

**Well Workplace Award
Executive Summary**

**West Virginia
Department of
Agriculture
Silver Award**

Information in this publication is carefully reviewed for accuracy. Questions, comments, or ideas are welcome. Please direct to Dr. David Hunnicutt, Executive Editor, at the address below.

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**WELLNESS COUNCILS
OF AMERICA**

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General Information

WELL WORKPLACE
Silver Application

Basic Information

Name of Organization West Virginia Department of Agriculture

Address of Organization _____

Council Affiliation Member

Contact Person Robin Gothard

Title Senior Executive Assistant

Work Telephone _____

Fax Number _____

E-Mail Address _____

Alternate Contact Brandy Brabham

Parent Organization West Virginia Department of Agriculture

Number of Sites Covered by this Application 1-GRD Agriculture Center

Number of Employees Covered by this Application 350 full & part-time

Nature of Business or Industry State Government

Name of CEO Gus R. Douglass, Commissioner of Agriculture

Date of Application May 31, 2004

Preface

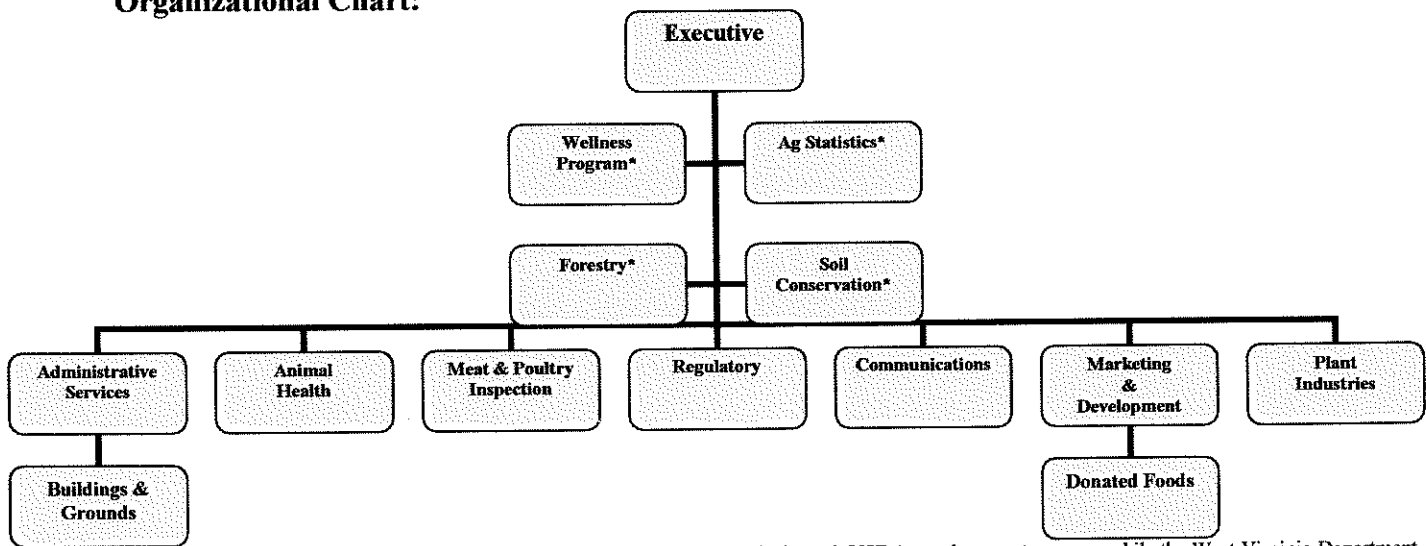
Organizational and Program Background

The West Virginia Department of Agriculture, headquartered at Guthrie, West Virginia, is a state agency. We work to accomplish the many priorities that face agriculture, economic development, public health and our environment. We use science to defend human, animal and plant health from the many dangers found in the fast-paced world we live. Our staff of 350 full and part-time employees, under the direction of Gus R. Douglass, Commissioner of Agriculture, works hard to meet daily challenges. We fight potential problems, thus preventing them and maintaining healthy standards residents have come to expect. We received the Bronze Well Workplace award in 2001.

The West Virginia Department of Agriculture's wellness program was initiated by Deputy Commissioner, Janet Fisher. She and other senior-level management realized the importance of providing a workplace based on wellness to encourage productivity and reduce health related problems. Janet asked executive assistant, Robin Gothard to research wellness programs available for organizations. Contact was made with Public Employee's Insurance Agency. They offered a wellness program entitled, "Pathways to Wellness." The program, services and products offered were the right combination for our organization. A worksite coordinator was appointed and committee members from each division were sought to form a representative wellness team.

Our organizational mission and vision is to promulgate, uphold and implement legislative enactments designed to advance the interest of agriculture industries; to guide and nurture the development and maintenance of agriculture and agriculture-related industries; and to ensure the safety and wholesomeness of the food supply and the safety of agricultural workers and practices. The wellness team's mission and vision is to educate, encourage and support healthy lifestyles; assist employees in identifying health risks and increase healthier decision-making among employees.

Organizational Chart:



*Programs run in cooperation with the Executive Division. They have their own funds through USDA or other grant sources, while the West Virginia Department of Agriculture provides a contribution through a combination of budget, staff, and facility use.

