



NEW

Fall/Winter 2024

HORIZONS

FFA.ORG

**Vision-
Impaired
Siblings Find
Focus in FFA**

Region Reports

What's FFA Like Around the Country?

Your Pre-Convention Checklist + New Merch Styles Inside!

HARVEST WHAT YOU PLANT



As a farmer's daughter, I learned firsthand you can't harvest something you don't plant. In addition to watching this concept unfold on my family's cattle and row crop farm in rural Missouri, I've experienced it during my time as an FFA member and alumna. After all, you can't reap rewards in our organization without first sowing seeds.

By the time this issue reaches your mailbox, it's likely you're preparing to start a new school year and possibly travel to Indianapolis for the 97th National FFA Convention & Expo. Perhaps you're also refining an application, writing a fall speech or making plans for what comes after high school. Regardless of what's on your plate, now is the perfect time to sow seeds that can set you and your chapter up for future success.

Fortunately, this issue is designed to help direct and inspire these efforts. For example, "Conversations Spark Community Change" on page 15 details how Grand Rapids FFA members Emma Braford, Kaiya Grossman, Isaac Palecek and Savannah Moinichen worked with Minnesota state legislators to sow seeds of support and make a positive, lasting difference. In "Your How-To Guide for High-Caliber Chapter Programming," starting on page 16, Stillwater FFA and Carroll County Middle

FFA share how planning and executing a strong Program of Activities helped them reap the rewards of becoming 2023 National Chapter Award Program winners. Additionally, Reedley FFA Alumnus Hugo Rodriguez shares how his involvement sparked an interest that later helped him cultivate a career path in "A Start in Animal Science" on page 37.

In all areas of life, including those related to agriculture and FFA, I believe we can't enjoy our accomplishments and impressive feats without first putting in the necessary time and effort. This fall, three generations of my family will climb into tractors, combines and grain trucks, then head to the corn and soybean fields. There, we'll (hopefully) be rewarded with a bountiful harvest resulting from months of persistent care, unwavering faith and abundant resilience.

Although uncontrollable circumstances may come our way, we can choose to plant purpose, nurture growth and harvest hope. Preparing for your future can start today, so what are you waiting for?

Lauren Quinlan

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THE FFA VISION

Growing the next generation of leaders who will change the world.

THE FFA MISSION

FFA makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education.

THE AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION MISSION

Agricultural education prepares students for successful careers and a lifetime of informed choices in the global agriculture, food, fiber and natural resource systems.

DIVERSITY STATEMENT

The National FFA Organization affirms its belief in the value of all human beings and seeks diversity in its membership, leadership and staff as an equal opportunity employer.

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The National FFA Organization is a resource and support organization that does not select, control or supervise state association, local chapter or individual member activities. Educational materials are developed by FFA in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Education as a service to state and local agricultural education agencies.

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Fraternal twins and Lubbock-Cooper FFA Alumni Faith and Caleb Snapp's involvement helped them overcome obstacles and experience a sense of belonging.

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Explore how agriculture and FFA are similar — and different! — throughout the country.



In Colorado, Kadie Childers prepares for the Greeley West FFA Chapter's annual farm-to-table event. P. 30

On the cover: **Greeley West FFA members Javier Gomez Muro (left), Andres Garcia-Palacios (center) and Savanna Guzman (right).**

THE FEED



5 Things FROM FFA.ORG

Finish the year strong by bookmarking these resources related to national convention celebrations, financial aid opportunities and more.

97th National FFA Convention & Expo

Each year, the streets of downtown Indianapolis fill with blue and gold jackets as we commemorate the past, present and future of FFA. This October, network with exhibitors in the National FFA Expo Hall, grab this year's official tee (and other gear) in the shopping mall, volunteer during National Days of Service and cheer on award finalists in Lucas Oil Stadium. There's truly something for everyone to explore and experience, so don't miss any of the action!



FFA Live!

If you'll be tuning in to convention from afar, this all-encompassing streaming broadcast has you covered. Watch proceedings from general sessions, award programs and Finals Hall presentations unfold in real time, and check out the Emmy-nominated Inside Convention show featuring captivating daily footage. Additional newsworthy content can be found on FFA.org and the National FFA Organization's Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, LinkedIn, X and TikTok pages.



Scan with your phone

Financial Assistance

Planning to attend a National FFA conference or event? If so, then consider applying for a Member Assistance and Experience Grant. This new program includes a simple online application that's completed by an FFA member or advisor. Once selected, funds are distributed to your chapter and used to offset registration and travel expenses for the National FFA Convention & Expo, Next Gen Conferences, Washington Leadership Conference and more.



Scholarships

High school seniors and college students, whether your future includes pursuing trade school, earning a vocational certificate or completing a two-year or four-year degree, FFA can help cover costs associated with furthering your education. Submitting a single online application qualifies you for multiple National FFA scholarships ranging from \$500 to \$10,000. After your initial submission, a simple reapplication process ensures you're able to be reconsidered up to a college junior standing. The application opens on Friday, Nov. 1.



See something, Say something

Whether you realize it or not, how you carry yourself and respond to certain situations can affect how others perceive both you and our organization. If you notice inappropriate behavior or danger at an FFA event, please speak up and let someone know. Call 911 in the case of an emergency and use the code "FFAevent" when filing a report through this third-party site. Regardless of your connection to FFA, play a role in ensuring everyone feels safe, welcomed and respected.



FFA AT-A-GLANCE

Mark these important dates, including application deadlines, upcoming events and more, in your calendar to help you take advantage of every opportunity FFA has to offer this season.

First of each month Day of Service Mini-Grant application deadline

Aug. 15..... Next Gen Conferences applications open

Aug. 30..... Fall Semester-Long Living to Serve Grant application deadline

Sept. 1..... Alumni and Supporters grant application deadline

Oct. 1..... SAE Grant application opens

Oct. 2..... Standard National FFA Convention registration begins at 8 p.m. ET

Oct. 23-26..... 97th National FFA Convention & Expo in Indianapolis

Nov. 1..... National FFA Scholarships application opens

Nov. 15..... SAE Grant application deadline

Dec. 15..... New Century Farmer application opens

Dec. 16..... Spring Semester-Long Living to Serve Grant application opens

**Dates subject to change. Visit FFA.org for the latest information.*

Your Pre-Convention Checklist As planning and preparations continue for the 97th National FFA Convention & Expo, here are a few things to know before you go. - By Taleen Hanna

Whether you're venturing to Indianapolis for national convention or tuning in from home this year, it's never too early to start preparing. Use these checklists to help stay on track and equip yourself for the big event this October.

Attention, Advisors!

Remember to register. Sign your chapter up for events like general sessions, workshops, career success tours and access to the shopping mall, expo hall and more. Visit **Convention.FFA.org/Registration** for a list of registration rates and details.

Create an interesting itinerary. Plan fun excursions and educational outings to keep members entertained. Encourage members at home to tune into FFA Live!, the streaming broadcast that will run throughout convention.

Make Your Mark, Members!

Pack with purpose. To participate in the sea of blue and gold that will fill the streets and screens, include

FFA Official Dress in your suitcase. In addition to an easily forgotten tie or scarf, remember to include an extra pair of socks or pantyhose!

Connect and engage. Download the National FFA Events app to stay in-the-know for all things national convention. Make sure to also follow the National FFA Organization's Facebook page and **@NationalFFA** on Instagram.

Convention Is Coming!

Visit **Convention.FFA.org** to stay updated on the latest news. While you're waiting, scan this code to learn about last year's celebrations.



FROM THE BOARD

Scan this code to access the latest National FFA Board of Directors meeting minutes.



THIS SAE POPPED OFF

A kernel of an idea led this National Trail FFA member to a creative (and delicious!) supervised agricultural experience.

— By Jodi Helmer

Grant Deaton remembers when his dad rented farmland from a man who sold popcorn at local fairs and festivals around their hometown of New Paris, Ohio. Deaton's dad didn't know enough about the crop to start growing it, but the idea stayed with the National Trail High School junior who decided to experiment with the crop for his supervised agricultural experience (SAE).

"When I was deciding on my SAE, all I knew was I wanted something different," Deaton says. "I didn't want to do the same things other FFA members were, and popcorn was unique."

In 2022, Deaton planted a quarter acre of popcorn. Today, the National Trail FFA member grows three and a half acres of the unique crop and demand has, well, popped off. Deaton sold 300 pounds of individually packaged popcorn in 2023, followed by 1,000 pounds in the first quarter of

2024. Looking ahead, he plans to increase his production levels to meet the demand.

"It's pretty exciting to see the growth," he says.

Doing to Learn

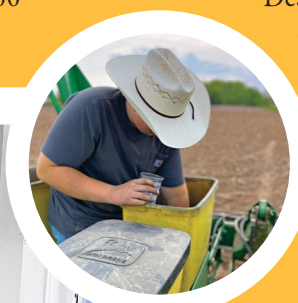
However, it took some trial and error to get to this point. Deaton wasn't pleased with the quality of his initial crop, which was better suited for small gardens, not commercial production. Before he switched suppliers, Deaton ordered samples of 15 popcorn varieties, popped all the corn and set up a taste test. He used these results to choose new varieties of white, yellow and mushroom popcorn.

Although growing popcorn is like growing field corn, Deaton learned the moisture content must be just right for the maximum number of kernels to pop. To ensure his popping corn doesn't have too much (or too little) moisture,

Deaton picks several ears of corn, puts the kernels in a moisture tester and pops some test batches before he harvests.

Once Deaton is certain the crop is ready, he harvests it using a machine purchased on Facebook Marketplace, then packages it in one-pound packages under the Deaton Popcorn label. He sells popcorn online and has contracts with high school concessions, baseball leagues, kettle corn vendors and retailers; Deaton Popcorn is even sold at the local movie theater.

"The biggest reward from my SAE is seeing its improvement," he says. "Sales have gone up tremendously, and people are interested in the product. I'm excited to see what will happen next."



Grant Deaton designed custom packaging, including a Deaton Popcorn logo, to help market his products to consumers.



Kick-Start Your SAE

Looking for ideas and inspiration? Access a full collection of videos at FFA.org/FFA-Video-Center/SAE-Video-Library.

UP-CLOSE LOOK AT PRECISION AG

Access to a high-tech simulator helped students in New York and Kentucky learn about the future of farming. - By Mark Moore



Thanks to donated agricultural technology education simulators from New Holland North America and Raven Industries, 11 FFA chapters nationwide are gaining firsthand knowledge and experiences in the field of precision agriculture.

These simulators are being used in classrooms like Erin Smith's, where she teaches agricultural education and advises the Stockbridge Valley FFA Chapter in New York.

"The chance [for students] to get hands-on opportunities by using the simulator will make precision agriculture come to life," she says. "They'll grasp real-world applications in a way we wouldn't be able to show them without the display."

