



# Virginia Cooperative Council

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VIRGINIA COOPERATIVE COUNCIL'S OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER

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## I'm All in on Cooperatives

By Norm Hyde

Virginia's first new Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry in six years started his term off by celebrating Cooperative Month with the Virginia Cooperative Council on Oct. 4. Dr. Basil Gooden, a Buckingham County native and former state director of the USDA's Rural Development Agency, told the VCC's annual Co-op Month breakfast he was "all in on cooperatives."

"Having grown up in a rural area in Buckingham County, we got our power from the Central Virginia Electric Cooperative. Growing up on the farm, we got our supplies from Southern States Cooperative. And I also respect the community service aspects of cooperatives," Gooden said.

"I understand a lot of what you do, and how you help farmers continue the legacy of good stewardship of the land and what they've been entrusted with."

Gooden, who still raises Black Angus cattle on the family farm in Buckingham County, shared with the audience why his career in public service has always been focused on improving the lot of rural Virginians.

"When my father took me to Virginia Tech 33 years ago, I didn't know a soul there. And he told me three things as he was leaving. First thing he told me was to get good grades. The second thing he told me was to stay out of trouble. But the third thing he told me as he was leaving my dorm room in Pritchard Hall really, really stuck with me. He said 'And don't come back to the country.'"



Virginia Sec. of Agriculture & Forestry celebrated Virginia Cooperative Month with the council. He visited with Carl Privett of the Maryland/Virginia Milk Producers Cooperative, talked about his priorities as the newest secretary of agriculture and forestry, and presented the annual Cooperative Month plaque to VCC Exec. Secretary Allen Melton.



"So here I am, a 17-year-old young man... and the man that I looked up to my entire life is telling me not to come back to the country, to a rural area. What he was saying was there are so few economic opportunities in Buckingham County."

"And that day defined who I am. Because I wake up every morning fighting for opportunities for rural Virginia. Because I want to change that narrative. I want every kid, regardless of where you are born, whether it's in Lee County, in Culpeper County or Accomack County, to have the same opportunities as kids born in Northern Virginia or Richmond or Virginia Beach

**Look inside for NICE report,  
annual award winners**

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have,” Gooden said.

Gooden went on to share his plans for leading the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the Virginia Department of Forestry. Boosting economic development in rural areas will be the keystone of his term as secretary, he said.

In addition to Virginia’s Agriculture Forestry Industry Development grant program, he said VDACS will be rolling out a smaller farm business development program in November.

“That’s a smaller grant program, up to \$5,000, but that grant will focus specifically on helping farmers and producers develop the business aspect of their operations. So we’re looking to help build the capacity of farmers to better promote, market, manage their business operations,” Gooden said.

Gooden said he would also focus on leadership development programs in rural Virginia, building on the work of some counties that have agriculture economic

development boards.

“What I feel and what I see across the commonwealth and across the country is that organizations rise and fall based on their leadership. If you have good leadership in a company, in an organization, in a municipality, you tend to do better than those organizations with poor leadership,” he said.

His third focus will be on strategic partnerships within state agencies and the federal government, Gooden said. He noted that while he served as the state director of the USDA’s Rural Development agency, he was in charge of distributing \$1.25 billion in federal grants each year.

“So the resources are there,” Gooden said. “Many people would never know. That’s money on the ground to help address issues, whether its telemedicine or trying to increase access to broadband Internet service. That type of funding is coming from the federal government, and we need to better utilize that funding here in the Commonwealth of Virginia.”

# Career Cooperative Leaders Celebrate Decades of Service

The leaders of both Farm Credit banks in Virginia were honored with the Career Cooperative Leadership Award at the annual Virginia Cooperative Month Breakfast celebration Oct. 4. Greg Farmer of Colonial Farm Credit will retire in March 2017 and Dave Lawrence of Farm Credit of the Virginias retired in 2016. Paul Franklin is the new chief executive officer of Colonial Farm Credit, while Peery Heldreth is the new CEO for Farm Credit of the Virginias.

