NEW HORIZONS

Spring/Summer 2024

FFA.ORG



Feeding the Farm

Oregon FFA Member Grows Flourishing Fodder System

Inside the Farm Bill

10 Tips

for a Successful State Convention



MAKE THIS YEAR COUNT

As we ring in a new year, it's common to set goals, sometimes referred to as resolutions, outlining what we hope to achieve in the next 12 months. Some people even select a word to reframe their mindset and help establish new habits or intentions. Regardless of how we choose to approach it, this can be a time to reset our focus, reaffirm our priorities and reinvent ourselves — but only if we choose to.

Fortunately, FFA provides numerous avenues to develop our potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success. Perhaps this means you decide to run for an office, attend a leadership conference or update your chapter's Program of Activities. It could also include sitting next to a new face at a chapter meeting or saying "thank you" to someone who's shaped your FFA journey.

This issue includes additional resources to help you maximize the upcoming year. "The Feed" section outlines tips for deepening your relationships, leveling up your leadership potential and expanding your supervised agricultural experience (SAE).

In "Wired for Growth" on page 24, you'll feel inspired as you read about how Oregon FFA alumnus Evan Vander Stoep helped address a need within his chapter and community. On page 30, "Hands-on Education" showcases how Brody Del Deo, Julianna Dufresne and Brian Thornhill are learning new skills through their specialized education at Bristol County Agricultural High School.

Looking back, I wish I could tell my younger self (who just so happened to be a Missouri FFA member) that everyone's path in FFA looks and feels different. As you approach what lies ahead in 2024, remember it's OK if your aspirations and accomplishments differ from those around you. How you choose to utilize the next 365 days is up to you, so I encourage you to make each and every one of them count!

IT'S GOOD TO BE BACK

A few weeks before I stepped into this role as editor of *FFA New Horizons* magazine, I found a drawer filled with past issues I'd received in high school. Talk about a full circle moment! From my hometown to our nation's capital, Lucas Oil Stadium and beyond, I'm grateful for all I've encountered while wearing and representing the corduroy jacket. As an FFA alumna, it's my honor to continue experiencing the lasting impacts of our organization, and it's a joy to share the stories of its talented members, alumni and supporters.

Lauren Quinlan

Lauren Quinlan
Editor, *FFA New Horizons*
ffanewhorizons@agriculture.com

On the cover: North Clackamas FFA advisor Kathy Mayfield and FFA alumnus Evan Vander Stoep.

Spring/Summer 2024
Volume 72, Number 2
FFA COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER Julie Woodard
EDITOR Lauren Quinlan
EDITORIAL CONTENT DIRECTOR Justin Davey
CREATIVE DIRECTOR Matt Strelecki
COPY EDITORS Jordan Brendeland, Nancy Dietz
EDITORIAL PRODUCTION MANAGER Diana Weesner
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION Daphnne Bonaparte, Washington, D.C.
BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY Barbara Jenkins, GA

Subscription Information
FFA New Horizons is published biannually by the National FFA Organization, 6060 FFA Drive, Indianapolis, IN 46278-1370. Publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts, art or any other unsolicited materials. For subscription information email FFA New Horizons Subscription Services at newhorizons@FFA.org.

Postmaster: Please send address changes to FFA New Horizons, 6060 FFA Drive, Indianapolis, IN 46278-1370.

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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.

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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.

Photography: David Ekstrom, Jeff Noble
Cover Photography: Jeff Noble

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Evan Vander Stoep combined his interests in production agriculture and technology on the North Clackamas FFA School Farm. P. 24

5 Things FROM FFA.ORG

Add to your tool kit and gear up for the year ahead with these resources about chapter programming, advocating for agriculture, noteworthy FFA stories and more.

Program of Activities

Looking to give your chapter's Program of Activities a boost? The beginning of a new semester (and year) is the perfect time to do so, and it could set you up to compete in the National Chapter Award program. Find inspiration from award-winning chapters and members that are excelling in the areas of growing leaders, building communities and strengthening agriculture.

Agricultural Literacy and Advocacy

As an FFA member, you represent both our organization and agriculture through your words and actions. The National FFA Agricultural Literacy and Advocacy Platform is designed to help you professionally initiate and engage in conversations related to agriculture. In addition to exploring the four-step effective advocacy model and the Agricultural Youth Opportunities Roadmap, learn about current industry topics and watch #SpeakAg dialogues.

Scan with your phone

Latest FFA News

A record-high membership of 945,988 members, combined with an extensive network of FFA Alumni and Supporters and corporate partners, means there's always something new and noteworthy happening in our organization. Browse past issues of *FFA New Horizons* magazine and bookmark this webpage to help you stay up to date on all things FFA.

Student Dashboard

This one-stop shop houses everything you may need to maximize your FFA experience. Manage your account and locate helpful resources such as the Official FFA Manual, the FFA Video Center and AgExplorer. As you prepare for your future, utilize the resume generator and simple FFA business card templates, and learn more about award, scholarship and grant opportunities.

Local Engagement

For more than 15 years, support from community partnerships has helped FFA chapters nationwide thrive. Learn how agricultural retailers, automotive and tractor dealers, restaurants, manufacturers and seed dealers pay it forward through blue jacket programs, grants, scholarships and additional financial assistance programs. Whenever you have the chance, remember to say "thank you" for all they do!

5 WAYS TO STRENGTHEN YOUR CONNECTIONS



Creating a healthy team environment starts with being intentional about developing relationships.

Try these simple tips to cultivate a more unified officer team.

– By Jessica Walker Boehm

As officer teams come together to serve FFA members at the local and state levels, team bonding is essential to ensure positive experiences for everyone.

"Being intentional about developing strong, respectful relationships is critical when it comes to creating a healthy team environment," says Carley Snider, education specialist for the National FFA Organization. "Completing tasks is important, but the process will be smoother, more effective and more fun if the team stands on a firm foundation, and that doesn't typically happen by accident."

To help facilitate cohesive collaboration during your year of service, Snider offers five tips.

1. Start building trust immediately.

Although it may feel scary or uncomfortable, Snider recommends being authentic and vulnerable with your team members from the beginning. In the same vein, show you're trustworthy by owning and apologizing for your mistakes and being willing to ask for help.

2. Develop a shared vision.

As a team, determine your overall goal for the year and identify your collective priorities by sharing your values, then outline the steps required for success. Snider says to think of your shared vision as a road map – without one, it's unlikely you'll reach your desired destination without conflict.

3. Find consensus as a team.

How will you know when your team has come to an agreement if it isn't unanimous? Creating a system that ensures everyone's voice is heard is imperative as you work toward a solution each team member can align with comfortably and confidently.

4. Show appreciation regularly.

Don't hesitate to recognize and celebrate your team's collective and individual efforts and accomplishments. When celebrating an individual, Snider says it's important to personalize your gesture. For example, do they prefer verbal affirmation, a small gift or another token of appreciation?

5. Make time for everyone.

Finally, spend one-on-one time with the members of your team to continue strengthening bonds. Whether it's grabbing coffee, getting together for lunch or going for a walk, setting aside time to foster relationships with each of your cohorts will help create a more robust team.

"Every member of your team will come in with their own unique perspective, and each one holds the same weight," Snider says. "These perspectives may clash from time to time, but as long as you keep the lines of communication open with trust, respect and kindness, you can achieve anything you set out to accomplish together."

As you prepare for the year ahead, check out the FFA state officers dashboard at **FFA.org/StateOfficers** to access helpful resources.

A POSITIVE IMPACT

As an FFA officer, the bonds you create can have a positive impact on members you encounter. According to the 2023 State Officer Exit Survey conducted by the National FFA Organization, 54% of participating state officers reported delivering one to seven workshops a month, reaching anywhere from one to 300 members per workshop.

Photography: Copyright © FFA

BLUE AND GOLD FROM HEAD TO TOE

Florence FFA members collaborated with FFA fundraising partner Bloom for Good to support chapter activities and programming.

– By Michelle Stangler



Florence FFA members used part of the funds they raised to finance a trip to the Texas State Fair.

Florence FFA advisor Denielle Bailey was searching for an easier way to excite her Texas students when she discovered Bloom for Good, a fundraising company founded by New Jersey FFA alumnus Pete Hexter.

"Our goal is to partner with groups and people who make a difference every day, and FFA does just that," says Jessie Stewart, Bloom for Good president.

FFA chapters have two options for fundraising with Bloom for Good. In addition to collecting online donations, chapters can create, market and sell unique sock designs.

Through his role as vice president of FFA sales with Bloom for Good, Justin Snider helps guide chapters through the fundraising process, ensuring they can reach their goals.

"My high school ag teacher was instrumental in my decision to pursue a career in agriculture, and FFA made a difference in my life," Snider says. "I know it can do the same for the next generation."

Funding the Future

In 2022, Florence FFA raised $12,000 using a Bloom for Good fundraiser. Chapter members surpassed this amount in 2023, reaching a remarkable $19,000.

"[Fundraising] helped me realize how much my family and friends want to help my agricultural experiences," says Laney Ellis, the chapter's 2022 top salesperson.

Looking for more ways to work with FFA corporate partners and supporters to help your chapter succeed? Visit FFA.org/Financial-Assistance to learn more.

LEVELED UP LEADERSHIP

Invest in your personal and professional growth this summer.

– By Jessica Mozo

As you enter the second half of the school year and look ahead to summer, consider how you can spend free time investing in your personal and professional development. Think about applying to attend a state or National FFA conference this summer to take your leadership skills to a whole new level.

In 2024, Washington Leadership Conference (WLC) celebrates its 55th year of providing a premier leadership experience to FFA members, surrounded by the rich history of our nation's capital. Additional National FFA opportunities include the FFA Member Leadership Series, New Century Farmer, Next Gen Conferences and the State Officer Leadership Continuum.

BASF Corp. is an FFA corporate partner for the State Officer Leadership Continuum conference series. "We're proud to be heavily invested in helping FFA members develop their potential by supporting initiatives behind the organization, both from a personal and professional standpoint," says Indiana FFA alumna Karissa Jones, a strategic account manager for the pest control, turf and ornamental division with BASF in Texas.

She encourages young people to attend leadership conferences because such experiences inspire members to become change-makers in their communities and provide valuable networking opportunities.

> "Leadership camps and conferences are about developing oneself."
>
> – Karissa Jones

"Leadership camps and conferences are about developing oneself," she says. "You also get exposed to the opportunities out there, and that exposure is important when trying to figure out your career path."

For a full list of National FFA conferences held this year, check out FFA.org/Conferences. Also, reach out to your state's association to find more activities and ways to become involved.

Illustration: Getty Images, mitay20
Photography: Courtesy of Denielle Bailey

AG FOR ALL ABILITIES

This Mena FFA alumna used her doctoral capstone project to promote inclusion in agriculture. – By Jodi Helmer

Keeley Cotter was active in the Mena FFA Chapter during high school. She served on the officer team, showed livestock, attended conferences and knew she wanted to remain connected to her agricultural roots after graduation.

In 2022, as part of a doctoral program in occupational therapy at the University of Central Arkansas, Cotter completed a capstone project that created agricultural opportunities for students of all abilities.

"When we look at ag and the [special education] sector, there's a big gap," Cotter says. "I wanted to find a way to empower students who have different abilities to actively participate."

Equipping Others

As part of the project, Cotter led an in-service training for FFA advisors. Within her lessons, she shared strategies for adjusting the curriculum for students who need accommodations for physical or cognitive disabilities or sensory issues.