The unit, a Raven RS-1 Demo Education Simulator, will also be shared with more agriculture programs in Smith's area, providing additional avenues for students and FFA members to strengthen their skills.

In Mansfield, Ky., Graves County FFA is implementing the simulator in its agriculture power and equipment operation and introductory agriscience courses.

"We're very excited for what this will bring to students in our program," says Abbey Lyell, the chapter's advisor. "We intend to use the simulator as part of a pathway exploration unit with our first-year students, which allows them to experience equipment they've likely never used before. They'll also learn about the abundance of agricultural technology being used to increase efficiency and sustainability."

To further enhance their learning experiences, New Holland North America and Raven Industries are providing FFA chapters with a Precision Toolkit, which includes additional online resources and curriculum. Members and advisors can access this by scanning the code below.



Cedar Crest FFA in Pennsylvania (pictured above) also received a simulator during a special event hosted at a local New Holland Agriculture dealership.



PICKUP PRIZE

In Oklahoma, Strother FFA won a new Ford truck as part of an annual giveaway aimed at recognizing excellence in chapters across the state.

- By Courtney Leeper Girgis

Strother FFA members from Seminole, Okla., anxiously waited in their seats during the sixth session of the 2023 Oklahoma State FFA Convention & Expo. A 2022 four-door Ford Super Duty truck was up for grabs, the prize of an annual giveaway that started in 2002 as a special project between the Oklahoma FFA Foundation and Oklahoma Ford dealers.

When the announcer called their chapter's name as the winner, Strother FFA President Jessica Sneed and her fellow members rushed to the stage.

"I think we were nervous and excited at the same time, hoping it was going to be us," she says.

From the beginning of the Built Ford Tough Giveaway, Oklahoma Ford dealers have requested the donated truck be used "as an incentive to recognize excellence at the local chapter level," says Trevor Lucas, Oklahoma FFA Association executive secretary.

To be eligible for the random drawing, chapters must have their National Chapter Award

application approved at the state level. In 2022, Strother FFA was among 33 Oklahoma chapters honored nationally as top-rated, 3-star chapters.

Randy Bean, Strother FFA advisor, says the new truck came at the perfect time – their old one was sitting in the



Strother FFA members and their advisor celebrate being the 2023 Built Ford Tough Truck giveaway winner.

mechanic shop. This year, his chapter used the truck to haul livestock and welding projects, as well as drive members to competitions.

"It was definitely a night to remember," says Cheyenne Range, Strother FFA vice president.

FORD FUNDS THE FUTURE

Visit FFA.org/Participate/Grants-and-Scholarships to browse Ford dealers that have signed up to support National FFA chapters and see if yours is on the list.

Quiz:

FFA Jacket History

- By Jessica Mozo

The iconic blue and gold corduroy FFA jacket is a symbol of unity, honor and pride for millions of members, alumni and supporters worldwide. As you gear up to wear your jacket at this year's 97th National FFA Convention & Expo and other FFA activities, test your knowledge about the official FFA jacket and its time-honored history.

1. What percentage of contemporary corduroy is made from cotton?
2. What year was the FFA jacket first created?
3. On average, how many FFA jackets are sold annually?
4. How many yards of corduroy are required to create one FFA jacket?
5. What is the maximum number of pins that should be worn on the front of an FFA jacket?
6. Since 2014, how many jackets have been gifted to members through the National FFA Give the Gift of Blue program?
7. In what year was the one-millionth FFA jacket sold?
8. Throughout the course of one year, approximately how many yards of corduroy are used to make FFA jackets?

ANSWER OPTIONS:

- A. 100
- B. 90,000
- C. 1.6
- D. 1933
- E. 3
- F. 1964
- G. 144,000
- H. 17,000

Answers: 1. 100 (A) 2. 1933 (D) 3. 90,000 (B) 4. 1.6 (C) 5. 3 (E) 6. 17,000 (H) 7. 1964 (F) 8. 144,000 (G)

5 Ways to Say "Thank You"

In light of the upcoming holiday season, here's how to get creative when expressing your gratitude.

- By Jessica Mozo

This time of year is known for giving (and receiving) gifts, so it's important to adopt an attitude of gratitude. A simple "thank you" to someone can have a powerful impact, and there are countless approaches you can use when expressing your appreciation.

Read on for five ways to thank others this season.

1. **Write a heartfelt thank-you note or card.** Although it may be faster to send an email or text message, taking time to write a handwritten message speaks volumes in our data-driven world.
2. **Volunteer your time.** Whether it's preparing a meal, completing a chore or providing an act of service, set aside a couple hours to do something nice for the person you're grateful for.
3. **Show up with an unexpected delight.** Bring the person their favorite coffee, sweet treat, flowers or something else you know they like. (Spoiler alert: It will make you feel good, too.)
4. **Treat someone to a fun event.** Spend quality time with the person by inviting them to an outing they enjoy, such as a new movie, play, sporting event, parade or concert.
5. **Create a shared gratitude journal.** This easy, fun activity is one you can do with family members or friends, and it gives each person the opportunity to participate. To get started, jot down a list of things you're grateful for, then pass the journal around and take turns sharing answers.

To help you carry out these ideas (or your own!), visit ShopFFA.org/Products and browse branded thank-you cards, gifts, apparel and more.

STARTING FROM SCRATCH

As a recently chartered chapter, Weeping Water FFA launched Limestone Coffee Co., a student-run business venture, to raise funds and help members gain valuable skills. -By Lydia Johnson

Although agriculture is the largest industry in Cass County, Neb., Weeping Water High School didn't have an FFA chapter until the fall of 2022. Krystl Knabe was a 4-H club leader in the area at the time and had a background in agricultural education, so recruiting a group of members to join the newly chartered chapter came naturally to her.

"We had a teacher retire, and our school knew agriculture was important to our community," says Knabe, who began teaching at Weeping Water High School when the FFA chapter formed and now serves as its advisor. "They viewed this as an opportunity to offer classes about agriculture to our students."

Two years later, Weeping Water FFA now boasts nearly 40 active members, and the chapter focuses on serving its community and developing leadership skills through Limestone Coffee Co., a student-run coffee trailer.

A Business Is Born

In the spring of 2023, FFA members preparing for the district parliamentary procedure competition discussed owning and operating a coffee trailer. Long after they finished competing, this idea was still fresh on these students' minds.

"There aren't any coffee shops around here, so you'd have to drive at least 15 minutes to find one," says Katie Meyer, a Weeping Water FFA member and one of Limestone Coffee Co.'s student founders. "We saw this need in our community and came together to meet it."

With help from Knabe, members began evaluating the feasibility of starting this type of business venture. Putting their heads together, they sought to address questions such as "What will be on the menu?" and "What's our profit margin?" and "How will we market it?"

Once all factors had been taken into careful consideration, members presented a proposal to Knabe and the school's superintendent. After receiving approval from both individuals, the chapter officially launched Limestone Coffee Co.

Ideas Become Actions

A stainless-steel trailer was converted into a mobile coffee cart, which is parked at the school and can be easily transported to nearby community events such as the Lincoln Marathon.

After about six months of operation, profits from Limestone Coffee Co. provided funds for 17 Weeping Water FFA members to attend the 96th National FFA Convention & Expo in Indianapolis last fall.

"At the beginning, making sure it ran consistently was a struggle," Meyer says. "As time progressed, we learned so much about leadership and organization."

Lay the Foundation

Visit FFA.org/Start-an-FFA-Chapter to learn about how you can create an agricultural education program and FFA chapter in your area.



Weeping Water FFA members found a new purpose for a stainless-steel trailer by transforming it into their student-run business, Limestone coffee co.

Compelled *by* Compassion

Capitan FFA member Joni Foster donated proceeds from an award-winning project to her hardworking peers. - By Kim Hill

Two of Joni Foster's market swine projects had been accepted for the Lincoln County Fair's livestock sale in Capitan, N.M., when she observed fellow exhibitors' disappointment as their animals didn't make the sale.

"Almost everyone is there 24 hours a day, so you see how much time and hard work they've dedicated to their projects," says Foster, the Capitan FFA president. "They might not make the sale, but they put in the hours and the effort."

In that moment, Foster thought of her prize-winning agricultural mechanics project: a table and chairs crafted from an old whiskey barrel. Feeling inspired to give back, she asked fair board members if the set could be sold during the auction, with the intention of dividing its proceeds between all Lincoln County Fair exhibitors.

The board agreed. As the items were auctioned off, numerous community supporters were moved by Foster's generosity and decided to pool their donations to drive up the final price. When the gavel dropped, the set brought more than \$41,000 – a collective community effort unlike anything Foster's mother, Jolie, had ever seen.

"To see a community come together to support not only my daughter and her dream of giving back, but also the local [county fair exhibitors] was one of the most moving things I've seen in my life," Jolie Foster says.

Looking back, Joni Foster says this series of events felt like a dream. "It took a few days for me to process what had happened," she says.

After the auction, community members donated additional funds to the cause, raising the table and chair set's final price to \$48,000. Each Lincoln County Fair exhibitor received an average of \$490, which was enough to help them continue showing livestock in the future.

Paying it Forward

Although Foster's passion is show pigs, finding a love for agricultural mechanics didn't come as easily. Helping in her family's metal business began as a chore, she says, and the whiskey barrel and chair set required precise woodworking and welding skills.



Joni Foster repurposed wood from an old whiskey barrel to create a top-ranking table and set of chairs.

"It was very old, so every piece [of wood] I used was different," she says. "It definitely created a challenge for me."

Since the materials she used to craft the table and chairs were donated, pocketing the money from the items' sale didn't feel right. Instead, Foster decided to pay it forward with the items' proceeds.

"I've seen how much Lincoln County does for its youth and for me," she says. "I also don't know what I'd do without FFA."

Foster's FFA advisor, Jake Devine, wasn't surprised by her compassionate generosity.

"It speaks to who she is," he says. "Joni wants to show up for the person in the back of the room and for the person in the spotlight. She wants them all to feel equal and wanted."



TRANSFORM INTERESTS INTO A CAREER

If you enjoy using your hands to create and discover how things work, consider a career in the power, structural and technical systems pathway. Visit AgExplorer.FFA.org/Focus/Power-Structural-Technical-Systems/ to learn more.



Question & Answer

Being a national officer is a once-in-a-lifetime experience and, for some, a dream come true. What is one word that summarizes your year of service, and why?



Amara Jackson

NATIONAL FFA PRESIDENT

Through meeting people from all walks of life, I've learned the power of **connection**. On my visit to Idaho, Alyssa, a Hansen FFA member, reminded me to create communities of people who believe in us, and Haven from the Cambridge FFA Chapter showed me that we must find ways to leave each space we enter better than we found it. Connections like these continue to shape the person, friend and leader I'm becoming.



