



## Students, professors examine ways to improve lives and agriculture in **ECUADOR**

By Zeke Barlow

The Andes Mountains where Luis Elvae grows crops are as steep as they are fertile.

The cake-batter-thick volcanic soil is perfect land for growing maize, potatoes, wheat, and the lucrative naranjilla fruit that is a ubiquitous crop in Ecuador. But the slope of the massive mountains also poses challenges for Elvae and other farmers.

Erosion, runoff, and deforestation have become serious problems in Ecuador over the past few decades as the South American nation's population has expanded, and more and more farmers are taking to the impossibly steep mountains to grow crops.

This is why Corinna Clements, a senior from Round Hill, Virginia, majoring in agricultural and applied economics, and Austin Larowe, a senior from Woodlawn, Virginia, majoring in agricultural and applied economics and agricultural sciences, spent two weeks in Ecuador talking to farmers about a project to curb deforestation by using a better variety of the naranjilla plant.

Meanwhile, Elli Travis, an agricultural and applied economics graduate student from Washington, D.C., spent the summer working with Ecuadorian farmers on ways to use text messages to improve the environment and boost profits by adopting pest-management techniques. The messages remind farmers to perform certain soil-saving practices on schedule.

All of the students work with Jeff Alwang, a professor of agricultural and applied economics who has been working in South American countries for decades on ways to improve their landscapes and the livelihoods of their citizens.

"By working with partners and farmers in Ecuador, we have been able to find simple but effective ways to increase incomes while helping to protect the environment in extremely fragile areas," Alwang said.

“By working with partners and farmers in Ecuador, we have been able to find simple but effective ways to increase incomes while helping to protect the environment in extremely fragile areas.”

— Jeff Alwang



Local markets around Ecuador highlight the vital role that agriculture plays in the country's economy and culture.

Alwang's work incorporates all three missions of the land-grant university.

He researches pest management and conservation agriculture. He conducts outreach by working with local governments and farmers to put his findings into practice. And he teaches the scores of graduate and undergraduate students he brings to Ecuador about international development.

Clements and Larowe spent part of their summer examining the role that the naranjilla fruit plays in Ecuadorian agriculture.

Although the lucrative plant grows heartily in the Andes, it is also susceptible to a vascular wilt that infects the plant and soil. The soil is then so laden with pests that farmers will simply clear-cut a nearby tract of forestland in order to plant in a pest-free environment, leading to a continuous cycle of erosion, runoff, and a host of other environmental problems.

So Alwang and his Ecuadorian partners have developed a grafted variety of naranjilla that uses rootstock of wild species of the plant, which is less susceptible to the pests. Clements and Larowe were there to examine if and how farmers are adopting the new plant.

"I've been studying these issues in textbooks and classes for years, but being able to witness them firsthand — and to be part of a solution — is a remarkable experience," Clements said.

Corinna Clements and Austin Larowe spent the summer in Ecuador interviewing farmers about practices that can help protect the environment and boost profits.



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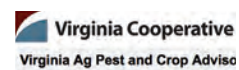
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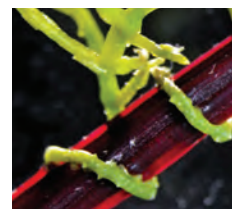


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Keep up with all the exciting research, academic, and Extension news at the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences website, [www.cals.vt.edu](http://www.cals.vt.edu), or find us on social media.



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## Dean's Update

Greetings from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

While you are reading this issue, I am sure you will be as impressed as I am by the many accomplishments of our faculty, staff, and students. On the following pages, you will learn more about students working across the globe on food security and environmental issues; the faculty's innovative research, such as the recent discovery of how plants communicate with each other at the molecular level; and how Virginia's first lady, Dorothy McAuliffe, recently joined us to kick off our Eat Smart, Move More campaign, which is helping young children lead healthier lives. These are among the many stories that help to illustrate the value and impact of the programs in the college. CALS is making a difference in people's lives around the world.

As many of you know, agriculture is the largest economic engine in Virginia, and the college has a large supporting role in the industry through its teaching, research, and Extension missions. In addition to the facilities in Blacksburg and the 107 Extension offices located across the commonwealth, the network of 11 Agricultural Research and Extension Centers represents Virginia's diverse agricultural industry and addresses the unique characteristics, needs, and challenges of various regions. We invest resources in these ARECs so that our faculty can continue to conduct research and Extension programs that are relevant to the industry and to communities. We have also begun an external review of the ARECs, using a team of scientists from peer institutions, in order to identify ways to make an even larger impact on the commonwealth. We are looking forward to the team's feedback.

