

CO-OP CONNECTIONS



Virginia
Cooperative Council

Quarterly newsletter of the Virginia Cooperative Council

Spring 2022



A total of 32 high school students, including six FFA state officers, took part in the Virginia Institute on Cooperative Education, March 25-26 at Graves Mountain Lodge. Photo by Jim Robertson, VMD Assoc. of Electric Cooperatives.

VICE: Co-op Education Made FUN

After being held virtually in 2020 and 2021, the Virginia Institute on Cooperative Education (VICE) returned to Graves Mountain Lodge from March 25-26. Guided by experienced adult leaders, 32 student attendees heard from a variety of speakers about what sets cooperatives apart from other businesses.

Sarah Jo Jones, an ag educator from Carroll County, helped students learn about themselves through the True Colors personality assessment. After being divided into four teams that included at least one member of each personality type, students chose various job positions in a competition to run cooperative feed stores. Adam Shiflett with Farm Credit of the Virginias led students in this Purdue University business management simulation, "Who's Minding the Store?" Aided by adult team leaders, students made difficult marketing and financial decisions. Profit and loss statements generated at the end of each quarter showed how successful they'd been to increase their store's sales and net worth.

After two days of activities, including a memorable address by Delegate Bobby Orrock, students were ranked based on tests and participation. This year's top scorer Rachel Craun of Mt. Crawford, Va. earned a \$2,000 scholarship. Regan Jackson of Boyce earned a \$1,500 scholarship, and following a three-way tie for third place, Katie Powell of Tyro, Aiden Hill of Galax and Nathan Badgley of Blue Ridge each earned \$750 scholarships. This year's top-scoring VICE participants who also earned scholarships to the North Carolina Cooperative Council's Lead-

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Lohr to headline Sept. 29 Co-op Month breakfast



Virginia Agriculture & Forestry
Secretary Matt Lohr

Past VCC board president Matt Lohr, named by Governor Glenn Youngkin in January to serve as Virginia's 5th Secretary of Agriculture & Forestry, will serve as our keynote speaker at the Council's Co-op Month event on Sept. 29.

Lohr previously was appointed by U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue as Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service from 2018-2021. He served as 14th Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services from 2013-2017. He also served as director of Farm Credit of Virginias' Knowledge Center during this time, facilitating the sharing of information and resources to help all farmers.

From 2006-2010, Lohr represented Virginia's 26th District, including Harrisonburg and part of Rockingham County, in the House of Delegates. He earned "Legislator of the Year" awards from the Virginia Economic Development Association and Virginia Career and Technical Education Association. He has received the American Farm Bureau's Excellence in Agriculture Award, as well as numerous farming and environmental stewardship honors.

The Council's Co-op Month event will again be held at The Place in Glen Allen. Nominations for the Council's Cooperative Leadership and Young Cooperator Awards are welcomed through August 30, with forms and more information under the "News" tab at www.virginia.coop. Recipients will be honored following the breakfast.

VICE recap, continued

ership Institute from June 20-24 are Becca Henegar of Delaplane, Courtney Begoon and Kirin Miller of Blue Ridge, Courtney Agee of Buckingham and Alyson Blackburn of Galax, as well as the five scholarship winners.

"We want to increase VICE participation to at least 50 students," said Mary Howell, VCC executive secretary. She added, "We are very grateful to our members who donate \$350 VICE scholarships so that we can continue to offer this event free of charge, as well as our volunteers who contribute their knowledge and talents to serve as adult leaders."

Next year's VICE will be held March 24-26, 2023.



Steve Cooke (at left) and Gerald Anderson discuss food cooperatives as part of the "Welcome to Cooperatives" VICE breakout sessions.

Members in the news

At their Annual Meeting in April, the **Maryland & Virginia Milk Producers Cooperative Association (MDVA)** honored Harvue Farms of Berryville, Va. as 2022 Producer of the Year. The award recognizes co-op members who look beyond quality milk to achieve outstanding farm management, care for the environment, and contributions to the community.

Harvue Farms is owned and operated by the Hardesty family, including David Hardesty, wife Debbie, son Matt and Matt's wife, Ashley. The family raises corn, triticale, rye grass and hay on 750 acres and employ four full-time employees to help milk their 260 registered Holsteins.

"We've been MDVA members since our start in 1950," said David. "Our family farm has grown with this co-op."

The Hardestys adhere to animal care standards well above national guidelines. Cows are tracked meticulously and the herd is known for being older than the national average. A free-stall barn with sprinklers attached to fans and open-barn concept keeps cows cool or warm based on the Virginia weather in any given month. In their community, David and Debbie have been 4-H leaders for more than 25 years and the farm provides a non-ownership leasing program for about 35 county 4-Hers each year who are not able to raise cows on their own property. Ashley served on the Nestle Farmer Led Sustainability Project, while Matt is the familiar face on Maola Milk half-gallon cartons.

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

VICE participants: where are they now?

This column profiles past attendees of the Virginia Institute for Cooperative Education, as well as Scroggs-Raper Scholarship recipients. Please contact VCC if you'd like to suggest someone to feature in an upcoming issue!