Cotter also held comprehensive lessons in agriculture for special education students in the Norfork FFA and Mena FFA chapters in Arkansas. The activities included a field trip to a farm to work in the garden and feed chickens as well as a mini lamb camp with Bryan Maye, her former ag ed teacher and FFA advisor.

"It really gave them the opportunity to be hands-on, independent and have their own learning process," she says.

The students enjoyed the activities, and the advisors learned a lot too.

"Working with those students and being part of that activity helped me to be more comfortable in that setting," Maye says. "To see the joy it brought to those kids was just phenomenal."

Norfork FFA advisor (and Cotter's father-in-law) Lyn Cotter had a similar experience.

"Safety is an issue and [Keeley] brought a different perspective of things we could do to safely accomplish the goal," he says.

Learning to Adapt

As part of her capstone project, Cotter also worked one-on-one with 13-year-old Norfork FFA member Jamey Martin to help him prepare to show sheep at the county fair. Martin has Down syndrome and needed accommodations to excel in the livestock show.

"Jamey has a little shorter trunk, and we have to adapt things a little bit," Cotter says.

Martin's lamb, Austin, won grand champion.

"Keeley helped me with the halter, feeding, walking and washing," Martin says. "It was fun."

Next Steps

After completing her doctoral program, Cotter accepted a position as an occupational therapist and plans to incorporate her love of livestock and passion for inclusion into her career. Overall, she hopes her capstone project will encourage FFA advisors to pursue opportunities to involve students of all abilities in agriculture.

"Inclusion is working alongside individuals — not just providing opportunities and then separating ourselves, but truly working as a team," Cotter says. "When we know the true meaning of inclusion, we're better able to put that into practice."





Above: FFA members and Keeley Cotter plant flowers during a field trip. Left: Cotter helps Jamey Martin prepare for a show.

Photography: Courtesy of Keeley Cotter

LEAVING A LASTING IMPACT

A central Iowa community came together to support FFA, agricultural education and the next generation of leaders in agriculture.

- By Jessica Walker Boehm

Thanks to their community's unparalleled generosity, members of the Southeast Warren FFA will soon see a dream become reality.

The chapter in Liberty Center, Iowa, built an animal learning center on the school's campus in 2022, but lacked the funds needed to add a facility that could house large livestock.

"Many of our members are interested in raising livestock, but they don't always have the land or financial resources to make it happen," says Southeast Warren FFA advisor Alex Rodgers. "In our animal learning center, students can raise pigs, sheep, goats and other small-to-medium-sized livestock. Unfortunately, it can't accommodate bigger animals like cattle."

With this in mind, Brandon Smith, a former Southeast Warren FFA president and founding member of the Southeast Warren FFA Alumni and Supporters chapter, and his wife, Bri Smith, saw an opportunity to give back.

The couple donated a steer to senior chapter member Spencer Wallace, who planned to show and sell the animal at the Warren County Fair in July 2023. Together, they decided to donate all proceeds from the sale to the chapter's large livestock barn project.

Exponential Interest

"We promoted this as a fundraising effort on social media, hoping to raise around $10,000," says Brandon Smith, who owns BS Squared Farms in Lacona.

To everyone's surprise, an anonymous buyer purchased the 1,200-pound steer for $7.50 a pound, totaling $12,225, but the story didn't end there.

Barry and Amy Tlach of Mid-Iowa Seeds in Indianola purchased the steer from the initial buyer, again paying $7.50 per pound. Next, the steer was sold to Scott James of James Oil Co. in Carlisle for $6.10 per pound.

James sold the steer one final time to the Southeast Warren FFA Alumni and Supporters chapter for $6 a pound, a purchase made possible by supportive community members.

In addition, part of the meat from the steer was sold through a raffle, which raised more than $2,500 that was also donated to the chapter's barn project. Several FFA members also made donations to help fund the project.

"When it was all said and done, the total amount raised came to $37,000," Smith says. "This was the highest-selling market animal in the history of the Warren County Fair, and it had nothing to do with the steer itself. Instead, it speaks to how much this chapter means to the community. Mr. Rodgers and these kids are doing great things, and everyone wants to help them continue to succeed."

In what Rodgers describes as a "full circle moment," Wallace and the Southeast Warren FFA officer team chose to donate the remainder of the steer meat to the local food pantry to give back to those who supported their chapter.

"It feels pretty surreal," Rodgers says. "We're still in awe and can't thank our community enough for their kindness and generosity. We hope when they see the new barn that's giving our kids so many new opportunities, they'll know it's there because of them."



Southeast Warren FFA member Spencer Wallace (center) and supporters gather at the Warren County Fair.

Photography: Courtesy of Spencer Wallace

Quiz:

Blue Jackets to Big Stages

– By Jessica Mozo

FFA members tend to reach for the stars, and sometimes they land among them. See if you can match descriptions of these former members who are now professionals excelling in their respective fields.

1. This Grammy Award-winning singer spent her childhood on her family's Christmas tree farm in Pennsylvania. She started writing songs professionally when she was 14 – about the same time she was a Hendersonville FFA member in Tennessee.
2. Before this quarterback was selected in the 2018 National Football League draft, he worked on his family's farm in California. As a Firebaugh FFA member, he was a national proficiency finalist and American FFA Degree recipient. His FFA jacket was displayed during the 95th National FFA Convention & Expo.
3. This country music singer was an FFA member in Start, La., before he became one of the best-selling musical artists of all time, selling more than 90 million records.
4. This former U.S. president was an FFA member in Plains, Ga., in the 1930s, where he was raised on a peanut farm.
5. Before becoming a singer and songwriter, this FFA alumnus was once a professional bull rider and worked in a Texas prison. His boss, the prison warden, encouraged him to quit and pursue a career in country music.
6. Throughout his 60-year career as a radio broadcaster, this journalist helped millions of listeners understand the importance of agriculture. He grew up milking cows in Wisconsin, and later became the best-known broadcaster in the U.S.

Famous FFA Alums

Here's a full list of former FFA members who became prominent figures in agriculture, entertainment, government, sports and other industries.

Answers: 1. Taylor Swift 2. Josh Allen 3. Tim McGraw 4. Jimmy Carter 5. Cody Johnson 6. Orion Samuelson

Sources: RFD-TV and Indy Star Photography: Getty Images, MirageC, EyeEm; Courtesy of Kaitlyn Baker

Try Something New With Your SAE

Don't be afraid to go against the grain and explore your unique agricultural interests.

– By Courtney Leeper Girgis

Many of Kaitlyn Baker's friends in the Frederick FFA Chapter in Frederick, Md., raise livestock as part of their supervised agricultural experiences (SAEs). While Baker enjoys animals, she wanted to do something different.

Reflecting on her freshman experiences in FFA, the sophomore decided she wanted to be a guiding voice to members trying to find their place in the organization. So Baker started an agricultural communications SAE.

FFA With Kay began with a Google document of ideas, an Instagram account and the encouragement of her FFA advisor, Richard Stonebraker. Baker began making videos in which she talked to the camera.

"But it didn't feel right," she says. "So I tried something new."

Noticing her mom had recently started listening to podcasts, Baker decided to try an audio format. She created a podcast on Spotify that can be found by searching "FFA.With.Kay." Baker uses the same username on Instagram.



Frederick FFA member Kaitlyn Baker's SAE includes producing a podcast called FFA With Kay.

Through "FFA With Kay," Baker answers questions she had as a first year FFA member, such as:

- **What's the organization all about?**
- **What's a Program of Activities?**
- **How do you wear official dress, and in what order do the pins go on your FFA jacket?**

For members who are thinking about trying a different kind of SAE, Baker's advice is to do your research and stay optimistic. Four months into her project, she is full of ideas for future podcast episodes and working to ramp up production while balancing school and other FFA-related responsibilities.

TAKE THE NEXT STEP

Are you ready to dive deeper into learning about a different aspect of agriculture? You can find more information and inspiration for starting a new SAE or diversifying the one you have already built by visiting **FFA.org/FFA-Video-Center/SAE-For-All.**

CELEBRATING ALL OF FFA

As you prepare for National FFA Week in February, use these ideas to show your love of all things blue and gold. – By Taleen Hanna



Remember to show your love of blue and gold. Visit ShopFFA.org to browse shirts, hats and other merch.

The first National FFA Week was celebrated in 1948 (76 years ago!) when the National FFA Board of Directors designated a weeklong celebration for all things FFA. During this time, we also commemorate George Washington's birthday, which falls on Feb. 22, and recognize his legacy and contributions to the agriculture industry.

There are lots of ways to recognize National FFA Week, including posting on social media and showing your gratitude to others. Take a look!

Saturday, Feb. 17

The week's festivities are just getting started, so spread the word. To get members excited about what's in store, share how you and your chapter plan to celebrate. Remember to tag National FFA on social media, include #FFAweek in your posts and visit **ffa.org/national-ffa-week** to access helpful resources and materials.

Sunday, Feb. 18: SAE Sunday

Use this as an opportunity to show off your supervised agricultural experience (SAE) and learn about others' interests. Post a picture or video showcasing your SAE and tell us all about it.

Monday, Feb. 19: Service and Advocacy Day

As FFA members, we seek to embody the last line of the FFA motto, "Living to Serve." Gather a few friends and plan an upcoming service project within your school or community.

Tuesday, Feb. 20: Alumni Day

FFA Alumni can make excellent mentors. Connect with one in the Forever Blue Network at **ForeverBlueNetwork.org**.

Wednesday, Feb. 21: Ag Teacher Appreciation Day

FFA wouldn't be possible without our advisors! Post about an ag teacher or advisor who has impacted your life, and remember to say "thank you!"

Thursday, Feb. 22: Give FFA Day

FFA is made possible through the generous support of others. Share your experiences and consider asking your friends, family and others to donate to our organization. Direct them to the Give FFA Day webpage.

Friday, Feb. 23: National Wear Blue Day

Wear blue today to show your FFA pride. Remember to snap a group photo or post a selfie on social media! Need something to wear? Visit **ShopFFA.org**.

Get Growing!

Over the past two years, Tractor Supply has raised more than $1 million through its Grants for Growing program. During FFA Week, visit a Tractor Supply store and show your support by purchasing $1 paper emblems at the checkout.

NATIONAL FFA OFFICER

Question & Answer

National FFA Week is a time for alumni, supporters and members to come together to celebrate the past, present and future of our organization. What is your favorite FFA Week event, activity or memory, and why?



Amara Jackson

NATIONAL FFA PRESIDENT

FFA Week with my hometown chapter, Corunna FFA, was a ton of fun because we always had an Ag Olympics competition. Whether it was throwing hay bales, eating whipped cream on a plate without your hands and finding a gummy worm in it, or doing a pop-chugging contest, it was a ton of fun. It was a great way to bring our chapter together and celebrate FFA.



Grant Norfleet

NATIONAL FFA SECRETARY

I'm proud to come from the Mexico FFA community, and one of my favorite activities is our supporters' luncheon. We'd wear Official Dress to school, then prepare meals to serve to our chapter's alumni and supporters. Our community came together to see what our FFA members were doing, so it was a great way to connect with those folks who might not know what was happening in the agriculture building and to thank them for their support.



Carter Howell

SOUTHERN REGION VICE PRESIDENT

My favorite experience is when FFA members converge at the state fairgrounds in Tampa each February. It's a unique opportunity I cherish, and the highlight is when we all come together for FFA Day. It's these casual encounters I treasure the most — spending time with fellow members, building camaraderie and getting to know each other on a personal level. These moments hold a special place in my heart and remind me why I love FFA and our blue jackets.



