

CO-OP CONNECTIONS



Virginia
Cooperative Council

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

Winter 2023

VDACS Commissioner Guthrie to speak at Council's Annual Meeting

The Virginia Cooperative Council will meet at Rockingham Cooperative's main office in Dayton for our 61st Annual Meeting on Thursday, March 2.

All members and their guests are invited to attend, with refreshments available at 9 a.m. and the meeting getting underway at 9:15 a.m. Afterwards, Friendly City Cooperative at 150 E. Wolfe Street in Harrisonburg, located a four-mile drive down the road, is hosting an optional tour and lunch for up to 30 participants, with a separate RSVP required.

Our keynote speaker will be Joe Guthrie, Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services. After graduating from Virginia Tech with a Bachelor's in Agricultural Economics, he earned a Master's in Agricultural Economics & International Trade from Massey University in New Zealand, where he studied as a Fulbright Scholar.

Before his current appointment, Commissioner Guthrie served 15 years on the faculty of the College of Agriculture & Life Sciences at Virginia Tech. Having grown up on a beef cattle and dairy farm in Pulaski, he also built a highly successful and environmentally sustainable farm business. He has always been active in agricultural organizations, serving as President of both the Pulaski County Farm Bureau and Virginia Cattlemen's Association earlier in his career. His community service includes 10 years as an elected official; four on the Pulaski County School Board and six on the Pulaski County board of supervisors, including the final two as Chair.

During the business portion of the meeting, attendees will be asked to vote on four board positions, with the following members nominated as candidates for re-election:

Laura Jackson of the Maryland & Virginia Milk Producers Cooperative Association, representing marketing cooperatives;

Mike Cannon of Culpeper Farm & Home Cooperative, representing purchasing cooperatives;

Gerald Anderson of Fredericksburg Food Cooperative, representing cooperatives at large;

Adam Shiflett of Farm Credit of the Virginias, as a public director.

In addition, James W. "Lucky" Graves, Jr. has been named an honorary director, taking the position held by his father, Council Award recipient Jimmy Graves, for more than five decades.

Please RSVP by **Feb. 27, 2023** via email to mary.howell@sscoop.com or by calling (804) 281-1211. We look forward to seeing you there!



Joe Guthrie, Commissioner of the Virginia Dept. of Agriculture & Consumer Services.

In This Issue

- Profile of Page Cooperative Farm Bureau by Alex White
- Virginia Institute on Cooperative Education to be held March 24-26 at Graves Mountain Lodge; applications due Feb. 15
- Scroggs-Raper Scholarship alumni profiles: Aldyn Abell
- Scroggs-Raper Scholarship applications due Feb. 24
- Mark your calendars for our Co-op Month Expo, to be held Oct. 4-5 at the Olde Dominion Agricultural Center near Chatham

New Member Profile: Page Cooperative Farm Bureau

Page Cooperative Farm Bureau's slogan, "Helping our Community Grow," has defined their mission since being founded in 1921 as one of Virginia's first coops. According to Manager Darrell Hulver, this purchasing cooperative serves as a bridge between rural Page County's businesses and farmers. For decades, their large storefront in Luray has been a convenient source of lumber, construction supplies, and hundreds of items in between.

The latter is an understatement, with this co-op billing itself as the place to find, "Everything for the home and farm." Current offerings span paint, appliances, lawn & garden supplies, feed, livestock health, pet supplies and much more. That inventory is bolstered by hands-on services that can only be found in this old-fashioned environment where "everybody knows your name."

In no particular order, co-op services include cutting items to order (wire, hardware cloth, PVC pipe, rebar steel and glass), selling other items by the pound, and even weighing bulk items such as garden seeds out to the exact specifications of customers.

Shoppers can enjoy mom-and-pop food offerings (and tasty country candy) while a hard-working team members helps you to find what you need.

Whether you are taking advantage of grain from local farmers or an inventory that can hold its own against any chain, it is no wonder that an establishment like this continues to compete in the age of big-box stores. The co-op attributes this to their farmer-driven cooperative model and the fact that they offer a personable experience in a world that draws from small-town roots.

That is a long way from the "train cars, loads of salt, wheat middlings and seed" that were among the co-op's original purchases after local farmers banded together in the early 1920s. They knew the cooperative business



Located at 127 Big Oak Rd, Page Cooperative's impressive retail store greets those entering the Town of Luray from the west on Rt 211.

model could boost their purchasing power, and Page Cooperative continues to offer superior service to its member farmers and businesses, as well as a great work environment for more than 30 employees.

The co-op's mark on Page County is easily discernible; working there has been a first job for many young people in the community, a state-of-the-art retail store welcomes visitors off Route 211, and its original mill location is now home to a collective small business incubator. The co-op is also a key supporter of institutions like 4-H, FFA, the Page County fair, and the Page County Technical Center.

