

CO-OP CONNECTIONS



Virginia
Cooperative Council

Newsletter of the Virginia Cooperative Council - "Achieving together what one cannot do alone"

Spring 2020



VCC board of directors, from left: LaVeta Nutter, Gerald Anderson, Mary Howell, Katie Frazier, Jimmy Graves, Claire Seibel, Jessica Harris, Richard Johnstone, Adam Shiflett, Dr. Kim Morgan and Dustin Francis. Not pictured: Jim Belfield, Brad Brown, Mike Cannon, Laura Jackson and Brian Wolfe.

Annual Meeting recap

A small but enthusiastic group of Council members gathered March 11 at Graves Mountain Lodge for the Council's 58th Annual Meeting. Following introductions and approval of 2019 Annual Meeting minutes, members unanimously elected the following as officers for the coming year:

President: **Brad Brown** of Augusta Cooperative

Vice President: **Adam Shiflett** of Farm Credit of the Virginias

Secretary: **Jessica Harris** of MidAtlantic Farm Credit

Members also confirmed Laura Jackson of the Maryland & Virginia Milk Producers Cooperative, Mike Cannon of Culpeper Farm & Home and Adam Shiflett of Farm Credit of the Virginians, re-electing each to three-year terms, along with new board members Gerald Anderson of Fredericksburg Food Cooperative and Dustin Francis of Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative.

Keynote speakers J.T. Jacobs and John Medved, both co-op electric line-workers, shared their experience on the co-op-funded team that brought electricity to several high-altitude South American villages last fall as part of

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Council & Foundation finance update

The Virginia Cooperative Council ended 2019 with \$67,651.07 in expenses and \$4,149.92 in expense over revenue. Three factors were board-approved costs to finalize the new Council's website, www.virginia.coop; the additional cost of a near-record 52 VICE participants; and transitioning to a new executive secretary, in which two staff were compensated for the month of January 2019. VCC's 2020 budget of \$58,720 was approved at the October 2019 board meeting and projects expenses to more closely match expected revenue.

The Virginia Foundation for Cooperation ended 2019 with \$24,526.50 in expenses and assets totaling \$636,856.58, a net increase of \$55,282 from the previous year. This reflects, in part, the Foundation's revised investment policy in which one-third of funds were converted to the equity class of investments. Legal notice of the Foundation's annual report was published in the Feb. 23, 2020 *Richmond Times Dispatch*.

Annual Meeting, continued

"United We Light: Project Bolivia." Keeping the audience in rapt attention, J.T. and John shared a photo slideshow and video (posted on VCC's Facebook page) that dramatized the good work done by these co-op staff. Both linemen answered numerous follow-up questions from the audience.

Katie Frazier provide the Audit Committee's report and a recap of 2019 financials for both the Council and Foundation.

Next, VCC advisor LaVeta Nutter from the Virginia Dept. of Education shared their new initiative, "Virginia is for Learning Lovers," that seeks to promote career-oriented learning categories. She encouraged VCC members to contribute to the curriculum review process.

Dr. Kim Morgan of Virginia Tech's Kohl Centre shared their latest initiatives, including activities of last year's Scroggs-Raper Scholarship attendees.

The gathering ended, as always, with everyone enjoying a hearty lunch overlooking the valley at Graves Mountain Lodge.

Members in the news

On Jan. 6, **Andy Seibel** was named Virginia FFA's chief executive, overseeing agricultural education programs for 33,000 high school students across the Commonwealth, along with professional development for 330 teachers in 192 chapters. Seibel earned three degrees from Virginia Tech: a bachelor's in agricultural education and master's and education specialist degrees in career/technical education. He was a high school agricultural education for 15 years and also worked for the Virginia Cooperative Extension service.

On April 15, **Dr. Kim Morgan**, who has been an associate professor at Virginia Tech's Kohl Centre since 2013, shared that she's been recruited by her alma-mater, the University of Florida, to join their faculty. She wrote, "As my start date is August of 2020, with sadness that I will have to resign from my position with the Virginia Cooperative Council board." Kim was a dedicated contributor each spring to the Virginia Institute on Cooperative Education and will be greatly missed by all of us at VCC.

In his April 28 *Co-op Weekly* column, National Cooperative Business Association President & CEO **Doug O'Brien** noted that "the need for co-ops has become starker as COVID-19 has brought into focus the outcomes of inequality and systemic inequities" in society. He noted that the current public health and economic crises have "laid bare the gulf between the people who own corporations and other stakeholders: most notably workers, small businesses, people of color, and lower-income consumers in both urban and rural places. He believes co-ops can play a key role in building more inclusive community. "Let's start by considering how to truly better align the interests of consumers, workers, producers and small businesses with the larger economy," he urges. "This is not accomplished by the gratuitous goodwill of the decision makers at conventional corporations, but when users of businesses also own and control those businesses."

As of May 11, **Fredericksburg Food Cooperative** is nearly halfway towards its capital campaign to raise \$750,000 to fund opening of its retail store later this year. For more information, please visit fredericksburgfoodcoop.com.

Each spring, Virginia-based co-ops demonstrate the 5th cooperative principle through financial support of youth education. These include **Colonial Farm Credit**, whose Colonial Agricultural Educational Foundation awarded a total of \$194,000 to 85 high school and college students across Virginia and Maryland, while the **Virginia, Maryland & Delaware's Association of Electric Cooperatives** provided over \$60,000 in educational scholarships to 57 students whose parents/guardians belong to member cooperatives in Virginia, Maryland and Delaware.

