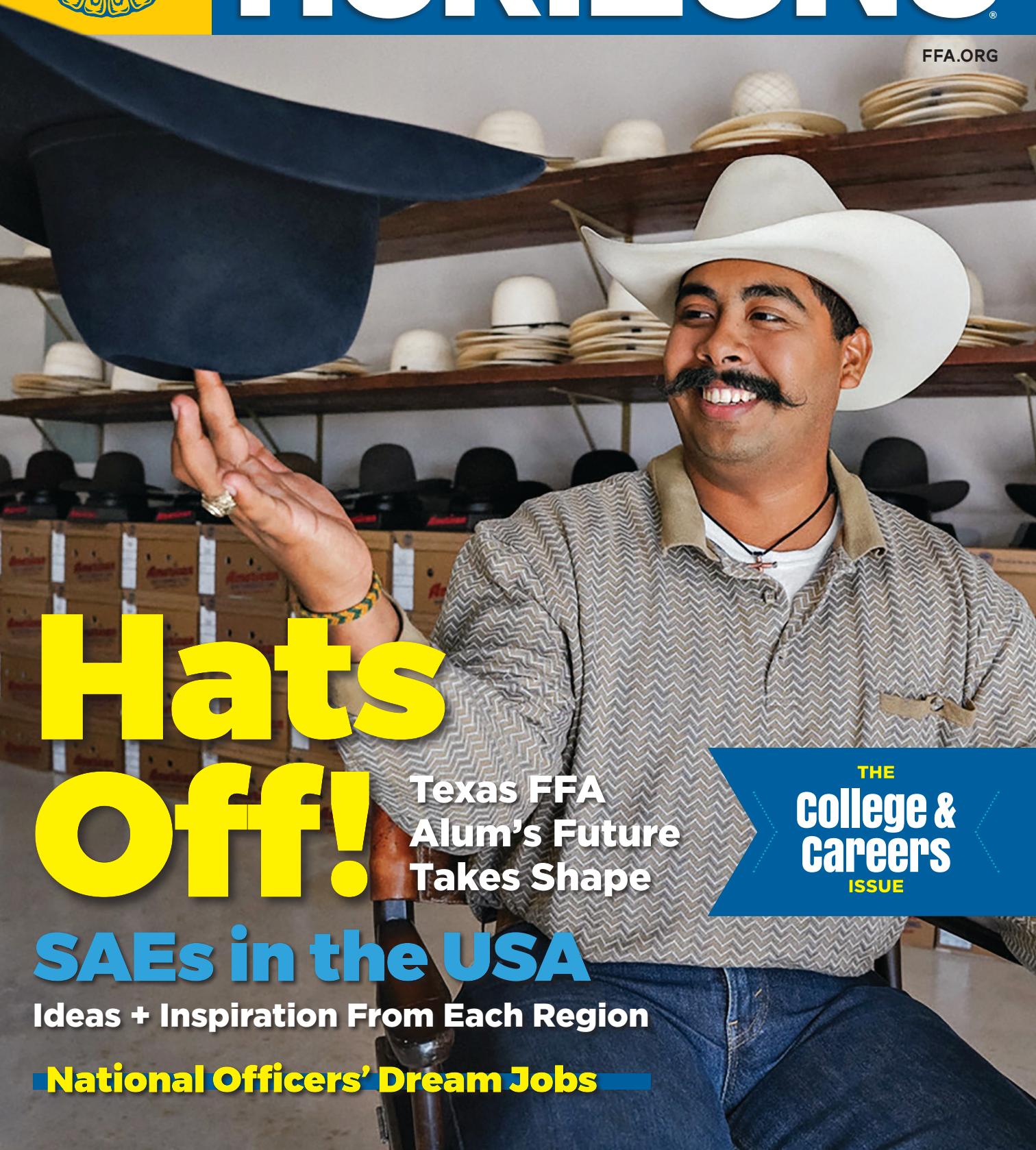
NEW HORIZONS

Spring/Summer 2025

FFA.ORG



Hats Off!

Texas FFA Alum's Future Takes Shape

THE College & Careers ISSUE

SAEs in the USA

Ideas + Inspiration From Each Region

National Officers' Dream Jobs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LIGHT-BUL



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Intrigued by agriculture? Enjoy working with your hands? Like to dabble in technology? Then a rewarding career as a **dealership mechanic*** at a John Deere dealer could be your calling.