Kanyon Huntington

CENTRAL REGION VICE PRESIDENT

My favorite memory is undoubtedly the week I spent traveling to different chapters across my district and state as a state officer. Whether it was a teacher appreciation breakfast or the unconventional donkey basketball, it was about bringing everyone together and realizing the value FFA brings to both agriculture and personal growth. It was a unique and crazy experience, and stands out as one of my most favorite activities during that remarkable week.



Morgan Anderson

EASTERN REGION VICE PRESIDENT

My Ohio FFA state officer team and I did a Leadership Night curriculum across the entire state that was geared around the idea of FFA for All. We were connecting students' goals at the local level to what these could look like on the state and national levels. FFA Week really shows students there is something bigger than your local area, and I watched their eyes light up. I don't think I'll ever forget this experience because facilitating it felt very special.



Emily Gossett

WESTERN REGION VICE PRESIDENT

There were three different chapters in my county in New Mexico, and we always held a Grant County FFA Olympics to see which chapter could really be the best in everything. We had all kinds of contests, including pie eating and relay races. It's one of those traditions I truly cherish because we were able to be a family. Although we were technically "rival" chapters, it was a day where we had fun through building community and fostering a foundation of friendship.

Photography: Copyright © FFA

AG 101
The Farm Bill

– By Mark Moore

The U.S. farm bill is an important topic of discussion in agriculture today. Since the current farm law (also known as the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018) expired in October 2023, lawmakers and industry leaders are working together to develop a new and updated version of the bill. Whether you're familiar with the farm bill or this is all new to you, it's helpful to understand what it means and how it affects the industry. Since conversations about the bill are expected to continue this year, here are a few things to know.



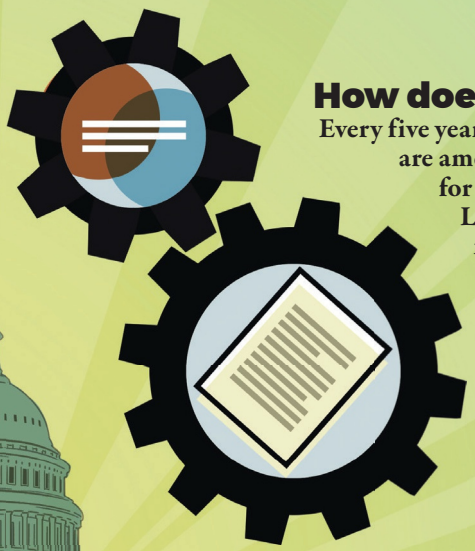
Who works on it?

Debate begins in the House Committee on Agriculture and the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry. From there, debate moves to the House and Senate floors, where amendments can be offered. Once a bill is passed by both the House and Senate, the legislation needs to be signed by the president before becoming law.



What is it?

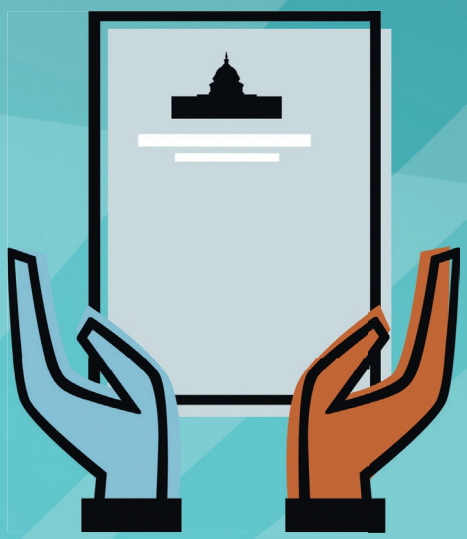
The U.S. farm bill is the primary piece of legislation that authorizes a variety of agriculture, food and rural programs. Topics such as trade promotion, farm price support programs, conservation, climate change, food and nutrition programs, and rural development can all be part of the bill.



How does the process work?

Every five years, the various provisions of the bill are amended, reauthorized or repealed for the upcoming five-year period. Lawmakers can have different ideas on how the provisions of the sweeping bill should work. The five-year time frame allows lawmakers to adjust or update policies to fit current market conditions.

Illustration: Matt Wood



Why is it important?

The farm bill started as legislation in the 1930s to support farmers and ensure food security for the nation. Since then, it has expanded to provide food and nutrition assistance, support rural communities, conserve natural resources, boost exports and more. For farmers, commodity support programs, crop insurance and marketing loans — all of which are included in the farm bill — can directly impact their work. The farm bill helps drive food and agriculture policy not only for the next five years, but also many years to come.

BREAKING IT DOWN

EACH FARM BILL IS DIVIDED INTO CHAPTERS (ALSO KNOWN AS TITLES) THAT COVER A SPECIFIC COMPONENT. THE 2018 VERSION OF THE FARM BILL WAS DIVIDED INTO THE FOLLOWING 12 TITLES.

1. **Commodities,** which includes price and income support programs.
2. **Conservation** programs aimed at farmers.
3. **Trade,** including export and international aid programs.
4. **Nutrition,** including food assistance programs designed for rural and urban communities.
5. **Credit,** which includes loan and credit programs for farmers.
6. **Rural Development** programs.
7. **Research, Extension and Related Matters,** including extension, federal and state research, and educational programs.
8. **Forestry** programs for farmers and rural communities.
9. **Energy,** including biofuels and renewable energy programs.
10. **Horticulture,** meaning farmers markets, local food programs, and support services for fruits, vegetables and other horticultural crops.
11. **Crop Insurance,** which is funding used to assist farmers and protect against yield loss and crop price losses.
12. **Miscellaneous** or programs that don't fit into other titles.





Tackling Food Insecurity

Members used FFA grants to package thousands of meals and embodied the FFA motto of "Living to Serve."

– By Michelle Stangler

Give enthusiastic FFA members some hairnets, food, packing materials and a few instructions and they'll use these to create positive, lasting change in the lives of others — and have fun while doing it.

This was the case for Charlotte Burns, one of the FFA members who helped package 37,404 meals during the 2023 South Carolina FFA State Convention.

"It instilled a sense of respect for how important it is to do all I can to help others," she says.

For some members, including 2022-23 South Carolina FFA State President Drake Ariail, being involved in this event enabled him to experience a sense of community and camaraderie.

"It was beautiful, and it demonstrated the brotherhood and sisterhood members can find within FFA," he says. "Not only were we working toward a common goal we all love, but I got to watch many members meet new people."

On a similar note, in South Dakota, Centerville FFA member Charleigh Walters was amazed by the number of people who participated in her state's Living to Serve event. Although she says many of the members didn't know each other beforehand, they worked together to package 50,185 meals during the 2023 South Dakota State FFA Convention.

"It was eye-opening," Walters says. "To me, 'Living to Serve' means you not only serve the people around you, but others from far away as well. It doesn't matter who or what — you just help whenever or wherever you can."

Both events were made possible by a Living to Serve Grant provided by National FFA. These grants, which are awarded annually, can be used to support yearlong and/or semester-long service-learning projects. Opportunities also exist to apply for a Day of Service Mini-Grant or State Day of Service Grants, both of which sponsor one-time service events.

From Burns' and Ariail's perspectives, living a life marked by service doesn't just mean participating in large-scale events; it also includes capitalizing on daily interactions.

"To me, it's taking every chance you can to show up and be there for someone by helping them out whenever you can," Burns adds.

ACT TODAY

"Living to Serve" empowers FFA members to make their communities, states, nation and world a better place. Visit **FFA.org/LivingToServe** to explore types of service projects, apply for a Living to Serve Grant or register for a National Day of Service event near you.

Photography: Courtesy of South Carolina FFA Association

CREAM OF THE CROP

Congratulations to the 2023 American Star Award winners on their extraordinary supervised agricultural experiences (SAEs) and noteworthy leadership, FFA involvement and academic achievement. Here, they share lessons learned and advice for other FFA members.

– By Kyle Hampel and Dene Dryden



Daniel Jossund

2023 AMERICAN STAR FARMER

A member of Ada-Borup-West FFA Chapter, Daniel Jossund is no stranger to operating heavy machinery and handling winter weather. In addition to offering snow removal services, he raises sugar beets, corn, soybeans, wheat and alfalfa on his family's farm in Minnesota. Jossund also bales straw and alfalfa, and he plans to expand his farming operation upon graduating from North Dakota State University with a degree in agribusiness.

His advice for FFA members interested in starting their own SAE is to persevere. "That's what I always tell myself when I'm out in the field and stuff isn't going right…'Oh, I hate this,'" he says. "Then I think there's nothing else I'd rather be doing."



Lainey Hutchison

2023 AMERICAN STAR IN AGRIBUSINESS

Horses are a way of life for Lainey Hutchison; she began riding at age 3 and competing in rodeos at age 7. Through her equine entrepreneurship SAE, the Crockett County FFA member from Tennessee teaches riding lessons and hosts youth farm camps. After earning her farm and ranch management degree from the University of Tennessee at Martin, Hutchison plans to incorporate new ideas into her business, including retreats and birthday parties hosted on her family's farm.

Hutchison encourages FFA members to chase their passions. "I found something I loved, and I made a business out of it," she says. "Without my SAE and FFA, I wouldn't have been able to showcase my independence as a woman in agriculture."



Whitney Glazier

2023 AMERICAN STAR IN AGRICULTURAL PLACEMENT

Whitney Glazier might be small in stature, but she's big on farming. The Lomega FFA member from Oklahoma grows crops, conducts plant science research at Oklahoma State University's (OSU) agronomy station and has worked at a veterinary clinic as part of her SAE. Looking ahead, she plans to graduate from OSU's veterinary school and open her own clinic, in addition to continuing to help on her family's farm when she can.

Through her SAEs, Glazier learned the importance of asking for help — something she hopes other FFA members will do, too. "Knowing you can have people in your corner who are willing to do anything to help you…is second to none," she says.



George Frees

2023 AMERICAN STAR IN AGRISCIENCE

As a Cass Career Center FFA member, George Frees' agriscience SAE enabled him to combine his interests in sugarcane cultivation and environmental stewardship. As a current student at the University of Missouri double majoring in biochemistry and plant sciences, he continues to conduct crop science research in four labs and serves as the campus beekeeper. After graduating with his bachelor's degree, he hopes to continue his education and pursue a career in ethnobotany.

When reflecting on his time as an FFA member, Frees says his involvement greatly impacted the trajectory of his life. "I wouldn't have gotten the scholarship I hold and had all the opportunities for research that I take part in now without FFA," he says.

Photography: Copyright © FFA

THE PATH TO A SUCCESSFUL STATE CONVENTION

CONSIDER THESE **10 TIPS** TO MAKE YOUR EXPERIENCE ONE TO REMEMBER.

By Lauren Quinlan
Illustration by Paul Lange



STATE CONVENTION CAN BE A TIME TO RECONNECT WITH FRIENDS (AND MAKE NEW ONES!) WHILE SHOWCASING YOUR HARD WORK AND CELEBRATING THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF OTHERS. IF YOU PLAN TO ATTEND THIS YEAR, HERE'S HOW TO ENHANCE AND ELEVATE YOUR EXPERIENCE.

1. SECURE YOUR SPOT.

Getting ready for state convention begins long before the first gavel drops. Jennifer Jackson, executive director of the Texas FFA Association, suggests thinking ahead and manifesting how you can set yourself up to attend.

