

# From CDE to a Successful Business

**This former FFA member creates innovative products to solve unique problems in agriculture.**

— By Jessica Mozo

Missouri FFA alumnus Todd Banner was still in high school when he created the concept that would turn into the successful business he runs now. Banner, who lives in Ames, Iowa, used the skills he learned in FFA to launch Swamp Fox Innovations LLC, a technology company that provides solutions to everyday challenges in the equine, livestock and recreational industries.

Banner got the idea for one of his company's products more than 20 years ago when he was an FFA member in Eldon, Mo.

"I grew up on a cattle farm and showed animals at the county and state fairs," Banner says. "I always noticed problems with animals drinking water. None of them drank enough water at shows, and some wouldn't drink any at all. It's a major problem for livestock owners and can be devastating for animals."

Banner thought the problem might be the chlorine in municipal water. Along with his FFA Agricultural Sales Career Development Event (CDE) team, he created the concept of a product that could be added to water to remove chlorine so animals would drink more.

"That was my junior year, around 1996, and it was just a concept at the time," Banner says. "It was a learning experience."

## Eventual Expertise

After high school, Banner got his PhD in chemistry and worked for Cargill as a scientist for two decades before starting his business.

"I was always science-centered. In college, I majored in agriculture and biochemistry, and later became a chemist and developed products," Banner says. "I started thinking about that FFA product concept 15 years later, and by then I had the technological expertise to solve the problem."

Banner created a product called Show FresH<sub>2</sub>O<sup>®</sup> that instantly neutralizes the chlorine and odor in municipal water. His wife, Nicole (pictured below), is an FFA alumna and does marketing for Swamp Fox.

Banner also created a product called Advanced Arena<sup>®</sup> Dust Control Fluid that reduces dust in indoor riding arenas.

"Our business develops innovative products for agriculture. We take everyday problems and develop solutions," Banner says. "Water treatment and dust control are two big ones. I'm working on a new product now that I'm excited about."

The impact FFA had on Banner's career path has proven invaluable.

"I actually manage the business like my old SAE [supervised agricultural experience] projects — I keep track of expenses and sales, create awareness for the product and teach people how to use it," he says. "I was always quiet and introverted, and FFA helped me gain self-confidence. SAE projects helped me learn how to run a small business."

As far as developing a successful new product, Banner says the key is to find unmet needs.

"Be aware of problems that exist," he says. "I had problems with my animals drinking. Is there a product you could develop to create a solution for a problem?"

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