



2026 Governor's Summit on Rural Prosperity

****Draft Agenda as of October 8, 2026****

****Details are subject to change****

Virginia Horse Center
487 Maury River Road
Lexington, VA 24450

Wednesday, October 14:

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

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

Federal Funding Put To Work in Rural Virginia

Explore how federal investments are advancing rural Virginia through the Rural Health Transformation Fund and expanded broadband deployment through Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) and Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment Program (BEAD).

Introduction:

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

Speakers:

- Heidi Hertz, Director of Rural Health Transformation
- Chandler Vaughan, Director, Virginia Office of Broadband

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 – Choose one

Downtown Walking Tour of Lexington

*Starting Location: Lexington Visitor Center
106 E. Washington Street
Lexington, VA24450*

Downtown Walking Tour of Buena Vista

*Starting Location: Virginia Innovation Accelerator/
Buena Vista Visitor Center
245 W. 21st Street
Buena Vista, VA 24416*

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

12:30pm

Sponsor Spotlight

Virginia Housing
Candice Turner, MSW
Strategic Housing Officer

12:35 – 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