Both men spent their professional careers helping farmers and rural Virginians in their part of the state succeed financially. Farmer began his career as loan officer in Farmville, Va. in the 1980s, working with poultry, dairy and cattle farmers during difficult financial times. His financial acumen and advice helped keep a lot of those farmers financially afloat. It was at that time Farmer determined that the best way for Farm Credit to serve the community was to maintain strong credit standards so as to be a steady resource for farmers in both good times and bad.



Matt Lohr, VCC president, presented the VCC Career Cooperative Leadership award to Greg Farmer of Colonial Farm Credit and Dave Lawrence of Farm Credit of the Virginias.

Since Farmer was chosen as President and CEO of Colonial Farm Credit in 2000, the cooperative has seen strong growth in loan volume, become the standard-bearer of the industry for excellent performance, and is the lender of choice for farmers and foresters in eastern Virginia and southern Maryland.

In addition to leading a \$665 million lending institution with 76 employees, Farmer served on both the Virginia Agriculture in the Classroom board of directors and

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as a consultant to the Colonial Agricultural Education Foundation. He has participated in many agricultural events and has been an active voice on Capitol Hill, meeting senators and congressmen to make sure the interests of rural and agricultural communities are served.

“First off, the patronage refund in the Farm Credit system is a good testament that the cooperative business model is alive and well,” Farmer said after receiving his award. “We’ve returned a lot of money, a lot of earnings back to rural communities. Secondly, Dave and I have been around a long time, long enough realize that although we get the awards, they really go to our team. We surrounded ourselves with good people and they really made us look good.”

The second Career Cooperative Leadership award winner this year has been a Farm Credit employee since 1975. David Lawrence began his career as a branch manager in Illinois and ended it as Chief Executive Office for Farm Credit of the Virginias.

A huge advocate for agriculture and the cooperative business structure, Lawrence never missed an opportunity to discuss the cooperative structure of Farm Credit and how it gives each and every borrower a vested interest in the company. Under his leadership since 2003 the loan portfolio of Farm Credit of the Virginias has grown

steadily, both in the number of borrowers as well as total loan volume.

Lawrence said he is especially proud of his record of helping return no less than 10 percent of interest accrued back to the borrowers of Farm Credit of the Virginias each year in the form of a cash refund. Some years that number was as high as 20 percent, and for the fiscal years of 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016 a second, special distribution has been returned to member-owners as well.

In addition to his financial leadership, Lawrence has been an advocate for providing educational and networking opportunities for borrowers and potential borrowers to help them build their business and financial knowledge. Under his guidance Farm Credit of the Virginias began a Knowledge Center to focus on providing resources and workshops for everyone interested in a career in agriculture, both young and experienced.

“The FFA and other young people are the future of agriculture,” Lawrence said after receiving his award. “We have our up and down business cycles, but agriculture is a great industry and I appreciate having spent my career working and supporting it.”

## Virginia Cooperative Month Celebrated with Style



(far left) Brandon Burton of the Old Dominion Electric Cooperative poured a glass of apple cider from Graves Mountain Lodge.

Bette Brand of Farm Credit of the Virginias and Shepherd Cronemeyer with the Virginia Agribusiness Council shared a smile.



# National Institute of Cooperative Education at Virginia Tech

Virginia hosted the National Institute of Cooperative Education once again last summer. The NICE conference was held at Virginia Tech July 23 – 27 and is an extremely successful tool for encouraging the next generation to consider joining or working in a cooperative.

In order to attend NICE a student must attend the VICE (Virginia Institute Cooperative Education) conference and meet the qualifications to represent Virginia at NICE. The VICE conference will be held at Graves Mountain Lodge, Syria, VA. March 31 – April 2, 2017 and the NICE conference will be held at the University of Kentucky in 2017.

This year's NICE participants gained an understanding of how cooperatives differ from other businesses and heard cooperative success stories from both the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors. While in teams the students served as managers of a simulated cooperative store, competing with other stores in their market area for sales and profit. Teams also analyzed case studies, developed their own student-run cooperative, and participated in team-building and leadership development activities. The closing session recognized the teams that were the top performers in various conference activities.

In addition to the regular conference activities, the Outstanding Youth Scholar Program provided both educational and social activities as one boy and girl from each state at the conference competed for the outstanding male and female youth scholar at the conference. This year's male and female NICE Outstanding Youth Scholars were from Kentucky.

