

# CO-OP CONNECTIONS



Virginia  
Cooperative Council

Quarterly newsletter of the Virginia Cooperative Council

Summer 2023



Georgia Cooperative Council leadership camp attendees (back row, from left): Mary Howell, Skyler Weaver, Cole Knicely, Bruce Jones and Adam Shiflett. Front row, from left: Ruth Haile, Alana Henegar, Hailey Lusk and Rachel Haile. Nearly 40 students took part in this event, held July 17-21 in Covington, Ga.

## Mark your calendars!

- Oct. 4 Co-op Expo for grades 6-12 at the Olde Dominion Agricultural Complex in Chatham
- Oct. 5 Co-op Month breakfast featuring MEC CEO John C. Lee, Jr.
- March 7, 2024 Annual Meeting at the Louisa Generation Facility in Gordonsville
- March 22-24, 2024 Virginia Institute on Cooperative Education at Graves Mtn. Lodge

## GA camp develops future leaders

Seven top participants from this year's Virginia Institute on Cooperative Education (VICE) - Ruth & Rachel Haile, Alana Henegar, Bruce Jones, Cole Knicely, Hailey Lusk and Skyler Weaver — traveled to the Georgia FFA Center in Covington for the Georgia Cooperative Council's leadership camp in mid-July. Forty students sponsored by various co-ops took part in the five-day camp, which included team-building activities and a wide variety of presenters.

"The Georgia FFA/FCCLA Center provides a great setting," said Adam Shiflett with Farm Credit of the Virginias, who served as a chaperone along with VCC Executive Secretary Mary Howell. The action-packed agenda included field trips and plenty of time outdoors where participants could scale a climbing wall, negotiate a high rope and zoom down a zipline, as well as race through a mud run that developed camaraderie and team spirit. Each team created a cooperative business of their choice at that start of the week, and were able to update their business plan as their understanding of co-ops grew before making a final presentation. Click [HERE](#) for event photos.

"We are grateful to our members who donate scholarships that help cover the cost to give Virginia students this invaluable experience," said Mary Howell.

## VDOE seeks curriculum input

The Virginia Dept. of Education is hosting six curriculum development workshops on agriculture-related topics from October 2023 through April 2024.

"To increase awareness of the role co-ops play in each of these areas, we encourage Council members to send representatives, especially for cybersecurity in food and agriculture" said LaVeta Nutter, Ag Education Specialist at VDOE. For details, email [laveta.nutter@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:laveta.nutter@doe.virginia.gov).

# Meet our 2023 Scroggs-Raper Scholarship recipients

Generous donations by Luther Raper and Claude Scroggs established the Scroggs-Raper Scholarships, which have been awarded since 2013 to students at Virginia's land grant universities and colleges studying topics related to agriculture. This year's 12 recipients include seven enrolled at Virginia Tech, one attending Virginia State University and four at Virginia Western Community College.

**Jaiden Cain** grew up near Harrington, Del., and is a senior at Virginia Tech. While a communications intern at Supporters of Agricultural Research (SoAR), she was part of winning FFA teams in agricultural communications and marketing. A member of Tech's Dairy Club, she enjoys volunteering at events to educate others about agriculture and dairy farming. "Co-ops keep the balance between producers and consumer, allowing both to benefit from the exchange," she writes, adding, "My goal is to help alter the public's incomplete understanding of agriculture and for more people to understand its key role in everyday life," she writes. After graduation, Jaiden plans to help on her family's grain farm and pursue a career in ag marketing/communications.



