

VAAE Winter In-Service

January 16-17, 2026

Blue Ridge Community College - Weyers Cave, VA

Conference App



Full Schedule,
Rooms, Sign-In
and Updates



2025-2026 VAAE OFFICER TEAM

State Officers

State President
Elizabeth Duncan
Appomattox County High School
ejduncan@acpsweb.com

President-Elect
Miranda Locuratolo
Liberty High School
mlocuratolo@fcps1.org

Past President
Lindsay Tomlinson
Liberty High School (Bedford)
tomlinson_lm@lynchburg.edu

State Secretary
Laura Dorrian
Eastern View High School
ldorrian@ccpsweb.org

VACTE Representative
Christy Kerr
Fort Defiance High School
ckerr@augusta.k12.va.us

Executive Directors
Andy Seibel and Sarah Jo Jones
Virginia FFA
gseibel@vt.edu; sarahjo@vt.edu

Area Officers

Appalachian Area

Vice President
Tori Alley
Pulaski County High School

Secretary
Jeannie Dudding
Giles High School

Treasurer
Kelsey Davidson
Holston High School

Blue Ridge Area

Vice President
Kaitlyn Sonifrank
Riverheads High School

Secretary/Treasurer
Jennifer Neil
Highland High School

Central Area

Vice President
Cecillia Vega Coronado
Floyd T. Binns Middle School

Secretary
Laura Dorrian
Eastern View High School

Treasurer
Kendall Rogers
Caroline Middle School

Northern Area

Vice President
Evan Lineweaver
James Wood High School

Secretary
Makayla Kidner
James Wood High School

Treasurer
Katie Bethke
Millbrook High School

Southeast Area

Vice President
Thomas Davis
Dinwiddie High School

Secretary
Amy Whitten
Mecklenburg Middle School

Treasurer
Calli Claybrook
Randolph-Henry High School

South Ridge Area

Vice President
Alysha Lawless
Bassett High School

Secretary
Caitlin Tatum
Bassett High School

Treasurer
Kate Stevens
James River High School

SCHEDULE (TENTATIVE)

FRIDAY, JANUARY 16TH

12:00-1:00 PM - Registration

1:00-2:00 PM - Welcome and Introduction Session

2:00-2:45 PM - National Chapter Award - Kaitlyn Marchant, Georgia FFA Association

3:00-3:45 PM - Proficiency Awards - Ben Lastly, Georgia FFA Association

Middle School Session - Lab Management with Derek Ritenour, Central High School

4:00-4:50 PM - Workshops

Middle School Session - Lab Management with Derek Ritenour, Central High School (continued)

Agriscience Fair Research - Dr. Hannah Scherer, Virginia Tech

Discussion Meet - Farm Bureau Young Farmers

AET Work Session - Sarah Jo Jones, Virginia FFA

Teacher Licensure - Dr. Natalie Ferand, Virginia Tech

Ag-tificial Intelligence - Anna Carty, Augusta County Public Schools

Youth Animal Science Update - YAS Team, Virginia Tech

5:00-5:50 PM - Workshops

FFA Ambassadors - Dakota Stroud, Signal Knob Middle School

Agriscience Fair Contest - Dr. Hannah Scherer, Virginia Tech

Sheep Genetics - Katie Bethke, National Agriscience Teacher Ambassador

Ag In the Classroom - Lynn Black, Ag In the Classroom

Ag-tificial Intelligence - Anna Carty, Augusta County Public Schools

6:00-7:00 PM - Dinner

7:00-8:30 PM - Ag Teacher Skillathon



SCHEDULE (TENTATIVE)

SATURDAY, JANUARY 17TH

7:30-8:30 AM - Breakfast, Conference Registration, Networking Time

8:40-11:45 AM - Certification Workshops

Greenhouse Growers Certification - Sunnie Wright, Virginia Greenhouse Growers Association