Whether it's submitting a proficiency application, participating in a career development event or leadership development event, strengthening your chapter's program of activities so you can compete in the National Chapter Award Program, volunteering for courtesy corps or running for an office, there are plenty of ways you can take your involvement in FFA to the next level.

2. PLAN INTENTIONALLY.

Whether you're traveling near or far, do your best to be where your feet are. Work with your advisor(s) to find restaurants, attractions and tours that enable you and your chapter to experience agriculture in another part of the state.

"Knowing where you are and where you're headed helps you have a game plan in place," says Utah FFA Association executive director McKena Wallentine.

Don't overlook the power of what's in your pocket. A smartphone app, which is released before state convention, helps Utah FFA members, advisors and guests navigate the convention center, register for workshops, track times and locations and more, Wallentine says.

"KNOWING WHERE YOU ARE AND WHERE YOU'RE HEADED HELPS YOU HAVE A GAME PLAN IN PLACE."
- McKena Wallentine



3. COME PREPARED.

"There's no such thing as being too prepared, so plan ahead," says Jocelyn Roache, 2022-23 New Hampshire FFA state secretary.

Roache encourages making lists and reviewing materials, such as interview questions, CDE contest notes or speech flash cards, in the days leading up to competition. When filling your suitcase, remember to pack all pieces of Official Dress, including an extra pair of socks or pantyhose and, most importantly, your FFA jacket.

4. EXPLORE EVERYTHING.

Once you've made it, soak up all convention has to offer. In addition to general sessions, see what else is available to you each day.

For example, the Texas FFA State Convention includes professional and leadership development events such as member-led workshops and an exhibit hall featuring boutiques and a college and career fair. An overflow stage is also used to recognize noteworthy members and FFA programs.

ONCE YOU'VE MADE IT, SOAK UP ALL CONVENTION HAS TO OFFER. IN ADDITION TO GENERAL SESSIONS, SEE WHAT ELSE IS AVAILABLE TO YOU EACH DAY.

Also, consider trying something new, especially if it's outside your comfort zone. For example, New Hampshire FFA members mingle at a karaoke night and themed dance, while Utah FFA members are invited to a social gathering full of lawn games, food, music and more.



5. MAXIMIZE YOUR TIME.

Although your days can quickly become filled with obligations, there will also be moments of downtime. Not every moment has to be productive, but you can make the most of the time you're given, Jackson says.

"At convention, you're filled with energy and excitement," she adds. "Use this to propel you forward as you engage with others and prepare for the upcoming year."

If you have an hour (or a few!) to spend with your officer team, complete a team-building exercise together. If you're with your chapter, gather a few members and brainstorm ideas for upcoming meetings, events, service projects and more.

6. NETWORK, NETWORK, NETWORK.

Establishing a great relationship often begins by saying, "Hello." If the opportunity arises, Wallentine recommends using this time to visit with industry professionals as well as college or university representatives and FFA alumni.

"Introduce yourself and take advantage of having those conversations," she adds. "You might shake the hand of someone who will be your future employer, and these types of connections will be valuable moving forward."

7. WRITE IT DOWN.

Considering all you're doing and seeing, inspiration may strike at any moment. Perhaps you'll think of ideas for your supervised agriculture experience or hear something in a keynote address or workshop that resonates with you.

Pack a small notepad and pencil in your jacket pocket or backpack and carry it with you. Between activities or at the end of each day, set aside time to jot down ideas you'll want to explore further, and potentially implement, after convention.



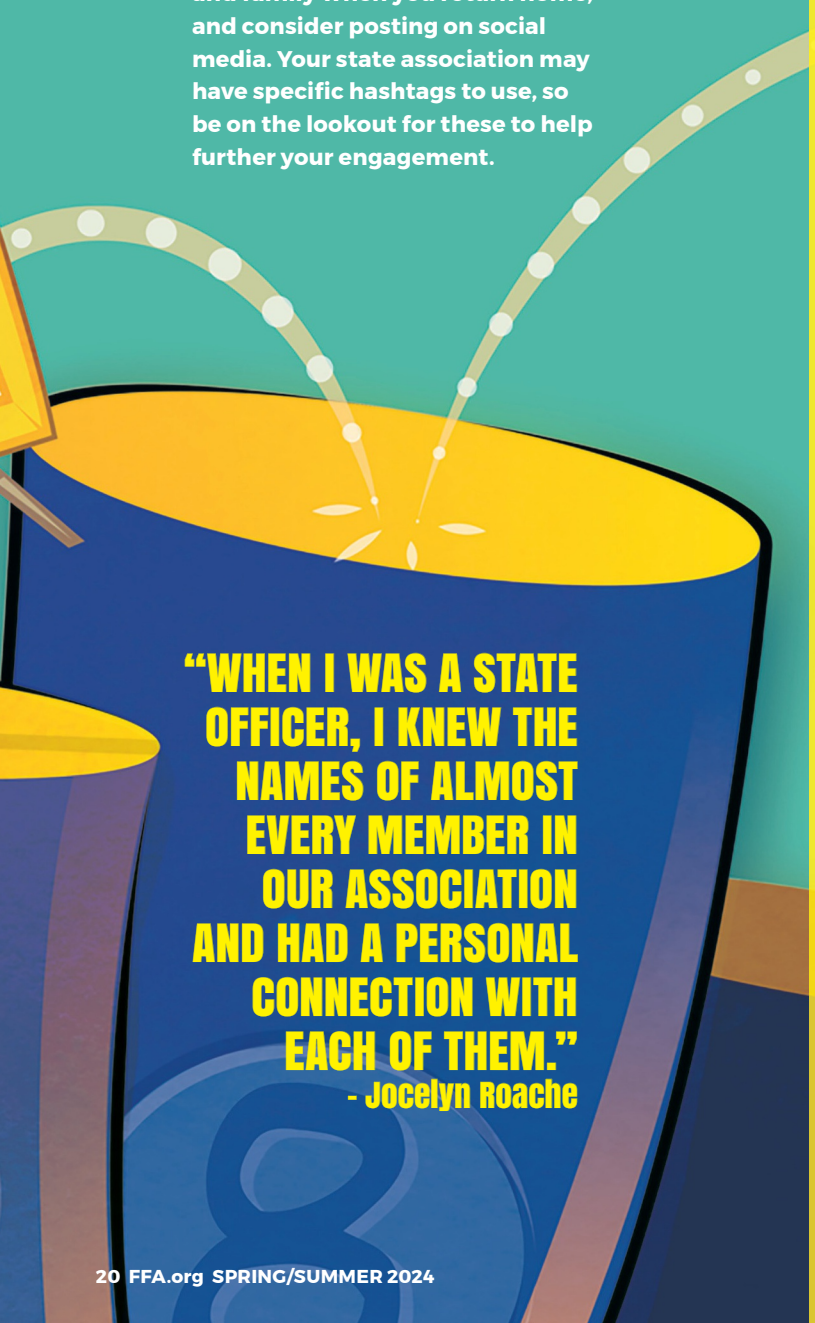
"INTRODUCE YOURSELF AND TAKE ADVANTAGE OF HAVING THOSE CONVERSATIONS."
- McKena Wallentine

8. SHARE YOUR STORY.

Everyone's path in agriculture is unique. When you meet members from different chapters and parts of the state, share how you got involved in FFA and invite them to share their stories.

"We're all like a big family," Roache says. "When I was a state officer, I knew the names of almost every member in our association and had a personal connection with each of them."

As you're soaking up your experience, take lots of photos and videos. Share them with your friends and family when you return home, and consider posting on social media. Your state association may have specific hashtags to use, so be on the lookout for these to help further your engagement.



"WHEN I WAS A STATE OFFICER, I KNEW THE NAMES OF ALMOST EVERY MEMBER IN OUR ASSOCIATION AND HAD A PERSONAL CONNECTION WITH EACH OF THEM."
- Jocelyn Roache



MY STATE CONVENTION STORY

Attending state convention was both memorable and impactful for New Hampshire FFA member Emma Davidson.

"I'd never been to something like this with FFA," Davidson says. "The environment was very welcoming and everyone was kind."

Davidson, a high school junior and member of the Winnisquam FFA Chapter, attended her first Granite State Association of FFA Convention in 2023. She participated in three contests – prepared public speaking, employment skills and animal welfare – all of which helped boost her confidence and enabled her to share her interests with others.

"This is what made me excited for my upcoming FFA year," she says. "I found people who shared common interests through icebreakers, which further enhanced my experience."

Through the competitions and sessions she attended, Davidson was inspired by her fellow New Hampshire FFA members and entertained by the state officer team. She encourages members interested in attending their state's convention to find a contest, event or activity to participate in and become involved from the get-go.

"You'll have lots of jam-packed days and late nights, but it's amazing and worth it in the end," she adds.

Davidson hopes to see her chapter's membership continue to grow in the future, ensuring more members have a chance to attend convention.

"Through FFA, I've gained many leadership skills," she says. "I've learned how to be an effective communicator, and I want to continue to spread the word. Having more people at convention in the years to come means we'll all be able to share such a fun opportunity."

Photography: Courtesy of Emma Davidson

9. CELEBRATE OTHERS.

Our organization becomes stronger when we believe in one another.

"Be in the moment and soak in everything that's going on," Wallentine says. "Treat this as an opportunity to support others, while simultaneously learning and growing yourself to be more like those who've worked so hard to walk across the stage."

As you watch members showcase their talents, compete at a higher level, receive awards and advocate for the agriculture industry, recognize and congratulate them. Cheer on your chapter members and thank your advisor(s) often. A few kind words can make a big difference.

"BE IN THE MOMENT AND SOAK IN EVERYTHING THAT'S GOING ON."
- McKena Wallentine



10. REMEMBER YOUR "WHY."

Before, during and even after convention, find moments to reflect on why you joined FFA. Use these thoughts to frame a few goals for the remainder of your time in the organization.

"No matter where you're from, remember the one thing we have in common is we're all wearing the same FFA jacket," Roache says.

Above all, find what makes you – and your state – special and take pride in it. You're part of what makes FFA special, and state convention is one of the many ways to recognize and contribute to the future of agriculture together.

INVESTING IN INNOVATIVE RESEARCH

THIS ILLINOIS FFA MEMBER FOUND HER PASSION THROUGH A PARTNERSHIP WITH NUTRIEN AG SOLUTIONS. – By Ricanna Spargo

When Avery Watson learned about an opportunity for students to collaborate with Nutrien Ag Solutions, the Union FFA member from Illinois was all ears.

"Representatives from Nutrien Ag Solutions asked if any ag students wanted to use a plot of [Nutrien Ag Solutions] land for research," Watson says. "They're really invested in getting high school students involved at their innovation farm."

After discussing her options with Thaddeus Bates, senior manager of the Nutrien Ag Solutions Innovation Farm in Champaign, Ill., she decided she wanted her research to focus on the advancements of equipment technology. Through her research, Watson is discovering the differences between modern and vintage planting equipment.



"I talked it over with my dad, and we decided I would use a plot of the innovation farm's land alongside a plot at our farm to conduct my research project," she says.

Watson grew up on a family farm, so she knew about the planting process. However, conducting research on emergence and planting depths has strengthened her knowledge and interest in the industry.

"I love researching and knowing what I'm doing relates back to my family and our farm," Watson adds. "Nutrien Ag Solutions team members have been accommodating of my project's needs. They let us borrow one of their planters, and there's always someone around to lend a hand when we need assistance."

BUILDING INTEREST IN AG

Investing in innovation is one of Nutrien Ag Solutions' core principles, and its partnership with FFA chapters such as Union FFA is one of the ways it fulfills this mission.

