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**Hershel "Woody" Williams VAMC selected: 1 of 10 nationwide
Agriculture Training/Behavioral Healthcare Services site**

Huntington, W.Va. —The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Office of Rural Health (ORH) has chosen Hershel "Woody" Williams VAMC as one of ten pilot sites nationwide for an Agriculture Training/Behavioral Healthcare Services program. The program will be known as Veterans Affairs Farming and Recovery Mental Health Services (VA FARMS).

"We are very excited about this program," said Fran Burgess, supervisor, Mental Health Vocational/Peer Support & Recreation Therapy services at Hershel "Woody" Williams VAMC. We have partnered with the Marshall University Social Work Department and the West Virginia Department of Agriculture. She continued, "Marshall University will provide Veteran self-care and family care training and the WV Department of Agriculture will teach the agricultural training classes."

The 2019 VAMC – Agrotherapy project schedule represents a full eight-week course, consisting of six weeks of classroom training and a two-week internship.

Two members of Marshall's Social Work Department developed a six-hour behavioral health workshop. Kim White, assistant professor and Keigan Abel-Brown, a graduate student, organized a concise compendium. "The workshop," said White, "will help veterans develop awareness of their responses to stress, identify new behaviors and responses, and use self-reflection to evaluate effect of behavior change on physical and mental health and relationships. We are excited about this partnership and look forward to working with veterans and our colleagues at the VAMC and within the WV Department of Agriculture."

The VA FARMS program is designed to allow veterans the opportunity to learn about agrarian practices. Seasonal crop production, indoor growing, bee keeping and honey production, wild harvest, Christmas trees, and soil preparation are a few of the areas the WV Department of Agriculture will be concentrating on.

Kent Leonhardt, West Virginia Department of Agriculture Commissioner stated, "While the Agricultural Training/Behavioral Healthcare services pilot project will focus on providing veterans agriculture training via classroom and hands-on activities, we also feel that downstream opportunities may be realized for two major issues facing our country." He posed this question, "How do we reverse shrinking agricultural workforce trends, as well as provide vital therapy to those who have proudly served their country?" His answer? "At the end of this project, we hope to have developed best practices to shape what could be a replicable model throughout West Virginia and the United States."

Hershel "Woody" Williams VAMC believes the VA FARMS program will be an answer for our Veterans in western West Virginia, eastern Kentucky/Ohio who wouldn't mind a little dirt under their finger nails if there was less stress in theirs or their family's lives.

The first program begins April 8, 2019, and will be Monday through Thursday, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., for six weeks. These six weeks of training will be at Hershel "Woody" Williams VAMC's main campus and the internships will be with local agricultural producers in the surrounding areas.

Veterans, if you are interested, please contact Fran Burgess, (304) 429-6741, ext. 2661.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Huntington, W. Va. is a fully accredited 80-bed acute medical and surgical care facility offering primary and sub-specialty outpatient care, including rehabilitation and mental health services. The Hershel "Woody" Williams VA Medical Center is honored to serve Veterans in a primary service area that includes 10 counties in West Virginia, 2 counties in southern Ohio, and 12 counties in eastern Kentucky.

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www.marshall.edu/social-work/

www.facebook.com/West.Virginia.Department.of.Agriculture/