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substation out in the Waldroup Road area," said Cummings. "Years ago, everybody in Fannin County that's on our system, the Dial area, the Suches area, they were all on one substation, and that was in Blairsville."

Continued Cummings: "Somebody had to develop a plan that said we expect population growth in these areas, so let's do something to alleviate some of the problems that we might have in delivering electricity to those folks. And that's why we have a substation at Blairsville, at Young Cane, and at Waldroup Road."

Places the EMC anticipates adding substations in the coming years include the Shooting Creek and Murphy

areas of North Carolina, among others.

EMC General Manager Jeremy Nelms discussed in the meeting that the Tennessee Valley Authority will be implementing a fixed-cost recovery wholesale rate change later this year in October.

The change will move a small portion of the energy charge to a fixed-cost rate similar to the EMC customer charge, according to Nelms.

"Those details have not been worked out yet," said Nelms of the TVA rate change. "I was really just bringing it to the board at that point to give them a preliminary heads-up so nobody got surprised this summer when I did bring the final details."

Per BRMEMC.com:

"The Tennessee Valley Authority is a corporate agency of the United States that provides electricity for business customers and local power distributors serving 9 million people in parts of seven Southeastern states. TVA receives no taxpayer funding, deriving virtually all of its revenues from sales of electricity."

Nelms also said in the Jan. 9 board meeting that he and his staff are looking into the possibility of allowing people to report power outages via text message.

The next board meeting will be held on Tuesday, Feb. 13, at 6 p.m. inside the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC Headquarters in Young Harris.

Session of the Georgia General Assembly.

There, he plans to continue working with fellow lawmakers on such issues as broadband infrastructure in rural Georgia, the opioid crisis, rural health care, education and more.

"I just want to continue to work and help the people of the 51st District, regardless of political party," said Sen. Gooch. "I am their voice in Atlanta, I represent the needs of the 200,000 citizens of the 51st District. I take that very seriously."

The 51st District includes Fannin, Union, Gilmer, Lumpkin, White, Dawson and parts of Pickens and Forsyth counties.

businesses, a perspective that informs his governance style to this day.

And *Georgia Trend* has taken notice.

"To be picked by this distinguished magazine – this is one of the top magazines in the state – to have that designation is very humbling, and I'm honored by that," said Sen. Gooch. "I take it as a compliment to the work that not only I do, but the staff and the office does on a daily basis to try to respond to constituents' needs."

Sen. Gooch returned to the Georgia State Capitol in Atlanta last week for the start of the 2018 Legislative

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public service," said Sen. Gooch. "I've been in public service for almost 17 years, and I really get a lot of satisfaction out of helping others and helping constituents to resolve their problems."

Not only has Gooch spent much of his adult life serving the public, he also spent 17 years in the private sector, running a Dahlonega resort called R-Ranch in the Mountains.

His experience in both the public and private sectors has given him a sense of balance between the two, and has enabled him to witness firsthand how government oftentimes hinders

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Cultivating Change grant monies are chosen via peer voting and deliberation through a grant review committee.

To show support for a local farm and help the Cookfairs secure grant funding, visit CultivatingChange.org, click "Vote Now!" then enter Blairsville into the subsequent search field to pull up Big Valley Branch Farm, Union County's very own certified organic farm.

"This grant will allow us to significantly increase our yields," said Sarah Cookfair. "Nearly one third of our acreage suitable for vegetable production sits in a drain. This seriously restricts not only what we can grow in these areas, but also drastically reduces the yields of what we do grow there.

"By giving us the funds to redirect our drains to the creek in an extremely efficient and noninvasive way, we would see yields in those areas doubling, and possibly even tripling."

A total of \$75,000 in grant funds will be awarded to many lucky farmers from coast to coast, ranging from \$3,000 grants to \$10,000 grants, all with the purpose of promoting and encouraging sustainable, organic growing practices.

Organic and sustainable farming often requires more attention and time than conventional farming due to a heavier reliance on natural cycles for health and crop performance.

This usually means slower, smaller crop yields, and subsequently higher prices.

Conventional farming, on the other hand, typically uses added synthetic chemicals and scientific alterations to produce maximum crop yields in less time, which is why non-organic or sustainable produce is often less expensive.

Because of this, the Cookfairs are certain that, should they receive the grant



A spread of delicious vegetables grown by Big Branch Valley Farm, on sale at the Union County Farmers Market during open season. Photo/Facebook

money to increase their land usage, they will be able to maintain reasonable prices and still provide customers with high quality organic produce.