Openings for high school students are available at select colleges across the country. The highly regarded **John Deere TECH Program** offers classroom education and hands-on training, as well as:

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FIND YOUR FUTURE



As a sophomore in high school, my sights were set on becoming the next Mexico FFA Chapter secretary. I poured into the application process and left my interview feeling confident. So, imagine my surprise when I opened a text message reading, "Congratulations! You've been selected as our chapter's newest reporter."

At the time, receiving this news represented a goal unreached and a dream that didn't come to fruition. Today, however, I'm grateful for the redirection it provided.

By serving as reporter, I recognized how my upbringing in agriculture overlapped with my interest in communications. Writing articles for my local newspaper, snapping pictures at events and managing my chapter's social media pages also helped me learn important lessons like finding joy — and even purpose — in the unexpected.

Between starting a new calendar year, wrapping up another spring semester and planning summer festivities, this time of year is filled with lots of changes, but also exciting possibilities. Perhaps you're preparing to attend an FFA camp or conference, travel abroad or begin your first year of college later in the fall.

Regardless of the season of life you're in, this themed issue was designed with you in mind. We sought to fill these pages with stories that spotlight how FFA equips its members, alumni, supporters and more to find their futures in agriculture — and how it can do the same for you.

"Make48 Competitors Convert Ideas Into Solutions" on page 8 showcases the real-world applications of competing in Leadership and Career Development Events. Explore exclusive member-created content that showcases outstanding Supervised Agricultural Experiences in "SAEs in the USA" on page 30. Finally, read about how Nate Jackson ("Hat's Off to This Alum," page 9), Caitlin Cox ("Alumna Makes Magic Happen," page 14) and Cory Reinle ("On the Record," page 40) all found their current careers thanks to their FFA experiences.

More than anything, I wish I could tell 16-year-old Lauren that her future would hold something far greater than what she envisioned for it at the time. Nearly 10 years after that pivotal moment I experienced as a member, I can see with full clarity how it led me to where I am today, and I wish you the best as you pave your own path in agriculture and FFA.

Lauren Quinlan

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College & Careers

To easily navigate to themed content throughout this issue, keep an eye out for this icon.

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THE FFA VISION
Growing the next generation of leaders who will change the world.

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

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

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

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

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An exclusive look at outstanding members and alumni located in every corner of the country.

5 Things FROM FFA.ORG

Take your FFA involvement to the next level this year by staying informed about program updates, submitting strong applications, drawing inspiration from others and more.

2024 National Convention Proceedings

Let's keep the convention celebrations going! Relive the magic of the 97th National FFA Convention & Expo by watching retiring addresses, exploring award and competition results, getting to know the newest national officer team and recognizing all the individuals who made this event possible. It's also never too early to begin making preparations for attending the 98th National FFA Convention & Expo, which will be held this fall in Indianapolis.

Program Updates

Our organization's membership roster has exceeded 1 million, so it's more important than ever to ensure National FFA award programs and competitive events continue to evolve. As you prepare for the upcoming year, check this webpage regularly to receive the latest updates on changes being made to the Agriscience Fair, Agricultural Proficiency Awards and more. You're also welcome to contact revisions@ffa.org with questions or feedback.

Scan with your phone

Student Engagement & Travel Assistance Grants

We want you to take advantage of every FFA opportunity possible this year, but especially national programs and events like the Washington Leadership Conference, New Century Farmer, Next Gen Conferences and more. If you're considering applying for one of these, let this grant program help. It's designed to help reduce travel costs, registration fees and other associated expenses — all while setting you up to succeed.

Application Center

Reaping rewards and creating change often starts with knowing where to look. Fortunately for you, this webpage is a one-stop shop for all FFA applications. Whether your chapter wants to meet a need with a Living to Serve Grant, you're hoping to participate in the National FFA Band, Chorus and Talent program at convention or you'd like to receive a jacket through the Give the Gift of Blue program, we've got you covered.

FFA Videos

Are you a visual learner who loves to see the impact of our organization and what FFA members, chapters and alumni are accomplishing across the nation? If so, this collection is perfect for you! Prepare for competitive events through watching Finals Hall presentations, take a deep dive into different kinds of Supervised Agricultural Experiences, access engaging student- and teacher-led workshops, feel empowered by career success stories and more.

FFA AT-A-GLANCE

Between conferences, events, service projects and more, there's something in store for everyone this time of year. Save these important dates so you don't miss out on any of the action.

