

Agriculture In Schools

Chris Hicks is an agriculture teacher at Lakewood High School.

Agricultural education, if you're unfamiliar with it, teaches students about the science, business and technology of agriculture; it also covers the management of land, the environment and natural resources.

"I had some excellent teachers in high school – particularly my Ag teacher and Business/Marketing teacher – that were very influential for me," said Hicks. "They showed me the real impact teachers could have and encouraged me to become a teacher. I knew that if I could impact kids in the same way that they did, then it would be a very fulfilling career."

Hicks became an educator and has worked in the schools for about seven years in Pender, Jones and now Sampson.

"First, Agriculture Education is extremely hands-on. A lot of kids benefit from hands-on application. Agriculture allows them to still incorporate math, literacy, science, and even history – but in ways that are relevant for them," he said. "Secondly, I love the fact that I'm doing something different every day. Whether we are building something in the wood shop, creating bows in horticulture, or taking care of chickens on campus, there is never a dull moment."

In fact, agricultural education programs teach students a variety of skills, including but not limited to: science, math, communications, leadership, management, technology, farm safety, and ag business leadership.

continued on page B



Reminder:

South River EMC offices will be closed Jan. 1 in celebration of the New Year.



South River EMC earns this award based on data modeled by the ACSI® in 2023. Award criteria are determined by the ACSI based on customers rating their satisfaction with South River EMC in a survey independent of the syndicated ACSI Energy Utility Study. For more about the ACSI, visit theacsi.org/ badges. ACSI and its logo are registered trademarks of the American Customer Satisfaction Index LLC.

Continued from page A

Hicks showcases this by making his students' dreams and goals a reality with numerous grants, in the last year amassing over \$100,000 for the agriculture department and programming at school.

"Our largest grant totaled nearly \$100,000 and allowed us to provide a complete renovation of our metal shop, updates to our on-campus greenhouse, and the installation of new grow benches in our shade house area," said Hicks. "Additional funding supported the creation of a new educational arboretum, the construction of a shade house for plant production, hydroponic systems for the classroom, a special research project related to Japanese maples, and more."

South River EMC awarded three grants to Hicks last year for: "Blooming into Leaders: Shade-house Expansion Project", "From Fish to Food: Aquaponics 101", and "FloraQuest: An Arboretum with a Purpose".

Stated Hicks: "The ideas for last year's projects came from a combination of conversations with my students and visits with other agricultural education programs. It's important for me to select projects that students are interested in, so that's always where my ideas start."

Hicks explained that the "Blooming into Leaders" grant had students in Agricultural Mechanics and Horticulture classes partnering to build a shade house for the horticulture program. The student led project had them pouring concrete, installing supports and building new tables, to build a shade house that measures 30 ft. x 40 ft., providing space for outdoor plant production during the growing season.

For the project, "From Fish to Food", students worked to establish an aquaponic system for lettuce and herb production.

"This project has been successful, and students have learned a lot about nutrient management, pH testing, harvesting produce and food safety."

Lettuce and herbs produced were offered in a salad bar for teachers last year.

"FloraQuest allowed us to install an on-campus arboretum, which supported our plant identification efforts in our Horticulture I & II courses," said Hicks. "Additionally, students were able to apply landscaping skills during the creation of the space. Our hope is to continue expanding the plants available in this area so that it becomes an enjoyable and educational space for our students and community."

He also received grants from Keep North Carolina Beautiful, the North Carolina FFA, the North Carolina Youth Outdoor Engagement Commission, the Simple Gifts Foundation and Smithfield Foods.

"These grants supported projects in our horticulture, agricultural mechanics and animal science program areas. Our grant from the NC Youth Outdoor Engagement Commission also provided special funding to support our Hunter Safety team with new equipment," he said. "Funding helped with improving our greenhouse and shop space with new equipment. Additionally, Simple Gifts provided funding that supports student travel to leadership conferences across the state and to the National FFA Convention and Expo in Indiana."