"It's a passion for us to bring out students and help build renewed interest in agriculture," Bates says. "We have to find different ways to encourage students to look at ag as an exciting career choice. There are opportunities for anyone who has an interest to find their role in the industry. You name it, and this industry has it."

Watson credits her time on the innovation farm to kick-starting a passion for research and helping others in her chapter gain valuable experiences.

"You can't be afraid of what you don't know," she says. "In the beginning, there was so much I felt like I didn't know. Being able to experience things alongside Nutrien Ag Solutions team members made me more confident. Just because you don't know something doesn't mean you can't learn."



Unity FFA member Avery Watson explored emergence and planting depths with a research project on a Nutrien Ag Solutions test plot.

GROW WITH GRANT FUNDING

Could your chapter use funding for a plant science-based project? FFA Alumni and Supporters chapters can apply for a Give Back to Your Roots grant sponsored by Nutrien Ag Solutions to help! Visit ffa.org/alumni-and-supporters/chapter-opportunities for more information.

Photography: Courtesy of Avery Watson

FOR THE LOVE OF LIVESTOCK

SONOMA FFA ALUMNUS DISCOVERED POSSESSING A PASSION FOR ANIMALS AND A WILLINGNESS TO LEARN WAS THE KEY TO GAINING NEW EXPERIENCES. - By Jodi Helmer

Although Casey Spencer started showing pigs and cattle in middle school and had odd jobs working on farms, he never thought about pursuing a career in agriculture. He changed his mind after his Sonoma FFA advisor took him to a California state FFA convention as a high school freshman. "My mind was blown," Spencer says. "There were so many people who were so passionate about agriculture, and there was so much out there to do in agriculture."

The experience encouraged Spencer to pursue diverse opportunities to see what piqued his interest. In 2020, he used the knowledge and skills gained while working for a draft horse operation to start Spencer Farrier Services. Running his own business helped Spencer connect with ranchers, which led to additional opportunities — including a job working for a beef cattle operation.

"I just put my head down and picked up work where I could," he says. "Even if it was something I wasn't 100% into, I gave it a shot and a lot of times it turned out to be a great experience."

The combination of loving livestock, having a positive attitude and being willing to try new things also changed the trajectory of Spencer's future.



Attending a California FFA State Convention led Casey Spencer to explore career avenues and find his niche in livestock production.

A NEW CHAPTER

Instead of going to a local junior college, Spencer's advisor pushed him to consider a different path. He applied to and was accepted into the University of Wyoming, where he's majoring in agricultural business and farm and ranch management.

During his sophomore year, Spencer joined the university's meat judging team and has since traveled around the United States and Australia to compete.

"Casey was one of the top performers from the get-go," says McKensie Phillips, coordinator of the meat judging team at the University of Wyoming. "Among his teammates, Casey is the one who genuinely enjoys the process of learning how to evaluate meat products and challenges himself to reach expert level."

In Australia, Spencer's skills also caught the attention of local ag industry professionals. He received offers to work on cattle ranches and with an international beef distributor.

Spencer, who earned his American FFA Degree this past November, is committed to finishing college, but he plans to keep his options open after he graduates in 2025.

"My advisors have done so much to build my confidence and encourage me to see where [agriculture] can take me," he says. "It's been good for me to get out and explore different parts of the country and to try new things and have a lot of experiences."

DIVE INTO AG CAREERS
Want to explore jobs or internships in the agriculture industry? Visit ForeverBlueNetwork.org.

Photography: Courtesy of Casey Spencer

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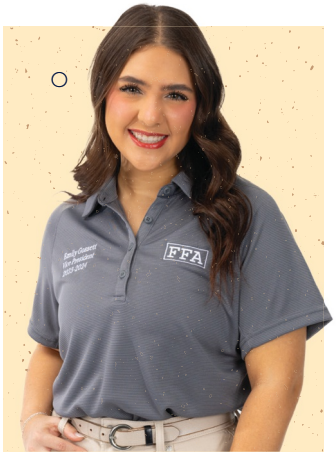

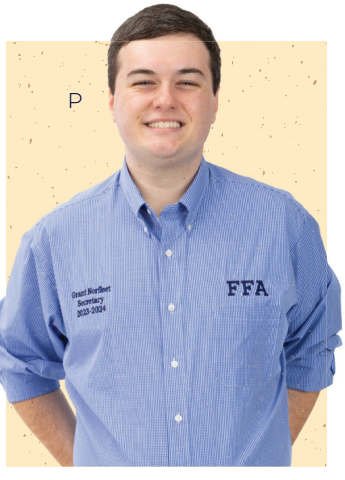

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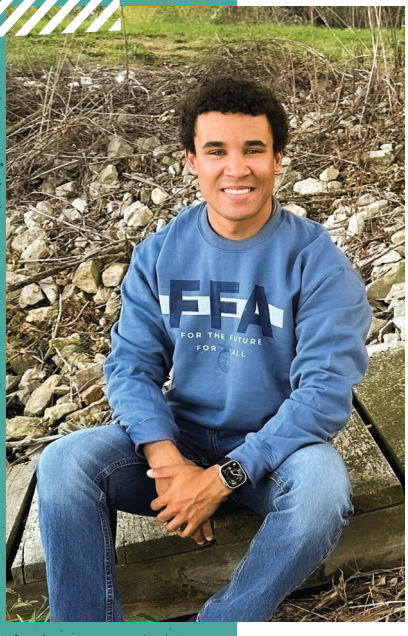

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WIRED FOR GROWTH

THIS NORTH CLACKAMAS FFA MEMBER DEVELOPED A CREATIVE, HIGH-TECH SOLUTION TO PRODUCE MORE FEED FOR THE CAMPUS FARM.

BY JODI HELMER | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF NOBLE

Evan Vander Stoep was a junior at Milwaukie High School when he first saw the fodder greenhouse on the farm that the agriscience class used to grow barley fodder.

"It was all in shambles, just pieced together," he recalls. "There were parts all over the place, and it looked like it would never work."

Although the system appeared beyond repair, Vander Stoep welcomed the challenge to get it working again. He started tinkering with the parts and sketching designs in January 2021. Even when it looked plausible on paper, agricultural education teacher and North Clackamas FFA advisor Kathy Mayfield was skeptical it could be fixed.

"My first thought was, 'Does he really know what he's doing?'" she says.



"Growing hundreds of pounds of feed per day, seven times a week, was quite a big task."
– Evan Vander Stoep



FEEDING THE FARM

The North Clackamas FFA Chapter is an urban program in Oregon. The 10-acre school farm is home to 32 producing ewes and six cows that consume more than 400 pounds of fodder per day, but the farm has a lack of acreage to grow crops and few opportunities to teach students about crop production.

Mayfield introduced controlled-environment agriculture almost a decade ago. The vertical racks allow the chapter to grow a lot of feed in a small space at a rapid pace. Her goal was to produce enough fodder to feed the livestock on the campus farm.

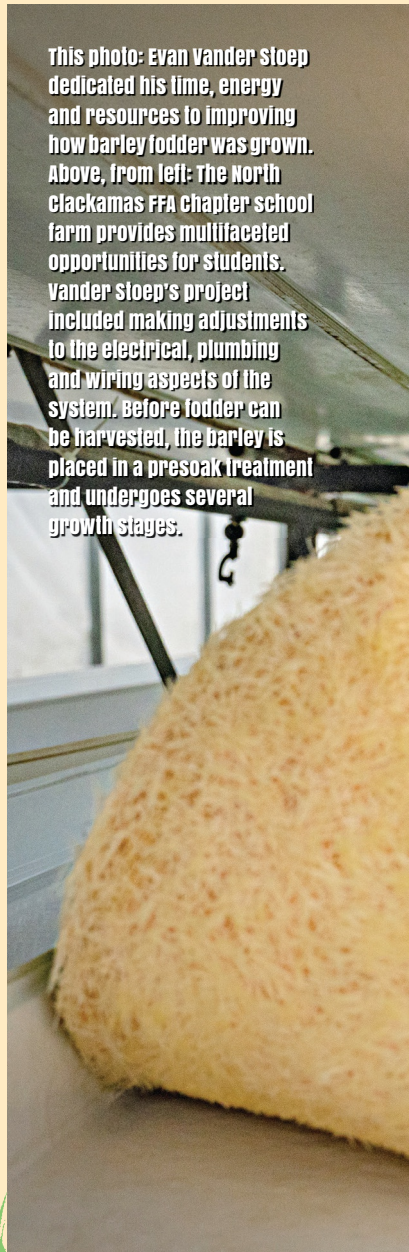
"It offers us the ability to teach kids how to produce a crop we feed to our animals," she says. "It's also very hands-on in terms of doing a cost analysis from an ag business standpoint, so it's multifaceted in terms of its application."

A 20x40-foot greenhouse on the campus farm was the ideal location to start a commercial-size barley fodder operation. Previous classes had installed a flood-and-drain system to fill trays with water that soaks the seed; these systems are common in commercial facilities but led to excess seed washout and poor production in the campus greenhouse.

In 2014, FFA members conducted an agriscience project to compare the performance of the flood-and-drain system with a mister system. The misters decreased mold levels and increased production, leading Mayfield to make the switch. However, the new system was not up and running, with most of the system torn apart when the COVID-19 pandemic shut down the operation.

When classes resumed, Vander Stoep was in the class responsible for getting the system running again after two years offline. Vander Stoep had some experience working on aquaponics and hydroponics using small fish tanks but admits, "Growing hundreds of pounds of feed per day, seven times a week, was





This photo: Evan Vander Stoep dedicated his time, energy and resources to improving how barley fodder was grown. Above, from left: The North Clackamas FFA Chapter school farm provides multifaceted opportunities for students. Vander Stoep's project included making adjustments to the electrical, plumbing and wiring aspects of the system. Before fodder can be harvested, the barley is placed in a presoak treatment and undergoes several growth stages.

quite a big task."

Chris Guntermann, a greenhouse specialist, provided input on designs. The blueprints went through five revisions before Vander Stoep felt confident enough to order parts and start construction.

"Ms. Mayfield was amazing in the way she supported me," Vander Stoep says. "She basically said, 'I'm going to let this high schooler go and spend hundreds of dollars on plumbing and electrical parts and hope it works.'"

CONCEPT TO COMPLETION

Vander Stoep devoted all his spare time to working on the fodder system, managing all the tasks including electrical, plumbing and writing the code for the controller. He often worked late into the evening to assemble the system and test configurations. Every day for more than four weeks, Vander Stoep traveled to the farm for the initial system trials to harvest and reseed the system himself, a two-hour daily process. He then trained other students to help run the system.

"It's so rare that students take ownership to that level," Mayfield says. "He didn't just take it on to completion; he took it to a higher level















than the industry standard."

From the initial design, Vander Stoep continued making tweaks. In the original design, which he dubbed, "the spaghetti noodle disaster," the valves that controlled the irrigation on each level of the racks were on the floor with hoses running off them.

Vander Stoep recognized it was a mess — and a tripping hazard — and switched the design so the hoses were affixed to the ceiling. The goal, he explains, was to position all the equipment so it was safe but accessible in case it needed repairs. He also made several other modifications, including programming a specialized industrial programmable logic controller (PLC) to work for the smaller-scale irrigation system to help manage the humidity in the greenhouse.

When the time came to grow fodder, Vander Stoep still had some reservations.

"I was confident the plumbing and electrical were going to work," he says. "but I wasn't sure I could hit the production goals Mayfield wanted to hit."

