

CO-OP CONNECTIONS



Virginia
Cooperative Council

Newsletter of the Virginia Cooperative Council - "Achieving together what one cannot do alone"

Fall 2024

Trio of co-op leaders recognized with awards

Jay Bryant and Richard Johnstone, longtime CEOs of the MDVA Milk Producers' Cooperative and the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives, respectively, earned Career Cooperative Leadership Awards Oct. 1 at the Virginia Cooperative Council's Co-op Month breakfast. Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative (SVEC) hosted this event at its headquarters in Rockingham, Va. Morgan Slaven, who serves as manager of governance and executive affairs for SVEC, earned the Young Cooperator Award.

Bryant recently retired after 21 years spent helping his cooperative evolve and prosper through a successful merger, while representing fellow milk producers at the national level.

"My cooperative has directly benefited from Jay's visionary leadership and influence on the board of the National Milk Producers Federation and the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy," wrote Joanna Shipp, chair of the national dairy promotion and research board, in her letter of support.

Johnstone's 36 years of service to cooperatives included 22 years as leader of the three-state electric cooperative association during a time of tremendous growth and change, and 18 years on the Virginia Cooperative Council. In the first of two terms as Council president, he led renaming of the Virginia Council of Farmer Cooperatives to a name that more fully reflects membership. Johnstone also served on the search committee for four Council executives, including current Executive Secretary Mary Howell.

Addressing members, Howell quoted pro basketball player-turned-politician Bill Bradley, who wrote, "Great leadership is unlocking people's potential to do better." She continued, "Richard exemplifies this trait, not only accomplishing a tremendous amount during his long



From left: Jay Bryant of MDVA Milk Producers' Cooperative, Morgan Slaven of Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative and Richard Johnstone of the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives with their Council Awards, presented at the Co-op Month Breakfast on Oct. 1.

career, but also motivating so many others to excel, creating a legacy that echoes into the future for lives made better."

Slaven started her career with the American Farm Bureau, working with its young farmer and rancher and women's programs. She next served as fundraising and grassroots specialist for Virginia Agriculture in the Classroom. Joining SVEC as manager of public affairs, she excelled in internal and external communication strategies, lobbying efforts and board activities. Slaven was twice promoted before accepting her current position.

Paying tribute to his friend and colleague, Dustin Francis of

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Mark your calendars!

- ◆ Feb. 14, 2025: Applications due for the Virginia Institute on Cooperative Education, open to students ages 16-18
- ◆ Feb. 22, 2025: Scroggs-Raper college scholarship applications due
- ◆ March 6, 2025: Annual Meeting at Virginia Farm Bureau headquarters in Richmond
- ◆ March 21-23, 2025: Virginia Institute on Cooperative Education at Graves Mountain Lodge

Panel of new VA co-ops echoes Co-op Month theme

“The Future is Cooperative,” this year’s Co-op Month theme, was reflected at the Oct. 1 Co-op Month Breakfast as Council members heard from representatives of four new Virginia cooperatives.

Attorney Sam Gray moderated a panel discussion with Julie Harner of Lovettsville Cooperative Market, Gerald Anderson of Fredericksburg Food Cooperative, Alex Burgard of Mindful Maker Co (no period!) and Tony Banks of the Central Virginia Poultry Federation. With speaker bios provided in advance to free up time for discussion, Gray asked questions that kept the conversation dynamic, focusing on each co-op’s unique story.

Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative (SVEC) hosted this event at its Rockingham, Va. headquarters. SVEC staff provided support for Dr. Dixie Watts-Dalton of Virginia Tech to share access via Zoom to more than 70 students in her virtual class on cooperatives.