"Organic production requires a minimum of a four-year crop rotation," said Cookfair. "Otherwise, you will face disease and pest pressures that, as an organic grower, you simply cannot contend with.

"Consequently, organic farming requires significantly more land than conventional farming. Maximizing our land and yields would allow us to keep pricing down for our customers."

The Cookfairs moved to Union County just over a year ago, traveling down the coast from New Jersey in search of an Appalachian town to call home.

Alex is originally from Fayette County and was familiar with the area, and after searching from Charlottesville, Virginia, on down, the couple decided that no place quite compared to Blairsville.

And so, the Cookfairs and their son moved south, bringing with them their love of farming and all things

sustainable and organic.

"We went into farming because we love spending time in the outdoors, and we hope to pass that love down to our son," said Cookfair. "It is essential that we take care of our land and our environment. As we age, we want our land to grow richer, more vibrant and more diverse – not to become degraded and overused.

"Furthermore, we feed our family off what we grow, so it seems only natural to grow the healthiest produce that we can."

Continued Cookfair: "We'd just like to take a moment to thank Union County for its warm welcome. When we moved our farm here, we had no idea what to expect, and went into last season extremely nervous that we might not be able to sell our produce.

"We were blown away by the support we received last season, and are really looking forward to this upcoming season."

The Cookfairs can be found at the Union County Farmers Market during open season, and via the farm website at BigBranchVF.com.

C.H.A.M.P.S...from Page 1A



CHAMPS graduates lining up to receive their certificates of program completion on Friday, Jan. 12. Photo/Lily Avery

education.

With these factors in mind, the Union County Sheriff's Office and Sheriff Mack Mason provide a program to the elementary school's fifth-grade students through the Georgia Sheriff's Association.

That program is called Choosing Healthy Activities and Methods Promoting Safety, otherwise known as C.H.A.M.P.S.

"I would like to thank everyone in the school system, the teachers and the administration, for taking time out of your day to let me come and teach these kids," said Lt. Darren Jones, C.H.A.M.P.S. Instructor with the Union County Sheriff's Office. "The mission for C.H.A.M.P.S. is to provide an educational program for Georgia's youth, which provides guidance and the skills, ability and knowledge to be safe, healthy and happy, in preparation for a successful life.

"During our time together, we had several different messages. We talked about what C.H.A.M.P.S. is. We talked about alcohol. We talked about tobacco. We talked about peer pressure, marijuana, meth and internet safety. We talked about a lot of things.

"I hope these kids take these lessons with them throughout their lives and use them to continue to make positive, healthy choices. And if you ever need me, for anything, just know that I'm always here."

The 10-week C.H.A.M.P.S. course looks at the dangers and pitfalls that children face on a daily basis through activities in the home or at school, including alcohol, bullying, narcotics, marijuana, other illegal substances and peer pressure.

UCSO Capt. Doug Loyd assisted Lt. Jones in presenting certificates and medals to all of the students, and as an extra treat, UCSO K9 Deputy Lacey also attended the event to give

her stamp of approval on the graduating class.

"I wanted to tell you guys that we appreciate all of your hard work and your efforts," said Capt. Loyd. "It's not easy at times to sit there in a classroom and listen to Lt. Jones and go over everything and stay focused.

"We appreciate all of you guys very much. And look at the support that is here for you today, that means a lot. Our prayer is that you take something from this and continue to use it later in life."

As part of the requirements to graduate from the program, each student was asked to write an essay at the end of the 10 weeks that included main points they had learned during the course.

Awards were given for best essay in each class, and one award was given for the best essay overall, which the selected student then read aloud to the audience.

Elijah Ochoa won that award with her incredibly written essay on alcohol,

marijuana, illegal substances and peer pressure, and how all of the aforementioned can negatively impact a person's health, wellbeing and life.

"These essays were all really, really good," said Lt. Jones. "It was difficult to choose who was going to win for each class, and even harder to decide who was going to stand up here and read this morning. I'm so proud of each one of you kids. You all did an amazing job."

After the ceremony was complete and all the students had made their way back to the elementary school, Lt. Jones treated the kids to lunch from Sicily's Pizza of Blairsville.

"I appreciate each and every one of these fifth-grade students," said Lt. Jones. "I hold these guys dear to my heart. Keep up the good work and thank you teachers, administration, parents, Sheriff Mason and everyone who continues to make this program possible. It's so important, and it's truly been an honor."