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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 197

Offered January 22, 1996

Expressing the sense of the General Assembly that the funding for the Virginia Cooperative Extension and agricultural research programs be restored to a level that will enable them to meet the needs of their service population.

Patrons—Bennett, Abbitt, Armstrong, Barlow, Clement, Councill, Croshaw, Crouch, Deeds, Hull, Jackson, Phillips, Reynolds, Stump, Tate, Thomas and Van Yahres; Senators: Hawkins and Houck

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) was established in 1914 in response to the federal Smith-Lever act, which appropriated federal funds to land grant colleges and universities to provide a community education program known as cooperative extension; and

WHEREAS, Cooperative Extension's mission is to empower "people of the Commonwealth to improve their lives through educational experiences focused on their needs and community interests"; and

WHEREAS, to fulfill this mission, VCE professional and paraprofessional staff are located in 107 units across the state providing educational program services to the residents of the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, staff of the VCE and the agricultural research centers are conducting research in a wide array of specialties, including agricultural technology and production efficiency and disseminating this important information to the agricultural community; and

WHEREAS, in 1994, 1.4 million Virginians participated in VCE-sponsored education programs, and 45,000 volunteers assisted in the delivery of these programs; and

WHEREAS, over the last several years VCE has experienced significant cuts in its budget, resulting in VCE currently being one-half the size it was in 1980; and

WHEREAS, the total number of agents have been reduced from 370 in 1989 to 232 in December 1995, including a reduction in agricultural and natural resources (ANR) agents from 140 to 95; and

WHEREAS, between 1989 and 1995 the number of specialists which support field programs in the Colleges of Agriculture and Life Science (including 4-H), Forestry and Wildlife Resources, and Human Services declined from 121 to 85.5 full-time employees (FTEs), with ANR specialists being reduced from 85 to 67; and

WHEREAS, the downsizing of VCE has resulted in most counties lacking an agent in one or more program areas, and the Counties of Powhatan, King George and Mathews and the Cities of Alexandria and Danville having no full-time agents; and

WHEREAS, Virginia's tobacco regions have been significantly affected by the continued vacancy of two tobacco agent positions in southside, which provided assistance to flue-cured tobacco growers in the Counties of Pittsylvania, Franklin, Mecklenburg and Brunswick, as well as the absence of a researcher/agent in the Glade Springs experimental station to serve burley tobacco growers of southwest Virginia; and

WHEREAS, the services offered by the two tobacco agents who left state service were considered so crucial to the tobacco communities of southside Virginia that several local governments have committed local moneys to fund these positions on a short term basis; and

WHEREAS, this is instance of local government's willingness to provide a crucial service which previously has been the responsibility of state government; and

WHEREAS, since 1994 the extension service has experienced a 20 percent reduction in staff, much of which is attributable to employees leaving under the Workforce Transition Act (WTA); and

WHEREAS, under the WTA, over 100 VCE and agricultural research staff left state service, resulting in a loss to the program of approximately \$3.9 million; and

WHEREAS, there is concern that the downsizing of VCE and agricultural research has placed Virginia's agricultural producers at a competitive disadvantage with their counterparts in neighboring states; and

WHEREAS, Virginia ranks third lowest among the 13 southern states in terms of per capita general fund appropriations for Cooperative Extension, with Arkansas ranking first (\$7.44) and Virginia eleventh (\$3.43); now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the funding of Cooperative Extension Service and agricultural research programs be restored to a level that will enable them to meet the needs of their service population.

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates transmit a copy of this resolution

INTRODUCED

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60 to the Governor, President of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, the Director of the
61 Department of Planning and Budget, and the Secretary of Finance.