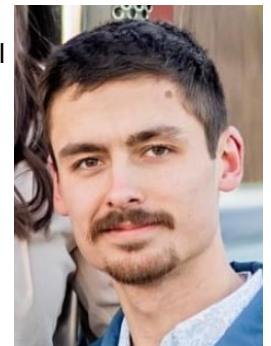
Julie Harner of Lovettsville Cooperative Market shared her co-op’s story in a panel moderated by attorney Sam Gray. Gerald Anderson of Fredericksburg Food Cooperative, Alex Burgard of Mindful Maker Co and Tony Banks of the Central Virginia Poultry Federation also discussed their co-ops’ origins and goals. To see Jim Robertson’s event photos, including the awards presentation, visit <https://vmdaec.s mugmug.com/2024-VCC-Breakfast>

Meet our 2024 Scroggs-Raper Scholarship recipients

A record number of students applied for Scroggs-Raper Scholarships, awarded since 2013 to students at land grant universities and community colleges studying agriculture-related topics. This year’s 16 recipients include 14 at Virginia Tech, one from Virginia State University and one from Southside Virginia Community College. Profiles of the six recipients not profiled in our previous issue follow.

Starting his final year at Virginia Tech, **Austin Funk** is a former Eagle Scout majoring in agribusiness. He holds a commercial driver’s license, which he uses to work for JKC Transport, R. Michael Trucking and Poor Man’s Poultry. After interning at Round Hill Farms, Funk is also has been a Virginia Tech Poultry Farm employee. His family owns a refrigerated carrier company that has hauled store-ready poultry and dairy products for more than 25 years.

“Once I graduate next May, my plan is to help run my parent’s trucking company, with the goal of diversifying our operations into other areas, such as grain and commodity services.”



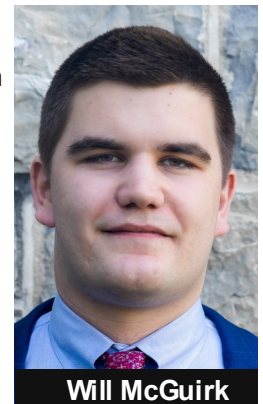
Austin Funk



Jake Littlefield is an environmental economics major who transferred from Northern Virginia Community College to Virginia Tech. After serving as president of NVCC’s NOVA Green Club, he spent last summer in Australia as part of VT’s Hokies Abroad program. His volunteer work includes NOVA Waste Collection and Virginia Cooperative Extension Service’s tree planting as part of the Climate Reality Project.

“My major developed my analytical and business development skills, building on my foundation in physics so I could lead business processes of student-run organizations like Solar Car,” he explains. “I enjoy working with a diverse team of engineers, designers and entrepreneurs. After college, I plan to gain hands-on experience before starting my own business in the energy sector.”

After earning his B.S. in agribusiness, **Will McGuirk** plans to continue at Virginia Tech to pursue a masters in applied economics. He serves as a teaching assistant for macroeconomics classes and is a leader in Tech’s Commodity Investing for Students, Ag Econ and Forestry clubs. Back home in Bel Air, Md., he’s helped managed a staff of 15 for McGuirk Brothers, the family’s farm operations business.



Will McGuirk

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2024 Scroggs-Raper Scholarship recipients, continued

McGuirk explains, “I plan to pursue a career in commodity trading and hedging that will help mitigate risk for farmers and end users,” he explains, adding that he also wants to continue the legacy of his family’s farm. “With my passion for agriculture, my goal is to help the American farmer adapt to evolving world markets.”



Growing up on her family’s grain and cattle farm in King William County, **Ashley Upshaw** was active in volunteer work for Colosse Baptist Church and held part-time jobs for Stonehouse Stables and Clearview Alpaca Farm. This Virginia Tech senior currently belongs to Virginia Tech’s Block & Bridle Club, Beef Leadership Club and the local chapter of Ducks Unlimited. While at Tech she works in Large Animal Husbandry at the Vet School.

“My father and grandfather were both foresters and my mother is an agricultural lender,” says Upshaw. “I plan to major in Agribusiness Management and Equine Science, then seek a management position at a ranch or in agricultural lending to gain experience to one day expand my family’s farm operations.”



Jack Wilson is a senior at Virginia Tech, majoring in environmental economics, management and policy. He is deeply involved in Virginia Tech COINS (Commodity Investing by Students), the nation’s only student-run investing organization.

“Post-graduation, my ambition is to delve into the commodity trading field. Beyond numbers, I thrive on interpersonal connections, relishing opportunities to collaborate and lead,” he writes. Looking ahead, my affinity for animals and nature fuels my desire to contribute to environmental stewardship. My ultimate aspiration is to establish and manage a farm alongside friends, cultivating a sustainable and fulfilling livelihood.”



