

Five 'Co-op couples' hone leadership skills

Young Leaders Conference participants urged to lead cooperatives back home

By Jerry Kirk

Five couples representing Tennessee Farmers Cooperative and three of its member Co-ops were among participants in the 2007 Young Leaders Conference Feb. 23 and 24 at the Music City Sheraton in Nashville.

The "Co-op couples" and their sponsoring organizations were John and Charissa Baskette of Talbott, Cocke Farmers Cooperative; Will and Lydia Gunn, Clarksville, TFC; Josh and Jennifer Johnson, Huntingdon, TFC; Skip and Brittany Turner, McMinnville, Warren Farmers Cooperative; and Brandon and Katherine Whitt, Murfreesboro, Rutherford Farmers Cooperative.

The conference attracted 263 attendees, including young leader participants as well as board and staff members from the event's sponsoring organizations — the Tennessee Council of Cooperatives (TCC) and Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation's Young Farmers & Ranchers (YF&R).

Theme for the two-day conference was "Communicating Leadership in America." Included were program segments that focused on cooperative education and leadership initiatives — from a cleverly structured "Jeopardy"-style game to a poignant reminder to the young participants that they not only represent the future of agriculture in Tennessee but the future of cooperatives as well.

"Thank you for investing your time to improve your skills as leaders and to increase your knowledge of the cooperative advantages," said



Among couples representing Co-op at the Young Leaders Conference are, from left, John and Charissa Baskette, Talbott; Will and Lydia Gunn, Clarksville; and Josh and Jennifer Johnson, Huntingdon. The other two "Co-op couples" — Skip and Brittany Turner of McMinnville and Brandon and Katherine Whitt of Murfreesboro — are not pictured.

TFC Chief Executive Officer Bart Krisle in remarks at a banquet on the first evening of the conference. "Your presence here is an example of how the last of the seven cooperative principles — promotion of education — is put into action. We must not and cannot forget the importance of this basic principle."

Krisle said he "strongly believes" that the cooperative form of business provides members the very best opportunity to gain strength in the marketplace and have control over vital inputs and services that directly affect their individual businesses.

"Today and in the future, cooperatives will continue to provide direct and indirect benefit for farmers in the communities across Tennessee and the nation in the communities they serve," Krisle said.

Conference participants were also on the receiving end of a fiery challenge from an imposing keynote

speaker whose specialty is motivating co-op members to become leaders in their organizations.

Former National Football League All-Pro defensive tackle Dave Rowe, now manager of member and public relations with Randolph Electric Membership Corporation in Asheboro, N.C., stressed that cooperatives are still "people-helping-people" businesses.

"We need people like you to step forward and say, 'Hey, I'd like to be a part of that!' Give something back to your community," urged Rowe, who's familiar to southern football fans as an analyst on Lincoln Financial Sports' Southeastern Conference telecasts. "In a cooperative, every member has a say in the operation of the business, and your selection to attend this conference says your voice is that of a leader. I urge you to go home and get to work."

Tennessee Electric Cooperative

Association's Joe Jackson, who serves as TCC's vice president for education, also urged participants to assume leadership roles within their local co-ops.

"You are our members, our owners, and our cooperatives exist to serve you," Jackson said. "The challenge now is for you, as leaders in your communities, to put your abilities to work at home by serving on co-op committees and assuming leadership responsibilities wherever you can."

The conference program also featured discussions of farm-based issues, including a general session on misconceptions of agriculture. Ag enhancements, animal identification, agri-tourism, value-added initiatives, current ag issues, and the Tennessee Beef Alliance were discussed in detail in break-out sessions.

The 2008 conference will be Feb. 1 and 2 in Pigeon Forge.



Leaders from across the state were chosen to serve on the first board of directors when the Tennessee Council of Cooperatives was organized in 1982. The first officers and board members are seated, from left, Roger Eldridge, Dairymen, Inc., vice president of youth educational programs; Mary Ann Gibson, Meriwether Lewis Electric Cooperative, vice president of adult programs; W.E. Bailey, Tennessee Farmers Cooperative, president; Dwight Hancock, Murfreesboro Production Credit Association, vice president of public and member relations; and Herb Smith, Federal Land Bank of Cookeville, secretary-treasurer. Standing are board members Harold Rutherford, Tennessee Valley Division of Dairymen, Inc.; Floyd Gray, Jefferson Farmers Cooperative; Edwin Moore, Louisville Bank for Cooperatives; Hale Harris, Tennessee Electric Cooperative Association; Tommy Lomax, Hardeman Farmers Cooperative; Randall Burns, Bledsoe Telephone Cooperative; and Donald Ardrey, East Tennessee Artificial Breeders Association. Board members Ed Kubale, Southeast Division, Dairymen, Inc., and Erbin Baumgartner, Volunteer Electric Cooperative, are not pictured.

Tennessee Council of Cooperatives reaches 25-year milestone May 17

The Tennessee Council of Cooperatives (TCC), which was formed with a simple purpose in mind and has chalked up an impressive record of education and promotion, will turn 25 next month.

TCC, formed at an organizational meeting on May 15, 1982, in Nashville, started with 59 member cooperatives. Today, membership stands at 93 cooperatives.

"The council was formed to promote and advance cooperatives in the state, and the purpose hasn't changed over these 25 years," says Glen Anderson, general manager of Bledsoe Telephone Cooperative and current president of TCC. "Cooperative education has always been a

primary goal of our organization, and we continue to target youth and adult audiences in our endeavors."

Educational projects have ranged from providing materials on cooperatives for inclusion in high school curriculums to sponsoring young leadership conferences and providing college scholarships.

TCC is made up of organizations that serve farmers and rural residents across the state. Membership includes electric, telephone, farm supply, dairy, tobacco, artificial insemination, and financial cooperatives as well as the Tennessee Farm Bureau. Tennessee Farmers Cooperative and 57 of its member Co-ops currently belong to the council.