

# CO-OP CONNECTIONS



Virginia  
Cooperative Council

Quarterly newsletter of the Virginia Cooperative Council

Summer 2022



Cooperative Council of North Carolina leadership camp attendees (from left): Aidan Hill, Mary Howell, Alyson Blackburn, Courtney Agee, Becca Henegar, Katie Powell, Regan Jackson and Adam Shiflett. More than 90 high school students took part in this event, held June 20-24 in Laurel Hill, NC.

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## CCNC camp grows awareness of cooperatives

Six top participants from this year's Virginia Institute for Cooperative Education (VICE) - Courtney Agee, Alyson Blackburn, Becca Henegar, Aidan Hill, Regan Jackson and Katie Powell — traveled to Laurel Hill, North Carolina in late June for a leadership institute sponsored by the Cooperative Council of North Carolina (CCNC). More than 90 students sponsored by co-ops across North Carolina took part in the five-day camp.

"This was our first time joining CCNC, and we looked forward to gaining new ideas from their event," explained Adam Shiflett with Farm Credit of the Virginias, who served as a chaperone along with VCC Executive Secretary Mary Howell. The action-packed agenda divided students into eight teams who each experienced the various steps of forming a t-shirt cooperative, including developing a mission statement, business plan and holding an annual meeting. Underscoring the democratic principles on which all co-ops are founded, attendees voted on each step of the business development process, including a decision on the winning t-shirt design that will be produced and sent to all attendees later this summer.

Each Virginia student was part of a different team, with several serving as team leaders. "I am grateful for the opportunity to network with other teens and made new friends I know I will keep in touch with," said Regan Jackson.

On Wednesday evening, a number of attendees shared their skills in talent show, with Aidan Hill doing a spot-on Forrest Gump impression and the five Virginia girls offering a hilarious demonstration in the art of staring. During the awards gala held on the final evening, Aidan earned the "Handy Smarty" award for his outstanding knowledge and helpfulness throughout the week of camp.

"We are grateful to our members who donate scholarships to help cover the cost of bringing Virginia students to events such as this," said Mary Howell. She added that next year's VICE is scheduled for March 24-26, 2023.

# RSVP by Sept. 21 for Co-op Month awards breakfast



Virginia Secretary of  
Agriculture & Forestry Matt Lohr

The Virginia Cooperative Council is hosting a special program to kick off Co-op Month in October, to be held at The Place in Glen Allen on Sept. 29 from 7:30 - 9 a.m.

"We're thrilled to have Virginia Secretary of Agriculture & Forestry Matt Lohr as our keynote speaker," said VCC President Brad Brown. Lohr previously was appointed by U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue as Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service from 2018-2021. He was 14th Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services from 2013-2017, and he also headed Farm Credit of Virginias' Knowledge Center, sharing information and resources to help 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. Lohr has served on the Virginia Cooperative Council's board of directors and earned the American Farm Bureau's Excellence in Agriculture Award, along with many farming and environmental stewardship honors.

Winners of the Council's Cooperative Leadership and Young Cooperator Awards will also be recognized during this event, which costs \$35 in advance or \$40 at the door. Please RSVP by Sept. 21 via email to Mary Howell, [mary.howell@sscoop.com](mailto:mary.howell@sscoop.com).

## New member profile:

### Lovettsville Cooperative Market

By Julie Harner

Incorporated in 2011, Lovettsville Cooperative Market (LCM) is a for-profit consumer-owned food cooperative. Our mission statement: LCM will offer healthy products in a member-owned grocery store to members and non-members alike. We are committed to policies, practices and values that support a vibrant community, strong local economy, and sustainably produced food.

LCM currently has 819 member-owners, most of whom live in Virginia, with about 100 from Maryland. New members can join through a fully automated membership process at [www.lovettsville-grocery.com/join-us](http://www.lovettsville-grocery.com/join-us).

Our annual meeting is each February (the last two years have been virtual), and includes a chili cook-off, state of the co-op presentation and board member votes.

We've conducted capital campaigns yielding \$1.4 million towards our goal of \$1.6 million, and will launch a third campaign this summer to reach the capital needed to build our 5,100 square foot storefront. We're using a 15-year member loan strategy with interest-only payments through year 10 and interest and 1/5th of principal from years 11-15. These loans pay up to 6% interest with investments under \$100,000. The money we've raised has come from approximately 100 of our member owners. We have also received small donations from our member owners and local organizations, and are working with the Loudoun County economic development team as well as county supervisors applying for available grants.

When open, our store western Loudoun County will be the only cooperative market in Northern Virginia and the



LCM board members/committee leaders, from left: Caroline Ahern (finance), Glenn Willard (policy) Julie Harner (membership), Karen Hignite (treasurer), Gretchen Demmin (producers), Ellis Burruss (building) and John DeSaix (board chair)  
Not pictured: Dennis Fize (producer) & Petrina Dawson (policy)

largest private employer in Lovettsville, contributing more than \$1 million annually in salaries, benefits and payroll taxes. In addition, we will be contributing a projected \$280,000 in revenue to local producers and \$80,000 in member loan interest, as well as \$37,000 in county and \$12,000 in town taxes.