Grant Norfleet

NATIONAL FFA SECRETARY

Celebration summarizes the culmination of my time in the blue jacket. The act of celebrating has a magical effect on those around us, and this year enabled me to champion others for exactly who and where they are. Our organization and industry are full of folks worth celebrating, so I made sure each person I met was celebrated with a bit of imaginary (or, in some cases, literal) confetti. Big or small, celebrate someone's successes today.



Carter Howell

SOUTHERN REGION VICE PRESIDENT

Throughout this whirlwind of a year, my goal was to **embrace** each moment, opportunity, place, person and the community I've been surrounded by. When we learn to embrace every moment we're in and the people we meet, we create opportunities for genuine and authentic experiences where we can learn and grow. FFA members, I challenge you to embrace every opportunity you're given.



Morgan Anderson

EASTERN REGION VICE PRESIDENT

This year, I've been filled with **gratitude**. From seeing the sun rise over the mountains in Colorado to creating flower crowns in a horticulture class in Pennsylvania, each day has reminded me how lucky I am to be part of something bigger than myself. I arrived as a stranger in many places, but left as a friend due to the warmth, kindness and hospitality of those who welcomed me with open arms. It's truly amazing.



Kanyon Huntington

CENTRAL REGION VICE PRESIDENT

I'm astounded by the **community** I've found in FFA. A community is a place where we feel like we belong, and our communities help our wings soar to new heights, much like agriculturists give nutrients to plants to help them grow. No matter what experiences our members have, they can zip up their blue jackets and feel at home on their journeys. In these moments, I developed a community where we could all build each other up.



Emily Gossett

WESTERN REGION VICE PRESIDENT

This year has been full of **joy**, which is a cheerfulness and gladness of the heart. Whether it was receiving quick words of encouragement or a special friendship bracelet, FFA members taught me the importance of living in a state of joyfulness. I'm grateful for the opportunity to count it all as joy because the people I interacted with were excited about celebrating others, served through kind actions and loved others well.

AG 101

A stylized illustration of a light blue head with a white face, holding an open book. The head has simple features: two dots for eyes, a small blue triangle for a nose, and two curved lines for eyebrows. Inside the head, there is a landscape scene with rolling hills, a small white house with a blue roof, a windmill, and a few trees. Above the head, there are white clouds and lines radiating from the landscape scene, suggesting a connection between the landscape and the head. The background is a solid teal color.

What's Your NEXT AG CLASS?

- By Lauren Manning

Whether you're a first-time freshman or a rising senior preparing for what comes after high school, it can be challenging to navigate the many choices of classes you could take, including those related to agriculture. Even if you're clear on the direction you're headed, consider casting a wide net when it comes to your education. This approach helps keep your options open and can allow you to transition to a multitude of career opportunities down the road. To aid in your search and ease your nerves ahead of the next class enrollment day, here are a few classes and potential career pathways to explore.

COURSE

CAREER PATH

ANIMAL SCIENCE

Taking introductory coursework in this area can help you determine if a path in veterinary medicine or ranching is right for you.

Veterinary Science
Production Agriculture

AGRICULTURE ECONOMICS

Businesses, farms and ranches often need support with understanding market trends, small business strategies and opportunities to diversify. Having a firm grasp of this content area is foundational for many career pursuits.

**Agriculture Business,
Sales & Marketing**
Production Agriculture

INTERMEDIATE BIOLOGY & CHEMISTRY

With many food manufacturers looking for new ingredients to meet consumers' evolving tastes, food science is a rapidly growing segment of the agricultural industry. A career in this field can also help address food safety concerns and meet expanding legal requirements surrounding food origin and transparency.

Food Science
**Agriculture Technology
& Innovation**

SOIL SCIENCE

Emerging trends in this industry include soil health and understanding how microbiology in soil impacts yields, nutritional quality, the need for inputs and the role of cover crops. As you learn about these topics, you'll be able to explore a variety of roles available in this field.

**Agriculture Business,
Sales & Marketing**
Production Agriculture

DATA SCIENCE & ADVANCED CODING

Digital solutions are becoming more common in agriculture, and ag tech is an exciting field where specialists can apply their innovations to solve real-world problems. Coding classes can help set you up to launch a start-up or work for a major equipment retailer. Using digital tools also helps food manufacturers learn about their supply chains and consumer preferences.

**Agriculture Business,
Sales & Marketing**
**Agriculture Technology
& Innovation**



CONTINUE YOUR SEARCH

Whether your future includes pursuing higher education or entering the workforce full time, FFA can help. Head to AgExplorer.FFA.org to take a deep dive into agriculture-focused career fields.

MORE THAN A JACKET

A statewide donation program helps Pennsylvania FFA Alumni and Supporters discover how much the blue and gold means to first-year members. – By Jodi Helmer

Grace Buckley remembers feeling a sense of pride the first time she zipped up her blue FFA jacket.

“Both my mom’s and dad’s sides of the family have a long history of being in FFA,” she says. “One of my dreams is to own a farm, so getting my FFA jacket was a step toward that goal.”

Buckley was one of 24 Greenwood FFA freshmen from her hometown of Millerstown, Penn., and one of 970 freshman FFA members across the state who received their jackets during the 2023 Pennsylvania FFA Association Mid-Winter Convention.

Although it’s now an annual statewide tradition, this goal of providing an FFA jacket to all new Pennsylvania members started 18 years ago.

Room to Grow

“My teaching partner and I were sitting and talking in our office when one of us said, ‘Wouldn’t it be cool if [the state alumni and supporters association] could give every new FFA member a jacket that was sponsored by an individual in the community?’” says Krista Pontius, Greenwood agriscience instructor and Pennsylvania FFA Alumni and Supporters treasurer. “It started out small.”

In its first year, the Pennsylvania FFA Alumni and Supporters gave out 75 jackets through the First Year Member Jacket Campaign. The program has grown by leaps and bounds since then, donating an average



Joining FFA is a family tradition for Grace Buckley, and receiving a jacket of her own opened doors to new opportunities.

of 400 jackets per year for almost two decades — yet it still wasn’t enough to keep up with demand.

“We were getting around 1,000 applications from freshmen each year and turning down more than half of them,” Pontius says. To increase the number of jackets available to new members in 2023, Pennsylvania FFA encouraged chapters to get involved and initiate their own fundraising efforts.

The Greenwood FFA Chapter encouraged freshman members like Buckley to write letters to community members and business owners, inviting them to sponsor jackets. Buckley wrote a letter to her grandfather’s trucking company.

“I shared how I wanted to help keep the agriculture world going,” she says. “I said getting my jacket would help me pursue my dreams and help others pursue theirs as well.”

The approach proved successful. Local companies like Horizon Farm Credit and Pennsylvania Farm Bureau signed on as sponsors, and several businesses and individuals sponsored multiple jackets. This support enabled Pennsylvania FFA chapters to distribute 970 jackets at the 2023 Pennsylvania FFA Association Mid-Winter Convention.

“Students have been seeing these jackets for years, and they finally get to have one with their name on it,” Pontius says. “It was so inspiring to see how our communities supported it. They said, ‘We believe in the blue and gold, and we want to help these young members get the start they deserve.’”

GIVE THE GIFT OF BLUE

Receiving an FFA jacket welcomes FFA members into our organization and instills a sense of pride and belonging. Learn more about the National FFA Give the Gift of Blue program, which awarded its 17,000th jacket in 2023, and donate at **FFA.org/GiveBlue.**

Conversations SPARK Community CHANGE

Four Minnesota FFA members helped pass legislation to provide grant funding for after-school programming in their state.

— By Jessica Walker Boehm



After extensive preparation, Kaiya Grossman (left), Isaac Palecek (center), Emma Braford (right) and Savannah Moinichen (not pictured) presented their research to state leaders.

Grand Rapids FFA members Emma Braford, Kaiya Grossman, Isaac Palecek and Savannah Moinichen are a testament to the saying “hard work pays off” — and young people across their state now benefit from their tenacity.

After discovering the prevalence of chemical substance abuse in Minnesota youth, these four took action in March of 2023, working with Minnesota State Representative Matt Norris and Senator Steve Cwodzinski on a \$48 million bill designed to fund after-school programs.

Although their initial attempt didn’t make final legislation, these dedicated members didn’t give up.

“We were disappointed, but quitting wasn’t an option,” says Braford, Grand Rapids FFA Chapter vice president and 2024-25 Minnesota FFA State vice president.

A NEW FOCUS

According to Braford, the group pivoted to support a Minnesota Department of Education bill that would award \$26.5 million to school districts over three years through After-School Community Learning grants.

Thanks, in part, to their persistence and determination, including hours speaking with lawmakers, this bill passed in February 2024.

“To say we’re excited doesn’t even begin to cover it,” Braford says. “Substance abuse issues are often due to low self-esteem or a lack of self-worth. We believe after-school programs devoted to giving students a sense of purpose and accomplishment will make a huge difference.”

Although the grant funds could support existing clubs, organizations or programs, they could also be used to start new after-school programs that align with students’ needs.

“We recently came up with an idea called Eighth Hour, which would be an after-school program with break-out rooms for students to explore career pathways that interest them,” says Grossman, who’s currently serving as the Grand Rapids FFA Chapter president and the 2024-25 Minnesota

FFA state secretary. “We’re hoping it’s approved and our district receives grant funding to make it happen.”

PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER

After experiencing significant losses in her life, Grossman says it was important for her to advocate for the well-being of her peers. She credits FFA with helping her build the confidence to do this.

“When I first zipped up my blue jacket, I was shy and couldn’t imagine talking in front of people,” Grossman says. “Fast-forward to this experience, where I stood in front of Minnesota state senators and spoke up for something I believe in. I almost can’t believe it, and I’m so thankful FFA helped me learn to use my voice.”

Moinichen echoes a similar sentiment as she reflects on the impact she and her fellow chapter members made in their effort to create positive, lasting change.

“I would have never pictured any of us being part of something so big as high schoolers,” Moinichen says. “We helped pass a bill that will change lives and showed our voices truly matter. I’ll never forget that.”

“When I first zipped up my blue jacket, I was shy and couldn’t imagine talking in front of people. Fast-forward to this experience, where I stood in front of Minnesota state senators and spoke up for something I believe in. I almost can’t believe it, and I’m so thankful FFA helped me learn to use my voice.”

— KAIYA GROSSMAN





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HIGH-CALIBER CHAPTER PROGRAMMING

TWO NATIONAL AWARD-WINNING CHAPTERS REFLECT ON THEIR JOURNEYS TO THE TOP AND SHARE TIPS FOR DEVELOPING A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM OF ACTIVITIES.