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

Jan. 31 || Spring Semester-Long Living to Serve Grant application deadline

Feb. 15 || New Century Farmer application deadline

Feb. 15-22 || National FFA Week

March 5 || Washington Leadership Conference registration opens

March 15 || Next Gen Conference: Agricultural Education application deadline

April 24 || National FFA Scholarship awards announced

May 15 || Registration opens for the State Officer Summit; Tractor Supply Co. Grants for Growing application deadline

June 17 || Yearlong Living to Serve Grant application deadline

July 25 || Fall Semester-Long Living to Serve Grant application opens

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

3 Can't-Miss FFA Week Activities

From dress-up days to interactive events, draw inspiration from these chapters that celebrated in style.

– By Taleen Hanna

As you begin brainstorming for National FFA Week on Feb. 15–22, 2025, check out how these chapters found ways to creatively participate last year. You can also visit **FFA.org/National-FFA-Week** for more resources to help you get started.

1. Show Gratitude.

St. Pauls FFA in North Carolina hosted a brunch to celebrate another successful year as a chapter and thank sponsors for their continued support.

2. Hit the Road.

Apollo High School FFA members drive their tractors to school. This event is so well-loved it's become an annual tradition for the Kentucky chapter.

3. From Head to Toe.

Many chapters across the country, including Ripon FFA in California, encourage members to participate in spirit days. This year, sport a fun FFA T-shirt or jacket on Wear Blue Day on Friday, Feb. 21.

CELEBRATE IN STYLE

Scan this code to shop FFA-branded merchandise, including clothing items, classroom essentials, gifts and more.

Raising the Bar for Give FFA Day

In 2024, the New York FFA Association raised more than $100,000 during Give FFA Day. This chart-topping donation was a collective effort made possible thanks to social media campaigns, direct mail and alumni engagement.

"My past state officer team set a group donation amount, and we challenged other officer teams to donate, too," says Amber Thibodeau, chair of last year's Give FFA Day committee in New York.

This year, Thibodeau encourages everyone to take advantage of Give FFA Day on Thursday, Feb. 20 — and to start planning for the event early!

College & Careers

Make48 Competitors Convert Ideas Into Solutions

Each year, FFA members represent their chapters by competing in National FFA Career and Leadership Development Events. Brady Boulton, Claire Erselius, Luke Erselius and Broox Stockman of the Montezuma FFA Chapter in Iowa were named the 2024 National FFA Agricultural Communications CDE team event winners. As part of the event, they wrote a feature story about a designated topic during the 97th National FFA Convention & Expo. Here's a section of that piece, edited for FFA New Horizons.

Students nationwide are addressing real-life problems through this one-of-a-kind, invention-based competition.

– By Brady Boulton

With access to cutting-edge resources and industry experts, Make48 Innovation experience participants are cultivating critical skills and gaining valuable experiences — all during a two-day competition.

After a Make48 corporate representative presents the event's challenge, participating teams collaborate to create a physical prototype, sales sheet and one-minute pitch that's presented to a panel of judges. A winning team, which receives $2,000 and a custom trophy, is then selected based on the product's relevance to the challenge's solutions and real-world applications.

Make48 founders are also currently developing a classroom curriculum for students and teachers, including those involved in FFA, throughout the country. This curriculum will use a bracket-style format to involve 128 participating schools, with the top 32 teams advancing and earning a spot to be featured in the Make48 television documentary series.

"We're tapping into the future workforce big-time," says Make48 CEO and Co-Founder Tom Gray.

To sign up for the Make48 curriculum or learn more about the two-day competitions, visit **Make48.com** or follow @GOMAKE48 on social media.

Top-Notch Communicators

Ready to see where the agricultural communications CDE can take you? Scan this code to learn more about the national competition.

ADVOCATING FOR AGRICULTURE

Raylynn Kubik, the 2024 Teen Miss Princess of America, uses her social platform to share her passions and educate others about the industry. **– By Taleen Hanna**

Growing up on her family's cow-calf ranch in Oklahoma means Newkirk FFA member Raylynn Kubik is surrounded by agriculture.

In addition to showing cattle and being active in FFA, she's serving as the 2024 Teen Miss Princess of America. Her platform for her year of service, called The Little Sprout, focuses on agricultural education and literacy.

She says young students are excited to learn about agriculture through books. "It really sticks out to me, seeing their faces light up," she adds. "I'm hoping to inspire efforts one little sprout at a time."

Kubik read to 12 classrooms during Read Across America Week in March 2024, and she continues visiting schools to spread her love and passion for agriculture.

"I've seen the struggles and lack of knowledge about agriculture that people have," she says. "Many don't know where their food comes from, and I love to share that with everyone."

One particular fact she loves to share is that Oklahoma is one of seven states that is home to more cattle than people.