The Bright Ideas grant program is from the North Carolina Electric Cooperatives, and Hicks



has some experience with the program from his previous posts.

"Bright Ideas grants have always been a great option for our educators. My administration has always encouraged staff to submit grant applications, so their support for our projects encouraged me to apply," said Hicks. "And, as a former member of an electric cooperative, I always felt it was great to see funding support our local teachers and students."

This is a sentiment shared by many educators who have received grants, as these grants have allowed them to introduce learning aids they might not otherwise have been able to present.

So, what's the goal for students at Lakewood High?

"My goal for students is to find something they are truly passionate about. I feel fortunate that I've found my passion in teaching," he said. "I understand that students may not find their future career in agriculture, but I fully believe that agricultural education and FFA can help students become better citizens, more prepared for their futures, and gain the skills most often needed to be successful in life."

Letting his students lead the way and welcoming their ideas seems to be working well for this Ag teacher, and he's always looking for new ideas.



Coming In 2025

South River EMC is adding a live-line demo trailer to its offerings for the new year. The trailer will be available for presentations focusing on safety around electric equipment to audiences of all ages.

Looking to cut down on paper in the new year? Rather read this magazine on the go?

Sign-up to receive Carolina Country as an e-newsletter once a month.

Receive all this great content, including recipes, to the device of your choice for reading.

Visit sremc.com/carolina-country, while there you can also check out past issues of South River EMC's newsletter, *The Communicator*.



A New Year, A New Chance To Win

South River EMC will hold a "Give Us An A" drawing in February.

If you are unfamiliar with our "Give Us An A" program, it's when students who live in a home served by South River EMC can submit their most recent report cards containing at least one A for a chance to win a gift card.

Just make a copy of the student's most recent report card containing at least one A and add the following information: South River EMC member name, mailing

address (if not already located on the report card), account number and a daytime telephone number.*

Send the report card with this information to:

South River EMC
Give Us An A
PO Box 931
Dunn, NC 28334
or email it to connections@sremc.com.

A drawing will be held for 15 names selected to receive a \$25 gift card. Please have report cards submitted by Feb. 4.

Best of luck!

* Failure to provide this information will result in disqualification.



Summer 2025: Basketball Camps

South River EMC offers a chance for current fifth and sixth graders to apply for the Touchstone Energy Basketball camps offered at NC State and UNC-Chapel Hill.

The camps give boys and girls a unique experience to attend basketball camp on one of two of the state's largest college campuses.

Students statewide are encouraged to apply for one of 50 all-expenses-paid scholarships

to attend the Carolina Basketball Camp at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the Wolfpack Women's Basketball Academy at North Carolina State University in Raleigh.

The Carolina Basketball Camp will be held June 25-28. The Wolfpack Women's camp will be held June 15-18.

The overnight camps are held in the summer, and campers work closely with coaches and players to develop fundamental skills, helping them perform and excel both on and off the court.

- ▶ Provide their own transportation to and from camp.

Winners will attend the camps courtesy of South River EMC. The Cooperative funds one scholarship to each camp.

Applications are scored on academics, extracurricular activities and an essay that must accompany the application.

The application period runs from Jan. 2 to March 31. Eligible students interested in the scholarship can visit sremc.com/basketball-camps.



Ayden Blue with Coach Davis.

Campers must:

- ▶ Be a rising sixth or seventh grader. This means the student should currently be in fifth or sixth grade.
- ▶ Attend a school in the Cooperative service area.
- ▶ Have permission from a parent or guardian to attend. An information sheet must be signed.



Coach Moore with Emery Williams.

Let's Talk: Supply and Demand

As the diagram on the right shows and says, supply and demand is a balancing act, and that is never more true when it comes to energy use.

There are numerous factors that impact electric supply and demand, and one we are looking at is demand surges.

We demand energy to heat and cool our homes, to indeed, live our lives, but as more people have demand, supply struggles to keep up.

