

CO-OP CONNECTIONS



Virginia
Cooperative Council

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

Winter 2021

Meet our 2020 Scroggs-Raper Scholarship recipients

Generous donations by Luther Raper and later by Claude Scroggs to the Virginia Foundation of Cooperation, Inc. established the Scroggs-Raper Scholarships, awarded to students at Virginia's land grant universities studying topics related to agriculture. This year's recipients include seven students in the Virginia Tech Department of Agriculture & Applied Economics, and our first recipient from Virginia State University profiled in the last issue. Here are brief profiles of our Virginia Tech recipients:

Hannah Browne is a junior who plans to use her agribusiness major to research and implement measures to better allocate resources in order to run an agricultural operation more effectively.

A member of Virginia Tech's Corps of Cadets Black Cadet Organization that provides mentorship and networking to younger cadets, she has served as vice president and social media coordinator. She has been a member of both the Highty-Tighties, Tech's regimental band, and Pan Jammers Blacksburg Steel band that performs at Tech women's basketball games and for the community.

Hannah participated in the 2019 Girls in Engineering Conference. "During the Tec-novation competition, my team developed 'Safe Track,' a mobile app that users can program to call family members and first responders, activated by the user saying a safe word," she explained in her scholarship application.



Hannah Browne



Elizabeth Deane

Elizabeth Deane is a junior majoring in dairy science. She is active in Virginia Tech's Ag Econ and Swine clubs. A volunteer at the Virginia Tech Sheep Center and BIG Event, Elizabeth works as a student assistant manager at Owens Food Court.

"I've learned that cooperatives provide a reliable source of income for dairy farmers, so that they don't have to rely on private contracts that can easily be cancelled," she noted.

As a 4-H member for the past 13 years, Elizabeth attended the National 4-H Congress in Atlanta and was inducted into North Carolina's 4-H Honor Club. This past summer, she interned at the Farm Credit Administration.



Chris Kuhler

Chris Kuhler is a 2nd-time Scroggs-Raper Scholarship recipient and FFA member. His grades put him consistently on the Dean's List and he serves as a student advising ambassador. As a member of Tech's Leadership and Social Change Residential College, he assists with food insecurity volunteer activities.

Chris works as a bus operator for Blacksburg Transit and also helps out at Lee Highway Nursery, his parent's farm.

"Participating in the Virginia Institute for Cooperative Education was a pivotal moment in my life. After this experience I knew I wanted a career relating to agricultural finance!" he said.

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Scroggs-Raper recipients, continued



Claire Morris

Claire Morris is a member of Virginia Tech Block & Bridle, Sigma Alpha and Young Farmers. She's served as an intern at Southern Piedmont Agricultural Research & Extension Center in Blackstone where she worked in the tobacco field and lab doing data entry and analysis, serving as a research assistant for Dr. Wade Reiter.

"I grew up on a farm and my parents belong to both Southern States and Southside Electric Cooperative, so I've witnessed how co-ops create a system that combines customers and providers, enabling people to stimulate the economy through shared goals and community involvement while encouraging innovations in technology and business," Claire stated on her scholarship application.

After attending both VICE and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Youth Tour in 2017, **Matt Myers** deferred college for a year to serve as 2018-2019 State Vice-President. During this time, he facilitated leadership workshops at FFA's conference for middle school students and also worked with other FFA officers to engage 2019 VICE participants through interactive exercises.



Matt Myers

"I'm planning to major in Agricultural & Applied Economics, and hope to attend law school," Matt explained. He regularly is on the Dean's List and also works as a bus operator for Blacksburg Transit.

Hunter Sanderson is another second-time recipient who has worked on his father's poultry farm since age 12. Active in Baptist Collegiate Ministries, he belongs to the Leadership and Social Change Residential College. His parents are members of Southern States and Southside Electric Cooperative.

"I've seen firsthand how co-ops bring key services to rural parts of the state and enable those using the services to play an active role in decision-making," he said.

Shelby Smith is a sophomore who has been active in Collegiate Young Farmers and the National AgriMarketing Association. She's also volunteered for the Big Event and is a representative for her residential house at Virginia Tech.

"My parents are members of both Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative and Rockingham Cooperative, which added a location in my hometown five years ago," she said, adding that she has a better appreciation for what makes co-ops different.

"Cooperatives are a great way to get citizens involved with their community. They feel like they have a say in what is going on," she explained.



Hunter Sanderson



Shelby Smith

Members in the news

On Dec. 9, **Farm Credit of the Virginias (FCV)** announced that **Michael Almond** has been named to their newly created role of Chief Lending Officer. FCV's CEO Brad Cornelius said, "Michael's experience with the Farm Credit System and the agricultural lending landscape, positive attitude and industry expertise will be a major asset to our senior leadership team and Association."

David Koogler, senior VP of member services & external affairs for **Rappahannock Electric Cooperative**, was recently reappointed to serve on the GridWise Alliance board of directors, a national organization aimed at modernizing the U.S. electric grid.

Fredericksburg Food Cooperative welcomed 386 new owner-investors in 2020, as well as hiring General Manager **Chris Roland**. The co-op plans to open their Co-op Grocery in early 2021, with every household or business who joins before the store opens its doors to be honored on the Founding Owners Wall.