Maple in the Classroom - Casey Withers, Future Generations University

First Aid/CPR - Becky Anhold, Mount Solon

8:40-9:30 AM - Workshops

Novice National Chapter Award - Kaitlyn Marchant, Georgia FFA Association

Advanced Proficiency Award - Ben Lastly, Georgia FFA Association

AET Work Session - Sarah Jo Jones, Virginia FFA

9:40-10:30 AM - Workshops

Advanced National Chapter Award - Kaitlyn Marchant, Georgia FFA Association

Novice Proficiency Award - Ben Lastly, Georgia FFA Association

Middle School Owl Chat - Amy Whitten, Mecklenburg Middle School

10:40-11:30 AM - Workshops

Middle School CDEs - Cindy Vance, National FFA and Dani Hodges, Appomattox Middle School

Owl Chats - Sherry Heishman, Central High School

11:45-12:45 PM - Lunch

12:50-2:30 PM - Make It, Take It Workshops

Branding - Miranda Locuratolo and Stephanie Loring, Liberty High School Middle School

Balloons - Alysha Lawless, Bassett High School

Vet Science - Sherry Heishman, Central High School

Middle School - Amy Whitten, Mecklenburg Middle School



WORKSHOP DESCRIPTIONS

(IN ORDER OF THE SCHEDULE)

Friday, January 16th

National Chapter Award General Session, Kaitlyn Marchant - Georgia FFA Association

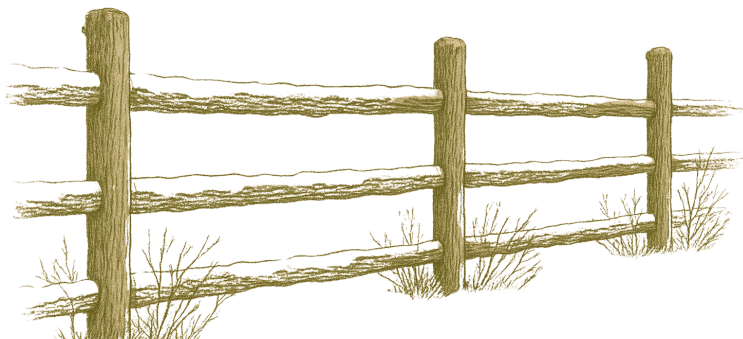
Proficiency Awards General Session, Ben Lastly - Georgia FFA Association

**Agriscience Amplified: Meeting the needs of all students (will take place during the 3:00-3:45 time slot and continue through the 4:00-4:50 slot)
Presenter: Derek Ritenour, Central High School**

In this workshop teachers will have the opportunity to conduct a hands-on agriscience lab activity and explore ways to adapt this lab, and other activities, to meet the needs of exceptional learners. From the mechanics lab to the classroom, teachers will have the opportunity to fill their toolbox with strategies to enhance student learning in the agriscience classroom, make connections to SAE and FFA, and build interbuilding relationships.

**Coaching the VA Farm Bureau Youth Discussion Meet
Facilitator: Dana Fisher, Virginia Farm Bureau**

This workshop will provide an overview of the Virginia Farm Bureau Youth Discussion Meet contest and how it can be used as a powerful leadership and communication opportunity for students. Participants will learn about the contest structure and scoring rubric, along with practical tips and strategies for coaching a successful competitor. The session will also include a mock Discussion Meet, allowing attendees to see the contest format in action and gain a clearer understanding of the contest format



WORKSHOP DESCRIPTIONS

(IN ORDER OF THE SCHEDULE)

Sweet Sheep Genetics

Presenter: Katie Bethke - Millbrook High School, National Agriscience Teacher Ambassador

As animal industries advance livestock through genetics, more issues and solutions are discovered. In this activity, students will crossbreed sheep and predict which genetic diseases may show up - diseases the industry is working hard to eliminate. Be ready to get hands-on in this real-world Mendelian Genetics activity! An effective way to reinforce or practice predicting dihybrid crosses, using Punnett Squares, etc.