I am especially encouraged by the comments in this issue of Innovations by Virginia Tech's new president, Timothy Sands. As you will read, he is a strong supporter of the work the college is doing every day to ensure Virginia Tech's reputation as a global leader.

We could not do it all without the support of our alumni, stakeholders, and friends, so thanks for all you do to help make our college an exceptional one.

Sincerely,

Alan Grant

Dean



Alan Grant, dean

**We invest resources in our ARECs so that our faculty can continue to conduct research and Extension programs that are relevant to the industry and to communities.**

## Q&A with President Timothy Sands



Timothy Sands, who became Virginia Tech's 16th president in June, was the provost at Purdue University, so he has a history with land-grant universities. We asked him for his thoughts on the land-grant mission, student experiences, and how the university impacts Virginia.

### What role do you see our college playing in the state's economy?

Part of the land-grant mission is to foster economic growth, which is what the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences is doing every day. It is preparing students for rewarding careers in the changing agricultural and life sciences industries, carrying out basic and applied research which is important for these industries, and delivering Extension programs throughout the commonwealth and beyond. The college, Extension, and the Agricultural Experiment Station work together to leverage advancements in science and technology to transform knowledge into practice that powers the economy and creates jobs around the commonwealth. Agriculture is the state's No. 1 economy, and we want to help keep it that way.

### Virginia Cooperative Extension celebrated its centennial this year. What do you see as Extension's role in the university's mission?

Extension is an invaluable component of the land-grant system, and it plays an important role in extending Virginia Tech's knowledge to the citizens of the commonwealth. In addition to the Extension programs on campus, the programs at 11 Agricultural Research and Extension Centers along with 107 Extension offices located across the state are essential for this land-grant mission and also help serve as gateways to Virginia Tech. Our partnerships with communities allow us to address local needs and provide specific educational opportunities to help Virginians better their lives now and in the future.

### You have spoken a lot about student experiences since you started. Why do you think these are so important?

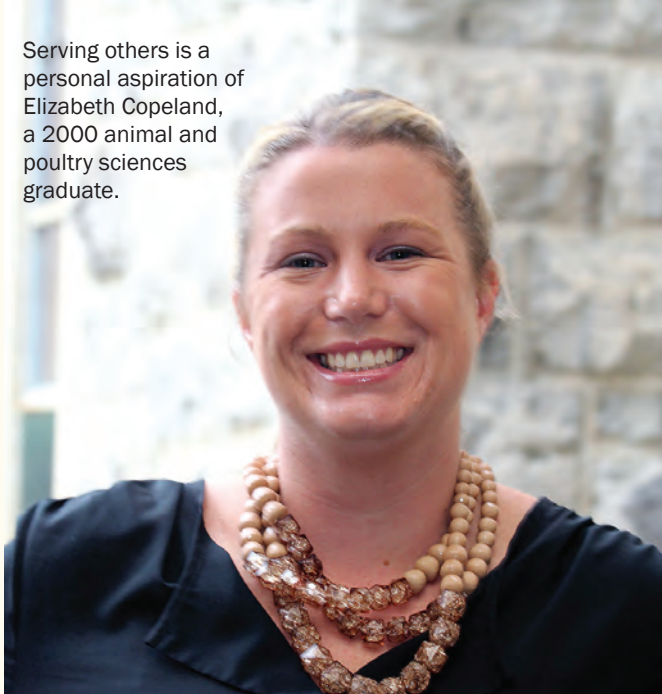
The students who are in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences today will be tomorrow's leaders. They will be involved in some of the most pressing issues our society is going to face, including feeding a growing planet and ensuring a safe water supply. By providing students with experiential learning opportunities, they gain the skills and experiences they need to be ready to tackle the many challenges awaiting them.

### As is apparent by the 17 patents you hold, most of your professional career has been involved in research, both in the private sector and at public universities. What role do you see our college playing in helping the university reach its research goals?