BY COURTNEY LEEPER GIRGIS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MATT WOOD

What does it take to rise to the top of the National Chapter Award program? Ask members and advisors representing Stillwater FFA and Carroll County Middle FFA and they'll tell you five things — consistency, creativity, hard work, passion and planning. To participate in this awards program, a chapter submits its Program of Activities (POA), a written guide that defines chapter goals, outlines steps needed to meet those goals and

serves as a calendar of events. As part of the POA, at least 15 activities must be completed — one for each of the five quality standards in the three National FFA divisions of growing leaders, building communities and strengthening agriculture.

Chapters are first recognized at the state level as superior chapters. Then, they receive gold, silver or bronze status. Each state's top gold chapters move on to the National FFA Star Chapter Awards, where they can receive 3-star, 2-star or 1-star recognition.

TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS AWARDS PROGRAM, AN FFA CHAPTER SUBMITS ITS PROGRAM OF ACTIVITIES, A WRITTEN GUIDE THAT DEFINES CHAPTER GOALS, OUTLINES STEPS NEEDED TO MEET THOSE GOALS AND SERVES AS A CALENDAR OF EVENTS.

From this point, the 3-star chapters become eligible to compete for the National Premier Chapter Awards as well as the Model of Excellence and Middle School Model of Excellence Awards. Last year, five chapters emerged as national winners from a list of 45.

From these best of the best chapters, one high school and one middle school are honored each year as overall Models of Excellence. Read on as the top two FFA chapters in the nation for 2023 reflect on what has made them successful — and how you can be, too.

STILLWATER FFA ★ OKLAHOMA

2023

MODEL OF EXCELLENCE AND NATIONAL PREMIER CHAPTER: BUILDING COMMUNITIES

This program's creativity has no end, partly because it cultivates a culture where students are free to share their ideas for activities, then turn those thoughts into a reality. A student-initiated, student-led approach is the Stillwater FFA Chapter's key to success.

Advisor Robby Branscum says his Oklahoma chapter's POA planning process begins with what is referred to as a "Shark Tank." A sign-up sheet with the 15 quality standards goes out. FFA members, including chapter officers, select a standard they're passionate about and develop an activity that fits that standard.

Just like in the hit TV show, FFA members present their activities to peers and receive feedback. If a student's activity is

accepted, they become the member in charge, which includes gathering a committee and making sure all aspects are coordinated from start to finish.

"We find it gives our students ownership,"

participants to bring a minimum of 20 canned food items. These cans are loaded on a trailer and donated to the local Salvation Army for Thanksgiving food baskets. The activity was proposed

**SOME EVENTS THAT STARTED IN
THE "SHARK TANK" BECOME LONG-
STANDING TRADITIONS, LIKE THE
CANS FOR COMMUNITY 5K RACE.**

Branscum says. "It empowers them. They know this was their idea and therefore take a lot of pride in making it the best it can be."

Some events that started in the "Shark Tank" become long-standing

traditions, like the Cans for Community 5K race. Instead of asking for monetary donations, the chapter challenges

six years ago and has since become a community favorite in Stillwater.

For the past eight years, the chapter has given a \$5 bill to each FFA freshman. These young students are asked to use the money to make a difference in the school or broader community. The only rule:

They cannot spend more than the \$5 they received.



Stillwater FFA members load more than 4,800 canned food items into a salvation Army truck.



The cans for community 5K race, which was proposed six years ago, has become a staple event in the Stillwater, Okla., community.

It's a lesson in how a little can go a long way, especially when people work together. Students have teamed up to buy trash bags and clean up the park or buy ingredients to bake for healthcare or rescue workers. For the 2023 award year, 75 students, each with \$5, served 1,542 community members in three months. In doing so, they logged 405 service hours and earned their chapter the 2023 Premier Chapter: Building Communities award.



Stillwater FFA members and their advisor, Robby Branscum, react to being named the 2023 Model of Excellence on stage at convention.

STILLWATER FFA MEMBERS ALSO OFFER THE FOLLOWING TIPS.

HAVE AN OPEN MIND.

Be willing to try new activities and understand the first year may not be successful. "When I think of the 5K race, I reflect on where it was the first year, where it is now and how much it's grown," Branscum says.

ENGAGE YOUNG MEMBERS.

To get young members excited about attending FFA events, Stillwater FFA started its "Very Involved Person" program. Members who attend at least 12 of 15 POA activities get an "I'm a Stillwater VIP" T-shirt.

KEEP GOOD RECORDS.

Although you may be tempted to put off completing paperwork, don't do it. "If we're planning as we go, the application process at the end should be relatively short," Branscum says.

LOOK AT EVERYONE IN YOUR COMMUNITY.

The most successful activities center around the unique needs of Stillwater's community, schools and students — including those who aren't FFA members.

STAY CONNECTED.

Branch out and interact with people who don't normally walk the halls of a high school agriculture building. Build greater connections with alumni, professionals and other types of supporters.

CARROLL COUNTY MIDDLE FFA ★ VIRGINIA ★ 2023 MIDDLE SCHOOL MODEL OF EXCELLENCE

IT'S IMPORTANT
NOT TO JUST TALK
ABOUT THE GOOD
THINGS THAT
HAPPEN WHEN
COMPETING AND
WINNING AWARDS;
IT'S ALSO NORMAL
TO EXPERIENCE
ARGUMENTS,
TEARS AND
STRESS, MADELYN
CAVINESS SAYS.

For Natalie Culler and Madelyn Caviness, 10th graders and alumnae of Carroll County Middle FFA in Virginia, standing on stage at the 96th National FFA Convention & Expo was a dream come true, and winning the 2023 Middle School Model of Excellence award was the cherry on top. The two recall watching videos of past recipients receiving their awards, each thinking, "Can I get there?"

Although living this dream was exciting, it was also scary at times. Culler recalls waiting outside the finals hall for 30 minutes before it was their turn to take the stage.

"I was trying to keep my mind off competing," says Culler, who did so by laughing with friends. "I tried to focus on remembering my part, what I needed to say and addressing the judge, but not

worrying about anything else in that moment."

Caviness says it's important not to just talk about the good things that happen when competing and winning awards. It's also normal to experience arguments, tears and stress, she says.

"It takes hard work and dedication," Culler adds. "It's not easy, but it's all worth it to accomplish a long-held goal."

Carroll County Middle FFA alumnae Magen Key (second from left), Natalie Culler (center) and Madelyn Caviness (second from right) celebrate on stage with 2022-23 National FFA Secretary Jessica Herr (far left) and their advisor, John Carpenter (far right).

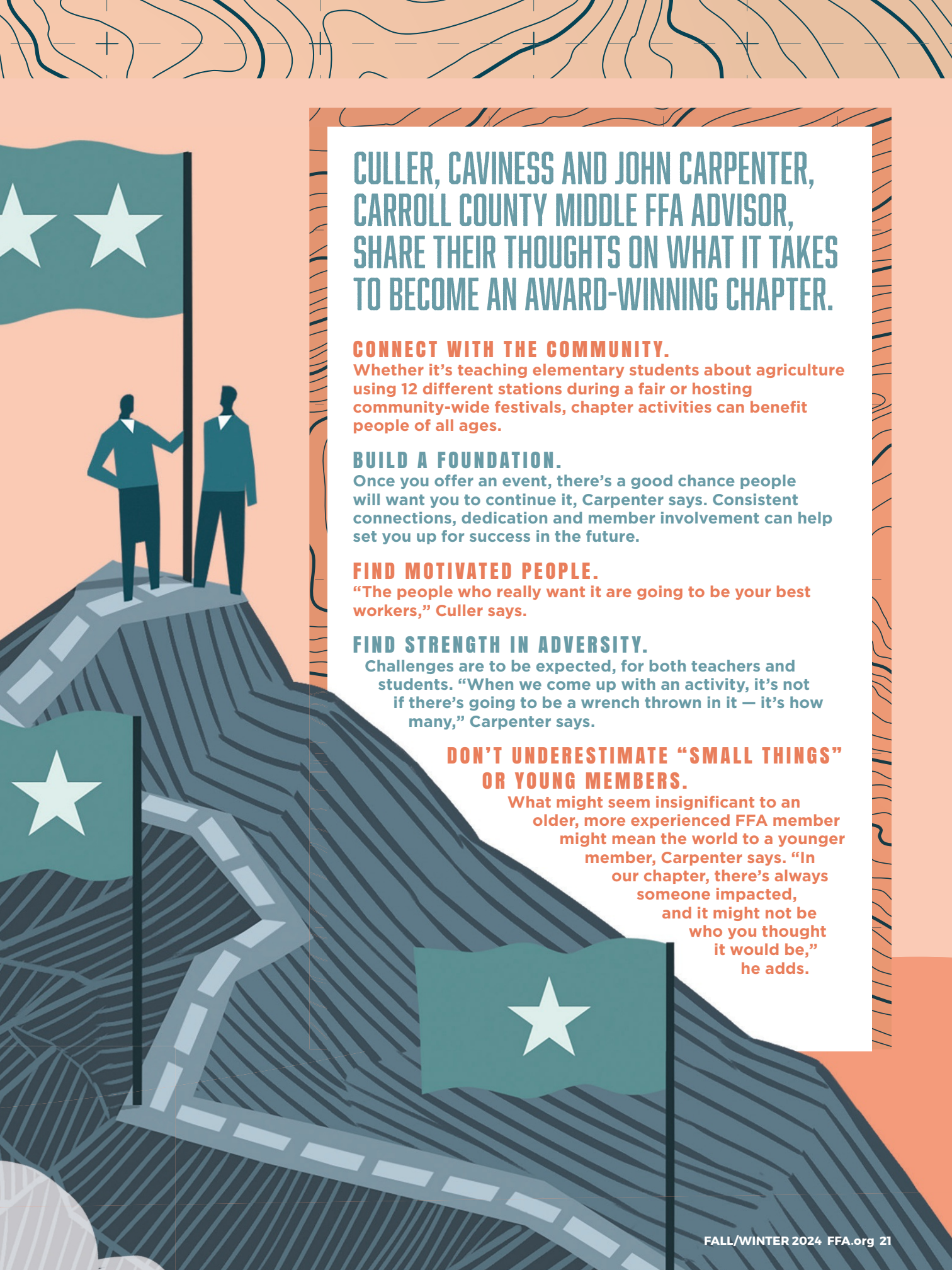


Past Virginia FFA state officer Gabrielle Martin (far left) and 2022-23 National FFA President Andrew Seibel (far right) pose with Carroll County Middle FFA members at a chapter event.

THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

Scan this code to access the 2023 Program of Activities Guide, which includes tips for getting started and strengthening your application as well as inspiration from additional award-winning chapters.