Skipped by the dedicated Darrell Hulver and affable Brian Lillard, this organization can look forward to many more years of epitomizing "the cooperative way." Page Cooperative Farm Bureau is the perfect example of what can happen when rural people come together to make a difference. We are all the better for their work "helping our community grow"!

-Contributed by Page County native Alex White, a senior at Harvard University who earned the Council's Young Cooperator Award in 2021.

Executive Secretary's Message

As I write this, our planning committee is busily preparing to host our three-day Virginia Institute on Cooperative Education (VICE) from March 24-26 at Graves Mountain Lodge. We are grateful to the many members who donated \$350 VICE scholarships as part of this year's membership renewal, helping us offer this event to students from across Virginia free of charge. We could not host VICE without the combined efforts of nearly 20 volunteers, including Council board members and Virginia Agricultural educators. We'll include a full recap of this year's event in the next issue!

The Virginia Foundation of Cooperation is again offering Scroggs-Raper Scholarships to students at Virginia's two land-grant colleges, Virginia Tech and Virginia State, as well as those at community colleges studying agriculture and/or forestry. This year's 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

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 would like to nominate someone we can feature in an upcoming issue!

Aldyn Abell Denton, Government Affairs Manager, CoBank

Please share your educational background. A native of the Northern Neck, my passion for agriculture was sparked at age six through involvement in my local 4-H livestock program, where I grew up raising market lambs. I earned my Associate of Arts & Sciences from Rappahannock Community College through dual-enrollment in high school. I graduated from Virginia Tech in 2016 with a B.S. in Agribusiness Management and minors in Political Science, Animal Science and Leadership and Social Change. I also hold a Masters in Public Administration from Virginia Tech's Center for Public Administration and Policy.

Tell us about your career. As an undergraduate, exposure to agricultural policy in my classes helped me recognize my passion for government relations. Following graduation, I briefly interned on Capitol Hill before being hired by the American Farm Bureau Federation in Washington, D.C. for their Young Farmers & Ranchers Program. My passion for policy work and representing the interests of farmers and ranchers led me to join CoBank, where I currently serve as the Senior Manager of Government Affairs. CoBank provides loans, leases, export financing, and other financial services to agribusinesses and rural power, water and communications providers in all 50 states. I support lobbying, industry relations, grassroots advocacy activities and Political Action Committee engagement on behalf of CoBank and the Farm Credit System in Washington, D.C. The agriculture community in Washington works together very closely. Every day I get to work with people just like me from their own rural areas across the country, advocating on behalf of an industry we are all passionate about.



Aldyn Abell Denton, VICE graduate & 2014/15 Scroggs-Raper recipient

How did your college experience prepare you? I am thankful for my mentors and professors that provided countless hours of guidance to help me navigate educational and professional opportunities over the past decade. Their commitment and investment into my future truly equipped me with the experiences and skills needed to be successful. The classes, clubs and extra-curricular activities provided by Virginia Tech, the College of Agriculture & Life Sciences and the Department of Agricultural & Applied Economics were incredibly impactful on my decision to become involved in agricultural advocacy. As an undergraduate, I was fortunate to receive a Scroggs-Raper Scholarship for two consecutive years, enabling me to complete my undergraduate education without the financial stress of having to work or take out student loans to pay tuition. As a result, I was able to stay heavily involved in a variety of organizations on campus during my undergraduate career including: Pi Beta Phi Sorority, Block and Bridle, Ag Econ Club, Kohl Agribusiness Centre and the National Agri-Marketing Association competition team. Each summer, I completed an internship that allowed me to apply what I learned during the academic year to gain real-world experience in the industry. These internships included working for the King George Farmers Market, Virginia Cooperative Extension in Orange and Fairfax Counties, Virginia Cattlemen's Association, Virginia Tech Alumni Association and in the office of Congressman Bob Goodlatte.

What advice do you have for other agriculture students? We always say "It's a small world," and in the agriculture community, this is certainly true. I would offer three pieces of advice to students looking to get started in the industry:

1. Find role models and mentors in the industry with your major or in the career path you want to pursue. Develop a relationship with them and ask them to mentor you. The Virginia Tech and agriculture community in general are very welcoming and always willing to help young professionals in the industry.
2. Take advantage of every opportunity offered to you. You never know what passion you might identify in those experiences or who you might meet, developing a sincere and friendly connection.
3. Ask questions. Don't be afraid to speak up in class, ask for advice from peers and mentors or request a meeting with an industry professional for a conversation about job or internship opportunities.

VCC supports Young Farmers of Virginia

Young Farmers of Virginia held their 71st annual convention at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds on Jan. 28-29. For many years, the Virginia Cooperative Council has supported the Young Farmer awards program, and congratulates this year's winner, Josh Pettit of Broadway, Va.

This organization's mission is to continue agriculture education in the post-high school years, 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 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.

Virginia Cooperative Council

P.O. Box 25202

Richmond, VA 23260

How to Contact Us:

Virginia Cooperative Council

804.281.1211 www.virginia.coop