Making Connections with Agriculture in the Classroom

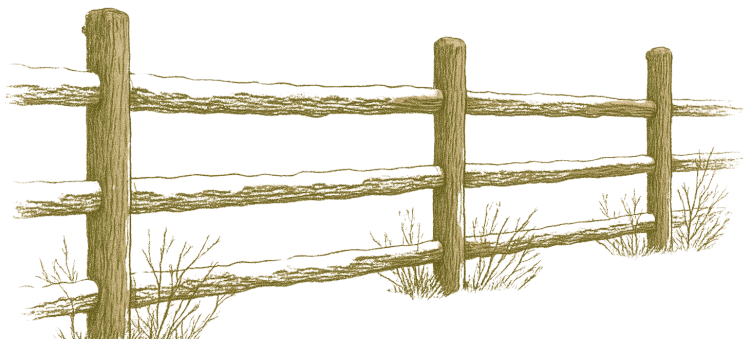
Presenter: Lynn Black - Director of Education, VA AITC

Come learn more about the many ways that Agriculture in the Classroom can support you! From grants to lessons and materials, Agriculture in the Classroom has the resources to sprout success in your classroom! Participants will learn of the latest opportunities from AITC and have the chance to register for a resource kit.

Understanding the Alternative Licensure Pathway

Presenter: Dr. Natalie Ferand, Virginia Tech

This session provides a clear overview of Virginia's alternative licensure pathways, offering guidance for teachers newly on a provisional license, as well as those well into the process who may need updates or clarification. We will review key VDOE requirements, common next steps, and available program options to support your transition into full licensure; participants are encouraged to bring their VDOE eligibility letter for tailored guidance. Dr. Ferand does not work for the VDOE, but she does "speak" VDOE, and will help translate licensure terminology and answer questions related to the provisional-to-alternative pathway process.



WORKSHOP DESCRIPTIONS

(IN ORDER OF THE SCHEDULE)

From Interest to Inquiry: Turning Student Ideas into Research Questions

Presenter: Dr. Hannah Scherer, ALCE, Virginia Tech

A good research question is foundational to any inquiry, but can be challenging to develop. In this workshop, we will explore different types of research questions and how they align with different modes of investigation that are appropriate for classroom inquiry, Agriscience Fair, and Research SAEs.

Ag-tificial Intelligence

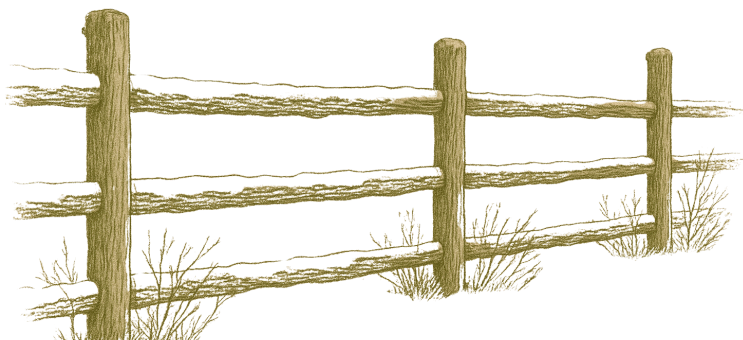
Presenter: Anna Carty, Augusta County ITRT

Discover how AI can streamline planning, spark new ideas, and support learning in the Ag classroom. We will explore AI tools, learn best practices, and leave with resources ready to use tomorrow. Please bring a personal device to this session!

Research Design for Project-Based Inquiry

Presenter: Dr. Nathaniel Porter, Virginia Tech

Description: Performing experiments and collecting original data can build student passion for agriscience learning, whether in the classroom or for extracurricular fairs and competitions, and research design skills support scientific literacy. This workshop discusses common experimental and survey research designs, as well as key software, statistics, and best practices for collecting data and engaging learners in scientific thinking through methodological practice.