An illustration of two stylized human figures standing on a mountain peak. The mountain is dark blue with white dashed lines indicating a path or ridges. At the top of the mountain, there are two flags: one with two white stars on a teal background and another with one white star on a teal background. The background of the entire page is a light orange color with a pattern of thin, dark blue wavy lines and small white plus signs.

CULLER, CAVINESS AND JOHN CARPENTER, CARROLL COUNTY MIDDLE FFA ADVISOR, SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS ON WHAT IT TAKES TO BECOME AN AWARD-WINNING CHAPTER.

CONNECT WITH THE COMMUNITY.

Whether it's teaching elementary students about agriculture using 12 different stations during a fair or hosting community-wide festivals, chapter activities can benefit people of all ages.

BUILD A FOUNDATION.

Once you offer an event, there's a good chance people will want you to continue it, Carpenter says. Consistent connections, dedication and member involvement can help set you up for success in the future.

FIND MOTIVATED PEOPLE.

"The people who really want it are going to be your best workers," Culler says.

FIND STRENGTH IN ADVERSITY.

Challenges are to be expected, for both teachers and students. "When we come up with an activity, it's not if there's going to be a wrench thrown in it — it's how many," Carpenter says.

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE "SMALL THINGS" OR YOUNG MEMBERS.

What might seem insignificant to an older, more experienced FFA member might mean the world to a younger member, Carpenter says. "In our chapter, there's always someone impacted, and it might not be who you thought it would be," he adds.

Letters of LIGHT

THIS INSPIRING PEN PAL PROGRAM INVITES FFA MEMBERS AND ALUMNI TO CREATE LASTING CONNECTIONS WITH OTHERS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY. – By Taleen Hanna

When Delainee Ellsworth reflects on her experiences in the Deary FFA Chapter in Idaho, one of the first things she recalls is how meeting others at conferences and conventions changed her life for the better.

“Everyone I met shared a new perspective with me,” she says. “They had different stories, but the blue jacket tied us together.”

Recognizing that not all FFA members may be able to travel and participate in live events, Ellsworth wanted to create opportunities for them to connect with and learn from one another. Thus, during her time as the 2023-24 Idaho FFA state president, the Letters of Light pen pal program was born.

To get involved, interested members and FFA Alumni fill out a short Google Form found on the Letters of Light Instagram page (@ffa_letters.of.light). Ellsworth then creates pairings based on

responses, and participants connect with each other through the timeless act of exchanging letters in the mail.

In the first 24 hours after Letters of Light launched last November, around 200 people filled out the interest form. Since then, the program has facilitated more than 1,000 pairings.

“I’m so lucky to be a small part of this,” Ellsworth says. “The idea behind [the Letters of Light program] was to help members become part of something bigger than themselves.”

MEETING FACE-TO-FACE

Lauren Argotte, a Lebanon FFA member from Indiana, began writing to her pen pal, Troy FFA member Izzy Penuelas from Idaho, last December. In March, Argotte and Penuelas both attended the National FFA Next Gen Conference: Agricultural Communications, where they were able to meet in person for the first time.

“That week, we were always by each other’s side and talked the entire time,” Argotte says. “It was so sad to leave, but I hope we get to meet up again soon.”



After connecting via pen pal letters, Izzy Penuelas (left) and Lauren Argotte (right) met earlier this year at a Next Gen conference held in Fort Worth, Texas.

Thanks to the program, Argotte says she’s gained helpful advice from Penuelas about both FFA and life experiences.

“[This program] provided an extra outlet where I can meet someone from a different state and continue connecting with them even after my time in FFA has ended,” Argotte adds.

Now that she’s a retired state officer, Ellsworth plans to pass the pen pal program to the next group of leaders who will serve as state officers – creating space for more FFA connections to bloom and flourish in the future.

“The whole [state officer] team gets to be part of this rewarding experience,” she says. “I’m really excited to see what they can do with it and where they take it.”



FIND YOUR PEN PAL

Scan this code to follow the FFA Letters of Light program on Instagram and submit a pen pal request form.



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Restoring

WHAT ONCE WAS LOST

Hawaii FFA member Stephanie Arellano uses eDNA to identify fish native to waters near Pearl Harbor. —By Courtney Leeper Girgis

Hawaii has been called the extinction capital of the world. Birds, snails and fish native — and, in many cases, unique — to the volcanic-formed archipelago (group of islands) have disappeared throughout the past two centuries with the introduction of invasive species and loss of habitat. Despite this, Stephanie Arellano, an FFA member from Waipahu, on the island of O‘ahu, is using agriscience to bring hope to her community.

Arellano, a senior in the Natural Resources Academy at Waipahu High School and past Hawaii FFA state officer, is using environmental DNA (eDNA) to show that two native fish species, the Hawaiian flagtail and the ‘o‘opu, are still present in local streams that flow into Pearl Harbor.

What Is eDNA?

Environmental DNA is the DNA of an organism found in that organism’s environment. It comes from skin, scales and other materials shed by the organism. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, eDNA is “important for the early detection of invasive species as well as the detection of rare and cryptic species.”

In the search for native fish in Waipahu’s waters, Arellano took stream-water samples from three different sites. She separated debris from the water, then performed water quality tests and sequenced DNA found in fish scales and fecal matter left behind.

DNA sequencing provides “barcodes,” or short sections of DNA. Similar to fingerprints in humans, these are unique to individual species. Even if Arellano never saw a Hawaiian flagtail or ‘o‘opu in the



waters, she knows, based on DNA barcodes, they are there.

“This is important because we have a lot of invasive species, and I want to restore our ‘āina,” says Arellano, referring to the Hawaiian word for “land.” According to the Hawaiian nonprofit organization Trust for Public Land, this word “encompasses the Hawaiian worldview of a reciprocal and familial relationship between people and land.”

“I want to restore Hawaii to its full potential and see more native species we have here for future generations,” Arellano adds.

For the Community

The next step for Arellano is testing for the presence of native fish in more of O‘ahu’s waterways and those beyond, on other Hawaiian islands. She hopes to find additional native species and identify priority areas for restoration using native plants to boost the fish’s habitat so they can better reproduce and thrive.

Waipahu High School already grows native plants in aquaponic



Stephanie Arellano (left) and her classmates Kathleen Felina (center) and Princess Anchela (right) showcase their research findings at a recent science fair.

systems, one of several different farming systems Arellano has enjoyed learning about through Waipahu FFA. Someday, she hopes to bring high-tech farming solutions to the Philippines, where her family is from, to help Filipinos “grow crops much faster.”

“My passion is to help my community here in Hawaii but also in the Philippines,” Arellano says.

For anyone interested in starting an agriscience research project, her advice is to “just do it.”

“There’s many opportunities,” she says. “It can get you somewhere, honestly, and help you better understand what your passion is.”

Ready to Make Your Own Discoveries?

Conducting and presenting an agriscience research project is a fantastic way for you to explore your interests, gain hands-on experience and discover potential careers. To learn more, visit FFA.org/Participate/Awards/Agriscience-Fair/.

Finding Focus in FFA

Lubbock-Cooper FFA Alumni and twins Faith and Caleb Snapp refuse to let vision impairment limit their dreams.

BY JODI HELMER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TYLER SMITH

Faith and Caleb Snapp were born 13 weeks premature and diagnosed with zone 1 retinopathy of prematurity, a lack of development in the retina that affects vision. Although this diagnosis caused them to be legally blind and presented challenges, it didn't stop the now 23-year-old fraternal twins from creating big ideas for the future — and they credit FFA for helping them pursue their dreams.

"I felt at home. FFA

always treated me just like everyone else and always gave me the same opportunities, no questions asked," Faith Snapp says. "More than anything, I realized if [FFA] was going to allow me to not be limited, I wanted to see where it could take me. I kept pushing."

Caleb had a similar experience and considers the Lubbock-Cooper FFA Chapter in Texas "a second family" that exposed him to diverse people and experiences — all of which

helped shape his future.

"Having such a large community of people who come together and hearing different people's voices was really cool," he says. "It made more and more opportunities blossom in our lives."

A Guiding Force

Faith and Caleb grew up around animals in Lubbock, Texas. Their mom, Angie Snapp, an agricultural education instructor and Lubbock-Cooper FFA advisor, owned horse stables

Caleb and Faith Snapp's guide dogs, Gril (left) and Prim (right), helped them learn to navigate the world, and FFA helped them discover unique passions and interests.



**“Being twins,
they’re very
different. They
have different skill
sets and interests,
but they both
found a place
in FFA.” – Angie Snapp**



This photo: Prim and Grit instill a sense of self-confidence and independence in Faith and Caleb Snapp. Right: Faith Snapp grew up raising and showing livestock, including Boer goats, on her and Caleb’s family farm in Lubbock, Texas.

and ran riding camps, while their older sister, Jacey, started showing Boer goats when the twins were in kindergarten. The Snapp twins started raising their own goat herd in the third grade and participated in all aspects of their care, from feeding and medicating to teaching others about livestock species.

Although Faith loved the family’s livestock, she shifted her attention to a different animal: a dog.

“I first learned about Guide Dogs for the Blind when I was 13,” she says. “My mom went to her first Texas FFA state convention and [the organization] had a booth. She brought home a pamphlet, and I thought



“I felt at home. FFA always treated me just like everyone else and always gave me the same opportunities, no questions asked.”

– Faith Snapp



it was so cool. I wanted to [volunteer to raise puppies that would be trained as guide dogs]. I didn't think about the fact that I would qualify for a guide dog.”

Guide Dogs for the Blind had a rule that all applicants for service dogs were required to be 18 years old. Faith applied at 14 and thought, “The worst thing they can tell me is ‘no.’”

To Faith's surprise, she got a call and was invited to go through the process to be matched with a dog. The process was intense, requiring both a phone interview and home visit that included having a trainer follow Faith at school, at home and on activities to ensure she could navigate the world with a dog. In 2017, Faith was matched with a trained black Labrador Retriever named Prim.

“I'll never forget the day I got the call and they told me I'd been accepted,” Faith says. “She didn't even finish her sentence and I was already crying. It was the best day ever.”

To prevent Faith from tripping, Prim alerts her to elevated surfaces like curbs, stairs and cracks in the sidewalk. She also alerts Faith to overhead obstacles, helps her navigate through a crowd and knows how to find Angie in a store or crowded environment. Prim also practices what Faith calls “intelligent disobedience,” which includes refusing commands if she recognizes a danger.

“If I'm crossing a street and tell her to go but there's a car coming that I can't see, she won't let me move,” Faith says. “If a car comes and we're in the road, she knows how to push both of us back on the curb or pull us out of the way, which is really cool.”

Prim was even trained to feel comfortable around livestock and accompanies Faith when she shows goats.

Watching Faith work with Prim allowed Caleb to see how a guide dog could help him, too. In 2018, he applied for a guide dog through the Guide Dogs for the Blind program and was matched with a yellow Labrador Retriever named Grit a few months later.

