

News Release

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AGRICULTURE COMMISSIONER HELMICK DISCUSSES STATEWIDE CROP AGGREGATION INITIATIVE, OPENS POTATO PROCESSING FACILITY AT HUTTONSVILLE

Joined by state and county elected officials, and regional business leaders, West Virginia Agriculture Commissioner Walt Helmick conducted a press conference today at the WVDA Farm in Huttonsville to discuss his statewide crop aggregation initiative while unveiling a potato processing and packaging line at that facility.

Commissioner Helmick has been working diligently since taking office in January 2013 to establish an aggregation network for West Virginia farmers to bring their products to for purchase and distribution to outlets across the state.

At Huttonsville this fall, a limited number of West Virginia grown potatoes are being processed and bagged and have been offered for sale to state institutions, public schools, senior centers and farmers markets for consumption and resale.

“We’ve got to learn in West Virginia that we have to do what it takes to begin feeding ourselves,” Commissioner Helmick stated. “At one time, 80 to 100 years ago, we were doing that. However, along came other industries and the work on our farms slowly dissipated and we got away from Agriculture.”

“The USDA tells us that in West Virginia we consume more than \$7.3 billion annually in food yet we produce significantly less than \$1 billion,” Commissioner Helmick added. “That’s a \$6 billion opportunity for us, plain and simple. Now we won’t close that entire gap but we’ve got to do more. We can grow many, many types of vegetable and fruits in our state for West Virginians to eat...and that’s what we intend to do.”

“This is the greatest economic development project we have in West Virginia right now. It’s up to us to capitalize on it.”

Over the next few years Commissioner Helmick plans to establish other regional aggregation sites at various locations throughout the state as well as starting cannery and processing operations.

“We’ve got to demonstrate that it can be done and I am confident once that takes place the private sector will take over,” Commissioner Helmick added. “Fresh, healthy, locally produced foods are what people want and need. The demand is there. We’re going to do our best to see that we take full advantage of that here in West Virginia.”