WEST VIRGINIA CODE: §19-1-12

§19-1-12. Veterans and Heroes to Agriculture Program and fund.

(a) *Legislative findings. —*

West Virginians have a longstanding tradition of service in the armed forces of the United States. Many veterans suffer from physical and emotional afflictions and are often unable to find gainful employment upon returning from combat. Exploring opportunities to engage West Virginia's veterans in agriculture is beneficial to the health and welfare of veterans, as well as to the future of West Virginia's agricultural economy.

(b) *Veterans and Heroes to Agriculture Program. —*

The Department of Agriculture shall develop a Veterans and Heroes to Agriculture Program to integrate veterans into the field of agriculture, and support veterans currently working in agriculture. These programs may include, but are not limited to, using post-mine land for agricultural development, promoting high tunnel crops and production, expanding the apiary industry, developing cottage industries, exploring niche crops, raising more livestock, increasing the aquaculture industry and helping veterans promote their agricultural products through farmers markets and cooperatives. The department may call on the Department of Veterans' Assistance and the state's Adjutant General for assistance to recruit and train eligible veterans, and develop and support the program.

(c) *Veterans and Heroes to Agriculture Fund.* —The Veterans and Warriors to Agriculture Fund is continued, but is renamed the Veterans and Heroes to Agriculture Fund. The fund shall consist of income from leasing the department's property for the program, surplus funds which may be transferred from the fund created by §19-12A-6a, gifts, grants and donations, and legislative appropriations which may be made to support the program. Expenditures from the fund shall be used exclusively, in accordance with appropriations by the Legislature, to pay costs, fees and expenses necessary to administer the Veterans and Heroes to Agriculture Program.

(d) Notwithstanding any provision in this code to the contrary, should the Department of Agriculture deem it necessary to provide land for activities within this program, it is exempt from the purchasing requirements as they relate to the competitive leasing of state property.

(e) The commissioner may propose emergency or legislative rules for approval in accordance with the provisions of §29A-3-1 *et seq.* to effectuate the provisions of this section.

(f) Expansion of Veterans and Heroes to Agriculture Program. — The Legislature finds that West Virginians also proudly answers the call to serve domestically in emergency response and law enforcement roles, including as police officers, sheriffs, firefighters, emergency medical technicians, and first responders. The Legislature further finds that farming,

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including growing corn, is a process that involves more than digging a hole, putting a seed in with dirt on top, and adding water. To that end, the commissioner is hereby authorized to expand the scope of the Veterans and Heroes to Agriculture Program to provide agriculture assistance and training to additional West Virginia heroes that will allow these brave individuals to continue to answer the call of duty by producing and providing fresh, healthy, and local food to their fellow West Virginians.

WV Legislature