“Just like Faith, when I got the phone call, I was bawling the entire time,” Caleb says.

Prim and Grit were adorable fixtures in Lubbock-Cooper FFA. Prim was at Faith's side while she participated in leadership development events and vet science and agricultural issues competitions, while Grit accompanied Caleb to agricultural mechanics classes and meat judging and radio competitions. Faith and Caleb also earned their American FFA Degrees.

While their guide dogs helped Faith and Caleb navigate the world, FFA helped the twins tap into their unique interests and develop their skills.

“Being twins, they're very different. They have different skill sets and interests, but they both found a place in FFA,” Angie says. “This organization has gone above and beyond to accommodate, make them feel welcome, encourage them and help them excel. I can't say enough about the confidence being in FFA has given them.”

A Vision for the Future

Caleb, a music lover and the self-described quiet and reserved twin, plays the piano, guitar, ukulele, bass drum, marimba and timpani. After receiving encouragement from FFA members and his



This photo: Caleb and Faith Snapp applied for, and later received, their guide dogs through the guide dogs for the Blind program. Right: Caleb Snapp shared his musical talents with others through competing in FFA Talent competitions as a Lubbock-Cooper FFA member.

advisors, Caleb agreed to participate in the senior talent show and emerged as the Lubbock District FFA Talent competition winner for his piano and ukulele performances.

“Even when I was kind of doubtful, my ag teachers ... were always super encouraging and pushed me further than I ever thought I could go, including the FFA Talent show,” Caleb says.

Caleb graduated from

South Plains College with an associate’s degree in sound technology. He currently works as an audiovisual intern at a local church while pursuing a degree in mechanical engineering from Texas Tech University.

FFA also had a profound impact on Faith’s future plans. She served as the Lubbock-Cooper FFA president, Lubbock District president, Area 1 first vice

president and a Texas FFA Association state officer.

When she started thinking about running for state office, Faith worried about meeting the qualifications and wondered if she could be on the travel team if she couldn’t drive.

“I talked with Austin Large, who was our executive director at the time. I remember him saying, ‘Faith, if you want to do this, we will do

everything in our power to make it possible,’” she says. “That memory really stands out to me because I just feel like it was the moment I realized they really did believe in me.”

Faith graduated from West Texas A&M University with a degree in animal science and was recently accepted to Texas Tech University School of Veterinary Medicine. In the future, she plans to become a vet in a mixed



animal practice and continue volunteering with FFA.

“I want to be a voice of encouragement to anybody who’s wanting to run for an officer position, show an animal or even take an agriculture class,” she says. “I will always advocate for others and always speak highly of FFA ... because I wouldn’t be here pursuing all the things I’m doing if it weren’t for the community that supported me.” •

“Having such a large community of people who come together and hearing different people’s voices was really cool. It made more and more opportunities blossom in our lives.”

– Caleb Snapp



WHAT'S FFA LIKE IN MY REGION?

LEARN HOW OUR ORGANIZATION
AND THE AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY
ARE SIMILAR (AND DIFFERENT!)
THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY.

COMPILED BY LAUREN QUINLAN

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MATT WOOD





SOUTHERN



2023-24 NATIONAL
FFA VICE PRESIDENT:

**CARTER HOWELL,
FLORIDA**



FAST FACTS

The agriculture industry directly or indirectly employs approximately 17.4% of **Mississippi's** workforce.

Alabama is home to more than 400 food production and beverage product establishments.

North Carolina ranks in the top three states for Christmas tree, pork, trout and turkey production.



OPPORTUNITIES & THE OUTDOORS:

Since 1850, the **Arkansas School for the Deaf** has provided academic and career-focused opportunities for students who are deaf and hard of hearing, including an FFA chapter for those interested in agriculture. During this year's National FFA Week celebrations, 2023-24 National FFA President Amara Jackson and members of the 2023-24 Arkansas FFA state officer team visited the school in Little Rock, Ark., to learn about its FFA members and program opportunities.



DIG INTO THE SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF

Scan this code to learn more about the Arkansas School for the Deaf FFA Chapter and watch a special presentation of the FFA Creed in American Sign Language.



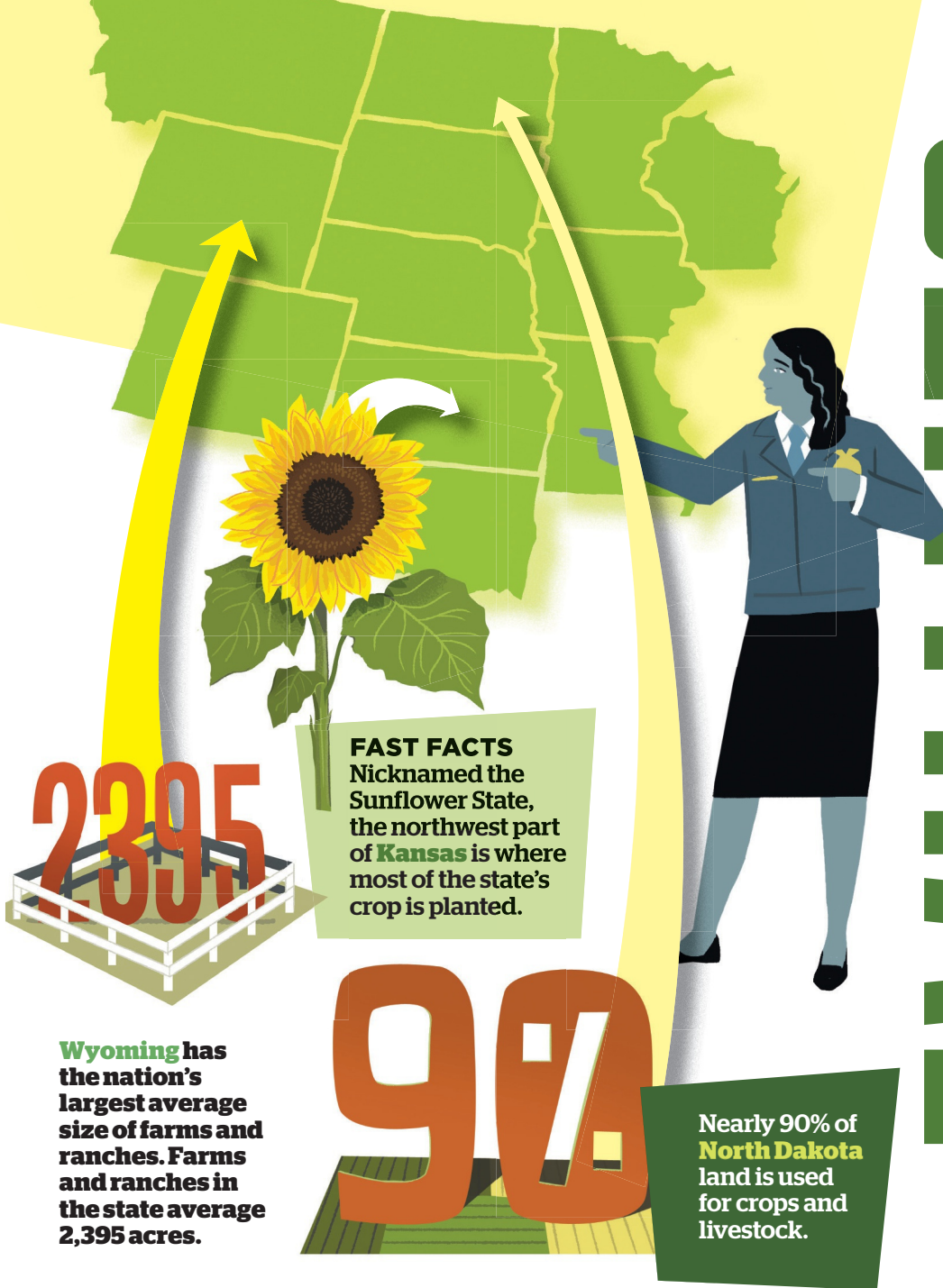
Mark Twain FFA, located in Jamestown, Tenn., considers the great outdoors a hands-on classroom. Thanks to a partnership with a local hunting lodge, the chapter raises pheasants and leads guided hunts. Members also process turkeys for Thanksgiving – one of which was donated to their state's governor last year – raise pheasants, collect quail eggs, grow

row crops and care for more than 14 livestock species on their 80-acre school farm.

Mark Twain FFA raises crops and poultry species.



FAST FACTS



FAST FACTS
Nicknamed the Sunflower State, the northwest part of **Kansas** is where most of the state's crop is planted.

Nearly 90% of **North Dakota** land is used for crops and livestock.

Wyoming has the nation's largest average size of farms and ranches. Farms and ranches in the state average 2,395 acres.

ALUMNI & AQUAPONICS:

The Greeley West FFA Chapter hosts an annual farm-to-table event in partnership with its Alumni and Supporters chapter. FFA members at this Colorado high school speak 27 different languages and the agriculture classroom has an emotional support animal named Bear.



In urban Wisconsin, Green Bay Southwest FFA members use six indoor hydroponics systems (known as Fork Farms) as well as aeroponics and aquaponics to grow approximately 35 pounds of lettuce per week. The chapter provides additional hands-on learning in the areas of honey production, orchard and vineyard maintenance and raising poultry.



2023-24 NATIONAL
FFA VICE PRESIDENT:

**KANYON
HUNTINGTON,
IOWA**



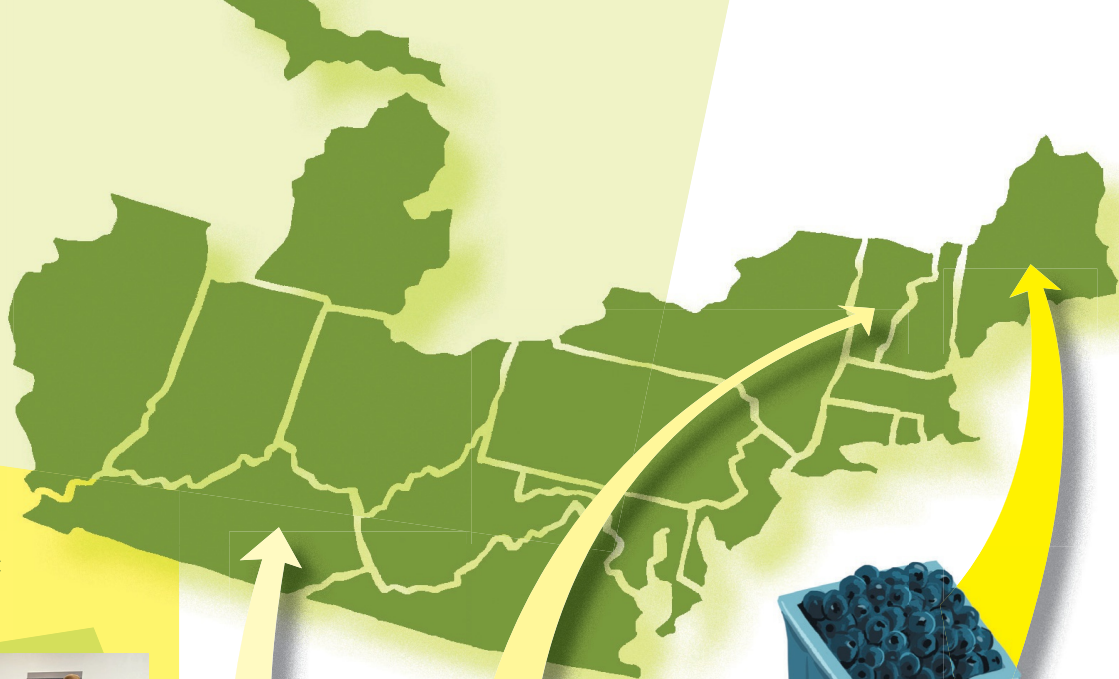
SERVICE & SCIENCE:



Each year, Penn Yan FFA collects and donates non-perishable food items.