We finally broke ground in March of 2022 and were hoping to be open for business by the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter 2023. However, we are currently battling supply chain delays on refrigeration and steel shelving, which have pushed back our opening date. Costs to furnish the store, including refrigeration and display cases, have also skyrocketed. However, our all-volunteer board of directors includes members with diverse business expertise, and we are committed to succeed!



# 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!*

## Beth Breeding VP of Communications & Marketing, National Turkey Federation

### What did participating in VICE mean to you?

I had the opportunity to participate back in 2004. Though nearly two decades have passed, this was an extremely impactful experience! I grew up in Fort Defiance, a rural community in Augusta County, where cooperatives have always played a major role in delivering essential services both at home and on the farm. Taking part in this event helped me put it all they do together!

### What is a favorite memory?

Being at Graves Mountain Lodge (so beautiful!) and meeting young people from across the state with similar interests.

### How did participating in VICE influence your career?

The National Turkey Federation represents the entire U.S. turkey industry - farmers, processors and the many allied industries supporting turkey production. In my role as Vice President of Communications & Marketing, I serve as spokesperson for the industry and help advocate for our members in Washington. One of my responsibilities is also working to raise consumer awareness of turkey products. They are not just for Thanksgiving! Because I get to work with a number of farmer-owned cooperatives in my career, my VICE experience has given me valuable background knowledge needed to understand the cooperative business model.



Beth Breeding, 2004 VICE participant.

## Executive Secretary's message: Spreading the co-op spirit in NC

After two years of not being able to take part in a summer co-op leadership camp due to pandemic limitations, the Virginia Cooperative Council was exciting to bring six of our top VICE participants to the Cooperative Council of North Carolina's leadership camp in June. The central premise of this five-day camp is to understand how co-ops differ from other businesses by going through the steps to build a t-shirt cooperative.

Adam Shiflett brought four students from northern and southwestern Virginia, while I drove our two students from Central Virginia. All of them are active in FFA and were planning to go to Virginia State Convention the following week, so we hoped this event would further grow their skills. Our students did not disappoint! Shortly after arrival, everyone divided into teams that each began the work of building their T-shirt cooperative. Periodic votes were used to decide which team's approach would carry forward. I was proud to watch all of the Virginia students share great ideas, with several also serving as their team's spokesperson.

The weather was unrelentingly hot, and meals left a little to be desired, so I volunteered to serve as adult leader for the team running the camp store. Our team manager set up a spreadsheet to ensure fair distribution of snacks during the break periods, and I made a run into town to add Gatorade, lemonade and a some other requested snacks to our store selection. We had totally sold out of everything by Friday morning! Visit <https://photos.app.goo.gl/QUtFUBJYEYkYhXvN9> for event photos.

- Mary Howell



Aidan Hill shares his team's business plan.

## Members in the news

**AgChoice Farm Credit** and **MidAtlantic Farm Credit** have merged to form **Horizon Farm Credit**, effective July 1, 2022. The merger was approved by each's membership in May, with final regulatory approval by the Farm Credit Administration. Horizon Farm Credit serves 100 counties in Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia, with 25 offices across its five-state footprint and more than 20,000 member-borrowers. Horizon Farm Credit's new CEO Tom Truitt said, "The merger strengthens our commitment to agriculture and our rural communities," adding, "our name is significant as we look ahead to the future of our industry with optimism, where innovation meets tradition, to help champion the dreams of our members." For more information, visit [horizonfc.com](http://horizonfc.com).

**The Maryland & Virginia Milk Producers Cooperative Association** earned the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy's 2022 Sustainability Award for Outstanding Community Impact. MDVA's sustainability work is funded through outside grants and donations, not member fees, and their nomination centered around three clean water partnership programs: Maola Clean Water Partnership, the Giant Clean Water Partnership, and the Turkey Hill Clean Water Partnership. "Our co-op looks for opportunities to strengthen the ties between our members and their neighbors through environmental stewardship, philanthropy and positive connections," said CEO Jay Bryant.



In June, **Rockingham Cooperative** announced a \$17 million investment to expand their Dayton feed mill. The investment is supplemented by a \$100,000 grant from the Governor's Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development (AFID) Fund, which Rockingham County will match. The project includes land acquisition, new warehouse space, upgraded ingredient bins, and installation of a solar energy system which will provide up to 90% of the electricity needed for the feed mill operation in addition to other upgrades.

More than 160 utility line workers, many from Virginia's electric cooperatives, gathered May 13-14 in Doswell for the Gaff-n-Go Rodeo. Coordinated by the **Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives**, this event has become one of the largest utility line worker rodeos in the country.

**Rappahannock Electric Cooperative** held its annual "Get Connected" member appreciation night June 2 at Louisa County High School. This evening of fun, food and fellowship gives members a chance to learn about their co-op and the services it provides. The event rotates to a different part of REC's 22-county service area each year, so all members have a chance to meet employees and the co-op's leadership team in person.

Have news from your co-op? Email [mary.howell@sscoop.com](mailto:mary.howell@sscoop.com).

### Virginia Cooperative Council

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