Mayfield challenged Vander Stoep to optimize the moisture levels, temperature and humidity to produce 7 pounds of fodder per pound of seed, but the initial results were disappointing.

The irrigation controller and climate control settings Vander Stoep initially spent days refining produced a volume of fodder as low as 3.2 pounds per





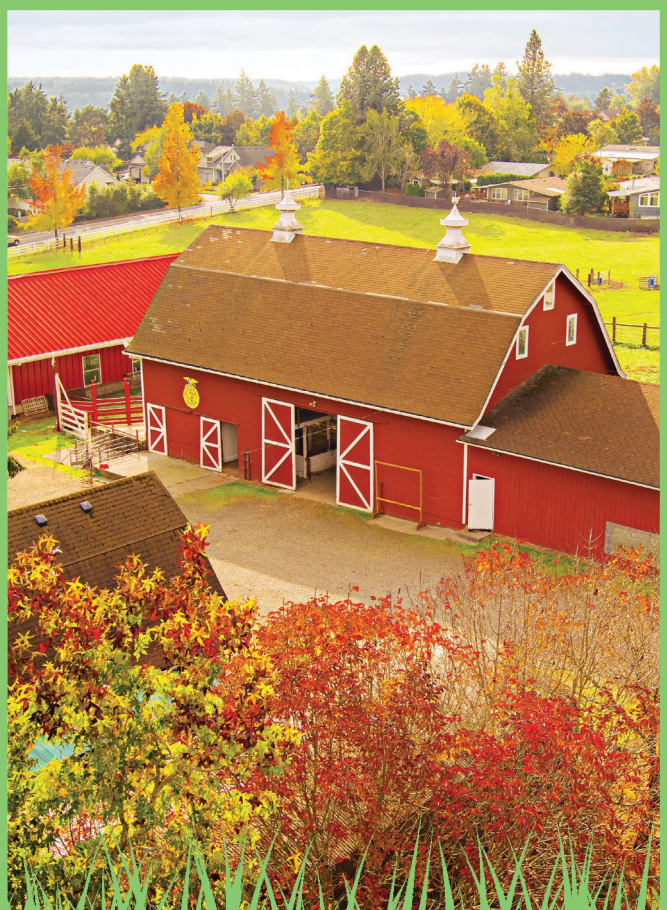




This photo: Barley fodder serves as a nutritious food source for the six cows that live on the North Clackamas FFA School farm. Above, left to right: Advisor Kathy Mayfield provided Vander Stoep with the creative freedom to develop a more efficient fodder system. After barley fodder is harvested and prepared, it's fed to the school's animals, including 32 producing ewes. The system allows students to learn about crop production.

EVERY DAY FOR MORE THAN FOUR WEEKS, VANDER STOEP TRAVELED TO THE FARM FOR THE INITIAL SYSTEM TRIALS TO HARVEST AND RESEED THE SYSTEM HIMSELF, A TWO-HOUR DAILY PROCESS. HE THEN TRAINED OTHER STUDENTS TO HELP RUN THE SYSTEM.





pound of seed, which was barely enough to feed six cows. Vander Stoep was undeterred.

"Electronics have always been my passion," he says. "I like being hands-on and working on stuff, and it's amazing to work on these things I would never have the ability to do if it wasn't for FFA."

With continued tweaks (coupled with a stubborn refusal to give up), Vander Stoep started seeing improvements in production. He quickly decided to turn his experimentation into an agriscience project.

SEED GERMINATION SCIENCE

Before each batch of fodder is started, four 15-pound bags of seed are soaked in 5-gallon buckets with water and an ounce of bleach for 24 hours. Vander Stoep wondered whether the water temperature during the seed priming presoak affected the ending production weights.

To test the impact, Vander Stoep filled two of the buckets with regular hose water of about 50 degrees Fahrenheit and used a 300-watt aquarium heater to control the temperature of the water in two other buckets, changing the temperature to collect data on the impact of a wide temperature range. The 15-pound bags of seed would then be lowered into the four buckets of water and left to soak for 24 hours.

It didn't take long to see a clear pattern of the impact the water temperature during the presoak had on production (based on harvested weight) once the seed was planted.

"I noticed there was a peak in production weights when the seed was soaked in water in the 72- to 75-degree range," Vander Stoep says. "Temperatures above 80 degrees were way too high. At those high temperatures, [the seed] started degrading and production levels were sometimes below normal."

Vander Stoep suspects the warm presoak better penetrates the seed, allowing it to hold more water and provide a boost during sprouting. The findings could help the North Clackamas FFA Chapter produce an extra 40 pounds of fodder per day, therefore feeding more animals.

The project earned Vander Stoep first place in the Oregon Agriscience Fair and a spot as a 2023 National FFA Agriscience Fair finalist.

TAKING THE NEXT STEP

Vander Stoep graduated in 2023 and accepted a position as a radio tower technician. He travels around the country repairing and installing technical equipment, which sometimes requires climbing hundreds of feet into the air to work on the tower's antennas and lights.

Similar to redesigning the irrigation system for the barley fodder operation, repairing radio towers requires top-notch technical and problem-solving skills. Vander Stoep is enjoying traveling to different states for work but hopes to return to agriculture in the future.

"I have a creative side; I like to come up with new ideas and design custom components," he says. "I want to put those passions to use and continue down an agricultural path; it's something I'm interested in and passionate about."

HANDS-on Education

Bristol County Agricultural High School students prepare for career success by learning to do and doing to learn every day.

BY COURTNEY LEEPER GIRGIS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID EKSTROM

Some students spend as many as 2½ hours each morning and afternoon riding the bus to attend Bristol County Agricultural High School in Dighton, Mass. — commonly referred to as Bristol Aggie.

"It's incredible how far they're willing to travel to come here and spend their days with us," says Leslie Blanchette, chair of the Bristol Aggie Animal Science Department and Bristol County FFA advisor.

Students come for hands-on education, adds Blanchette, a 1995 alum of the school. Bristol Aggie is one of only five agricultural high schools in the country, according to Blueprint magazine. Three of them are in Massachusetts.

When the Massachusetts Legislature started Bristol Aggie in 1912, it was an all-boys farm school. Boys moved to the campus to learn how to become better farmers. In early spring through summer, they returned to their family farms to practice what they learned. Girls joined in the 1960s, although the first female student, Elizabeth Bowen, attended in 1936.

Today, Bristol Aggie sits on more than 220 acres along the Taunton River and offers seven majors: agricultural mechanics, animal science, arboriculture, floriculture, landscape design and contracting, natural resource management and environmental engineering.

Today, Bristol Aggie sits on more than 220 acres along the Taunton River and offers seven majors: agricultural mechanics, animal science, arboriculture, floriculture, landscape design and contracting, natural resource management and environmental engineering. Each student becomes an FFA member and selects a major in the fourth term of their freshman year, after exploring each option. Half their days are spent studying academics. The other half is focused on vocational training — in and outside the classroom.

To get into Bristol Aggie, students participate in a competitive application process. They come from more than 16 towns and four cities in Bristol County as well as up to 16 out-of-county districts each year, and their agricultural backgrounds vary. One student may have grown up on a 1,000-cow dairy farm, while another lives in a third-floor apartment and hasn't seen a cow until arriving at Bristol Aggie.

Here are three of their stories.

Connecting Animal Science to Human Health

Julianna Dufresne enjoys watching the different personalities of the rats, mice, rabbits, guinea pigs and birds she cares for as a senior animal science major. The Bristol County FFA president feeds and performs physical exams on small animals as part of the veterinary science and laboratory animal technology concentration, one of four in the animal science department. Last year, she spent time bonding with an African gray parrot named Rocco, who learned voice tricks.

Dufresne also occasionally works with the school's horses, pigs, sheep and dairy



"All of this experience has given me confidence with animals. I can handle any mouse, any rat or any bird someone puts in front of me, and I can do it with confidence. That will be huge, especially in a doctorate program."

– Julianna Dufresne



Julianna Dufresne's senior research project includes examining the effects of disinfectants on microbial growth. After graduating from Bristol Aggie this spring, she plans to continue her education at a nearby college and pursue a career in research.



Dufresne's interest in antibiotic resistance led her to present a national-qualifying FFA speech on this topic.



Visiting the Natural Resource Management (NRM) Museum on Bristol Aggie's campus encouraged Brian Thornhill to apply for, and later attend, the school. Bristol Aggie students, including Thornhill, develop the museum's exhibits as part of their coursework.

cows in the school's new robotic dairy barn. She has helped dehorn and vaccinate dairy calves against tetanus, clostridial infections and other diseases.

Dufresne's heart was set on becoming a small-animal veterinarian when she first came to Bristol Aggie. However, her hands-on classes made her realize she wants a career at the intersection of animal science, microbiology and human medicine.

Dufresne plans to pursue a doctorate in virology or immunology, then work for a research company where she can observe the effects of drugs or other human-health treatments on different pathogens in





As an NRM major, Thornhill helps care for turtle hatchlings raised on Bristol Aggie's campus. The turtles, some of which are native to Massachusetts and surrounding areas, are eventually released into their natural habitat.

> "Everything I learn here every single day is going to benefit me in some way in my future career."
> – Julianna Dufresne

research animals, including mice, rats and primates.

"Microbes fascinate me in a way no other topic ever has," Dufresne says, recalling the time she and classmates performed fecal smears. They looked under the microscope for parasitic eggs from hookworms, roundworms and tapeworms in fecal samples from their school animals.

She recently prepared a speech for FFA that explores the topic of antibiotic resistance, and she is developing a research project that will observe the effects of different disinfectants on microbial growth.

"Everything I learn here every single day is going to benefit me in some way in my future career," Dufresne says. "All of this experience has given me confidence with animals. I can handle any mouse, any rat or any bird someone puts in front of me, and I can do it with confidence. That will be huge, especially in a doctorate program."

Real-World Conservation

Brian Thornhill knew he wanted to be a Bristol Aggie when he was in eighth grade. He had just visited the school's Natural Resource Management (NRM) Museum during the annual fall show, which draws more than 5,000 visitors each year.

The taxidermy, snake and reptile exhibits were cool, Thornhill says, but he was enthralled by a student showing the differences between two types of arachnids: spiders and harvestmen.

"He was explaining those [harvestmen] technically aren't spiders," Thornhill recalls. "I love creepy crawlies, and that's what completely sold me. That's when I said, 'I have to go to this school.'"

Thornhill is now a senior NRM major teaching juniors how to run turtle tanks at the museum. As an NRM student, he learns about how ecosystems work and the roles of different groups of animals in them. Students work closely with academic and professional partners, including wildlife biologists at the University of Georgia, the state and federal departments of wildlife and fisheries, and Oxbow Associates, a private company.

Through these partnerships, students receive rare, endangered turtle hatchlings or eggs, which they hatch in school and care for over the winter. They release the turtles into their natural habitat in the spring, with hopes of boosting populations.

Recently, the students have begun monitoring red herring populations in the Taunton River, which runs alongside the campus. They learn how to keep their lab environments biosecure and to present their findings professionally at scientific conferences.

Thornhill wants to "keep doing NRM things" in the future, perhaps teaching at a







Brody Del Deo and his arboriculture instructor, Seth Cook, climb into the arboriculture department's bucket truck to perform maintenance on a tree located on Bristol Aggie's campus.





college or working for the state.

"I think this is definitely laying the foundation," he says.

