Virginia Association of Counties
ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2024.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact Gage Harter.

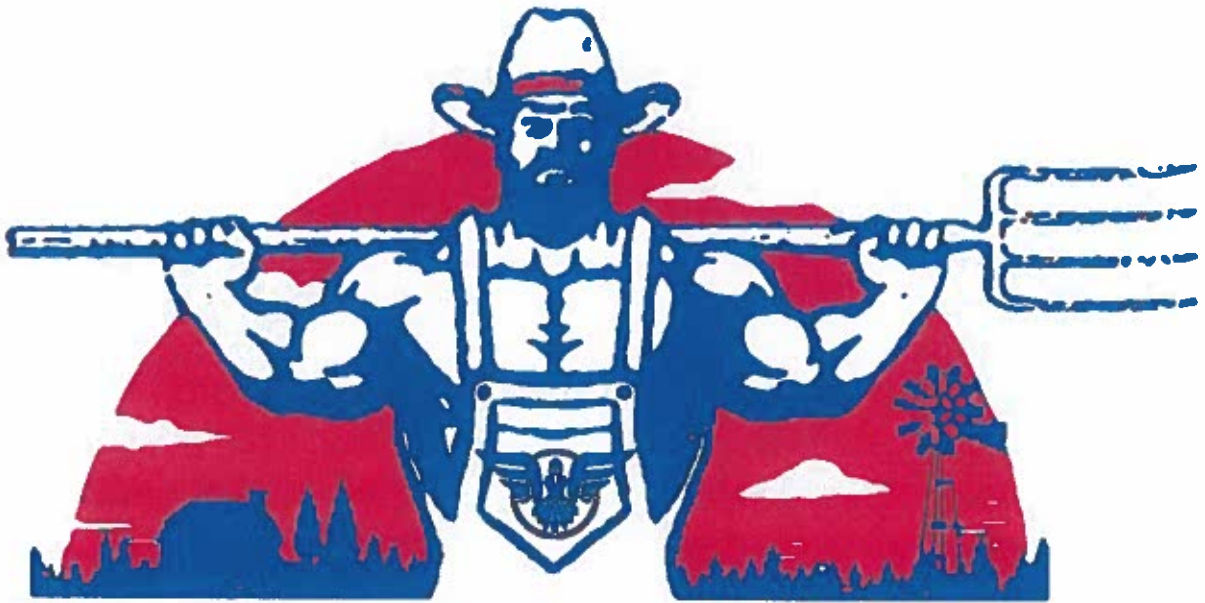## PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Franklin

Program Title: Farm Strong Obstacle Course Race

Program Category: Parks and Recreation
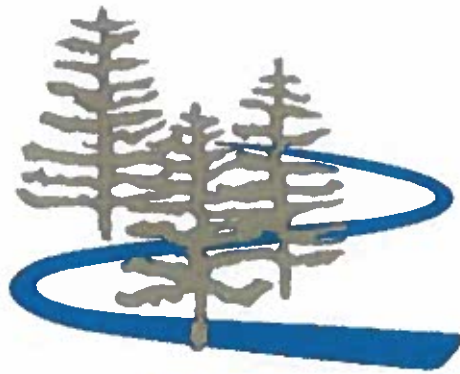
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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Brandy L. Rosser

Title: Assistant County Administrator

Signature: Brandy L. Rosser

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FARMSTRONG

FRANKLIN COUNTY
PARKS & RECREATION

Farm Strong Obstacle Course Race 2023

-You may be gym strong but are you Farm Strong?

Everything has a life expectancy or a best-by date. In the world of Parks and Recreation it is no different. To see the future and know when an event will peak and trend-out would be a programmer's superpower. To be able to foresee popular trends and plan for those trends would give any department an unfair yet coveted programming advantage.

With a twenty-five-year legacy, Franklin County Parks and Recreation's signature event, Ramble Weekend, was a summertime rite of passage for many locals. Known as Virginia's largest three-day paddling festival, it included live music, meals, a night float, and a four-mile paddling race. Events like these were once considered rare, but in the early 2000s, outdoor recreation festivals began to spring up with surprising frequency throughout the region. During the past five years, declining participation in Ramble Weekend has led staff to consider how this popular event could be given a breath a new life.

In June of 2023, Ramble Weekend made its final appearance while also introducing a new event called Farm Strong Obstacle Course Race (OCR). The farmwork obstacle course race was inspired by one of Franklin County's greatest strengths—the agriculture industry. It was designed to pay homage to generations of farmers who have gone before us and worked the land without the aid of machinery. It also recognizes the current generation of farmers whose labors are vital to both the

local and regional economy. To ensure participation in this unfamiliar event, all Ramble Weekend attendees were given free entry into Farm Strong. Professional timing services were contracted and a 5K was simultaneously held for individuals who preferred a more traditional race. The inaugural event held on June 3, 2023, saw 50 competitors. Feedback was so positive that plans were made to make this a new signature event.

In 2019, Franklin County Parks and Recreation was approached by the owner of a local gym who had successfully facilitated races such as Spartan/DEKA events, Marine Mud Runs, and Fitness Boot Camps. It was then that Anthony with Ferguson Fitness first suggested a farmwork-inspired obstacle course race. He voiced he would serve as a consultant for the obstacles but was unable to provide physical support. County staff saw huge potential in this one-of-a-kind event, but it was not until 2023 that Franklin County Parks and Recreation had the capacity to consider the offer.

The Farm Strong OCR was co-designed by the Spartan SGX coach team at Ferguson Fitness and Franklin County Parks and Recreation. It was intended to bolster the declining numbers associated with Ramble Weekend while highlighting one of the county's most valuable industries—farming and agriculture. Obstacle course races can readily be found across the country, but none put their local spin on it quite like Franklin County. With over 160,000 acres of farmland, 38% of Franklin County is farmland. We rank second in the state for acres of corn silage produced and second in the state for value of milk from cows, per USDA.

The agricultural strength of Franklin County is not only measured by data but can be seen in the physical strength of the individuals rising early to milk, facing the elements to fix the fence line, fording rivers to climb steep banks and check the newborn calves, and hauling sacks of feed. It was

for this reason that Farm Strong was born. Because of this, the tag line was obvious: "You may be gym strong, but are you Farm Strong?"

Parks and Recreation staff had a blast consulting with Ferguson Fitness to create memorable and challenging farmwork-inspired obstacles. Twelve elements were created using only the supplies found on a working farm. These items were also readily available at the Parks and Recreation maintenance shop. They included: 5-gallon buckets which were used to scoop water from the Pigg River carrying them a distance to fill an empty container, wooden blocks used to simulate balancing across the stringers of a barn loft, rope used for climbing up a steep hillside, sandbags that simulated carrying feed sacks, hay bales that had to be jumped across as hurdles, and a John Deer tractor as the focal point where competitors climbed 11 feet to the raised bucket using a rope. No items were purchased for Farm Strong 2023, and the only expenses were $400 for timing services and $100 for finisher stickers. A volunteer group from a middle school football team provided 12 volunteers who served as course marshals at each station.

As we say goodbye to Ramble Weekend, we believe to have found a new winning recipe with the Farm Strong Obstacle Course Race. Building upon strengths found within Franklin County is always a great start. The public-private partnership allows for a unique perspective that is sometimes blurred when clinging to historic county tradition, and consulting with a business that specializes in fitness-based workouts extends our reach into a more targeted demographic while bringing awareness to one of the largest industries within Franklin County. Franklin County Parks and Recreation is looking forward to growing this one-of-a-kind event.

Rope Climb/Hang

Either

Climb to top & touch bucket

Or

Hang with feet off ground for 10 seconds