Research is at the heart of what we are doing at Virginia Tech — helping make the world a better place. The work that the college is doing in developing renewable energy sources, making a safer, more-reliable food supply, improving health, and protecting our environment are crucial as the global population swells and new challenges arise daily. The college's amount of sponsored funding has increased significantly in recent years, contributing to the National Science Foundation's ranking of Virginia Tech as seventh in the nation for university research expenditures in the agricultural sciences. These are testaments to the high-quality, relevant work the college is conducting.

## Alumni making a difference

Serving others is a personal aspiration of Elizabeth Copeland, a 2000 animal and poultry sciences graduate.



Elizabeth Copeland, a 2000 graduate of animal and poultry sciences, continually finds ways to exemplify the same Virginia Tech spirit of community service in her current professional life that she fostered when she was a student.

Copeland served on the Virginia Tech Women in Leadership and Philanthropy council, and she has remained active in the CALS community — currently serving on the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Alumni Organization board and attending the National Agricultural Alumni and Development Association annual conference as a board volunteer.

Copeland is an associate manager in corporate communications for Altria Client Services Inc., and one of the many ways she embodies the spirit of *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve) is through volunteering with the Altria Companies Employee Community Fund's Grantmaking Committee. The organization has awarded 1,594 grants totaling more than \$43.1 million to local community organizations in the past 13 years.

"Service to others above self is one of the core guiding principles of how I live every day — a value that was instilled in me early on but enhanced while I was at Virginia Tech. Now when day-to-day tasks become overwhelming in the real world, I try to step back and take a moment to remember what is truly important to me — helping others," said Copeland.

Keep up to date with all the college's news and upcoming events at  
[www.cals.vt.edu](http://www.cals.vt.edu)

## State fair brings out agriculture and Extension enthusiasts

Kids filled up grain jars, students sold barbecue, and Virginia Cooperative Extension educated the public on everything from food safety to aquaculture at the State Fair of Virginia this year.

The annual fall event held just outside of Richmond was once again a big success, in part because of all the activities provided by the college and Extension.

The Ag Econ/NAMA club handed out grain jars to young children and school kids who learned about the uses of cotton, soybeans, corn, and wheat and the importance of these crops in the commonwealth. All told, more than 8,000 grain jars were filled during the 10-day fair. A number of the college's alumni helped the students and shared stories of their Virginia Tech experiences.

The Block and Bridle Club was also at the fair, selling its ever-popular barbecue as a fundraiser.

Sept. 28 was Virginia Cooperative Extension Day at the fair, when visitors stopped by a number of exhibits around the fairgrounds to learn about everything Extension touches, including 4-H, emergency preparedness, financial management, and gardening. Those who had their "passport" stamped at five or more of the stations received a free VCE drawstring backpack.



Among the thousands of people who visited the college's display at the State Fair of Virginia were (from left) Virginia Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Todd Haymore, Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe, first lady Dorothy McAuliffe, Brad Copenhaver, director of government affairs at the Virginia Agribusiness Council, and Katie Frazier ('04), president of the Virginia Agribusiness Council.

## Virginia's first lady helps kick off *Eat Smart, Move More* campaign in Richmond



By Amy Loeffler

Virginia's first lady, Dorothy McAuliffe, helped launch a statewide campaign known as Eat Smart, Move More at Richmond's Chimborazo Elementary School on Friday, Aug. 15. The campaign is part of Virginia Cooperative Extension's Family Nutrition Program, whose mission is to help low-income families make healthy food choices on a limited budget by fostering healthy, active lifestyles.

"Guiding our children toward healthy choices isn't easy," said McAuliffe, "and it's important that we have campaigns like Eat Smart, Move More to help show Virginia's youth that it is cool to make healthy choices."

This year's campaign features billboards located throughout the commonwealth and bus signage in several larger localities that depict Virginia youth following in the active footsteps of Virginia Tech student athletes. Posters will also be distributed to schools participating in the program.

The aim of the Eat Smart, Move More campaign is to help show children and their families that eating nutrient-dense foods and being active are not just good health choices, they are also socially respectable actions and behaviors. The campaign demonstrates that eating nutritious foods helps athletes achieve

their goals on baseball fields, basketball courts, and anywhere else they have to depend on their bodies to perform well.

The kick-off event featured the unveiling of a city bus branded with an Eat Smart, Move More sign and activities for children, such as a garden scavenger hunt and a nutrition fishing game where participants learned health facts. Nutrient-dense smoothies were passed out to attendees, and the first lady made time for photo opportunities with kids.

