

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.**