

News Release
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**AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT OPENING UP 40 ACRES OF PRIME FARMLAND IN MASON COUNTY FOR
VEGETABLE, SMALL FRUIT PRODUCTION OPERATIONS**

West Virginia Agriculture Commissioner Walt Helmick announced Wednesday that 40 acres of prime farmland located on WVDA property at the Lakin State Farm in Mason County will be leased this summer to individuals, partnerships, organizations and co-ops for the purpose of commercial vegetable and small fruit production.

“Farming is indeed important work, it’s a hard line of work full of hard workers,” Commissioner Helmick said. “In an effort to expand vegetable and fruit production in West Virginia we must grow more product. Therefore, we are now accepting applications that must include a business plan, for those interested in utilizing this land for commercial production of vegetables and small fruits.”

“As Agriculture Commissioner I hope to see many get involved because the demand for food products will only continue to grow,” Commissioner Helmick added. “We have a real opportunity in West Virginia right now. Currently we consume over \$7 billion annually in food yet we only produce approximately \$675 million. We have a \$6 billion opportunity staring us right in the face so we have to be innovative and be willing to be more progressive. This pilot project in Mason County is just one step in the process.”

Commissioner Helmick also said that a part of the Lakin Farm would also be dedicated for demonstration/educational purposes.

The West Virginia Department of Agriculture will offer some technical support for those chosen for the Lakin Farm Project and WVU Extension Services will also provide some consultation services.

For more information or to obtain an application, interested persons should contact WVDA employees Dwayne O’Dell, Bob Tabb or Jarrod Dean by calling 304-558-2210. Deadline for completed applications will be March 14, 2014.