"We greatly appreciate the first lady's interest and support of programs promoting healthy lifestyles and choices of young Virginians," said Ed Jones, director of Virginia Cooperative Extension and associate dean for the college. "The Family Nutrition Program's primary objective is to make sure that families in the commonwealth are empowered with the knowledge to make good nutritional choices."



More than 100 signs are displayed on billboards and buses across Virginia that encourage youth to lead healthy lifestyles.

## Diversity Incentive Fund creates opportunities for inclusion

The College Diversity Council created the Diversity Incentive Fund in order to provide support for new, innovative, and creative approaches to raising awareness, engaging learners, and changing behaviors about inclusion within the academic community as well as the broader communities the college serves.

Bo Zhang, a research assistant professor in crop and soil environmental sciences, was the recipient of the award in 2013. Last summer, she used the funds to expose two undergraduate students from Virginia State University to soybean breeding on a five-day tour that included stops in Blacksburg and the Eastern Virginia Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Warsaw, Virginia. The aim of the visits was to spark an interest in graduate school research among underrepresented students.



Krystal Thomas and Montae Chappell, students at Virginia State University, participate in a program made possible by the Diversity Incentive Fund that exposes them to soybean breeding. The program is part of an effort to expose more underrepresented students to graduate school research.

This year, the \$2,000 award was split between two programs. Eric Wong and Ed Smith, both professors of animal and poultry sciences, will be putting on a series of informal meetings between college faculty and staff and members of the Virginia Tech Postbaccalaureate Research and Education Program, or VT-PREP, and the university's Initiative for Maximizing Student Development. The goal of the meetings is to increase awareness of the programs, which increase minority participation in the sciences.

A second award was given to Gonzalo Ferreira, an assistant professor of dairy science, who will use it to create a series of educational videos for Hispanic workers on dairy farms.

Visit [www.cals.vt.edu/diversity](http://www.cals.vt.edu/diversity) to learn more about the college's diversity and inclusion programs.

## New options for students address industry and community needs

Students in the college now have more academic choices in the departments of food science and technology, horticulture, animal and poultry sciences, and agricultural, leadership, and community education.

Two new study tracks will allow students to explore trending topics in grape growing and fermentation. One is a new minor in viticulture offered by the Department of Horticulture, and the other is an option to study fermentation in the Department of Food Science and Technology. These academic avenues will produce graduates who can address the needs of the established grape growing and wine industries in Virginia, as well as the burgeoning hard cider industries in the commonwealth and worldwide.

Another way Virginia Tech is preparing graduates for the future is through the new companion and lab animal emphasis in animal and poultry sciences. The emphasis allows students who plan to pursue careers where working with companion and lab animals will be a significant part of their research endeavors a chance to



Meg McGuire is studying fermentation, a new option in the Department of Food Science and Technology, and already has plans to apprentice at Foggy Ridge Cider in Dugspur, Virginia, after she graduates.

gain experience working with them in preparation for professional lives beyond Virginia Tech.

The Department of Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education is also offering two additional options. The first option, called teaching and learning in agriculture, leads to work in youth programs or a teaching certificate at the master's level through a partnership with the School of Education. The second option, community leadership and development, is geared toward those who want to work with people in the agricultural industry.

## Virginia Ag Expo and alumni gathering held in the Northern Neck

The Northern Neck of Virginia is a rich and fertile landscape that is home to wineries and farms. This summer, alumni, stakeholders, Extension agents, farmers, and others got to experience both at the Virginia Ag Expo and at the annual pre-expo Alumni Organization gathering.

More than 70 alumni and friends of the college gathered Aug. 6 at Good Luck Cellars, a winery in Kilmarnock, Virginia, for an evening of camaraderie and wine tasting. The owners, Paul and Katie Krop, were especially glad to be hosting the event because they sought out many experts from the college to help them get their wine production started. After a catered dinner, graduate student Cain Hickey, who is working with viticulture Professor Tony Wolf at the Alson H. Smith Jr. Agricultural Research and Extension Center, spoke about the meteoric rise of grape and wine production in the commonwealth in recent years.

