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HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 794

Offered July 16, 2024

Commending the Southern Piedmont Agricultural Research and Extension Center.

Patron—

WHEREAS, for 50 years, the Southern Piedmont Agricultural Research and Extension Center, located in Blackstone, has provided outstanding applied research and education to support Virginia Cooperative Extension programs and enhance Southside Virginia's integrated and diverse agricultural production systems; and

WHEREAS, the Southern Piedmont Agricultural Research and Extension Center (AREC) was established in 1974 through a lease between the U.S. Department of the Army and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech), with funding allocated by the General Assembly; the center conducts research and extension programs covering tobacco, forages, small fruit crops, beef cattle, and a variety of other field and specialty crops; and

WHEREAS, the Southern Piedmont AREC is one of the 11 agricultural research and extension centers strategically located throughout the Commonwealth that serve local communities and producers, and it is the only center supporting Virginia tobacco producers by providing research-based knowledge to improve management practices; and

WHEREAS, under the leadership of its first director, James L. Tramel, the Southern Piedmont AREC cleared approximately 125 acres for field research and installed a six-acre irrigation pond and irrigation system; and

WHEREAS, James L. Jones served as the second director of the Southern Piedmont AREC from 1990 until 2002, during which time Virginia Tech obtained approximately 1,180 acres for the center through a public benefit conveyance from the U.S. Department of Education; James L. Jones was succeeded by Carol A. Wilkinson, who served as the third director until 2022; and

WHEREAS, the Southern Piedmont AREC conducts hands-on, inquiry-based learning activities to educate the new generations about the exciting aspects of agricultural science through collaborations with Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech, government and community partners, industry associations, and local producers; and

WHEREAS, the Southern Piedmont AREC is currently led by Arash Rashed and employs six resident faculty supported by 11 full-time staff members and additional seasonal employees; to date, the center has welcomed more than 70 graduate students and trained numerous undergraduate student interns in research areas covering agronomy, plant pathology, plant genetics and breeding, forages, and entomology; and

WHEREAS, the Southern Piedmont AREC currently maintains 130 acres for crop research, 120 acres for research grazing, 16 acres of certified organic land, 850 acres of forestland, and a 40-acre silvopasture area, which integrates trees, forages, and livestock grazing on the same land in a mutually beneficial way; the center also has specialized facilities for tobacco curing, as well as extensive greenhouses and high tunnels; and

WHEREAS, the Southern Piedmont AREC is committed to serving the agricultural sector and residents of the Commonwealth through innovative technologies and techniques, including automation for monitoring and curing tobacco, its silvopasture area, and precision agriculture methods to evaluate crop development; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, That the Southern Piedmont Agricultural Research and Extension Center hereby be commended on the occasion of its 50th anniversary; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the Southern Piedmont Agricultural Research and Extension Center as an expression of the House of Delegates' admiration for the center's unique contributions to agriculture in Southside Virginia.

INTRODUCED

HR794