In the Trees

Brody Del Deo felt nervous climbing his first tree as a sophomore. He had learned proper safety protocols. He was hooked into a harness. But it was the encouragement from his classmates and instructors that helped him overcome his fear of heights.

As a senior arboriculture major, Del Deo now considers tree climbing one of the best parts of school. He and his classmates learn how to diagnose diseases and other issues in trees and how to make them more aesthetically pleasing. Then they practice pruning, planting and, when necessary, removing trees on campus. They learn to use the same tools and equipment, such as chain saws and bucket trucks, as professionals.

"I really like the hands-on work," Del Deo says. "It helps me learn better than sitting in the classroom."

When Del Deo transferred into Bristol Aggie, he chose the arboriculture major because he knew he wanted to work outdoors. He already had experience in landscaping, so he decided to try something new.

"Arboriculture opened my eyes," Del Deo says. "I didn't realize there were so many opportunities for working outside every day."

Last spring, Del Deo climbed a Norway maple tree — ascending 30 to 40 feet — to prune it. It was the first time he had done so mostly on his own.

"It showed me how I



In 2022, Bristol County Agricultural High School, commonly referred to as Bristol Aggie, underwent a $105 million expansion. Today, the 220-acre campus is nestled near the Taunton River in Dighton, Mass. After being selected from a competitive applicant pool, some students travel more than two hours each way to attend classes at the school.

Opposite: All seven majors at Bristol Aggie, including arboriculture, place an emphasis on experiential learning. In his program, Brody Del Deo has gained skills such as tree identification, pruning, removal and climbing.

would be doing it working in the industry," Del Deo says. He wants to jump right into production arboriculture after high school.

The hands-on education at Bristol Aggie is beneficial, he adds, but the best part is the community.

"You find a group of people who share similar interests," he says. "It makes coming to school enjoyable every day."

Cultivating Career Readiness

Watch and see how Bristol County FFA members prepare for their futures.

More Space to Learn

Bristol County Agricultural High School features 220 acres of learning space, both in the classroom and outside – in barns, pasture, an agricultural mechanics shop, greenhouses, a vet clinic, a museum, the campus grounds and on the Taunton River.

In 2022, the school completed a $105 million expansion that built and/or updated six buildings.

- **The new Center for Science and the Environment houses the student-curated Natural Resource Management Museum, specialized biosecure labs and flexible classrooms.**
- **The new Student Commons features a dining area and a media center.**
- **Renovations and a small addition to Gilbert Hall include administration offices, classrooms, two gymnasiums and a climbing lab for arboriculture students.**
- **A new Landscape/Arbor Building.**
- **A renovated Ag Mechanics Building with welding, diesel mechanics and electricity labs.**
- **A new Net-Zero Dairy Barn with robotic milking technology.**

Sustainable design elements such as composting toilets and vegetative roofs were also incorporated to conserve water and energy. The expansion creates spaces for 640 students to experience hands-on agricultural education, which is up from 450 students in years' past.



Paving a Path FORWARD

Corey Flournoy, an FFA alumnus and former National FFA president, maintains a commitment to cultivating a culture of belonging. - By Jessica Walker Boehm

Although Corey Flournoy's role as the executive in residence for equity, diversity and inclusion for the National FFA Organization is fairly new, he's no stranger to FFA — nor to trailblazing.

Flournoy, a Chicago, Ill., native, became the first African-American National FFA president in 1994. He didn't realize it at the time, but he says this position changed the course of his life.

"During my year of service, I learned the importance of building meaningful relationships as I met people from across the U.S.," Flournoy says. "I started to understand that when you get to know someone beyond the surface, you develop empathy, and that's when real conversations and connections can begin."

Empathy became a cornerstone of Flournoy's professional career. In 1996, he co-founded the company he still operates today, Creative Outreach Consulting. Through this company, he delivers a 360-degree holistic approach to individual and organizational transformative change through proven practices; programs and processes in leadership development; personal coaching; and diversity, equity and inclusion.

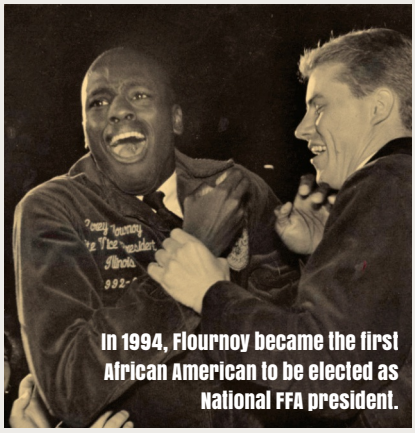
A PLACE TO BELONG

When National FFA Organization CEO Scott Stump asked him to take on a similar role within FFA in 2023, Flournoy knew it was a perfect fit.

"My ultimate goal is to help ensure all students in FFA feel welcomed, no matter who they are, where they come from or how they identify," says Flournoy, who also served as vice president of people and culture development at Aurora, a self-driving startup, and was Groupon's first global head of inclusion and diversity. "If we want to increase diversity in FFA, we must make certain that each member not only feels safe and comfortable but also has ample opportunities to engage, grow and thrive within the organization."



Flournoy brought a message of inclusivity to the 96th National FFA Convention & Expo.



In 1994, Flournoy became the first African American to be elected as National FFA president.

He brought this message to life as a keynote speaker at the 96th National FFA Convention & Expo, asking members to turn their focus to the concept of belonging.

"Everyone can think back to a time when they felt like they didn't belong, whether at school, in an extracurricular or even with a friend group. I think we can agree it's unpleasant, to say the least," Flournoy says. "However, every FFA member has the power to make sure this doesn't happen when people come to our classrooms, chapter meetings, conferences and conventions."

In addition, he encouraged members to challenge themselves to look beyond their biases and fears, get out of their comfort zones and intentionally engage with people they may perceive as different.

"FFA offers so many beautiful opportunities to connect with people from all walks of life," Flournoy says. "Ultimately, it's up to each of us to take advantage of those opportunities — and when we do, we see they are incredible gifts."

National FFA is committed to creating a space where all members feel valued. To learn more, visit **FFA.org/FFA-For-All.**

Photography: Copyright © FFA

The Evolution of Agricultural Communications

STARTING IN 2024, THE NATIONAL CAREER DEVELOPMENT EVENT (CDE) WILL CHANGE TO REFLECT INDUSTRY STANDARDS AND ENABLE COMPETITORS TO EXPAND THEIR SKILLS IN AN ENGAGING AND INTERACTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT. – By Lauren Quinlan

Collaboration and creativity are two characteristics FFA members need to compete and ultimately excel in the agricultural communications career development event (CDE).

"This competition was, and is, no easy feat, but it's something I was happy to pour my heart into," says Anna Kate Mathis, an alumna of Madison County High School FFA in Georgia. Mathis and teammates Katherine Carrouth, Abigail Adams and Anna Moon, along with one of their advisors, Eryn Elliott, were named the 2023 National FFA Agricultural Communications CDE team event winners.

"Through competing, I learned to balance the power of confidence with demonstrating humility," Adams adds. "Although it's important to believe in your work, it's essential to recognize it's an opportunity for growth and change."

A CAREER-READINESS APPROACH

The 2024 national competition, which will be held fully in person during the 97th National FFA Convention & Expo in October, will include several notable changes, according to Dr. Courtney Gibson, National FFA Agricultural Communications CDE superintendent and associate professor of agricultural education and communications at Texas Tech University. The rationale for implementing these changes, Gibson says, is twofold. In addition to providing avenues for team members to strengthen real-world skills, the event is designed to mirror the agricultural communications profession and agricultural industry as both continually evolve.

"As you practice something, you become better at doing it," adds Carol Herl, National FFA CDE/LDE education specialist. "These changes will equip more members with the foundational skills they'll need to be successful in today's workforce."

Beginning this year, national competitors will complete an individual writing mechanics exam and attend a press conference event. Team members will then divide and conquer to complete four practicums, which include designing a magazine spread, writing a news story, producing an audio or visual piece, and developing a social media strategy. Each team will then package and present the work to a panel of judges, with a question-and-answer session to follow.

Reagan Robinson, a Lake Butler FFA alumna from Florida, was named the 2023 National FFA Agricultural Communications CDE top participant winner. Her advice to FFA members interested in competing is to push beyond the fear of the unknown and try something new.

"You must take that first leap of faith to achieve something greater than yourself," Robinson says. "Through your participation, you'll obtain knowledge and partake in experiences that are vital for enhancing your future. My story shows that time doesn't always warrant success — determination and grit do — and greatness is only achieved once you decide to try."

From left: Abigail Adams, Katherine Carrouth, Anna Kate Mathis and Anna Moon were named the 2023 National FFA Agricultural Communications CDE team event winners.



Communications in Action

Curious about the types of content you can produce by competing in the agricultural communications CDE? Check out this video produced by 2023 national top participant winner and Lake Butler FFA alumna Reagan Robinson.

Photography: Courtesy of Eryn Elliott



ON THE RECORD: DANIELLE WATERWORTH

The Case New Holland business leader has called on her FFA experiences in her journey to help equipment dealers and customers succeed in the field.

– By Jessica Mozo

> **"FFA also exposed me to vital skills such as public speaking, working in teams and project management. I was constantly pushed to be involved and stay busy, which has helped make for a successful career."**
>
> **– DANIELLE WATERWORTH**

Danielle Waterworth attributes FFA involvement and experiences to helping her prepare for a 20-year career at Case New Holland.



FFA Alumna Danielle Waterworth of Racine, Wis., enjoys a successful career with Case New Holland (CNH). We caught up with Waterworth about her career path and work today, and how FFA helped prepare her for success.

Q: What does your job entail as a corporate representative for CNH?

A: I have two roles within the parts and service organization of our agriculture business. First, I'm the vice president for North America ag dealer and customer support, so I help dealers with back-office needs such as product support, training, warranty, technician recruitment, parts support and more.

My second role is in global ag services and maintenance development. I strategically look at how we can use technology in our machines to provide better service for our customers. We build tools that enable our dealers to prioritize uptime for our customers and help us sell products like maintenance plans.

Q: What FFA chapter were you a member of?

A: I grew up in Bluffs, Ill., a town of about 700. I was a member of the Bluffs FFA Chapter from 1994 until 1998, when I graduated. I was also a collegiate FFA member.

Q: What did your career path look like?

A: I majored in ag finance at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Outside of one year in a commercial banking role, I've been at CNH for 20 years, with the first 13 years being specifically focused on using my college major. It has evolved from there with roles in sales, service and technology.

Q: How did FFA help prepare you for your current career?

A: My first exposure to profit and loss and a balance sheet was through my FFA supervised agricultural experiences (SAEs). This exposed me to the business side of agriculture, and approaching my dairy goat and swine projects from a business perspective was incredibly interesting to me.

FFA also exposed me to vital skills such as public speaking, working in teams and project management. I was constantly pushed to be involved and stay busy, which has helped make for a successful career.

Q: How are you still involved and connected with FFA today?

A: Two years ago, I retired from serving on the Wisconsin FFA Foundation Board. Nationally, I sit on the FFA Alumni and Supporters Advisory Committee as a corporate chapter representative.

I'm the site lead for our CNH FFA Alumni and Supporters Chapter, so I'm involved with our corporate chapter. I also stay involved with our local Union Grove FFA Chapter, which my two daughters will be members of when they're a bit older.

Photography: Courtesy of Danielle Waterworth, Getty Images, vaximilian

FFA in the USA

As you plan your Program of Activities (POA), check out these noteworthy ideas to make your FFA year the best it can be. – Compiled by Julie Woodard

Alabama

Southern Choctaw FFA members in grades 10-12 learned about the risks and dangers associated with driving under the influence through maneuvering a small ATV on a driving course while wearing fatal vision goggles.