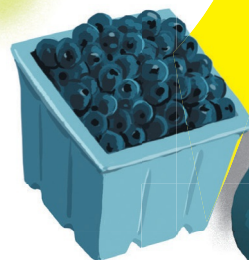
For 93 years and counting, Penn Yan FFA members have found new ways to serve in their New York community. Each February, their “Souper” Bowl food drive event includes collecting and donating non-perishable items to The Living Well, a local charity organization. The chapter also recently partnered with Sleep in Heavenly Peace, which focuses on building and delivering beds to children and families.

At the Hunterdon County Environmental Sustainability and Engineering Academy in Glen Gardener, N.J., FFA members can experience multiple facets of agriculture. This school utilizes natural resources and ecology-focused curriculum, and many members are involved in FFA agriscience research. To round out their education, seniors also conduct a capstone research project.



FAST FACTS

There are about 75 farmers markets located throughout the state of Vermont.



Maine is the nation's top producer of wild, also known as lowbush, blueberries.



In **Kentucky**, Lexington is considered the Horse Capital of the World.



2023-24 NATIONAL FFA VICE PRESIDENT:

MORGAN ANDERSON, OHIO

EASTERN

WESTERN



**2023-24 NATIONAL
FFA VICE PRESIDENT:
EMILY GOSSETT,
NEW MEXICO**

KITCHENS & KINDNESS:

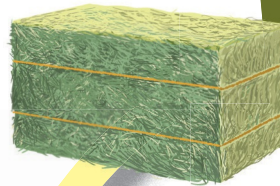
As the food production and processing industry continues to grow in their region of Idaho, Hagerman FFA provides real-world opportunities for members to sharpen their skills. In the Academy of Agriculture and Food Science, which is part of the Hagerman Joint School District, members can learn from a food science teacher who has a background in culinary science.



In Oregon, Perrydale FFA and other Lower Willamette FFA District chapters partner to facilitate Food For All, an annual service learning project. Members embody the FFA Mission of “Living to Serve” as they collect, package and donate thousands of pounds of food items to support those in need.

FAST FACTS

Washington farmers produce more than **300 different commodities**, with apples being the state’s top commodity crop.



Alfalfa hay is Nevada’s leading cash crop, and much of it is sold to dairy operations in surrounding states.



September marks the beginning of chile pepper harvest season in **New Mexico**.



Excellence in EDUCATION



This Kentucky FFA advisor was recognized with the prestigious Milken Educator Award for his role in inspiring, empowering and advocating for students. – By Jessica Walker Boehm

On what seemed like an ordinary day in October 2023, Jacob Ball received one of the most exciting surprises of his life.

Ball, a 6-12th grade agriculture teacher and FFA advisor at the Carter G. Woodson Academy in Lexington, Ky., was presented with a Milken Educator Award — known as the “Oscar of Teaching” — during a schoolwide assembly.

This prestigious award, which includes a \$25,000 unrestricted cash prize, was created by Lowell Milken in 1987 and honors early- to mid-career education professionals who embody excellence as they help shape the future of education in the U.S.

Since Milken Educator Award recipients can’t be formally nominated or apply for the award, they’re typically caught off guard when hearing the news. Ball says that’s exactly how he felt when he realized everyone was gathered to celebrate his achievement.

“I was told to dress to impress because our school was hosting an assembly and we’d have guests attending from the Kentucky Department of Education, but I had no idea what was coming,” says Ball, who was instrumental in developing and launching the Carter G. Woodson FFA Chapter at the all-boys college preparatory academy in 2019. “When I heard my name, I was completely shocked and in total disbelief. I still can’t quite wrap my head around it.”

However, the win came as no surprise to Ball’s students and colleagues, who have seen him build the FFA program and create a robust chapter with 185 members.

Growing Leaders

Additionally, to better serve his student population, Ball combined the Carter G. Woodson FFA with Junior Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences (MANRRS), an organization that encourages students to pursue agriculture, natural resources and environmental sciences degrees in college.

“It’s important for students of color to not only see themselves in agriculture, but to understand they can thrive and succeed in this industry,” Ball says. “This is especially important at Carter G. Woodson Academy, where education is shared through the lens of African-American history and cul-

ture, and the majority of our students live in urban settings.”

Reflecting on his career and rewarding moments as an agriculture instructor and FFA advisor, Ball points to his students’ many outstanding accomplishments. To date, six of his chapter members have earned full-ride college scholarships, and many of his former students are pursuing bachelor’s degrees in agriculture-related fields.

“I’ve been incredibly fortunate to have the opportunity to help young people grow as leaders and carve out paths they can be proud of,” Ball says. “I feel lucky to be part of each of my students’ journeys.”

Jacob Ball (center) celebrates winning the Milken Educator Award, which includes a check for \$25,000, with members of the Carter G. Woodson FFA Chapter.



Attention, Advisors!

Access additional resources for your educator toolbox, including lesson plans and professional growth opportunities, at FFA.org/My-Toolbox/Instructor/Educator-Resources.

A Start in Animal Science

SHOWING LIVESTOCK BLAZED A TRAIL FOR HUGO RODRIGUEZ TO PURSUE A CAREER AT THE WORLD'S LARGEST PORK PRODUCER.

— By Lydia Johnson

Growing up in California's Central Valley and without an agriculture background, Hugo Rodriguez was hesitant to join the Reedley FFA Chapter and become involved in the agricultural industry. After receiving encouragement from his high school's FFA advisors, Ronald Sa and Carlos A. López, however, he decided to show a Duroc barrow at the local fair during his junior year.

"I was nervous and excited," Rodriguez says. "I'd never raised a pig in my life. I didn't know what was going on, but I was ready to take on the challenge."

After this experience, Rodriguez mentored fellow students and decided on his next chapter: enrolling at California State University, Fresno and majoring in animal science. Toward the beginning of his freshman year, Rodriguez started working at the campus swine unit as an intern, where he was later promoted to the role of senior student manager.

"We helped support FFA chapters with show pig projects," Rodriguez says. "We also sold and marketed hogs to local stockyards and meat lockers."

During his summers, Rodriguez expanded his skills by interning at a Smithfield Foods hog production unit in Utah and working at a Seaboard Foods processing plant in Oklahoma.

He also competed as a member of the California State University, Fresno livestock judging team.

Hard Work Pays Off

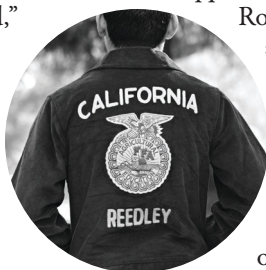
These experiences proved worthwhile. After graduating college in 2020, Rodriguez began a full-time job with Sierra Nevada Farms, a fifth-generation pig farm in California. A year later, opportunity knocked again, and

Rodriguez joined the staff at Smithfield Foods, the world's largest pork producer, located in northern Missouri. During his three years with the company, he's held multiple positions and overseen multiple stages of production to ensure high-quality animal care.

"In my current role as assistant hog procurement manager, my team and I ensure we have enough hogs in our facility to produce the end products you see in grocery stores," he says.

As an FFA Alumnus, Rodriguez encourages members looking to jumpstart their careers to ask questions, find ways to get involved and say "yes" to new opportunities.

"Always keep an open mind and be curious about the endless opportunities the agriculture industry has to offer," he adds. "Never be afraid to get in there and get dirty because you never know where it may take you."



"Never be afraid to get in there and get dirty because you never know where it may take you."

— Hugo Rodriguez

In his current role at Smithfield Foods, Hugo Rodriguez applies skills and knowledge he gained as a Reedley FFA member.

A person wearing a plaid shirt and jeans is walking on a dirt path. The background is a warm, golden sunset sky. The text "ON THE RECORD: GORDIE GASCH" is overlaid on the left side of the image.

ON THE RECORD: GORDIE GASCH

This retired agricultural education teacher and FFA advisor participated in a monumental movement to make FFA a place for all.

- By Jessica Mozo

“Some thought girls didn’t belong in agriculture back then, but today many farms around the world are run by women.”

- GORDIE GASCH

Throughout his time as an FFA member, advisor and alumnus, Gordie Gasch has had a front-row seat as our organization continues to evolve.



Gordie Gasch, an FFA Alumnus and 1969-70 Wisconsin FFA state secretary, served as a delegate during the historic 1969 National FFA Convention business session when women were granted full FFA membership

for the first time. We recently caught up with Gasch to learn more about what that historic day meant to him and how he’s seen the National FFA Organization change in the years since.

Q: In the moment, did you realize how monumental it was to grant full FFA membership to women?

A: At the time, we weren’t thinking it was a monumental change, and it didn’t hit us that the decision was going to be life-changing for so many people. Some thought girls didn’t belong in agriculture back then, but today many farms around the world are run by women.

Q: How did that historic vote impact FFA?

A: I taught agriculture for 28 years. In all my years of teaching, I wondered what would happen if girls were never allowed to join FFA. They’re currently officers

leading chapters, participating in competitions and making decisions. They want to hold leadership roles and demonstrate their skills, and FFA does a great job of facilitating this growing interest.

Q: How have you seen FFA evolve in the years since you were a member?

A: In Wisconsin, the biggest thing is we don’t have many dairy farms left. The ones we have are between 3,000 and 5,000 cows, and families who operate the farms are often managers. There also seems to be fewer farm kids involved in production agriculture now. Agriculture classes and FFA have learned to adapt and appeal to students interested in things like

natural resources, horticulture and food science.

Q: How has FFA been a multigenerational affair for your family?