"They're never expecting that, and it's something I find so heartwarming," Kubik says. "I'm able to share with them that this industry is feeding and clothing our nation, which is something to be proud of."

Love to advocate? If so, Kubik encourages you to research your community's strengths in agriculture and share these with everyone you meet.

"We can tell everyone about the wonderful benefits we have in our backyards," she says.



Raylynn Kubik wears her state costume and represents Oklahoma during the 2024 Teen Miss Princess of America competition.

Photography: Eva Flis Photography

HATS OFF TO THIS ALUM!

Manor FFA Alumnus Nate Jackson turned a love of cowboy hats into his dream career. - By Jodi Helmer

Nate Jackson still remembers the moment he got his first cowboy hat. "I never wanted to take it off," he says.

In Jackson's hometown of Manor, Texas, a cowboy hat is more than a fashion statement; it's a way of life.

Jackson had an entire collection of hats by the time he graduated high school; the Manor FFA Alumnus wore them to school and in the ring to show chickens. He also worked at Double R Hat House in Elgin, Texas, while pursuing an agricultural communications and journalism degree at Texas A&M University.

"I thought [getting that job] was the coolest thing ever," Jackson says. "The excitement of getting asked to do something I was interested in and learning more about it really sparked my passion for cowboy hats."

Jackson accepted a full-time position shaping hats for Double R Hat Ranch in 2021. The process involves steaming the hat to create different shapes and styles that are based on personal preferences and work environments.

"Some people say the way a hat is shaped can tell you where a person's from," Jackson says. "You can go to West Texas and see how their hats are shaped, then go up to Saskatchewan, Canada, and see that they have a different look."

Honing His Craft

It was a passion for storytelling that made Jackson stand out in the classroom.

"He's a genuine cowboy who loves to tell stories," says Holli Leggette, associate professor of agricultural communications and journalism at Texas A&M University. "I think that's part of what makes him special."

Jackson joined Texas A&M University's Minorities in Agriculture and Natural Resources and Related Sciences (MANRRS) chapter to meet more first-generation agriculture students. He also managed the chapter's social media account and served as its vice president, further honing his communication skills.

In 2023, Jackson launched a podcast, Beneath the Hat, to highlight stories of artists, cowboys and industry leaders. His most memorable guests were Dusty Green and Ricky Guerra, modern cowboys who spend their days driving cattle on the range.

"People don't realize these guys still exist," Jackson says.

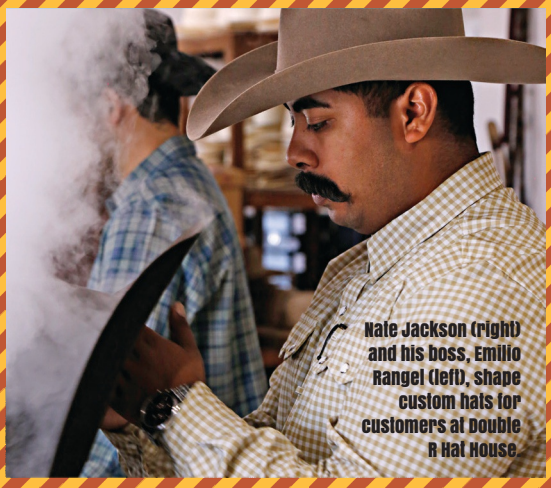
Whether it's talking with customers while shaping hats, interviewing podcast guests or sharing his own experiences, Jackson believes agriculture benefits from those who tell their stories.

"We're in a place in our society where there are so many people from all kinds of backgrounds," he says. "Everybody is different. No matter who you are or where you come from, being yourself is the best thing somebody can do."

From his FFA roots to his current role at Double R Hat House, scan this code to watch a video about how Jackson paved his own path in agriculture.

Partnership With a Purpose

Since July 2023, the National FFA Organization and MANRRS have partnered to help ensure a brighter future for generations of agriculturists to come. To learn more about MANRRS and find a collegiate chapter near you, visit MANRRS.org.



Nate Jackson (right) and his boss, Emilio Rangel (left), shape custom hats for customers at Double R Hat House.

Photography: Jordan Reynolds

college & careers

Quiz: Careers in Agriculture

– By Jessica Walker Boehm

Good news: If you're interested in pursuing a career in agriculture, you have an ever-growing array of options.

The challenging part? Deciding which career might be the best match for you.

That's where AgExplorer comes in. With more than 300 career opportunities available for you to learn about, National FFA worked with AgCareers.com and many partners such as Culver's and Syngenta to develop this interactive website that can help you find your future in agriculture.

As you imagine all the possibilities, test your knowledge of agriculture-related careers by filling in the blanks below.