Alaska

Silent Springs FFA built a dozen hydroponic grow towers, which were distributed to science teachers in the area. Members also hosted a seminar for high school teachers to build their own towers.

Arizona

To help students prepare for finals, Basha FFA hosted a studying and snacks session. After a 15-minute presentation on handling stress, students split into different rooms to study.

Arkansas

The Arkansas Virtual Academy FFA Chapter extends agricultural education to a special needs homeschool cooperative. Through tailored bi-monthly lessons, FFA members mentor students and share learning materials with participating families.

California

During the Lakeside-El Capitan FFA Chapter's safety conference event, members can earn certifications to operate a forklift, tractor and loader.

Colorado

Manzanola FFA hosted a mock career development event (CDE) for their school's student body to showcase what they can learn in an agriculture class and FFA.

Connecticut

Woodbury FFA started the Timber Team club, where members compete in wood-related sports like cross-cut sawing, bow sawing, log rolling, axe throwing and pulp tossing.

Delaware

Milford FFA spearheaded the impactful Suck It Up! campaign. Members collaborate with natural resources and environmental industry partners to distribute educational kits and absorbents to local farmers.

Florida

A representative from Duck's Unlimited shared materials and instructions to help Cottondale FFA members construct their own duck nesting boxes and learn about the area's wood duck population.

Georgia

The Bonaire Middle FFA Chapter collaborated with its local elementary school to offer Pause for Paws, which helps children learn to read animal body language and avoid dangerous situations.

Hawaii

Using organic techniques, Kea'au FFA members grew fresh vegetables in raised beds and planter bags to feed those on fixed incomes in elderly housing units near the school's campus.

Idaho

Highland-Craigmont FFA members created videos about local agriculture products and other commodities, which were shared on the chapter's Facebook and Instagram accounts.

Illinois

Through an interactive activity, Sterling FFA members learned about the best way to pass farm equipment and how recognize safety concerns when sharing the road.

Indiana

Sullivan FFA produced a video highlighting members' supervised agricultural experiences (SAEs), which was played on a loop during its county fair.

Iowa

Charles City FFA members worked with the local housing department to build 30 raised bed gardens and provide demonstrations for residents living in city-owned housing.

Kansas

Chapman FFA designed a "Where's the Energy?" activity to raise awareness of the problematic effects of energy drinks. Members selected healthier alternatives (like fruit water) and received a demonstration for making protein balls.

Kentucky

Clark County FFA used a $5,000 grant from the National FFA Organization to build bookshelves resembling barns, which were stocked with agriculture books and placed in every elementary school in the county.

Louisiana

To help students understand impacts of the International Rice Festival and rice production in their community, Crowley FFA created a four-day event known as La Vie Du Riz (The Rice Life).

Maine

Presque Isle FFA members enrolled in agriscience classes made springtime gnomes and cards to spread some cheer to nursing home residents.

Maryland

Parkside FFA and Worcester FFA members restore a historical site, which included enhancing native plant gardens, eradicating invasive species and revamping vegetable beds.

Massachusetts

During its annual fall show, which is now in its 87th year, Bristol FFA members showcase all things related to agriculture.

Michigan

Lapeer County FFA members facilitated a variety of educational exhibits during the Eastern Michigan State Fair.

Minnesota

Howard Lake-Waverly-Winsted FFA made care packages for FFA alums currently in college.

Mississippi

McLaurin FFA addressed hunger and higher food prices by hosting two workshops and raising laying hens to provide fresh eggs to the local food pantry.

Missouri

The Pettis County R-V FFA officer team conducts monthly seat belt checks as students and parents arrive at school. Individuals wearing seat belts are rewarded with Life Saver candy, and rewards are given to those who wear their seat belt the most throughout the year.

Montana

During Washington Leadership Conference, two Shepherd FFA members developed a Living to Serve

Need more inspiration? Scan the "Program of Activities" code on page 4.

plan named Bags of Hope. The program provides a personalized bag to local foster children each year.

Nebraska

Lakeview FFA members learned how to properly test for nitrates and fecal matter in local streams. After hosting a Test Your Well Night event, members delivered test results to community members.

Nevada

Diamond Mountain FFA members strengthen their advocacy and public speaking skills through giving in-person presentations to their school board and county commissioners.

New Hampshire

To celebrate Maple Month, FFA members and farmers teach the public about maple syrup production in the state.

New Jersey

Buena Regional FFA uses hydroponics and aquaponics to grow herbs and vegetables that are incorporated into school lunches. Members also create healthy recipes featuring their produce.

New Mexico

The newly established Organ Mountain FFA Chapter taught students how to use community resources to support good nutrition and build essential life skills such as gardening and cooking.

New York

To show the strength of agriculture in their county, Penn Yan FFA members decorated farm equipment with Christmas lights and coordinated the Lights on Wheels parade during the annual Starshine Celebration.

North Carolina

To advocate for canine health, Lumberton FFA members surveyed their local dog park, then devised a plan to build and install play equipment for dogs and their owners.

North Dakota

After receiving a host site kit from the National Association of Agricultural Educators, Wahpeton FFA celebrated National Teach Ag Day through an event that included classroom decorations and cake.

Ohio

National Trail MVCTC FFA members installed the Enchanted Trail at the Preble County Historical Society. Community children could search for wildlife through "fairy" doors in various trees, and members read books at 12 different kiosks.

Oklahoma

Edmond FFA decided to promote healthy hydration through organizing a week-long water drinking challenge. Disposable bottles were given to students, then recycled for an environmental project.

Oregon

Dallas FFA partnered with local historical society members and producers to create a display at its county museum. The display features video interviews with former FFA members, local producers and current students.

Pennsylvania

Chambersburg FFA members discussed agriculture education with their local state senator during a legislative breakfast. Members also shared their ideas on a proposed bill to return whole milk to schools.

Puerto Rico

State officers and members were invited to an Agriculture and Entrepreneurship event, where they could learn more about the labor and agriculture business worlds on their island.

Rhode Island

Narragansett FFA competes in the Freeze Off ice cream contest, where teams try to create the best ice cream. Last year, the "Mariner Maple Madness" won first place.

South Carolina

Woodmont Middle School FFA members partnered with their state's Farm Bureau Federation to create an interactive commodity map game for students, staff and community members.

South Dakota

Bridgewater-Emery FFA hosted a Safety of Farm Youth Camp that brought together students in kindergarten through fifth grade.

Tennessee

Hendersonville FFA created 145 bud vases, which were delivered by members to promote agriculture education and strengthen relationships with state officials, including the governor.

Texas

College Station FFA hosted a Christmas meeting with representative Kyle Kacal. Members rotated through three ag literacy stations, where they learned about cotton, cacao, sugar, flour and egg production.

U.S. Virgin Islands

Ivanna Eudora Keen FFA remodeled the backyard of an elderly couple living on the island of St. Thomas. The chapter planted new plants and created a walkway and sitting area for the couple.

Utah

With the help of a local veterinarian, JATC-North FFA and veterinary program students provided essential neuter/spay services and vaccinations to cats. They're also mapping feral cat colonies in partnership with their local animal shelter.

Vermont

Many chapters run a dairy bar or food booth at local county fairs throughout the summer. These are used to fundraise and help FFA members learn valuable skills.

Virginia

The Liberty FFA officer team hosts a Back to School Membership Drive Tailgate. Food, music and agriculture-related games with prizes and incentives are offered, and members must pay their FFA dues to attend.

Washington

To increase engagement, Goldendale Middle School FFA members can earn parts of the FFA emblem for each event they attend. The emblems adorn paper FFA jackets hanging outside their classroom.

West Virginia

Mineral County FFA wanted to provide a better food supply system for the community and investigate innovative economic opportunities. After obtaining a commercial fish processing license, the chapter filleted, smoked, packaged and donated 240 Atlantic salmon fillets.

Wisconsin

Osseo-Fairchild FFA hosted an Open Season Supper before deer hunting season, where local Department of Natural Resources representatives discussed safety practices and answered questions.

Wyoming

Seeing participation at chapter meetings decrease, Green River FFA officers spiced things up by creating themed meetings. These included an activity and dress-up contest, where members could be rewarded for being the best dressed.

Members, submit your chapter updates at FFA.org/Submit-Your-Story.

MEDIA CENTER

ARTS & CULTURE IN AGRICULTURE

– By Jessica Wesson

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

PODCASTS

Women Making History

Follow these five podcasts to learn about agriculture through the eyes of some of the industry's leading female hosts.

Beyond the Crops

Jena Ochsner and Mary Pat Sass started their podcast to share an inside look at life on their family farms. New episodes air every Tuesday, and they discuss everything from farm happenings to conversations about motherhood, mental health and agronomy.

Midwest Farm Wives

As wives and mothers from western Kansas and northeast Missouri, Whitney Larson and Kylie Epperson use their podcast to share their personal experiences in agricultural and rural life.

The Rural Woman

Katelyn Duban is a first-generation female farmer in Alberta, Canada. Each week she sits down with female guests to discuss their stories in agriculture. New episodes are released every Friday.

The Female Farmer Project

Audra Mulkern shares the stories of female farmers. She brings to light the unique challenges her guests face and provides a platform to both elevate their voices and share resources with listeners.

Girls Talk Ag

Jennifer Campbell, a farmer/blogger; Karen Corrigan, an independent agronomist/business owner; and Kelsey Litchfield, a digital media consultant, team up to address current hot topics in agriculture. Tune in once a month to listen to the trio's engaging conversations.

BLOG

The Next Step

After retiring as the 2022-23 National FFA eastern region vice president, Miriam Hoffman started a blog to encourage young people to face their future with humble confidence.

As she puts it, "You don't have to plan out your whole life in order to simply take the next step." Hoffman writes about how she strives to live out those words as a young college student who still has many decisions to make about her own future.

MULTIMEDIA SERIES

My FFA Experience

Jason Holland started My FFA Experience in 2020 as his supervised agricultural experience, and it was originally called Jason's FFA Experience. He later rebranded the platform to reflect how each member's experience is different.

The platform offers a YouTube video series, blog and social media content to showcase Holland's tips and tricks on all things FFA. In 2022, My FFA Experience was featured on RFD-TV and won a Missouri FFA agricultural communications proficiency award.



Illustration: Getty Images, diane555
Photography: Courtesy of IUPUI





FFA Moment

1929

Arkansas FFA member Carlton Patton made history 95 years ago, in 1929, when he became the first Star Farmer of America. Ten years later, in 1939, identical twins Albert and Arthur Lacey of Hondo, Texas, became the only FFA members to ever share the title of Star Farmer of America. This award, which was sponsored by the Kansas City Star until 1949, is one of the first awards created by FFA.

Now known as the American Star Awards program, it's considered one of the highest achievements an FFA member can obtain. Each year during the National FFA Convention & Expo in Indianapolis, FFA recognizes member who possess exemplary supervised agricultural experiences, in addition to outstanding leadership, extensive FFA involvement and noteworthy academic achievement.

The photos on this page highlight several American Star Award winners throughout the years. Top: Stanley Chapman, the 1953 Star Farmer of America. Bottom: Kevin Holtzinger (left), the 1979 American Star Farmer, and Robert Lovelace, the 1979 Star in Agribusiness. Read about the 2023 American Stars on page 15.

For more information about the American Star Awards program, scan this code.

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