An overview of our wellness initiative must include the seven benchmarks of a successful program. We have senior level support, a cohesive wellness team, an operating plan, solid data collection, a variety of programs and interventions, a supportive environment and reliable evaluation methods.

Our wellness program was purposely placed incorporation with the executive division of our organization. Commissioner Douglass appointed his executive assistant as the program coordinator. The program was placed high in our organizational structure to symbolize to employees that the whole Department values health and the executives try to foster a work environment that is conducive to wellness.

Not only is wellness an ideal the Department promotes, we also embrace the need for a comprehensive plan. That’s why the Commissioner requested that each division director select a representative from their division to take part on the wellness team. The wellness team meets monthly and develops wellness programs annually. The Department believes that by having a representative from each division, all employees have equal opportunity for input into programming.

When the wellness team began this initiative, we surveyed the employees for overall health conditions, interests and needs. As part of that initial data collection, the wellness team identified priorities and objectives. As programs began, the team conducted follow-up surveys to determine if interests and needs were changing and if any health conditions seemed to be improving. Throughout the duration of the initiative, the team has had made adjustments based on the results of the data collection outcomes.

The outcome of our data collection forms the foundation for our operating plan. At the conception of the wellness program, we developed an operating plan where we set up our mission, goals, basic timelines, member roles and responsibilities, evaluation methods, budget needs and communication plans. We review our operating plan annually and make adjustments.

Programs and interventions for the Department provide the substance of our wellness initiative. Ultimately, programs motivate employees to make behavioral changes for their health thus improving their contribution to the Department. The wellness team has worked to incorporate various levels of programming from awareness and educational to behavioral modification. We distribute wellness newsletters, e-mail articles, and provide a wellness library. We conduct lunch seminars and demonstrations, as well as fitness classes, support groups and training programs.

The Department provides a supportive environment through its written policies and procedures. Our employee handbook, explicitly gives employees the option to use flex-time to participate in wellness activities. We also have posted emergency procedures, tobacco restrictions and recognition bulletins for successful participants of wellness activities.

We evaluate our wellness activities in a variety of methods. We track participation and satisfaction. Changes in employees' knowledge, attitudes, and reported behaviors are monitored and recorded. Human Resources report that our wellness programs have a positive impact on productivity in areas of morale and absenteeism. We communicate the results of our evaluation through our wellness newsletter and targeted programming.

While many individuals contribute to the effort of making our wellness program a success, the program coordinator, Robin Gothard has remained constant in her determination to make our program one of the best in the nation. She is in regular contact with the WV Wellness Council, Public Employee's Insurance Agency and Partners in Corporate Health. She frequently finds grants or new funding sources to support our programming goals. As part of the executive division, she provides the commissioner and deputy commissioners with first-hand reports on our progress and efforts. Robin believes, "Individuals and organizations should make wellness a priority."

Three unique strengths the West Virginia Department of Agriculture wellness program offers the employees include the camaraderie among coworkers, supervisor and subordinates; the morale that unifies the participants to support the Department in our overall mission to better serve the citizens of West Virginia; and the support system of fellow wellness activity participants regardless of where each work.

The camaraderie is a unique strength of the wellness programs; because while at work, employees have little time to socialize or learn more about each other, especially those in separate divisions. Typically during lunch or break, divisions stick together. Even during Department-wide meetings, divisions will gather in the same work groups. However, with wellness programs, everyone from each division are not required to attend, thus allowing participants to mingle with those in other divisions and across supervisor subordinate barriers. This interaction produces comments of good will and light-hearted rapport among participants on our evaluation forms.

Along the same lines as camaraderie, the wellness program creates increased morale. The participants report feeling more like a team. Participants seem eager to come to work on days that wellness activities are scheduled. They also leave programs with a refreshing dose of enthusiasm and dedication. Sharing the common goal of wellness at any level helps the participants feel more similar to coworkers, supervisors and subordinates. Similarities unify work groups and make them more productive because they are a more cohesive team.

The support system that the wellness program provides is vital for participants in reaching their wellness goals. While individuals must decide to make wellness a priority, working for an organization that supports wellness and provides programs to enhance individual efforts increase the likelihood of success. Not only do participants find support from the organization as a whole, they are also able to receive and provide support from fellow employees that take part in the programs. During our weight loss programs, we provide support group meetings to share challenges, ideas to stay motivated and participants encourage one another.

Since our wellness initiative began in the fall of 1999, we have strived to provide the programs that employees sought. Some of our most popular programs include our health screenings, where employees can

get a variety of tests at minimal costs to help them determine their overall health. The lunch-and-learn presentations are also very popular; because of our physical location getting back and forth from town takes most of lunch time, so many people take advantage our lunches at minimal costs. Weight loss initiatives and physical activity classes are among the most popular based on participation and feedback from employees.

The West Virginia Department of Agriculture is committed to providing its employees with a healthy place to work. We value wellness and promote it among all employees. We have several remote sites and field workers. We strive to increase remote sites' participation by providing newsletters, asking office directors to appoint wellness committee members, and including them in our individual-monitored programs. Another way the Department emphasizes its commitment to wellness is by having a 'wellness' drive on our computer system, where all wellness activities are posted and employees are encouraged to save wellness articles that might interest others.