That's why cooperatives like South River EMC offer programs like Switch And Save and Member-Owned Generation. One program incentivizes residential members to move energy use to off-peak times. Member-Owned Generation is where our agricultural members with generators, agree to move energy use during peak use times, and run off their generators. This lessens strain on the grid at times.

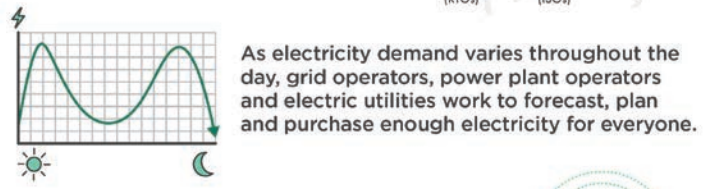
Members also participate in our Watt Watchers program, where at peak times, they are asked to shift energy use. This is yet another way we reduce demand on the grid.

There are other things that can be done though, such as installing a water heater timer on your electric storage water heater. Instead of letting it heat water throughout the day when no one is home, set it to come on at times when it is needed, such as when you wake up or return home for dinner.

If you have a full house, consider dropping the thermostat a few degrees, as body heat can add to a comfortable situation, making it warmer than necessary.

A Balancing Act: ELECTRICITY SUPPLY AND DEMAND

Behind the scenes, a network of people and facilities work together to ensure you have electricity when you flip the switch.



Ensuring communities have the exact amount of electricity they need is a challenging task, but behind the scenes, a network of industry experts make it happen every day.

Factors that Impact Electricity Supply and Demand

- Demand Surges
- Extreme Temperatures
- Infrastructure Costs and Availability

- Supply Chain Challenges
- Fuel Costs
- Federal and State Regulations

There are actions we can take to help lessen use and demand on the grid, but there are other factors that we can't control, such as extreme temperatures. However, we can change our energy use during extreme temperatures to help mitigate demand.

Infrastructure, supply chain challenges, fuel costs and regulations are all items we have the ability to learn about and find answers to improving.

If you're interested in any of the program previously mentioned in this article, contact South River EMC today!

We're looking out for you to provide safe, reliable and affordable electricity.



Being Prepared Could Help Save

Sure, it's definitely not pool season, there may be a few days here and there before summer rolls in that you might think the pool needs opened, but wait.

If your pool pump is older and single speed, it may be time to replace it before you open the pool.

Start a season in savings and replace a single-speed pool pump with a variable or two-speed pump.

A single-speed pump uses one speed, the highest, to perform all pool tasks and this can add up. By selecting a pump where you

can alter settings to task, you are more efficiently using energy and water.

Just think about that and the rebate offered by South River EMC, find details at sremc.com/pool-pumps.

Consider SEER2 Ratings For Heating And Cooling

How you heat and cool your home is important.

That's why selecting a unit with a higher seasonal energy efficiency ratio 2, or SEER 2, rating is important.

The SEER 2 rating measures the cooling efficiency of a heating and cooling system, now, why is this important? Because North Carolina tends to have a warmer climate with more time spent in cooling than heating.

Why does it matter? Because at some point, your current heating and cooling system will need to

be repaired or replaced, and you need to be ready.

The rule of thumb for replacing a heating and cooling system is to multiply the age of the system by the repair cost. If the outcome is over \$5,000, you should probably replace. If the outcome is under \$5,000, you should probably repair it.

While an industry accepted standard, it's still a bit of a shock when it happens.

Knowing what you want when the system does need replaced makes the transition easier, will

you go with a higher efficiency system, or just the same old same?

The advantage of a system with a higher SEER2 rating is that it is more efficient and as the biggest energy user of your home, could save you money.

Plus, South River EMC offers a rebate. For details on the rebates offered on heating and cooling systems, visit sremc.com/energy-star-heating-cooling.

When Replacing Your Windows Is Necessary

Have you been giving your windows a little side-eye, wondering what their impact is on your energy costs?

Windows might not be the first thought when it comes to energy costs, but they could ultimately be a contributing factor. Windows give us a view, but they also can allow in air among other things.