In December, five cooperatives based in Virginia and Maryland formally organized the Virginia, Maryland and Delaware Association of Broadband Cooperatives. The founding members include VCC members **Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative (EMPOWER Broadband)** and **Prince George Electric Cooperative (RURALBAND)**, as well as BARC Electric Cooperative (BARC Connects), Central Virginia Electric Cooperative (Firefly Fiber Broadband) and Choptank Electric Cooperative (Choptank Fiber, LLC). "Broadband access is something our members desperately need," said **John Lee**, President & CEO of MEC and EMPOWER Broadband. "Generations of future Virginians and Marylanders will have opportunities to learn, to work, to communicate and to enjoy benefits long available to those in cities and suburbs, thanks to our group of broadband cooperatives."

Want to share news from your cooperative? Email mary.howell@sscoop.com or send a message via the Council's Facebook page.

The VICE Squad: Where are they now?

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

Kate Lawrence

What did participating in VICE mean to you? I was a senior in high school and had not gotten into my first (and really only) choice of schools, Virginia Tech. Attending VICE, and subsequently NICE which was held in Virginia that year, affirmed that VT was the place for me and gave me the drive to buckle down at community college for a year and work towards a transfer. The “real world” experience that VICE provided helped confirm that the path I had planned on after high school was the correct one for me and worth pushing forward with, and that year in community college ended up being the best thing to motivate me.

Do you have any favorite memories?

As when attending any statewide event, I was blessed with the opportunity to form relationships with peers from across Virginia. Little did I know that many of the people I met that week would continue to be part of my life through college and well into my professional career! I still interact with many of my VICE and NICE colleagues on a regular basis.



How has participating in VICE influenced your career?

I am currently working in my 8th year as an Agriculture Extension Agent with Virginia Cooperative Extension Service in Botetourt County.

VICE was my introduction to how and why cooperatives are formed and how they allow community members that benefit from that business to have a hand in how the business is influenced and run. I work closely with Farm Credit of the Virginias, Rockingham Cooperative, the Rockbridge Farmers Cooperative and the Augusta Farmers Cooperative on a daily basis to better serve the producers in Botetourt, Roanoke, Craig, and Alleghany counties. I consider my relationship with these co-ops incredibly valuable and vital to my work.

I'm especially proud of helping form partnerships among local cattle producers to market their feeder cattle in a cooperative manner, allowing smaller producers to take advantage of truck-load pricing. While this cooperative relationship may not be organized in an official capacity, the core principle of small producers working together to take advantage of incentives normally reserved for larger groups is still very beneficial.

Executive Secretary's message: 2021 Annual Meeting & VICE to be virtual

At its Dec 15 conference call meeting, the Council's board of directors considered current state policy on group gatherings, as well as the limitations on travel for many co-op staff through March 31, and voted to hold our 2021 Annual Meeting virtually. Those wishing to participate in the Council's **59th Annual Meeting on March 2** beginning at 11 a.m. are asked to register by Feb. 24— simply email the Council at mary.howell@sscoop.com and you'll receive a link to the meeting platform. Four director positions are up for election, and each member cooperative will receive a mailed numbered ballot later this month, with a self-addressed stamped envelope to facilitate returning it to our office by Feb. 24.

The Annual Meeting will feature Adam Ford with Rockingham Cooperative as our keynote speaker. Rockingham Cooperative is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year and published a commemorative book, “The House that Cooperation Built,” available at all co-op locations. Virtual annual meeting participants will be entered in a door prize drawing for this and other great prizes!

This year's Virginia Institute on Cooperative Education (VICE), normally held in late March or early April, will also be conducted virtually. Applications are online at www.virginia.coop and must be received by **March 5, 2021**. Students will be required to complete an online exam based on the “Welcome to Cooperatives” manual, as well as submit a project on the cooperative of their choice by April 15, 2021. Top performers will be eligible for education scholarships, with winners notified by May 15, 2021.

The VCC board also agreed to postpone the presentation of VCC leadership awards until October, in hopes that we'll be able to recognize award recipients in person at our Co-op Month event.

Thanks to technology, the Council is continuing its mission to educate Virginians about the benefits of belonging to — and supporting — our state's many cooperative businesses.

- Mary Howell

Changes herald new era for Southern States Cooperative

"It's not the strongest or the smartest who survive – it's those who are most adaptive to change."

I remember reading this quote many years ago, and it also holds true for organizations such as Southern States Cooperative. The world has changed in many ways since 1923, when a few farmers met in Richmond to solve a common problem – sourcing forage seed varieties that work for the mid-Atlantic area.

Over the years, Southern States added fertilizer and agronomy services, as well as fuel, feed and farm supplies, resulting in a thriving cooperative that has served its members well.

As the turn of the century approached, it became quite clear to our management team that our cooperative could not continue forward as both a wholesaler and as a retailer. The resulting decisions required macro-changes to our cooperative's structure. First came exiting the feed manufacturing business by creating a partnership with Cargill. Second, we partnered with GROWMARK for our wholesale energy and agronomy businesses, becoming a member of our nation's 6th largest cooperative. Finally, just last month on Dec. 18, 2020, Southern States closed on the sale of our wholesale farm supply business.

So where does that leave Southern States? We can now have a laser focus on our farmer-members and other retail customers. We have 87 Southern States locations across our multi-state service territory, and will continue to serve our more than 192,000 farmer-members as well as thousands of other customers who enjoy dealing with Southern States.

Some have asked, is this the end of Southern States?

The answer is an emphatic **no** – we have been adapting to change and believe this is the dawn of an exciting new era for our cooperative.

We are also looking forward to celebrating our 100th anniversary in 2023!

*- Steve Patterson,
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of Merchandising,
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Virginia Cooperative Council

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