Virginia Ag Expo — the largest outdoor agricultural exhibit in the state — was held the following day at Bleak House Farm in Lottsburg, Virginia, which has been owned by the Downing family for generations. The event was a tremendous success and was attended by more than 1,800 people. Visitors toured the farm where Extension specialists and agents gave field presentations, met exhibitors showcasing the latest equipment and agricultural tools, and got a peek at the Downings' collection of antique tractors.

Alumni and friends gather annually for a dinner before the Ag Expo.



## Virginia Ag Pest and Crop Advisory gets a face-lift

The Virginia Ag Pest and Crop Advisory system has been delivering time-sensitive crop and pest updates to Virginia farmers and agriculture industry representatives for more than 15 years.

To continue to meet these needs and to provide the most up-to-date information about the pest advisory system, a blog has been created where the information can be found.

The new and improved Virginia Ag Pest and Crop Advisory blog will offer the same features as the old system — weekly email alerts, for example — but it will also allow users to subscribe to an RSS feed. Information will still be tagged by topics, commodities, and author, which will allow users to quickly find previously posted information.

The new system will be much easier for authors to use as well. It will be simpler for them to post information, and it will allow for more photos and other media, such as videos. Each advisory will also have a unique website URL to make bookmarking and sharing easier.

Farmers starting their work week often rely on the information the advisory provides, including in-season, real-time pest alerts; pest survey results; the status of emerging and migrating pests; pesticide resistance issues; notifications of pesticide labeling changes; and reminders of economic thresholds, sampling procedures, and best management recommendations.

Anyone who wants to receive the Virginia Ag Pest and Crop Advisory can visit <http://blogs.ext.vt.edu/ag-pest-advisory> to subscribe to the weekly email or RSS feed. Comments or suggestions about the new system can be sent to Ames Herbert at [herbert@vt.edu](mailto:herbert@vt.edu) or call 757-657-6450.

## Animal and poultry sciences gets record funding

As temperatures rise across the globe, heat stress in livestock has become an increasingly important area of research in animal science.

Overheated animals produce less meat, and Rob Rhoads, associate professor of animal and poultry sciences, is attempting to find answers to questions about livestock's decreased ability to produce muscle tissue as the mercury climbs into the high double and triple digits.

He recently received funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture to explore myriad topics in animal science — including meat production.

Rhoads was one of several faculty members from the Department of Animal and Poultry Sciences who received funding from the USDA, resulting in a record \$3 million in grants from the agency.

"The fact that we received such a high amount of funding is a reflection of not only the cutting-edge science we are doing, but also of the potential impact that all this work has on society," said David Gerrard, the department head.

Other faculty members who were part of the \$3 million in funding awarded to the department include Assistant Professors Elizabeth Gilbert and Mark Cline, who will study protein manipulation and appetite in chickens; Associate Professor Sally Johnson, who will study the impact of early life nutrition on muscle growth in cattle; and Gerrard, along with Jason Scheffler and Assistant Professor Samer El-Kadi, who plan to define postharvest biochemical mechanisms in animals.

Rhoads is working in conjunction with Iowa State University to study how heat stress affects swine metabolism and reduces muscle growth.

"When people think of heat stress, they think of very hot places like Arizona, but everywhere in the world animals will experience some level of heat stress," said Rhoads.

The study of animal and poultry sciences is often translatable to the human condition. Rhoads hopes that his research will help further explain heat-related illnesses in humans.

Rob Rhoads and several other faculty members from the Department of Animal and Poultry Sciences recently received a total of \$3 million in funding from the USDA.



# PLANTS may use language to communicate with each other

A Virginia Tech scientist has discovered a potential form of communication that allows plants to share an extraordinary amount of genetic information with one another.

The finding by Jim Westwood, a professor of plant pathology, physiology, and weed science, throws open the door to a new arena of science that explores how plants communicate with each other on a molecular level. It also gives scientists new insight into ways to fight parasitic weeds that wreak havoc on food crops in some of the poorest parts of the world.

Westwood examined the relationship between a parasitic plant, dodder, and two host plants. He found that during this parasitic relationship, thousands upon thousands of mRNA molecules were being exchanged between the plants, creating this open dialogue between the species that allows them to freely communicate.

“Now that we have found that they are sharing all this information, the next question is, ‘What exactly are they telling each other?’” said Westwood, whose findings were recently published in the journal *Science*.

When a dodder plant attacks other plants, such as this beetroot, it is engaging in a sort of communication with the host plant.