1. _____ help ensure that students understand the importance of the agriculture industry and can identify where their food, fuel and fiber come from.
2. _____ repair and maintain unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).
3. Those who work as _____ collaborate with landowners and federal, state and local governments to manage, improve and protect natural resources.
4. _____ sell agricultural products or services for their companies.
5. _____ design and develop agricultural equipment and system products that help farmers improve the yield of their land.
6. _____ diagnose diseases by examining animal tissue and body fluids.

ANSWER OPTIONS:

A. Inside sales representatives
B. Agriculture educators
C. Drone technicians
D. Conservationists
E. Veterinary pathologists
F. Design engineers

Answers: 1. Agriculture educators (B) 2. Drone technicians (C) 3. Conservationists (D) 4. Inside sales representatives (A) 5. Design engineers (F) 6. Veterinary pathologists (E)

DISCOVER YOUR DREAM JOB

Still looking for a role that piques your interest and suits your skills? Continue your search at **AgExplorer.FFA.org.** You can also check out the jobs and internship board after creating and logging into your account on **ForeverBlueNetwork.org.**

Give Great Speeches

Discover five tips to deliver an amazing speech your audience won't forget.

– By Jessica Mozo

Public speaking is a core component of the National FFA Organization. Regardless of what career you choose, being able to speak confidently will help set you up for success.

However, this requires extensive preparation and practice. Just ask Kade Lawrence of Canyon FFA in Texas. He won the 2023 National FFA Prepared Public Speaking Career Development Event, which is sponsored by Elanco, Rabo AgriFinance and Tractor Supply Co., and believes effective communication is an invaluable life skill everyone should strive for.

Read on for Lawrence's five P's of public speaking so you can also write and present an award-winning speech that leaves a lasting impression.

1. Be positive. Listeners prefer to hear about an enjoyable experience with a happy ending. Keep your mannerisms light, positive and upbeat.

2. Be passionate. Choose a topic you feel enthusiastic about and express your passions through your presentation. After all, if you find a topic dull, imagine how it'll feel to your audience.

3. Be particular. A well-developed speech is not shy of specifics, but rather attentive to details. Use information, evidence and facts to support your topic and keep the audience engaged from start to finish.

4. Be poised. It's advantageous to practice your speech exactly how you'll deliver it. A composed, dignified and self-assured speaker has the confidence to deliver a captivating speech.

5. Be presentable. A neat and professional appearance makes all the difference. In addition to establishing a strong first impression, it conveys your seriousness and professionalism.

Learn From the Best

As you refine your speaking skills, find additional inspiration from talented speakers who've graced the National FFA Convention & Expo stage. Scan this code to access a full collection of past convention keynotes and retiring addresses.

Photography: Getty Images, EyeEm

NATIONAL FFA OFFICER

Question & Answer

What is your dream career? How did your time in FFA help plant this seed, and what are your post-secondary plans to help you get there?



Thaddeus Bergschneider

NATIONAL FFA PRESIDENT

When I think about my future, I have no idea what lies ahead, but I'm open-minded, curious and excited. I'm currently attending the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and studying finance and agribusiness, with a concentration in consumer economics. Wherever business and agriculture meet, that's where I'm headed. FFA made me passionate about agriculture, and I remember reciting the Creed during my freshman year. It speaks to the values and traditions of American agriculture, and that's when I knew I was meant to stay in the industry.



Luke Jennings

NATIONAL FFA SECRETARY

My heart lies with our youth, so I hope one day to be an agriculture educator and FFA advisor. Agriculture offers such a diverse range of careers that I plan to stay open to new opportunities as well. I'm currently studying agriscience education at the Ohio State University. I found a home within an agriculture classroom because FFA introduced me to many industry supporters and educators. My mentors have guided me toward a career in agricultural education, and seeing the impact we have on changing students' lives is something I want to be a part of.



Mary Schrieber

CENTRAL REGION VICE PRESIDENT

I'm torn between becoming an agriculture educator and FFA advisor or working as a lobbyist, advocating for the industry within our government. I'm currently at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls studying agricultural education with a minor in agricultural policy development. It was from my time in the agricultural education classroom, competing in Career and Leadership Development Events, traveling to conferences and meeting people from across the nation where the seed of a career in agriculture was nourished.



Caroline Groth

EASTERN REGION VICE PRESIDENT

My dream career is to one day be the first female commissioner of agriculture for Kentucky.
I grew up in a very urban part of Lexington and didn't know FFA even existed until my eighth grade year. Throughout my time in FFA, I learned who Caroline was, both inside and outside of the FFA jacket. I plan to continue my time at the University of Kentucky, where I'm majoring in agricultural education and agriculture economics, then go on to law school.



