

FFA members are 'game' to learn about cooperatives

Story and photos by Rachel Boreing

A new game about cooperatives could soon be racing to all agriculture classrooms across Tennessee.

The NASCAR-themed "Start Your Engines with Cooperatives in Tennessee" was the winner of the first-ever Cooperative Game Challenge at the 80th State FFA Convention March 31-April 2 in Gatlinburg. The activity was created by the Cherokee High School FFA chapter of Rogersville.

Sponsored by the Tennessee Council of Cooperatives (TCC), the competition was designed to be a fun and exciting way to teach students across the state about cooperatives and their importance, says Joe Jackson, director of youth and member relations for the Tennessee Electric Cooperative Association and vice president of education for the TCC.

"We are really excited about the opportunity this has for all of us and especially for agriculture students to learn more about the cooperative way of business," said Jackson. "We wanted to come away from this competition with a good game about cooperatives that we can distribute to all agriculture teachers in Tennessee."

The TCC, established to advance cooperatives through education and promotion, is composed of a variety of organizations across the state including Tennessee Farmers Cooperative and 55 of its member Co-ops, dairy cooperatives, farm credit organizations, telephone and electric cooperatives, tobacco cooperatives, and the Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation.

In keeping with the FFA motto of "Learning to Do, Doing to Learn," the TCC's Cooperative Game Challenge encouraged FFA members to create a hands-on activity that can be used in the classroom to effectively

educate students about cooperatives. According to the rules, the challenge is "intended to promote a competition that fosters information assimilation, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills necessary to successfully participate in, form, or manage a cooperative."

Seven teams competed in the challenge at the state FFA convention, with Jackson and other TCC members Ricky West and Ralph Stewart serving as judges. Several teams even gave interactive presentations, allowing the judges to play the games during the demonstrations.

When all the games had been presented, Cherokee FFA's "Start Your Engines with Cooperatives in Tennessee" was chosen as the state winner. Team members designed their game to be used over a "season," which spans several class periods to facilitate learning and comprehension. At the beginning of the "season," each student picks a car and follows it for the course of the entire game.

The game features seven "race-tracks," each with a different set of questions that must be answered for the students to advance and earn points. Each track is based on one of the seven cooperative principles:

- Voluntary and open membership
- Democratic member control
- Member economic participation
- Autonomy and independence
- Education, training, and information
- Cooperation among cooperatives
- Concern for community

During the convention, Greg Anderson, TCC president, recognized the top two teams and presented their awards. As the first-place winner, Cherokee FFA received \$250, and advisor Tera Bunch received \$100. The second-place team was Portland FFA, which received a \$150 check for the chapter and \$100 for advisor Terry Shartzter.

After the presentations, the smiles of Cherokee team members Ashley Hilton, Elizabeth Tunnell, Breanne Williams, and Zach Booth showed how excited and proud they were to have their hard work pay off. They also pointed out that in the process they met another objective of the Cooperative Game Challenge — "to work together cooperatively as a group."



At the recent State FFA Convention, the Tennessee Council of Cooperatives presented the first-ever Cooperative Game Challenge award to Cherokee High School's FFA chapter from Rogersville. From left are advisor and teacher Tera Bunch, members Breanne Williams, Elizabeth Tunnell, Zach Booth, and Ashley Hilton, and advisor and teacher Kevin Helton. The purpose of this new competition was to create a fun, hands-on way for agriculture students to learn more about cooperatives.

"We always share responsibility, even if it isn't required," said Hilton.

Bunch, a second-year teacher, was equally excited about her students' achievement.

"They have put so much time into this," said Bunch. "For the past month, they have been working at school for hours and hours and taking materials home. I am just really proud of them."

The TCC-sponsored educational project was made possible by the sale of agriculture specialty license plates — or "Ag Tags" — to Tennessee motorists. Funds from Ag Tag sales are returned to the agricultural community in the form of grants for youth programs, market development projects, and other activities.

More information is on the Tennessee Department of Agriculture's Web site at www.picktnproducts.org.



During Cherokee High School FFA's interactive presentation, TCC member and judge Ralph Stewart plays the "Start Your Engines with Cooperatives in Tennessee" game with team member Breanne Williams.

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