

CO-OP CONNECTIONS



Virginia
Cooperative Council

Quarterly newsletter of the Virginia Cooperative Council - "Achieving together what one cannot do alone."

Winter 2022



VCC Vice President Adam Shiflett presented the Young Cooperator Award to Alex White, pictured here with Lois Reeves of Page One, a charitable organization in Luray.

"Having served as assistant manager for Page One's food pantry, I know the funds given as part of my award will be put to great use to help my community. I really appreciate the cooperative model. We need cooperatives for everything!"

Alex White, on receiving the Council's Young Cooperator Award

White earns Young Cooperator Award

James "Alex" White III, a government major currently attending Harvard University, received the Council's Young Cooperator Award in a presentation held at Page One on Dec. 21 in Luray, Va. The Council sponsors this award to recognize outstanding co-op members under age 40. Alex was nominated by Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative (SVEC), to which his family belongs.

A graduate of a small rural high school and community college, the Page County native consistently strives to make a positive impact through public service. In 2020, Alex was one of Virginia's youngest delegates to a national political convention. He served as a Boys Nation Senator from Virginia and attended the Sorenson Institute Leaders Program at the University of Virginia.

As a self-proclaimed "big believer" in the cooperative model, Alex was part of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's 2018 Youth Tour, with his local co-op, SVEC, sponsoring him. His efforts to advocate for rural areas led him to become Virginia's youngest government official at the time of his appointment to the Page County Economic Development Authority.

The Young Cooperator Award includes a \$500 prize. Reflecting his concern for community, a key cooperative principle, Alex donated his award to Page One, a Luray nonprofit that uses diverse forms of fundraising to provide vital family assistance to Page County residents. Alex served as Page One's assistant food pantry director and volunteered all day after receiving his award.

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Perkins to Speak at Council's Annual Meeting on March 3

The Virginia Cooperative Council will return to the Dairy Barn at the Frontier Culture Museum in Staunton for our 60th Annual Meeting on Thursday, March 3.

All members and their guests are invited to attend, with refreshments available at 9 a.m. and the meeting getting underway at 9:30 a.m. A buffet lunch will not be provided this year, but attendees are welcome to join us "dutch treat" at Mrs. Rowe's Restaurant afterwards.

Our keynote speaker will be Whitney Perkins of the Virginia Farm Bureau, who currently serves as business development director for the Virginia Foundation for Agricultural Innovation and Sustainability (VA FAIRS). Whitney began working with this program in 2015.

During the business portion of the meeting, attendees will be asked to affirm a board vote that amends the Council's bylaws to provide greater flexibility in selecting board of directors candidates. Members will also vote on

four open board positions, with following members nominated as candidates:

Adam Ford of Rockingham Cooperative, representing purchasing cooperatives;
Zach Wakeman of Southern States, representing purchasing cooperatives;
Jessica Harris of MidAtlantic Farm Credit, representing service cooperatives;
Katie Frazier of Farm Credit of the Virginias, representing cooperatives at large.



Whitney Perkins, assistant director at the Virginia Farm Bureau.

Please RSVP no later than **Feb. 28, 2022** by emailing mary.howell@sscoop.com or calling (804) 281-1211.

Members in the news

After the deadliest storm in Kentucky's history struck Dec. 10, devastating thousands of homes, Virginia's agricultural community immediately sprang into action. A group of co-ops and other businesses donated more than \$256,000 in poultry, hamburger, cheese and milk that arrived just in time to help needy families for Christmas. The Farm Ministry, a project of **Rockingham Cooperative** Feed Division manager Keith Turner, led this partnership that included other Council members **Culpeper Farmer's Cooperative**, **Farm Credit of the Virginias** and the **Rockingham Farm Bureau**. Adam Ford of Rockingham Cooperative noted, "A second tractor-trailer from Virginia arrived in Kentucky on Jan. 13, and we're working to provide additional food and supplies to these communities." The Farm Ministry is in the final stages of becoming a non-profit, he added, with more details available at www.thefarmministry.org.

When an early January storm left thousands of Virginians without electricity, including many across **Rappahannock Electric Cooperative's** 22-county service territory, **Graves Mountain Lodge** in Madison County provided housing and meals to dozens of out-of-state line crews who came to speed power restoration efforts. **Jimmy Graves**, whose family has hosted the Virginia Institute on Cooperative Education (VICE) at Graves Mountain Lodge since the 1970s, also is stepping down from his honorary position on the board of directors after more than five decades of dedicated service.

Past Council board member **Matthew Lohr** has been named by Governor Youngkin to serve as Virginia Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry. Matt most recently was chief of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service agency, which has an operating budget of more than \$4.5 billion and more than 10,000 employees across 3,000 offices. He previously served as Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and in the Virginia House of Delegates from 2006 to 2010. Lohr, a fifth-generation farmer, is president of Valley Pike Farm, Inc. He graduated from Virginia Tech and was both a state and national officer for FFA.

The **Farm Credit Knowledge Center** is hosting a Farm Management Institute at two locations this spring: on March 29 in Fisher, WV and on March 30 in Rochelle, VA. Open to anyone interested or involved in agriculture, topics for these day-long events include business planning and the global and domestic outlook. Speakers include Dr. Dave Kohl, professor emeritus at Virginia Tech, and Scott Sink, owner of Hethwood Market and SES Enterprises. For more information, visit www.FarmCreditofVirginias.com/Knowledge-Center, call 800.919.FARM or email KnowledgeCenter@FCVirginias.com.

