Peanut production has long been a vital and profitable sector of the agricultural community in Southampton County, Virginia. The county is approximately 600 square miles with 93,000 acres in crop production. The fertile, well drained sandy loam soils are well suited to peanut production. For many years dating back to the early 1900’s peanut production has had a rich and valued history in Southampton County. At one point in time, the acreage exceeded 30,000 but due to the loss of the quota system, competing commodities at profitable price levels, and loss of infrastructure, acreage has declined to just over 5,000 in 2011. While the acreage has been drastically reduced, the crop provides the best profit margin projections of any crop commercially grown in Southampton County in 2012. Therefore, a strong research and education effort must be maintained in order for our growers to successfully compete in the ever changing world of peanut production. There are many unprecedented challenges facing the peanut producers of the V-C region. Among these are new challenges in insect and disease control. The loss of Temik and the highly restricted use of Metam sodium have left many producers looking for alternative methods of controlling nematodes, thrips, and CBR. Another major constraint to production is the labor requirements involved with peanut production due to harvesting, drying, and transportation. Also, there is a pressing need for the use of a proven method of determining when peanuts are mature and ready to dig. With the new varieties coming into commercial production that may differ slightly from older ones the proper timing of harvesting will be especially critical for maximizing yield and quality potential.

As a new agent to a large peanut producing county, it is my opinion that we must do a better job of relaying research based information to our producers so they can better deal with these challenges. I come from a fourth generation peanut farm in the southeastern portion of the county and understand from experience the importance of unbiased information. Since coming aboard in July of 2011, I have circulated among the producers to hear first-hand their concerns and needs. To assist producers in determining optimum crop maturity for digging, in late September I organized a peanut pod blasting clinic in conjunction with Dr. Maria Balota. The clinic was held at a local buying point and 32 samples from 17 growers were evaluated. These samples represented nearly one third of the
acreage in Southampton County. That effort will be expanded in 2012 to accommodate more growers and to monitor peanut maturity from late August through October. When producers were making decisions about corn earworm control, I assisted Dr. Ames Herbert with insecticide efficacy trials on a local producer’s farm to help determine the most effective spray treatments. For the upcoming 2012 growing season, I am working with growers to set up on-farm variety trials, insect control evaluations, and to assist in monitoring of pest outbreaks. I will conduct on farm in-season insect scouting clinics to help growers improve their skills in making effective treatment decisions. And finally, I have initiated bimonthly newsletters to inform growers countywide of upcoming programs, production and pest management issues.