## Honors residential community expands learning opportunities, perspectives

By Amy Loeffler

As students in the Honors Residential College in East Ambler Johnston Hall recently awaited the arrival of Virginia Tech President Timothy Sands, the hallways were filled with the characteristically excited chatter in anticipation of an honored guest — as well as the unbridled giggles of a young child as she was being hoisted above the shoulders of an East Ambler Johnston resident.

Not the typical scenario you might associate with the undergraduate experience, but at the Honors Residential College, intergenerational mingling and informal learning are not just the norm, they’re encouraged as part of the academic experience.

Eric Kaufman, faculty principal and associate professor of leadership education, his wife, Shevon, 9-year-old son, Ethan, and 6-year-old daughter, Sara, live in the Honors Residential College along with 320 honors students, 28 of whom are from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

“My family and I are thrilled to be in this environment,” said Kaufman, who enjoys frequent informal opportunities to interact with students outside the classroom. Students who live here are welcome to visit with the Kaufmans and discuss anything from their academic careers to personal matters.

“Living among faculty expands students’ viewpoint and helps them to think about what their priorities are for life — not just as freshmen in college,” said Kaufman.

Building intellectual curiosity is also a priority at the Honors Residential College. Students who reside here are taught to regularly think about concepts they learn in class and how they overlap with other disciplines.

Alexa Turner, 20, a junior majoring in animal and poultry sciences from Gilbertsville, Pennsylvania, said



Eric Kaufman speaks with students at a tea held in the Kaufman family’s apartment in East Ambler Johnston Hall.

that the interdisciplinary thinking that is fostered here has helped her to reconsider her own agriculture-based major through various academic lenses.

“I really like the idea that I can come from a class about designing animal chutes, and my friend who lives in the college who is majoring in engineering can actually suggest ways it can be done with steel,” said Turner.

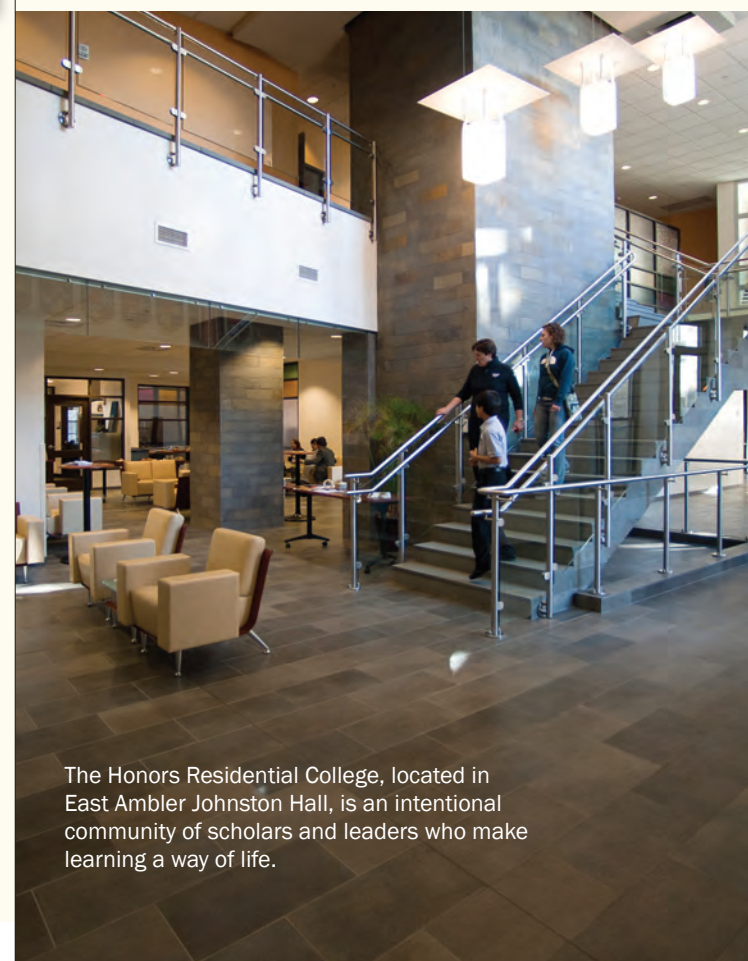
During President Sands’ recent visit, he asked the crowd a rhetorical question: “What is the value of an honors education?”