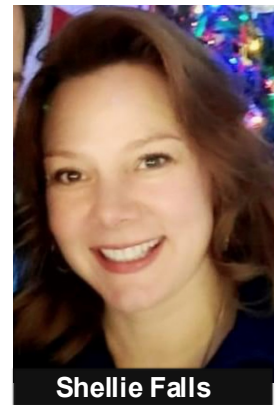
Jaiden Cain



Abigail Clark

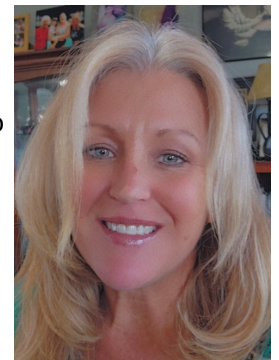
**Abigail Clark** of Boone's Mill, Va., is earning her associate's degree in agricultural science from Virginia Western Community College (VWCC). She plans to work as a licensed veterinary technician while taking classes to prepare for Blue Ridge Community College's pre-veterinary program. She volunteers at the Franklin County Humane Society and works at Noah's Ark animal complex. "Co-ops encourage local farming and businesses, and create equity throughout our communities," she writes.

**Shellie Falls** of Roanoke is also pursuing an associates' degree in agricultural science from VWCC. "I am a former optician who enjoyed helping people change career paths to the hospitality industry," she says. When her business was shut down during the COVID pandemic, Shellie participated in Roanoke Food Cooperative's program to match food assistance funds to be able to afford quality organic fruits and vegetables for her family. After graduation, she plans to combine her agriculture skills and love of bringing people joy to create gardenscapes for visitors to enjoy at theme parks, state fairs and other tourist attractions.



Shellie Falls

Our third recipient attending VWCC, **Eve Green** of Roanoke explains, "I've been at my current job 25 years and am currently office manager. At almost age 50, I decided on a career change. My initial goal was zoology, but I've since become more interested in agriculture and forestry." Eve fosters and trains rescue dogs and enjoys doing "anything that gets me outdoors!"



Eve Green



Lorien Griffith

**Lorien Griffith** of Blue Ridge, Va., writes that she was home-schooled, with part of her education provided by local education co-ops. After she completes her studies in agriculture at VWCC, she plans to start a small sustainable farm to provide food for her family and community. "I have a passion for agriculture and education and may even start my own co-op to help more people learn about farming!"

**Grayson Haskins** is a sophomore at Virginia Tech's College of Agriculture & Life Sciences. A member of VT's Dairy Club, as part of Virginia Farm Credit Dairy Days at the 2022 State Fair, he helped provide 850 fresh milkshakes to attendees while sharing the role of cooperatives in the "Milk for Good" program. He learned about the Virginia State Dairywomen's Association while doing project research for his Entrepreneurship in Agriculture class. "I plan to major in agribusiness management with a minor in dairy science," he writes, adding that his participation in team sports helps him learn how to manage disappointment and uncertainty, while developing resilience & mental toughness.



Grayson Haskins



# Scroggs-Raper scholarship recipients, continued

Starting her sophomore year at Virginia Tech, **Brooke Hodges** plans to major in agribusiness. She actively volunteers in her hometown of Bedford while working at Huddle House to help cover tuition costs. “My local Farm Credit donated funds twice to help me raise a market lamb to show,” she writes, adding that her plans are to either become an extension agent so that she can give back to her community or work for a farm credit or farm bureau.



**Brooke Hodges**



**Kinley Kellum**

**Kinley Kellum** is a Virginia Tech junior majoring in agribusiness with a minor in crop & environmental science. She worked as the greenhouse manager at Dreaming Tree Farms in Aylett and after graduation, plans to pursue a career as a crop consultant in the Southern States Cooperative agronomy sector. “In my hometown, both Farm Bureau and Southern States have a huge impact on the people and life around us, and I am looking forward to helping ensure the highest possible yield of crops in once I complete my education.”

**Julie Kessler** is a junior in Virginia Tech’s Agricultural Technology Program majoring in landscape & turf management. Active in VT’s Turfgrass Club, she’s been a crew member for VT Athletics’ grounds crew and Blacksburg Country Club. Noting that Virginia Cooperative Extension offers certified fertilizer and pesticide applicators training that are also part of her education, she writes, “I hope to one day own my own business or serve as head groundskeeper of a professional football or soccer field.”