Abigale Jacobsen

WESTERN REGION VICE PRESIDENT

I was a kid from the suburbs right outside of Sacramento, so I didn't really foresee myself in an agriculture-focused career. Being involved in FFA, however, gave me the opportunity to learn about the possibilities of various careers in agriculture. I've volunteered at a wildlife sanctuary, so using my skills gained from FFA was fascinating and encouraged me to continue pursuing a career as an equine veterinarian, in emergency work or in the surgery field.



Jack Lingenfelter

SOUTHERN REGION VICE PRESIDENT

I would love to represent agriculture and agricultural education as a lobbyist and advocate back in my home state or in our nation's capital. My Supervised Agricultural Experience focused in agricultural communications, which taught me about communicating with others and gave me the passion and increased knowledge about the industry. It also opened my eyes to the true importance of this industry and supporting our farmers who are the backbone of agriculture.

Photography: Copyright © FFA

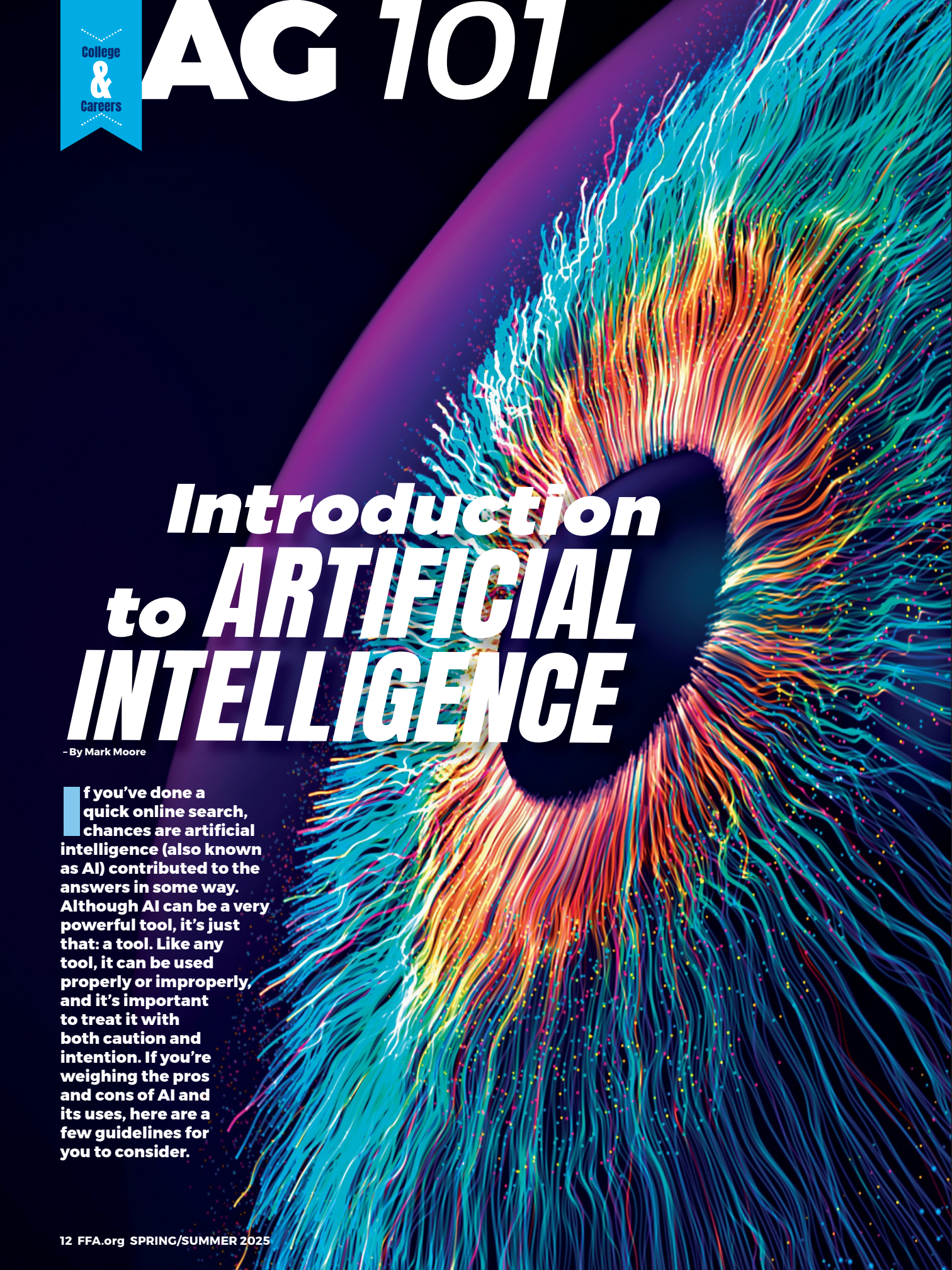
College & Careers

AG 101

Introduction to ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

– By Mark Moore

If you've done a quick online search, chances are artificial intelligence (also known as AI) contributed to the answers in some way. Although AI can be a very powerful tool, it's just that: a tool. Like any tool, it can be used properly or improperly, and it's important to treat it with both caution and intention. If you're weighing the pros and cons of AI and its uses, here are a few guidelines for you to consider.



RELIABILITY

Let's say you're working on a presentation for your peers or FFA chapter about new trends in agriculture. AI can help you get started by identifying these trends and providing some helpful avenues for additional research. But it can also rely on faulty data or provide incomplete information that may not be up-to-date. Be careful about what's supplied to you using AI and make sure to review its results for accuracy and credibility.

PLAGIARISM

Using someone else's words, ideas, expressions or language and passing them off as your own work is called plagiarism, and it's a big no-no. Plagiarism occurred well before the internet, but today it can still be tempting to copy and paste an idea you think is cool – especially if it was generated by AI. Remember to clearly identify where information came from and always give credit where it's due.

ASSISTANCE

AI can make doing your schoolwork a lot easier. After all, there was a time when a research project involved spending hours in a library looking up information in various books and magazines and writing it down by hand. That same research can now be done in the comfort of your home with only a few searches on your computer. However, not all information you find on the internet is correct, and quickly completing a task doesn't always mean it's better. It's your responsibility to ensure all information is correct and to put forth your best effort in everything you do.