“The honors community is a natural opportunity for diversity,” said Sands. “The whole culture here is remarkable. We’ve seen there is a strong correlation between having a mentor and thriving.”

Emily Brittingham, 20, a human nutrition, foods and exercise major from Lexington, South Carolina, exemplifies the value of mentorship in the college.

“I enjoy talking to the Kaufmans,” she said. “I like that I can walk down the hall and ask advice and bounce ideas off of them about my career and academic goals. They’re a great resource.”

Whether it’s seeking advice from a faculty member, seeing where the life sciences and engineering sciences overlap, or just listening to giggles bubble out of the hallway, the Honors Residential College is an integrated learning experience that challenges students in every aspect of their personal and professional development.



The Honors Residential College, located in East Ambler Johnston Hall, is an intentional community of scholars and leaders who make learning a way of life.

## Scramble for Scholars Golf Tournament

Alumni Organization  
SCRAMBLE FOR SCHOLARS

The CALS Alumni Organization would like to thank all of our alumni and friends who have supported the Scramble for Scholars Golf Tournament over the last decade.

With your generous support we have:

- **Raised more than \$50,000.**
- **Established four endowments.**
- **Provided over 20 annual scholarships.**

[www.cals.vt.edu/alumni](http://www.cals.vt.edu/alumni)

## Awards

Please join us Friday, March 20, 2015, as the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Alumni Organization hosts the annual Awards Program that recognizes our outstanding alumni.

- **2 p.m. – Ceremony**
- **3 p.m. – Social**
- **6 p.m. – Reception**
- **7 p.m. – Dinner**

The Inn at Virginia Tech and Skelton Conference Center  
For more information, contact Jamie Lucero at [jlucero@vt.edu](mailto:jlucero@vt.edu) or 540-231-9666.  
To register: <http://attend.com/alumniawards2015>



## John Riley gave back to the groups that gave him so much

By Zeke Barlow

John Riley's love of 4-H started at an early age, when the Augusta County native would show sheep and steers at

county fairs. A quiet boy who loved academics, he relished the role that 4-H played in his adolescence, which is when he learned the business side of running a farm and how to become a leader.

"You know when you make a connection with something at a young age, and it sticks with you your whole life? For John, that was 4-H," said Matt Hickey, Riley's nephew and owner of Breezewood Hills Farm in Augusta County.

After 4-H made such a large impact on him, Riley spent a lifetime giving back to it and to a number of other programs aimed at educating youth about agriculture.

He received bachelor's and master's degrees in agricultural and applied economics from Virginia Tech in 1969 and 1971, respectively. He became a professor of agricultural economics at Kansas State University and later served as the dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and Natural Resources at the University of Tennessee.

Riley coached the National AgriMarketing Association – or NAMA – marketing teams in Kansas and Tennessee and was an advisor to the FarmHouse Fraternity at both schools. Students knew him as a trusted mentor and friend who offered them guidance

“The joy and friendships that he had over his life he developed through 4-H and NAMA, and he wanted to share that with others.”

— Matt Hickey

and wisdom, both in their academic careers and personal lives. He was so well-liked, a national NAMA award was named in his honor – the Dr. John B. Riley Outstanding Advisor Award.

Though Riley passed away in 2013 at the age of 66, the impact of his life-long commitment to agricultural education will continue for generations.

Riley left gifts and endowments to a host of organizations, including the Augusta County 4-H program and his local FFA chapter at Buffalo Gap High School, as well as the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics and NAMA at Virginia Tech.

"The joy and friendships that he had over his life he developed through 4-H and NAMA, and he wanted to share that with others," Hickey said. "He was a very giving person."

Steve Blank, the department head of agricultural and applied economics, said the gifts Riley gave toward the department's enrichment fund will benefit students for years.

"John knew that enrichment funds give us the flexibility to provide a host of different student opportunities depending on the need. One year we may use these funds to send students to Washington, D.C., where they can meet with agribusiness leaders and government leaders. The next we may use it to send our students to the national NAMA competition," he said.

The gift to Augusta County 4-H, where it all began for Riley, will allow for investment in the 4-H program of today and innovation for the 4-H program of tomorrow.

And perhaps it will help inspire a young child devote his or her life to helping people become leaders in agriculture – just like John Riley did.



Riley was such a well-liked and respected teacher and mentor that students at the University of Tennessee held a candlelight vigil after his passing.