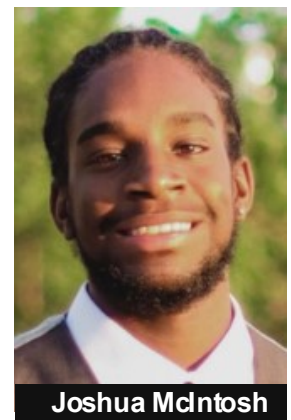
**Julie Kessler**



**Jake Littlefield**

**Jake Littlefield** recently transferred to Virginia Tech after completing studies at Northern Virginia Community College, where he was president of NOVA’s Green Club and took part in environmental engineering events. “As an environmental economics major, I look forward to working with the Virginia Cooperative Extension service as well as with organizations supporting the future of Virginia communities!”

**Joshua McIntosh** is a junior at Virginia State University majoring in agriculture with a concentration in business. Active in VSU’s entrepreneurship club as well as JROTC and track and field, he has helped introduce younger generations to 4-H programs as well as install an irrigation system in a 30-acre field. “After college, I want to make a genuine difference by building a business that will give low-income communities access to better food choices.”



**Joshua McIntosh**



**Gabriel Wiggins**

A junior at Virginia Tech studying environmental economics, management and policy, **Gabriel Wiggins** serves as a teaching assistant for the Ag Econ Dept.’s Foundations of Agribusiness class while also working in various sales and food service jobs. He hopes to graduate in five years with a masters in applied economics. “My minor is water in society, but I haven’t yet discovered my specific job. My deep love of rivers in the environment makes me want to use my knowledge and skills to help communities with water-use issues.”

*Applications for 2024 Scroggs-Raper Scholarships will be posted at [www.Virginia.coop](http://www.Virginia.coop) by December 15, 2023 and are due by February 23, 2024.*

# Executive Secretary's Message: Celebrate Co-op Month by supporting our Co-op Expo!

Not long after Dustin Francis of Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative took over as chair of our Co-op Month Committee, he suggested we hold an event at the Olde Dominion Agricultural Complex (ODAC) on Route 29 in Pittsylvania County. Not only would having our annual Co-op Month breakfast in Southside Virginia encourage more members from this area of the Commonwealth to attend, but using ODAC as the meeting site would provide a convenient location to offer a free educational opportunity for students to learn about cooperatives while promoting the Virginia Institute on Cooperative Education — and planting the seeds for possible future cooperative careers.

Thus our first-ever Co-op Expo has been launched! More than a dozen Council members, including Augusta Cooperative, Colonial Farm Credit, Farm Credit of the Virginias, Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative, Old Dominion Electric Cooperative, Rockingham Cooperative, Southern States Cooperative, Southside Electric Cooperative and the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives, as well as several local agriculture-related businesses, have signed up to participate.

We're marketing the Expo to area schools, explaining that this event has been designed for students in grades 6-12, and that groups can swing by anytime from 10 a.m. until mid-afternoon to visit the booths, receive giveaway items and have a chance to win some great door prizes.

All educators who RSVP for their school group by Sept. 5 will enjoy a free hot lunch from our food truck as well as plenty of snacks.

We also encourage members to RSVP for our Co-op Month breakfast by Sept. 20 via email to [mary.howell@sscoop.com](mailto:mary.howell@sscoop.com). Anyone needing overnight lodging can take advantage of the Council's discount at the Hampton Inn Gretna. Room reservations should be made by Sept. 4 by calling (434) 656-9000. We look forward to seeing you there!

- Mary Howell



**Virginia Cooperative Council**  
P.O. Box 25202  
Richmond, VA 23260

## How to Contact Us:

Virginia Cooperative Council  
[www.virginia.coop](http://www.virginia.coop)  
[mary.howell@sscoop.com](mailto:mary.howell@sscoop.com)

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