farms, Great Smoky Arts & Crafts Community, farm fresh fun (farm tours, petting zoo, pumpkin patch), fish farms, breweries, distilleries, plant nurseries, heritage & culture (family farms passed down for 100 years or more, living history farms, general stores, National Ornamental Metal Museum, quilting)
- Live music, farmers markets, Relay for Life, Car shows, Worlds Largest Yard Sale

2. North Carolina
http://www.gottobenc.com


Additional Resources for Farmers
- Resources for farmers, classes in agritourism for farmers, networking association, Agritourism liability insurance directory, Agricultural tourism highway signs program and application process resources

3. Kentucky

- “Farms are Fun” “Kentucky Proud” “The Land of Unbridled Adventure”
- Distilleries and Breweries, Farmers Markets, Museums and historic farms, Wineries, Bed and Breakfasts, Trail Rides (horse), Christmas tree farms, Horse Farms and Racing, Gardens and Nurseries, greenhouses and horticulture farms, Restaurants (local produce sourced), Orchards, Mazes, hayrides, U-pick, Livestock expos and shows, Walking trails with sculpture, amphitheaters, lakes, special theme gardens, butterfly gardens, animal topiaries, moon gardens, and other thematic features, farm attractions (food and fiber), roadside markets, Archery and Guns, Horsedrawn carriage, master crafts, botanical gardens.
4. West Virginia

- Orr’s Farm Market
- “Family Owned, Family Grown.” “Happiness Grows Here!”
- Berries, fruit, asparagus, rhubarb, spring onions, lettuces, pumpkins, grapes, other locally sourced produce, bison, wholesale
- Birthday parties, pick-your-own, bakery, farm market, school tours, live music, outdoor festivals, holiday open house, bonfires, hayrides.