WORKSHOP DESCRIPTIONS

(IN ORDER OF THE SCHEDULE)

Saturday, January 17th

Certifications

Greenhouse Operators Certification
BQA/YQCA
Maple in the Classroom
First Aid/CPR

Short Morning Workshops

Novice NCA, Kaitlyn Marchant, Georgia FFA Association

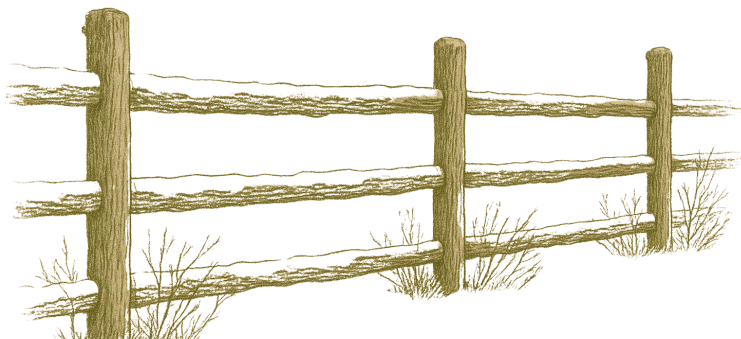
This work session is perfect anyone with little to no experience completing the National Chapter Award Application. Talk to your colleagues and ask in-depth questions.

Advanced Proficiency Awards, Ben Lastly, Georgia FFA Association

This work session is for those looking to fine tune your applications and increase student success. Bring sample applications for feedback!

AET Work Session, Sarah Jo Jones, Virginia FFA Association

If you need help getting started or learning how to optimize AET for your chapter, this work session is for you! Bring your laptop and your questions!



WORKSHOP DESCRIPTIONS

(IN ORDER OF THE SCHEDULE)

Saturday, January 17th

Short Morning Workshops

Advanced National Chapter Awards with Kaitlyn Marchant, Georgia FFA Association

If you understand the basics of the NCA and just need some help understanding scoring and how to push your chapter to the next rating, this is the time for you to get feedback and talk to your colleagues. Bring past applications to review.

Novice Proficiency Award Applications with Ben Lastly, Georgia FFA Association

Don't know where to start? This is it! Bring your laptop and learn how to get started with proficiency award applications. Talk to your colleagues and ask questions.

Middle School Owl Chat

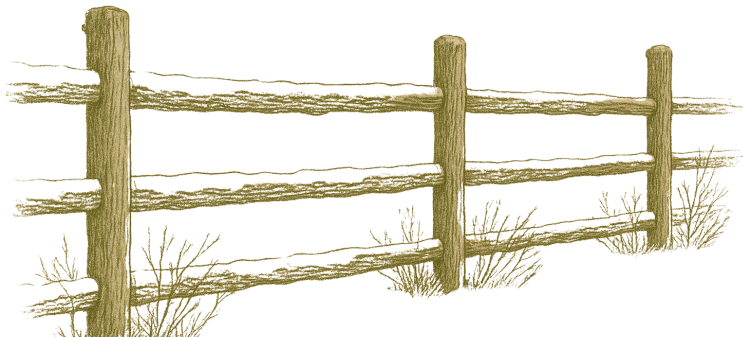
Presenter: Amy Whitten, Mecklenburg Middle School

Middle School Ag Teachers, you're not alone! Come chat with a veteran middle school teacher about all things Middle School. If you need advice on how to manage your classroom, incorporating FFA, or increasing student participation - this is a place for you to get advice and support.

Middle School CDE Preparation

Presenters: Dani Hodges, Appomattox Middle School and Cindy Vance, National FFA

During this session, middle school teachers will focus on preparing materials for the middle school CDEs. Take advantage of working cooperatively with your peers to prepare for these events.



