

VIRGINIA AGRIBUSINESS COUNCIL

2021 GENERAL ASSEMBLY OUTLOOK



Kyle Shreve is the Executive Director of the Virginia Agribusiness Council, a statewide trade association representing the agriculture, forestry and green industries.

COVID-19 has disrupted every aspect of life and this includes the Virginia General Assembly. The Virginia General Assembly was called into Special Session and is finishing up their work trying to complete updates to the state budget as well as COVID-19 legislation and criminal justice reform. The Assembly has largely operated virtually which has put a strain on the Council's lobbying ability. Even with these challenges, we are pleased to report a successful Special Session for the agribusiness communities. During this Session, we engaged on a variety of budget items, bills addressing price gouging for suppliers and mandatory paid family leave.

As we look ahead to 2021, we expect to see some familiar bills come back, such as mandatory paid sick and family leave, and more adjustments to the state budget due to the ongoing COVID pandemic. Bills on paid sick family leave will be introduced which will require all employers to provide the time to all employees that work at least 20 hours a week. The Council also expects bills that would restrict or ban the use of certain pesticides and herbicides. Lastly, the efforts to restore the Chesapeake Bay continue and the Council continues to advocate for funding to achieve Virginia's 2025 Bay goals. VAC staff will be easily accessible and hard at work on your behalf at the General Assembly during this 45-day "short" session in January. We do expect the General Assembly to operate virtually through the entirety of the 2021 session.

Bills that will be priorities for the green industry will target applications, like last year's attempts to limit spraying times for certain species of pests and a repeat of the failed 2018 bill which sought to ban chlorpyrifos in the Commonwealth. As is sometimes the case, bills introduced in other states find their way into Virginia and will likely continue. There may be efforts to update and strengthen Virginia's Seed Law as well as bills to delay or extend applicator certification deadlines due to the impact of COVID on recertification.

Like in past years, we will continue to work with VTC, the golf course superintendents and others in the green industry, because the coalition effort directly prevents these bills from moving forward. As the changing makeup of the General Assembly presents new challenges, we are finding innovative ways to educate new members and have called on those of our members in the field to provide technical expertise to relate to legislators. The Council will monitor all the bills introduced during the session and flag any bills affecting the turf industry.

The Council plays a vital role at the state level and as this upcoming session goes online, we will still be there in close communication with elected officials in both the House and the Senate, advocating on your behalf, adapting to the new reality of digital influence. The Council will have to rely more heavily on e-mail, conference call or Zoom meetings to deliver the messaging.

As we prepare for the upcoming 2021 session, all of us at the Virginia Agribusiness Council are grateful to the VTC for its membership and its members who support our collective advocacy efforts. One of the reasons we are so successful is because our members and board stay active and utilize opportunities to lobby their hometown legislators on behalf of the entire industry. From all of us at the Agribusiness Council, thank you so much for your support in this truly critical time. 🍀