Also in her final year at Virginia Tech, **Miru Yim** is majoring in food and health systems economics. Concerned about global food security, she was team lead for Service Abroad South Africa 2024, and works as a research assistant, website developer and project manager for the mung bean service project to benefit Senegal, Africa. She also managed sales and e-commerce for Nona Lim foods, expanding her background in natural foods sales and marketing.

“My academic journey has sparked a desire to go into the global commodity value chain market, with a specific focus on improving the livelihoods of smallholder farmers and various stakeholders within these value chains using innovative technology to facilitate and upscale agricultural practices.” Yim continues, “One of my primary academic motivations is to gain a global perspective on complex cultural and economic issues in which innovative solutions can bridge the intersections of policy, economics, and agriculture. My goal is to create partnerships between the public and private sectors while honoring food sovereignties, helping smallholder farmers thrive in an increasingly digital and interconnected world.”

Executive Secretary’s message: Funding the Future

American venture capitalist John Doerr once wrote, “If you can’t invent the future, the next best thing is to fund it.” In my six years with the Council, we’ve sought to provide a quality educational experience for the 40-50 students who attend the Virginia Institute on Cooperative Education (VICE) each year, plus top performers invited to Georgia’s co-op conference.

As the chart on the back page shows, nearly half of our \$62,000 annual budget is used for youth education. We depend on many members who include one or more \$350 VICE scholarships with their annual dues, and are excited that the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives has pledged up to \$5,000 annually to support VICE attendees from Virginia member cooperatives. In the six decades since the Council began its work, an estimated 3,000 students have gained understanding of the cooperative business model. And since its founding in 2013, we’ve awarded \$208,000 to nearly 80 college and community college students as part of our Scroggs-Raper scholarship endowment.

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Council awards, continued

Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative noted that Slaven had recently prevailed over other applicants to earn the 2024 Virginia Farm Bureau Federation's Young Farmers Excellence in Agriculture Award.

"Today's recognition ties in perfectly to her Excellence in Agriculture Award," he began. "In Morgan's presentation to award judges, she highlighted three key issues the ag industry must address in the next five years. One of which is fighting a mental health stigma within the agriculture community." Putting the seventh cooperative principle of Concern for Community into action, Slaven oversaw an open and fair election process for those who represent SVEC's 80,000 members and initiated a program that helps with employees' financial well-being.

Slaven's award carries a \$500 stipend, which she has donated to the Virginia FFA Foundation. Its board is considering how to assist FFA members in areas of Southwest Virginia impacted by Hurricane Helene and subsequent flooding, and this unrestricted donation may help.

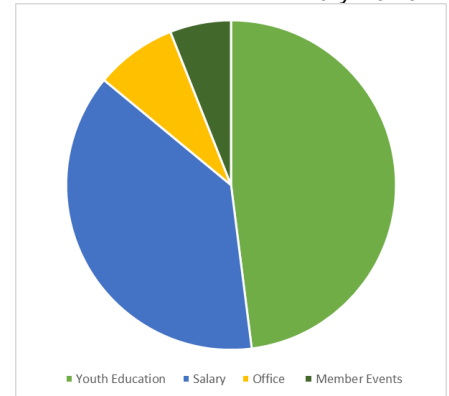
If you know someone deserving of recognition and wish to nominate them for a 2025 Council Award, please email Mary Howell at mary.howell@sscoop.com.

Executive Secretary's message, continued

Following this year's Co-op Month theme, "The Future is Cooperative," members can be proud that their ongoing support helps fund increased awareness of cooperatives among Virginians. We've planted seeds that will grow to guide future decisions and prove how cooperatives can play a key role in a sustainable and mutually beneficial future. As you receive your membership renewal notices for 2025, thank you for providing support to continue the Council's mission of co-op education and awareness.

- Mary Howell

Major categories in the 2025 Virginia Cooperative Council budget:
Youth Education (light green)
Staff Salary (blue), Office Expenses (yellow; includes tax preparation and insurance) and Member Events (dark green).



Virginia Cooperative Council

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