So, when do they need to be

considered for replacement?

There's not a particular timing standard, but more a comfort level. Are your windows drafty?

Then, do you have difficulty opening or closing them, are they showing signs of damage like cracks, or rotting frames? Is there condensation between the panes? Can you hear excessive outdoor noise coming through

them?

It doesn't have to be all these items, but if you see or experience any of them, it might be time to replace windows in your home.

Get quotes or be prepared if you plan to do-it-yourself. Window replacements are eligible for rebates from South River EMC. For details, visit sremc.com/energy-star-windows.

Community Action Help Nets Rebate

Home a little chilly this time of year? It might be that it needs some repairs and upgrades, like weatherizing your home.

Air infiltration in a home is normal and expected, but too much of a good thing creates problems. Draftiness can lead to increased costs in an effort to make up for it. By weatherizing and making improvements, you can help both comfort and cost.

However, some repairs may not fall in your budget, maybe your heating and cooling unit needs a tune-up, or you need some more insulation, maybe you can't do the weatherstripping or the caulking.

Low income single-family or manufactured homes could receive help from community action. The weatherization package for single family or manufactured low-income homes includes: air

duct sealing, improved insulation, an HVAC tune-up or replacement, and a programmable thermostat in a home with a heat pump or an electric furnace/central AC.

In having work completed by a Community Action program, you could be eligible for a rebate from South River EMC. For details, visit sremc.com/weatherization.



Could HERO Be Your Next Move?

Considering up sizing or down-sizing?

A high efficiency residential option, or HERO, home might be the way to go.

These types of homes are built 30 percent more efficiently due to improvements in the thermal enclosure.

This includes slightly better insulation, fenestration, air sealing, equipment, and lighting packages to deliver savings.

There are two ways to build

such a home:

- The prescriptive path, which is straightforward, involving full compliance with a list of specific requirements for things like insulation, high-efficiency lighting, window U-factors, whole house tightness and duct leakage testing, and more.

- The performance path is more flexible requiring an energy cost analysis (provided to you by your HERS Rater and signed-off by a Design Professional) as proof

that the home you are building will have energy costs that are less than or equal to that same home built to the HERO Code's prescriptive requirements. Higher efficiency equipment will not help you, because the HERO Code focuses almost solely on improvements in the thermal enclosure.

HERO homes are eligible for rebates. For details on them, visit sremc.com/hero-program.

More Efficient Water Heating Options? You Decide

The water heater is one of the most overlooked appliances in a home. Typically, an unassuming cylindrical tank tucked out of the way, often in the basement or garage, is not thought about much, until it must be considered.

Suddenly, hot showers don't last as long, or the water coming out of the tap is more lukewarm than hot, or worse, completely cold! That's why deciding on your water heater replacement before it's too late can help you avoid a headache when it's time.

When thinking about a replacement, there are some compelling reasons to consider an Energy Star certified electric heat pump water heater, HPWH, to save serious money and energy.

HPWHs use the heat around the unit to warm water, and because they move heat rather than make it, they are 2-3 times more efficient and that can be all the difference. Although they do carry a slightly higher cost, HPWHs can quickly recover those costs, particularly for a family of four.

Maybe you're looking into solar water heating? This might require a little more inspection before making a decision. These systems are typically roof mounted, so you must be sure building codes and covenants allow for that. Also, do you have a good solar resource? Get quotes from several installers to ensure you are comparing apples to apples in this respect. A good solar

resource will help you not only with hot water, but recovery costs as well.

Then, there are the solar systems themselves, visit energy.gov for a rundown on types of systems.

We looked at these types of systems because South River EMC offers rebates on HPWHs and solar water heaters, and if you'd like to consider a more efficient option of water heating. For information about the rebates, visit sremc.com/energy-efficient-water-heating.



PO Box 931
Dunn, NC 28335
910.892.8071
800.338.5530
sremc.com



 Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives
The power of human connections®