Have news from your co-op? Email mary.howell@sscoop.com or send a message via the Council's Facebook page.

Co-op scholarship recipients: where are they now?

This column profiles past recipients of the Scroggs-Raper Scholarships sponsored by the Virginia Foundation of Cooperation, as well as past attendees of the Virginia Institute on Cooperative Education. Please contact us if you know someone we can feature in an upcoming issue!

Meredith Adams, North America CRM for Bayer Crop Science

Please share your educational background. I earned an M.S. in Agriculture and Applied Economics and B.S. in Agribusiness from Virginia Tech. While there, I was involved in the Ag Econ club, Quiz Bowl, the National Agricultural Marketing Association (NAMA) and Block and Bridle. I participated in three internships and study abroad opportunities, including Southern States Cooperative in Richmond, Virginia; Monsanto Company in St. Louis, Missouri; and DEKALB / Asgrow Seed in Caseville, Michigan.

Tell us about your career. After graduation, I moved to St. Louis as a field sales trainee with Monsanto Company (now Bayer Crop Science). I also worked for them in Illinois as a district sales manager before being named the U.S. Brand Manager for Climate Field View, a digital platform that helps farmers make data driven decisions to optimize crop yield and maximize profit. I currently lead North America CRM (customer relationship management) Data Analytics Capabilities for Bayer Crop Science, where I work to improve digital tools and enhance customer experience.

How did your college experience prepare you? Virginia Tech's culture, my professors, and mentors made it possible for me to challenge myself and step out of my comfort zone. I met new people, took new classes, joined new clubs, and traveled to new places. Those felt like big risks, but skills I learned from those experiences translated into who I am today. This allowed me to move across the country for a new work experience, meet friends, and foster professional relationships in the industry. Virginia Tech is a great place to explore and you don't have to love something in order to try it. My experiences at school led me to know as much about what I didn't want than what I do want! That has helped me identify my strengths, narrow my focus, and accelerate my career.

What advice do you have for other agriculture students? Don't discount all the experiences that happen outside of the classroom. I learned so much from extracurricular activities like NAMA, industry meetings, and one on one conversations with professors. I'm grateful for my time at Virginia Tech and love to mentor students and young professionals in the industry. The energy and passion that lives on the Blacksburg campus is unmatched. I'm proud that the Council invests in the future of agriculture by providing Scroggs-Raper Scholarships.



Meredith Adams, 2013 & 2014
Scroggs-Raper Scholarship recipient

Executive Secretary's Message

The Council's planning committee is preparing to host the first in-person Virginia Institute on Cooperative Education (VICE) since the COVID-19 pandemic started two years ago, on March 25-26 at Graves Mountain Lodge. We've scaled back some activities to help minimize health risks, but as they have for decades, high school student attendees will continue to learn about different types of cooperatives, participate in the "Who's Minding the Store?" co-op business simulation, and have a chance to win lots of fun prizes. Following evaluations based on two tests and participation in all exercises, top performers will earn college scholarships of \$1,000, \$1,500 and \$2,000 and the opportunity to travel to the Cooperative Council of North Carolina's leadership camp from June 20-24. If you know any 16-19 year olds who may wish to attend, send them to www.virginia.coop to complete an application right away—the deadline is Feb. 18!

The Virginia Foundation of Cooperation will again offer Scroggs-Raper Scholarships to students at Virginia's two land-grant colleges, Virginia Tech and Virginia State, as well as those at community colleges who are studying agriculture and forestry. The application deadline is Feb. 28 and recipients will be notified by May. Please consider including the Foundation in your estate planning, as all donations are tax-deductible.

Wishing everyone a healthy and joyous spring!

- Mary Howell

VCC supports Young Farmers of Virginia

Young Farmers of Virginia held their 71st annual convention in Petersburg on Jan. 28-29. Joining them was Joseph Guthrie, a Pulaski County farmer and Virginia Tech agriculture instructor who was recently appointed by Governor Youngkin as Virginia Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

For many years, the Virginia Cooperative Council has supported the Young Farmer awards program, and congratulates this year's winner, Cindy Lam of the Spottswood Association.

This organization's main mission is to continue agriculture education in the post-high school years, primarily by hosting monthly educational meetings that inform members on issues facing their area, as well as general agricultural issues.

Executive coordinator Kaitlyn Sonifrank explained, "Our focus has shifted over the years from traditional meeting presenters to more niche markets, with many chapters offering meetings on specialized markets such as agritourism, etc. However, the roots of the organization are not lost! Farm tours, crop



Young Farmers convention organizers with Joseph Guthrie (center), Commissioner of the VA Dept. of Agriculture & Consumer Services.

needs, and animal husbandry are still big topics of discussion. We strive to make connections between those who are starting out with production agriculture and those who've been in agriculture their entire lives."

Young Farmers of Virginia also hosts a state farm tour each July. To learn more, email Kaitlyn Sonifrank at youngfarmersofva@gmail.com.

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