WORKSHOP DESCRIPTIONS

(IN ORDER OF THE SCHEDULE)

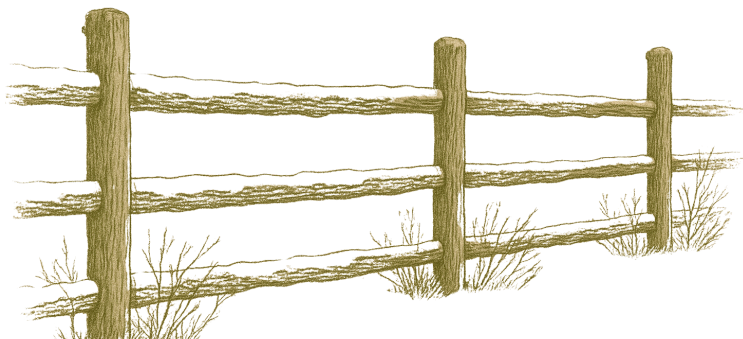
Saturday, January 17th

Short Morning Workshops

High School Owl Chat

Presenter: Sherry Heishman, Central High School

This workshop equips agriculture teachers with practical tools to manage busy programs more efficiently. Through hands-on activities and simple systems, participants learn strategies for organization, delegation, stress reduction, and building sustainable routines. Leave with ready-to-use templates, leadership tools, and fresh ideas to strengthen your ag program while protecting your well-being.



WORKSHOP DESCRIPTIONS

(IN ORDER OF THE SCHEDULE)

Make It, Take It Workshops:

Vet Science Grab-and-Go Teaching Tools: Build, Teach, Compete! (Vet Sci program on a shoestring budget)

Presenter: Sherry Heishman, Central High School

A hands-on workshop where ag teachers create ready-to-use veterinary science teaching tools. Participants receive several cost effective hands-on ideas that align with the CDE, leaving with practical resources that immediately enhance classroom instruction. Examples teachers will create a suturing pad to use and add items for venipuncture/injections; triage scenarios - will work through various scenarios; emergency vet scenarios.

Branding Iron Basics for Ag Classrooms

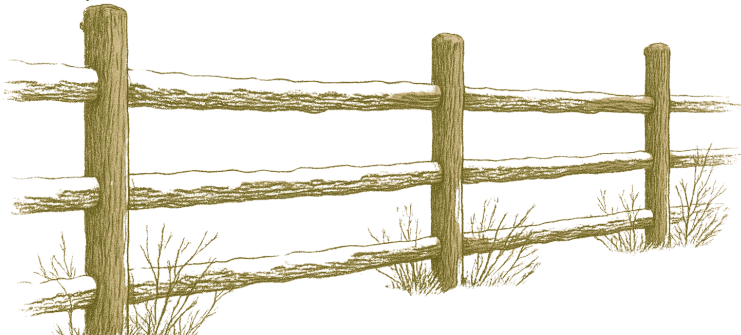
Presenters: Miranda Locuratolo and Stephanie Loring, CL Payne FFA

This hands-on workshop introduces agriculture teachers to practical, classroom-ready techniques for creating custom leather branding projects. Designed with ag mechanics and ag science programs in mind, the session blends craftsmanship, design skills, and safe shop practices—all while providing teachers with project ideas their students will love.

Twist, Tie, & Teach: Balloon Art Basics for the Classroom

Presenter: Alysha Lawless, Bassett High School

Bring creativity, color, and hands-on fun into your classroom! In this interactive teacher workshop, participants will learn the basics of balloon sculpture, including essential tools, safety tips, and simple twisting techniques that are easy to replicate with students. We will explore ways to connect balloon art to school and community activities, events, and creative projects as well as ways to earn funds. The workshop includes a hands-on component where participants will design and create a small balloon centerpiece to take home.



WORKSHOP DESCRIPTIONS

(IN ORDER OF THE SCHEDULE)

Make It, Take It Workshops:

Middle School - Livestock Lesson, No Livestock Required

Presenter: Amy Whitten, Mecklenburg Middle School

Middle school Ag teachers bring the excitement of livestock shows into the classroom—no barn or live animals required. Participants will explore creative, hands-on ways to teach livestock using middle school-friendly materials and resources.