Cheyenne Rhodes

Marketing & Sales Specialist, Farm Credit of the Virginias

What did participating in VICE mean to you?

VICE was a leadership conference held in high esteem when I was in FFA. It was a big deal to get to participate, so when it was my turn, I couldn't wait! I knew that Farm Credit was a big supporter of VICE, and even in high school, working at Farm Credit was my goal. VICE was probably one of my first interactions with Farm Credit employees, and I even got to do my cooperative interview with Farm Credit. VICE was a big jump into my future career.




Cheyenne Rhodes,
2010 VICE participant.

Please share your favorite memories.

Would I be a true VICE participant if I didn't say my favorite memory was the food? The Graves Mountain Lodge family and staff do a wonderful job of hosting the event and it definitely is unlike any other leadership type conference I ever attended during my FFA career. VCC and its sponsors do a great job to make this conference unique, hands on, and memorable for all the participants. I couldn't tell you what I learned in my 11th grade biology class, but the skills and knowledge I gained at VICE that same year are still with me.

How did participating in VICE influence your career?

It would be difficult not to give VICE credit for my career path after college, because I've been working for a cooperative since day one! As a student participant, I distinctly remember how challenging the store simulation was, but also how interesting it was and how much I enjoyed it once I figured it out. I appreciate the same challenge and enjoyment that I get out of my career at Farm Credit of the Virginias every day. It's been such a treat for me to come to VICE as an adult leader and help my colleagues lead this portion of the conference. I see the exact same frustration on the students' faces each year, but it is truly rewarding to watch their "lightbulb" moments, too, and listen to them get excited about experiencing the cooperative business model firsthand.

A photo of Cheyenne Rhodes, now an adult, standing and leaning over a table, interacting with a young woman who is sitting and writing in a notebook. They are both wearing name tags.

Cheyenne as a team facilitator
during 2022 VICE.

Executive Secretary's message: Heaven-sent help at VICE

In March, while busy making final preparations for our first in-person VICE since 2019, I received emails from Sarah Jo Jones, an Ag teacher from Carroll County, and Dixie Watts-Dalton, a longtime Council supporter whose new position has enabled her to again help out with VICE. Each offered to contribute her expertise — Sarah Jo with the True Colors personality assessment that Dr. Kim Morgan previously led, and Dixie with a stirring presentation on her life journey and Virginia Tech's Ag Econ program, plus wonderful giveaway items and homemade cookies. I'm also very grateful to Jim Robertson of the VMD Assoc. of Electric Cooperatives, who captured this event in digital format. Visit <https://vmdaec.smugmug.com/VICE-2022/> to see this year's photos.

In addition to our experienced adult helpers, who included Adam Shiflett and Cheyenne Rhodes of Farm Credit of the Virginias, past VICE participants Jessica and Marty Harris and Eric Stogdale of the Massanutten Technical Center, I was impressed by the contributions of newer adult leaders, including Zach Wakeman of Orange Madison Cooperative, Steve Cooke of Friendly City Food Cooperative and Gerald Anderson of Fredericksburg Food Cooperative. Council Secretary Jessica Harris took careful notes on areas for improvement and ideas to improve VICE in coming years. I also appreciated help from our six FFA state officers and all the members of the Graves family who donated their talents to make this year's event, our 31st year at Graves Mountain Lodge, so memorable.

Mark your calendars for next year's VICE, March 24-26, 2023. Applications for students in grades 11 & 12 will be posted on our website by year's end, and due by February 28, 2023. Those who would like to join us and help out are always welcome!

- Mary Howell

Dalton rejoins Virginia Tech staff

Following 10 years at Southside Virginia Community College, where she created and led the college's agribusiness program and served five years as academic dean, Dr. Dixie Watts Dalton has returned to her alma mater, Virginia Tech. Last August, she accepted a position as associate professor in the Department of Agricultural & Applied Economics to create and lead an agribusiness concentration in the Online Masters of Agricultural and Life Sciences (OMALS).

After earning B.S.&M.S. degrees in Agricultural Economics at Tech, Dixie received a Ph.D. in economics from Duke University.

"My dream was to return to Tech to teach. As fortune had it, the Ag Econ Dept. had an opening when I graduated," she explained.

Dixie taught, advised, and conducted extension programs at Tech from 1993-2010, serving as Ag Econ undergraduate program coordinator, developing an internship program with colleague Dr. Charlie Coale, creating the First Year Experience course, and teaching up to seven classes per year. She partnered with VCC to develop a class on co-ops, which gained approval as a University Core Curriculum class, attracting students in every college across the university. The course informed students about this unique form of doing business and provided success stories across many types of co-ops, introducing many Tech students to what would be their only exposure to the agricultural industry.

Dixie's current position is primarily remote, allowing her to work from her family farm in Lunenburg County.



Dr. Dixie Watts-Dalton

Welcome to our newest members!



Page Co-op
Farm Bureau

Luray, VA

www.pageco-op.doitbest.com

Lovettsville Food
Cooperative

Lovettsville, VA



www.lovettsville-grocery.com

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