*Draft Agenda as of September 29, 2026*

# 2026 Governor's Summit on Rural Prosperity

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***Details are subject to change***

**Virginia Horse Center**
487 Maury River Road
Lexington, VA 24450

**Wednesday, October 14:**

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| 10:30am | **Registration Opens** |
| 11:15am | **Lunch Buffet Opens** |
| 11:50am – 12:10pm | ***2026 Governor's Summit on Rural Prosperity Officially Begins*** |

**Welcome Remarks**

- Kristie Proctor, Executive Director, The Virginia Rural Center
- Senator Creigh Deeds, Chair, Senator Frank M. Ruff, Jr. Center for Rural Virginia
- Steve Shank, CEO, Virginia Horse Center

12:10 – 12:55pm **"Welcome to Rockbridge" Panel and Discussion**

*Every great summit needs a great host, and this year, that host is Rockbridge County. Nestled in the Shenandoah Valley, this region blends small-town charm, deep history, and a thriving spirit of community and commerce.*

**Moderator:**

- Senator Chris Head, 3rd Senate District

**Panelists:**

- Jen Carpenter, Executive Director, Main Street Buena Vista
- Jeremy Franklin, Executive Director, Main Street Lexington

- Brandy Flint, Director of Economic Development, Rockbridge County
- Tracy Lyons, Executive Director, Lexington, Buena Vista and Rockbridge County Chamber of Commerce
- Sheryl Wagner, Executive Director, Lexington, Buena Vista and Rockbridge County Tourism

12:55 – 1:10pm **Featured Speaker: Lieutenant Governor Ghazala Hashmi**

**Introduction:**

- Senator Creigh Deeds, Chair, Senator Frank M. Ruff, Jr. Center for Rural Virginia

1:10 – 1:55pm **Rural Health Update**

**Introduction:**

- Delegate Lily Franklin, Board Member, Senator Frank M. Ruff, Jr. Center for Rural Virginia

**Speakers:**

- Secretary Marvin Figueroa, Secretary of Health and Human Resources
- Heidi Hertz, Director of Rural Health Transformation

1:55 – 2:10pm **Break and Visit Exhibitors**

2:10 – 3:00pm **Rural Virginia at Work: Economic Development & Opportunity**

*Economic development is essential to building strong, vibrant rural communities and creating opportunities for Virginians to live, work, and thrive across the Commonwealth. Secretary of Commerce and Trade Carrie Chenery will share an update on the Administration's economic development priorities and vision for rural Virginia, followed by a lightning round with agency leaders highlighting emerging opportunities, key initiatives, and the resources available to support business growth, innovation, tourism, energy, and economic development across rural communities.*

**Introduction:**

- Bryan David, Chair, Council for Rural Virginia

**Moderator:**

- Secretary Carrie Chenery, Secretary of Commerce and Trade

**Panelists:**

- Eric Lin, Director, Virginia Department of Small Business and Supplier Diversity

- Joe Benevento, President & CEO, Virginia Innovation Partnership Corporation
- Vince Maiden, Director, Virginia Department of Energy
- David Manley, Executive Director, Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission
- Rita McClenny, President & CEO, Virginia Tourism Corporation
- David Devan, Senior Vice President, Policy and Strategic Partnerships, Virginia Economic Development Partnership

3:00 – 3:15pm

**Featured Speaker:**

- The Honorable Don Scott, Speaker of the Virginia House of Delegates

**Introduction:**

- Senator Emily Jordan, Vice Chair, Senator Frank M. Ruff, Jr. Center for Rural Virginia

3:15 – 3:30pm

**Natural and Historic Resources Update**

**Speaker:**

- Secretary David Bulova, Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources

**Introduction:**
Senator Tammy Mulchi, 9th Senate District

3:30 – 4:15pm

**Break and Travel to Field Trip Sites**

4:15 – 5:15pm

**Field Trips and Experiential Opportunities**

*Downtown Walking Tour of Lexington or*
*Downtown Walking Tour of Buena Vista*

6:30 – 8:00pm

**Evening Reception**

The Livery at The Georges
*11 North Main Street*
*Lexington, VA 24450*

**Thursday, October 15:**

7:30 – 8:30am

**Breakfast Buffet Opens**

8:30am

***2026 Governor's Summit on Rural Prosperity Day 2 Officially Begins***

**Welcome Remarks**

- Delegate Sam Rasoul, Board Member, Senator Frank M. Ruff, Jr. Center for Rural Virginia

8:30 – 9:20am

**Rural Housing Panel and Discussion**

*A panel discussion focused on innovative approaches and solutions to rural housing challenges, while highlighting innovative housing projects from across the Shenandoah Valley.*

**Moderator:**

- Kristen Dahlman, Deputy Secretary of Commerce and Trade

**Panelists:**

- Delegate Briana Sewell, Chair, Virginia Housing Commission
- Dr. Tamarah Holmes, Director, Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development
- Dr. Monique Johnson, Chief of Programs, Virginia Housing
- Brandy Flint, Economic Development Director, Rockbridge County Director of Economic Development, Rockbridge County

9:20 – 10:10am

**Rooted in Rural Virginia: Agriculture, Forestry & Equine Industries**

*Agriculture and forestry are cornerstones of Virginia's rural economy, supporting communities, creating jobs and new opportunities for growth across the Commonwealth. Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Katie Frazier will share an update on the Administration's priorities and vision for these vital industries, followed by a lightning round with agency leaders highlighting emerging opportunities, key initiatives, and the work underway across agriculture, forestry, and Virginia's equine and racing industries.*

**Introduction:**

- Delegate Nadarius Clark, Board Member, Senator Frank M. Ruff, Jr. Center for Rural Virginia

**Moderator:**

- Secretary Katie Frazier, Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry

**Panelists:**

- Charles Green, Commissioner, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
- Terry Lasher, State Forester, Virginia Department of Forestry
- Waqas Ahmed, Executive Secretary, Virginia Racing Commission

10:15am

**Keynote Speaker:**
**Governor Abigail Spanberger, 75th Governor of Virginia**

**Introduction:**
- Senator Creigh Deeds, Chair, Senator Frank M. Ruff, Jr. Center for Rural Virginia

10:45 – 11:00am

**Break and Visit Exhibitors**

11:00 – 11:50am

**Transportation Panel and Discussion: Moving Rural Virginia Forward: Transportation, Technology, and Economic Opportunity**

*Transportation is the backbone of rural Virginia's economy. From the farms and forests of the Shenandoah Valley to the small businesses lining our rural corridors, the ability to move people, goods, and services efficiently is essential for economic growth. Meanwhile, emerging technologies like unmanned aircraft systems and electric vertical takeoff and landing aircraft are opening doors that rural Virginia has never had before.*

**Moderator:**
- Former Senator Emmett Hanger, Board Member, Senator Frank M. Ruff, Jr. Center for Rural Virginia

**Panelists:**
- Delegate David Reid, 28th House District
- Delegate Terry Austin, 37th House District
- Former Secretary of Technology Karen Jackson, President and CEO, Apogee Strategic Partners and Senior Fellow, CCALS

11:50am – 12:30pm

**Drone Demonstration, Visit Exhibitors, and Lunch Buffet Opens**

12:30 – 1:00pm

**Virginia Rural Leadership Institute Class of 2026 Cohort Presentation**

**Introduction provided by: Lindsey Watson, Board Member, Senator Frank M. Ruff, Jr. Center for Rural Virginia**

*Showcase the work of the graduating cohort and highlight community impact projects from across rural Virginia.*

1:00pm **Rural Summit Concludes**