UNDERSTANDING

Not quite sure about a specific topic? It's easy to ask AI to give you an answer. However, it's equally – if not, more – important that you understand the information being presented, what it means and that you're clear on the concepts or research you're learning about and sharing. It's not enough to just ask the right questions – you have to understand the answers, too. To check yourself, see if you can explain the information to someone like a classmate, teacher, parent or friend.

Careers With AI in Mind

IF WORKING WITH INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGY LIKE AI PIQUES YOUR INTERESTS, THERE ARE SOME EXCITING AGRICULTURE-FOCUSED CAREERS YOU MAY WANT TO CONSIDER. THESE INCLUDE, BUT AREN'T LIMITED TO:

- **Research scientist**
- **Software engineer/architect**
- **Data analyst**
- **Information technology (IT) programmer**
- **Precision agriculture specialist**
- **Plant breeder**
- **Agronomy consultant**

STILL LOOKING? Check out AgExplorer, which is made possible thanks to FFA corporate partners Culver's and Syngenta. This interactive tool is designed to provide you with the resources needed to explore potential career paths. Visit AgExplorer.FFA.org to get started.

USE SAFELY AND RESPONSIBLY

As our world continues to evolve, stay informed on the latest technological innovations and advancements. Scan this code to access the National FFA Organization's standard operating procedures on the use of AI.

Photography: Getty Images, Andriy Onufriyenko

Alumna Makes Magic Happen

CAITLIN COX APPLIES SKILLS FROM HER FFA EXPERIENCES IN HER ROLES AT THE WALT DISNEY COMPANY. – By Kim Hill



Before moving to Florida and starting her full-time career, Caitlin Cox served as a New Hampshire state officer and ran for a national FFA office.

Caitlin Cox sees connections between FFA and The Walt Disney Company every day.

Cox is a senior representative for nature strategy and integration with The Walt Disney Company, where her team supports nature conservation, restoration and rewilding efforts.

"Conservation and agriculture go hand-in-hand most of the time," Cox says. "Some of the best conservationists in the world are farmers."

She also sees parallels in successful community projects with robust youth-led components. Cox knows the value of strong youth organizations from her roles as former New Hampshire FFA state president and secretary and national FFA officer candidate.

A Granite State native, Cox says her FFA experiences were formative. She says consistently working with people who didn't share her passions or background helped her become a more well-rounded person. "I also learned what it meant to be a servant leader," she adds.

An Unexpected Path

Cox's FFA experiences also led her to the University of New Hampshire, where she initially pursued an agricultural education degree.

"I began to realize it was informal education settings where I really thrived, so I shifted to agriscience communications," she says. "That was a great move for me."