Beginning in August, the Farm Credit Knowledge Center is hosting an Ag-Biz Planner Course for young, beginning and/or small farmers. The 10-module course will run through January 2021, with participants asked to register by July 9. For more information, visit www.FarmCreditKnowledgeCenter.com/LocalEvents/Programs.asp or email Sarah Scyphers at SScyphers@FCVirginiacs.com.

Want to share news from your cooperative? Email mary.howell@sscoop.com or add a guest post on the Council's Facebook page.

The VICE Squad: Where are they now?

This column profiles past attendees of the Virginia Institute for Cooperative Education. Contact VCC if you'd like to suggest a VICE graduate to feature in an upcoming issue!

Rebekah Slabach

What did participating in VICE mean to you?

I remember being the only youth from my county to attend VICE, but meeting people I now call friends and mentors today! Teamwork is a major focus of VICE and how youth are challenged to think for themselves and not settle for the easy way. At VICE, there is no one 'right' answer to run the cooperative business – and that's the same way in life.

Do you have any favorite memories?

Graves Mountain Lodge makes the VICE experience! I have often described VICE as you 'work hard and play hard.' You are never by yourself, but learning and having fun along other people. The relationships are my favorite part from VICE – and attending NICE and then coming back as a volunteer.

How has participating in VICE influenced your career?

While I never had a specific job title in mind for my future, I did always know that I wanted to help people and make agriculture better. Having an understanding of cooperatives is important in my role as an Agriculture Extension Agent today. And those skills and relationship contacts I have gained from VICE have made a big difference. Being able to support farmers and the agricultural community often means connecting them with the best information and resources out there. So much of what I do on a daily basis is connection and building cooperative relationships among people and groups. It is amazing what teamwork, positivity, and setting vision or goals can do!



Rebekah Slabach, 2010 VICE participant

Executive Secretary's message: Using technology to preserve our mission

As the VCC board gathered March 10 for the meeting prior to our Annual Meeting, concerns about the impact of the COVID-19 virus on public events, including the Virginia Institute on Cooperative Education (VICE), were already being discussed. Following a conference call with the board early the following week, I emailed all 50 student applicants to let them know that VICE would not be held on its original dates of March 27-29, but that we were hoping to reschedule in June. They were also given the option to submit a project, in the form of a short video, slideshow or 500-word essay, to provide more details about the cooperative profiled in their "Report on My Visit to a Cooperative."

With the Governor's issuance of an initial stay-at-home order through June 10, 2020 and closing of public schools across the Commonwealth through the end of the school year, Adam Shiflett and I developed online tests based on the "Welcome to Cooperatives" and Purdue Agribusiness Management Simulation" manuals that all VICE students receive. I then emailed the VICE applicants again to let them know that while we would not be holding VICE this year, they could complete both online tests in addition to their project to be considered for a VICE scholarship. They also would be welcome to apply for next year's VICE, set for March 26-28, 2021, provided they meet the 16-19 age requirement.

Many thanks to Brian Wolfe and Adam Shiflett, who reviewed and ranked the project submittals. After checking test answers, which included three open-ended essay questions about what they would do if they were the manager of a co-op business seeking to increase sales, we agreed to award five students scholarships, as listed below along with the co-op they researched:

Noah Esper of Ashburn, VA—\$500 (Farm Credit of the Virginias)

Audrey Fleming of Buchanan, VA—\$1,000 (Rockingham Cooperative)

Brian Howard of Fincastle, VA—\$1,000 (also Rockingham Cooperative)

Jordan Newman of Cartersville, VA—\$1,500 (Farmers Cooperative)

Loren Satterwhite of Dayton, VA—\$1,000 (Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative)

With a little help from technology, we were able to keep the spirit of VICE alive, share news and information about Virginia's many cooperative businesses and fulfill VCC's mission of supporting youth education!

- Mary Howell

VCC Supports the Young Farmers of Virginia

Congratulations to **J.J. Funk** on receiving the 2020 Young Farmer of the Year Award from the Young Farmers of Virginia.

“J.J. and his wife operate a goat farm in Rockingham County and plan to teach their children how to raise goats from birth to sale, and provide opportunities for FFA students in their area,” said Kaitlyn Sonifrank, who serves as their Executive Coordinator.

The Virginia Cooperative Council sponsored this award, presented Jan. 24 at the Young Farmers Convention in Natural Bridge. To learn more about the Young Farmers of VA, please visit their new website at <https://youngfarmersofva.wixsite.com/yfva>



Carl Smith, a director on the Young Farmers of Virginia board, presents J.J. Funk (at right) with their Young Farmer of the Year Award.

Welcome to our newest member!

Friendly City Food Cooperative
Harrisonburg, VA www.friendlycity.coop

Welcome back Prince George Electric Cooperative **Waverly VA** www.pgec.coop

How to Reach Us:

Virginia Cooperative Council
(804) 281-1211
mary.howell@sscoop.com
www.virginia.coop
[Facebook.com/VirginiaCoopCouncil](https://www.facebook.com/VirginiaCoopCouncil)
Twitter @VACoopCouncil

Virginia Cooperative Council

P.O. Box 25202

Richmond, VA 23260