A: My dad judged at the American Royal Livestock Show in 1935 or so. When I was in high school, I competed in winning poultry and dairy career development event (CDE) teams during my time as an FFA member. My four daughters have been on five state-winning CDE teams and competed at nationals. I also have a grandson who’s an FFA member in high school now.

I’m technically retired but still actively involved in FFA. I coach the poultry judging CDE team for my local FFA chapter in Brillion, Wis.

FFA *in the* USA

For the first time, we have more than 1 million FFA members nationwide! As our organization continues to grow, check out these fresh ideas and classic gems from previous issues to keep everyone engaged. — Compiled by Julie Woodard

Alabama

As part of its annual state convention, the Alabama FFA Association honors FFA chapters with 100% student membership. The chapters host tailgates or cookouts, trips to the Sunbelt Ag Expo and other fun events for members.

Alaska

Midnight Sun FFA promotes and supports the growth of its chapter by hosting an Alaskan Ag Day, which includes a themed scavenger hunt and bread and butter making station.

Arizona

Pearce FFA members learn about soils, crops and a variety of plant disorders as well as cotton judging and hot pepper eating. The chapter's Chile Field Day also has a long-lasting legacy.

Arkansas

During the summer, members can embark on industry tours and develop leadership skills at the immersive Arkansas Leadership Conference held at Camp Couchdale.

California

California FFA uses the Three-Component Model to engage members, starting in the classroom where students can receive college preparatory credits and meet graduation standards.



Colorado

This year's state officers visited more than 100 chapters statewide, where they facilitated workshops to connect with members.

Connecticut

Mattabeset FFA hosts an annual freshman orientation. The event, led by the chapter's president, features workshops and a thrilling Ag Olympics.

Delaware

From egg selling ventures to aquaponics systems and a floral shop, Woodbridge Middle FFA exposes students to all areas of agriculture.

Florida

The DeLand Middle FFA Chapter hosts a lock-in for all members, which encourages new members to enter a raffle to "pie" an eighth-grade member at the closing of the event.

Georgia

Jefferson Middle FFA members open the school year by inviting prospective students to experience an FFA meeting before deciding to join.

Hawaii

Hawaii FFA is working to revive new and old chapters. For example, state officers traveled to Honoka'a High to meet with the school's FFA advisor in hopes of reviving this dormant chapter.

Idaho

A hands-on community garden maintained by Hagerman FFA members helps fund the chapter and is part of a farm-to-table classroom experience.

Illinois

Last fall, state officers visited 335 chapters and 8,234 students and conducted an escape room workshop on the opportunities within the Three-Component Model of Agricultural Education.

Indiana

Tri-West FFA hosts a schoolwide cornhole tournament, which creates a fun evening for current members and encourages prospective members to join the chapter.

Iowa

The Osage FFA Chapter worked with its subdistrict to host a celebration of women in FFA. Members listened to speakers, participated in workshops and learned how to tell their stories.

Kansas

Chapman FFA hosts Greenhand Greetings, which includes a Freshman Frenzy. Members visit the homes of all incoming freshmen enrolled in agricultural education and give them copies of the Official FFA Manual as well as the chapter's constitution, Program of Activities and an officer contact list.

Kentucky

Kentucky FFA implemented a new chapter-level award called "Spirit of the Creed." The award is designed to recognize and engage members who aren't holding leadership positions but are valuable to their chapters.

Louisiana

The Ponchatoula FFA Chapter sponsors a back-to-school FFA tailgate for all members before the school's football season opener.



Maine

Caribou FFA celebrates with a pig roast at its annual banquet. Meat from a locally raised hog is paired with baked potatoes grown at the school.

Maryland

North Harford FFA recognizes a "Member of the Month." In addition to being included on a school bulletin board, selected members are featured on social media and receive a goodie bag.

Massachusetts

State officers facilitated a series of leadership workshops across the state that taught chapter officers how to become better community leaders.

Michigan

Kent Area Career Tech Center FFA adds diversity to its students' education by growing exotic plants in its greenhouse such as pineapple, aloe vera and banana trees.

Minnesota

The Sleepy Eye FFA Chapter hosts junior high fun nights and an annual lock-in dedicated to encouraging younger members to join the chapter.

Mississippi

This state association is thriving. Members have facilitated agriculture days, held livestock shows and a rodeo, repaired equipment and tried new competitions.



Missouri

To empower members, the state hosts Public Speaking Institutes, where members work with specialists, including past national FFA officers, to learn the fundamentals of speeches and speaking contests.

Montana

Chester-Joplin-Inverness FFA hosts a Greenhand Night. All high school students are welcome to learn more about FFA opportunities while participating in fun activities and games.

Nebraska

Wallace FFA members raised broiler chickens. After the chickens were finished feeding out, members participated in and learned about the butchering process.



Nevada

Battle Mountain FFA students make ice cream during an eighth grade recruitment day at the high school.

New Hampshire

Chapters engage members by holding events for middle schoolers, particularly eighth graders, to spark their passion for agriculture.

New Jersey

As part of its agricultural engineering class, the Penns Grove FFA Chapter builds energy windmills from classroom items.

New Mexico

Each year, state officers roll out a legacy platform that encourages members to use FFA opportunities to benefit their communities.

New York

Members partner with state government leaders for a Forum on the Future of Farms and Food. This event aims to increase interest in agriculture from all New York students, schools and communities.

North Carolina

In July, members convene at the North Carolina FFA Center in White Lake for the annual State Leadership Conference. FFA members join to develop relationships, leadership skills and a desire to serve.

North Dakota

Belfield FFA hosts a junior high ag day for neighboring schools. Participants learn about competitions, agricultural topics and leadership skills through hands-on experiences.

Ohio

Every spring, FFA chapters in Preble County hold an annual basketball tournament called the Ag-Ball series.

Oklahoma

To welcome new members, the Tecumseh FFA Chapter hosts an annual mud volleyball tournament at the beginning of the school year.

Oregon

Southern Oregon District hosts a Dutch oven cook-off at leadership camp, where each chapter presents a dessert to its advisors.

Pennsylvania

In Mid-West FFA, all new agriculture students and their families are invited to an Ag Open House and Back 2 School BBQ to tour facilities, learn about FFA activities and find inspiration

for supervised agricultural experiences.

Puerto Rico

Each spring, Puerto Rico FFA members are encouraged to assist at the Guajataca Leadership Camp, where they interact with nature and get to know each other.

Rhode Island

A state officer “Wanna Be” workshop in March helped members learn what it takes to hold each position.

South Carolina

FFA members attended the Ag Tailgate in the fall before a Clemson football game to learn about agriculture-focused university majors and careers.

South Dakota

Advanced animal and plant science classes hosted by the Winner FFA Chapter helped members work with the garden plants or livestock.

Tennessee

The first-ever Tennessee FFA SAE Hall provides opportunities to showcase production agriculturists and the diversity of supervised agricultural experience projects.

Texas

Harper FFA has seen member engagement bump due to the interest in its Flea Market Flip program. Students find old furniture or other unique items, then utilize classroom skills to transform them.

U.S. Virgin Islands

Students took part in the islands’ first Ag Discovery event. The agenda included a field trip to the garden and poultry farm managed by one of the FFA chapters.

Utah

In a world full of technology, social media engagement is so important! Utah FFA loves interacting with members through eye-catching posts and uplifting agricultural content.

Vermont

In February, FFA members participated in the Vermont Farm Show. Activities included a scavenger hunt, state officer workshop and more.

Virginia

More than 400 members attended Virginia FFA Day at the Capitol this past January. Members met with legislators from across the state to advocate for FFA and agricultural education.

Washington

The state offers unique leadership opportunities such as the Evergreen Leadership Tour as well as potato judging and apple evaluation competitions that emphasize the state’s agricultural commodities.

West Virginia

The Washington FFA Chapter recently served its community by donating and delivering 60 masks to thank first responders.

Wisconsin

To help educate chapter officers, state officers visit every school within their respective section and host Sectional Leadership Workshops.

Wyoming

Members come together for a week during the Wyoming FFA Leadership Camp to work on chapter communication, leadership, public speaking and outdoor adventure.

MEDIA CENTER

ARTS & CULTURE IN AGRICULTURE

- By Jessica Wesson

CHECK OUT WHAT'S NEW AND TRENDING IN AGRICULTURE MEDIA.

SOCIAL MEDIA

National FFA Facebook Group

This Facebook group, which was created in 2016, boasts more than 20,000 members. It includes current FFA members, alumni, agriculture educators and supporters. If you're affiliated with FFA, join this group to begin sharing ideas and networking with others nationwide.



Follow the National Officers

The official Instagram account for the National FFA Organization, @nationalffa, is your go-to place for all things FFA. For a closer look at each newly elected national officer's journey this upcoming year, find and follow @nffapresident, @nffa_secretary, @nffa_svp, @nffacvp, @naffaevp and @nffa_wvp.



AUDIO PSA

The Blue Jacket Frequency



The North Dakota FFA Association is challenging members to submit 30-second public service announcements to air on the Red River Farm Radio Network. In addition to providing tips related to chapter programming and grant funding, participants are encouraged to share their FFA involvement, career goals and personal stories with listeners. The campaign launched earlier this year, and several North Dakota FFA state officers paved the way by submitting their own recordings.



VIDEO SERIES

Cruisin' Cowgirl

Twelve years ago, Carey Portell was involved in a car accident caused by a drunk driver and sustained life-altering injuries. Portell began filming and sharing this video series to shed light on how she navigates daily life as a disabled cattle rancher. Travel with Portell to events, where she speaks about facing challenges head-on and teaches workshops about disabilities in agriculture.



EXPERIENCE THE ACTION

Throughout this year's 97th National FFA Convention & Expo, make plans to watch FFA Live! From the first gavel drop to the election of a new national officer team and everything in between, this Emmy-nominated streaming broadcast ensures you won't miss any of the action happening in Indianapolis. **Starting Oct. 23, scan the code below to access interviews and clips from convention attendees, watch general sessions and more.**



FFA Moment

2004

Twenty years ago, the first live webcast of the National FFA Convention premiered on FFA.org. Since then, this service has enabled FFA members, advisors, alumni, supporters, corporate partners, parents and guardians, friends and others to experience the magic of our organization's largest annual celebration in real time.

Think about what it was like the first time you took in all the sights and sounds associated with convention. Perhaps you felt the emotions of award winners being recognized on stage, watched in awe as the National FFA Band, Chorus and Talent performed or were inspired as you listened to keynote speeches and retiring addresses. Whether you're tuning in from near or far, technology has a special way of bringing us together and showcasing our love for the blue and gold.

Newsroom reporter Mae Crosby (left) interviews keynote speaker Juan Bendaña (right) for an FFA Live! segment during the 96th National FFA Convention & Expo in October 2023.

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