

VOL. 1 ISSUE 1: DECEMBER 2022

STATE FAIR OF VIRGINIA: GENERAL AG & ED PROGRAMMING

Changing the Dialogue for Agriculture & Natural Resources
Starts at the State Fair



Maximizing the Educational Value

Natural Resources partners moved from their former Dominion Classroom location into the interior of the Farm Bureau Center for the 2021 fair. The move required flexibility and logistical maneuvering but achieved a key goal of significantly increasing the foot traffic for our partners!

In a survey sent out to all teachers participating in our Ed Expo Field Trips after the 2021 fair, 73.3% said they would be interested in signing up for 20–30-minute sit-down lessons with educational partners. During the 2022 State Fair, SFVA worked with Natural Resources to introduce new interactive classrooms for groups to maximize their educational experience.

Despite communication on this opportunity being limited, we hosted **seven** successful classrooms during the school week, including ones for the general public on Friday, Sept. 30, due to school groups having to cancel because of the weather. Topics included careers and STEM in Natural Resources with VT, Soil and Water in Virginia with SWCD, Turtle Troubles with DWR and Fish Ageing and Horseshow Crabs with VMRC.

Additional Natural Resources agencies joined us on Saturday, Oct. 1st for the first Virginia Outdoors Day. We look forward to growing with our educational partners!



Ed Expo at a Glance:

- 8,124 students
- 1,440 adults
- 80 counties represented

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Milking It for Meaningful Partnerships

Conversations started with the Federation of Virginia Food Banks late in 2021 to discuss how we could work together and highlight the relationship between food insecurity and agriculture through the State Fair of Virginia's platform during the 10-day fair.

For the first year, attention was focused on the Federation's Milk for Good Program. According to the Federation of Virginia Food Banks, milk is one of the most requested yet least donated items to Virginia's food banks. Most families served by Virginia food banks receive less than 1 gallon of milk per year.

The Virginia State Dairymen's Association, Virginia Tech Dairy Science Club, and Dairy Alliance all contributed to the conversation.



Dairy Days were celebrated during the opening weekend of the fair in conjunction with the dairy cattle show, kicking off during the Black Tie & Boots Scholarship Gala. VT Dairy Science milkshakes were sold in the Meadow Pavilion with all proceeds benefitting Milk for Good, Friday-Sunday. Fairgoers could enjoy dairy activities at the Dairy Alliance tent outside the pavilion, at the shows, or at the Southland Dairy Pavilion with hand milking and milking parlor demonstrations.

Farm Credit contributed \$10,000 as the Commonwealth Milk Champion, sponsoring Dairy Days and our first-ever Milk Mustache Contest. \$5,000 of that contribution went to The Federation of Virginia Food Banks' Milk for Good Program with additional funds supporting the Dairy scholarship program and programming activities.



"Agriculture is Virginia's largest private industry, yet hundreds of thousands of our neighbors regularly struggle with food insecurity. We're grateful to have the State Fair of Virginia as a partner in our efforts to bridge the gap and connect more people with nutritious, local foods."

In our first year selling milkshakes alongside the Virginia Tech Dairy Club, we raised over **\$7,000** for our 'Milk for Good' initiative. More than **3,000 half-gallons** of locally processed milk will go out through our statewide pantry network this fall as a result. We look forward to building on this promising partnership in the years to come."

EDDIE OLIVER
FEDERATION OF VIRGINIA FOOD BANKS,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR





Capitalizing on Engagement

Every year, our Giant Pumpkin and Veggie weigh-off and exhibit is a popular attraction for fairgoers, always captivating the crowd. However, during the actual weigh-off, the interest wanes and the crowds disperse due to the time involved in moving the giants on and off the scale.

This year, we wanted to capitalize on the crowd the giants draw to engage the general public to learn about agriculture. Giant admirers played four rounds of Ag Trivia during the weigh-off with topics in Virginia Agriculture, General Ag and Natural Resources, Food Science and Pumpkins. Audience members could participate in trivia for their chance to test their knowledge and win fair tickets!

Similar to 2021, giant growers were interviewed about growing as we interacted with the audience. A solid crowd was maintained in the Blue Ribbon Tent throughout the 3-hour weigh off. The weigh off ended with Barry Shrum from Shenandoah taking 1st place for Giant Pumpkin at 756 pounds and Luke Williams from Middlesex taking 1st in Watermelons at a Virginia-breaking-259 pounds.

Giants, including our momentarily world-record 105-pound butternut squash, were displayed in the Horticulture Pavilion throughout the fair following the weigh-off. One of the giants was also selected as the 2022 Governor's Choice Pumpkin and was sent to the Virginia Executive Mansion following the fair to be displayed throughout the season.



Fan Favorite Votes

Scarecrows decorated the interior of the Horticulture Pavilion this year thanks to a new competition inviting individuals and families to enter their own pasture ornaments. Over 3,000 families voted for their favorite! First place went to Mark Farkas of Sandston, and Lynwood Broaddus of Milford took second place.

With a record number of quilt entries (175), fairgoers also had the chance to select the People's Choice Quilt.





Empowering the Next Generation

In addition to our annual livestock, culinary, creative and horticulture competitions, students competed in:

- 13 FFA competitions
- 22 SkillsUSA competitions
- DECA, HOSA and FCCLA educational days

Students from across the commonwealth showcased their skills in a variety of contests in agronomy, business, electricity and HVAC, healthcare and so much more.

Competition students had the chance to receive scholarship money for various contests while also qualifying for the 2022 Youth Applied Scholarships offered through the State Fair Youth Development Board.

Over \$80,000 is offered annually to students through the State Fair Scholarship Program for continued education.

A Platform for Agriculture

Throughout the 10-day fair, The Meadow Event Park welcomes nearly a quarter-million individuals every year. Year-round, the historic property is home to myriad events from horse and livestock shows to trade shows and concerts, providing a venue for over half a million guests!

We are excited for future opportunities to work with partners to grow an effective platform for agriculture and natural resources! We connect the public to where their food comes from and build knowledge and confidence in our food system and land stewardship.



Thank you to all of our partners, sponsors, and attendees for making what we do possible!

If you or your organization is interested in learning how you can be involved and help grow our educational platform, please contact Sarah Jane at sthomsen@statefairva.org or 804-994-2743.



The State Fair of Virginia Youth Development Board is invested in expanding leadership capacity and educational opportunities for youth across the commonwealth, through the State Fair of Virginia. We know that connecting our students and teachers with agricultural producers, and business and industry leaders, is critical to meeting this goal.

As a Board member and supporter of the State Fair of Virginia's youth programs, I'm excited to encourage and support our youth to engage in their futures through competitions and educational programs at the State Fair of Virginia.

KATIE FRAZIER
FARM CREDIT OF THE VIRGINIAS &
SFVA NON-LIVESTOCK PROGRAMS
COMMITTEE CHAIR