

West Virginia Veterans and Warriors to Agriculture Program



July 19, 2015

West Virginia Veterans and Warriors to Agriculture Program

How it began:

- a. Campaign issue 2012 Commissioner of Agriculture race
- b. Nonpartisan- Both candidates liked and promoted the project



West Virginia Veterans and Warriors to Agriculture Program

Goals:

- a. To increase the number of entrepreneurs entering agricultural businesses, and to assist veterans in the transition from battlefield to home through education and business opportunity.
- b. To address Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury issues through agricultural therapy. Studies show that regular physical work like agriculture after returning home prove effective in dealing with issues such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

West Virginia Veterans and Warriors to Agriculture Program

SB469- Introduced and passed both Houses in 2014

Created the Veterans and Warriors to Agriculture Program to encourage veterans and returning warriors to become involved in the field of agriculture, and to support veterans currently working in agriculture by promoting farming enterprises, assisting with the development of cottage industries, exploring niche crops, increasing livestock and aquaculture industries, and helping to network and market products through farmers markets and cooperatives. The department may provide land or space at state-owned agricultural facilities for lease to veterans or warriors who want to learn or start an agricultural business without having land.

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Participation:

- a. A participant is required to be a veteran or a member of the National Guard or Reserve
- b. Or must be a direct descendent of a veteran including “Gold Star” Family Member



Since the program began, over 250 veterans signed up to participate in Veterans to Agriculture with over 80 striving to become beekeepers.

West Virginia Veterans and Warriors to Agriculture Program

Collaboration occurs between WVDA and:

- a. West Virginia Veterans Assistance
- b. West Virginia University
- c. WVU - Parkersburg
- d. Work Vessels for Veterans Helping Vets Succeed
- e. THE MISSION CONTINUES
- f. WV Beekeeping Association
- g. WV Veterans Coalition
- h. Homes for Vets Now



West Virginia Veterans and Warriors to Agriculture Program

OUTCOMES OF THE PROGRAM

- a. Over 150 small business and cottage industries started by veterans.
- b. 10 veterans who have participated in our Specialty Crop Grant Project and all are growing gardens in West Virginia, and selling produce in Farmer's Markets.
- c. 10 disabled veterans and families participate in our joint project with Berea College and also participate in WV Veterans to Ag "Victory Garden" project. All are growing their own food in their backyard, as well as canning and preserving food through our training.
- d. 43 veterans have signed up for classes in December 2015. They are located in Hedgesville, Huntington WV. Veterans Office and Princeton. The classes will be taught by three instructors. Classes will also be taught at other locations with established bee yards to help give real hands on experience to the students. Bee keeping training is by far our best and most participative group.

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OUTCOMES OF THE PROGRAM

- e. WVDA averages 20 calls a week seeking application and information about the program.
- f. WVDA has developed a partnership with Parchment Valley Veterans Therapeutic programs in Jackson County.
- g. WVDA has developed a memorial fruit tree planting project for fallen veterans and Gold Star Families. The tree planting is schedule for fall in Clay County on a veteran's farm. This is a beautiful site with good visibility.
- h. Developing the first veterans farmer's cooperative "Minutemen Farmers Coop"
- i. Assisted over 100 veterans to start a new agribusiness in WV.
- j. Have multiple accounts of veterans that have credited this program with changing their lives and some even saying that Vets to Ag has prevented them from contemplating suicide.

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Why is it important to WV?

- a. West Virginia Veterans and Warriors to Agriculture program is WV-grown. It's West Virginians helping West Virginian veterans.
- b. Unique potential to have a positive impact on new and beginning farmers including veterans with mental and physical health needs, unemployment, and revitalization of West Virginia's agricultural sector.