As a student, Cox was crushed when she didn't get a dream internship. A coworker suggested she look at Disney internships because of her brother's fantastic experience.

"I didn't realize it then, but what I'd done was successfully network with this coworker by sharing my aspirations with her," Cox says. "She connected me with an opportunity I wouldn't have otherwise known about."

Cox's internship in conservation education at Disney's Animal Kingdom Theme Park started her career path with the multinational entertainment conglomerate. From that initial internship, she learned the power of networking and how to quickly convey a compelling message.

"There's so much to see and do at Walt Disney World Resort," Cox says. "You have to be fast and impactful if you want folks to think the animal you're talking about is as cool as the Kilimanjaro Safaris ride."

Every day, she uses skills that began in FFA — everything from working with a team toward a deadline to budget management and extemporaneous speaking.

"Thanks to dairy cattle judging, I'm also confident in my ability to make quick evaluations on a group of data points, then efficiently present my reasoning to decision-makers," Cox says.

Overall, what Cox loves most about both Disney and FFA is the strong tie to legacy and tradition.

"It's exciting to see organizations with long heritages race into the future and evolve without abandoning their roots," she says.

Accomplished Alums

In addition to agriculture, FFA alums are making strides in the areas of business, entertainment, the military, sports and other sectors. Scan this code to learn more about prominent former members and what they've accomplished in their chosen career fields.

"It's exciting to see organizations with long heritages race into the future and evolve without abandoning their roots." – Caitlin Cox

Photography: Casey Wang

College & Careers

[CAREER SUCCESS]

Tools for the TRADE

FFA equipped Mississippi Alumnus Levi Richardson with the confidence to get the job done.

- By Kim Hill

Although Levi Richardson has an aptitude for making things, he credits FFA with providing the tools to build his success in the Mississippi workforce.

Richardson joined the FFA junior program in middle school. "I loved it so much I stayed in FFA until my high school graduation," he says.

Richardson equates Newton County High School's FFA chapter to a "big family of students who share similar passions for agriculture and leadership." He felt at home in FFA, and says the leadership skills he gained as a member were his biggest takeaway.



Levi Richardson became an FFA member after receiving some encouragement from his older brother.

Photography: Sarah Laird

"I've always been mechanically inclined," says Richardson, who served his chapter as sentinel. "But I was never the type to jump out of my comfort zone or try to be a leader. I learned how to do those things [in FFA]."

Skills to Succeed

After high school, Richardson enrolled in the precision machining program at East Central Community College in Decatur, Miss.

"I've always found creating something out of nothing to be interesting," Richardson says.

During his time at East Central Community College, Richardson began interning at Addy Metal Fabrication, making precision parts and fabricating items from blueprints. He joined Mid South Baking Company as an engineering technician in 2021.

Mid South was later acquired by C.H. Guenther & Son, a manufacturer of food products that include the buns and English muffins made at the Pelahatchie, Miss., plant where Richardson works. His job as an engineering technician is to keep the production machinery running.

"I do a little bit of electrical troubleshooting, repairs, installing equipment and mechanical troubleshooting — it's really a jack-of-all-trades job," Richardson says. "I like the challenges of figuring out what's wrong or learning something new. I also enjoy getting my hands dirty and making something go."

Given his skill set, Richardson's supervisors encouraged him to seek additional training. With 100% tuition support from his employer, he completed an associate's degree in mechanical engineering at Holmes Community College. He's also considering further career development by enrolling in a bachelor's degree program in the future.

"I attribute a lot of my success to being in FFA," Richardson says. "In college, I was part of another team in SkillsUSA. I probably wouldn't have joined if I hadn't been in FFA and seen what being part of an organization can do for you. I would have been way too nervous and shy to go on job interviews, and now I've done several to get to where I am. FFA gave me the confidence to get out there."





8 Tips to Throw the Best Banquet Yet

BY JODI HELMER
ILLUSTRATIONS BY MATT WOOD

USE THIS EXPERT ADVICE TO HOST A CELEBRATION TO REMEMBER.

As the end of the school year approaches, FFA members and advisors nationwide are preparing to host their chapter banquets. Although this can be an exciting event, there is no one-size-fits-all blueprint, and it's important to find what works best for each agriculture program.

Some chapters may prefer to keep it casual with barbecue, student-created slideshows and minimal decor, while others call the caterers, break out the fancy plates and spend months making decorations. Whether banquets are understated or over-the-top, Munford FFA advisor Ann Johnson from Tennessee believes they should all share a common focus.

"We're gathering to celebrate the students' success," she says. "A lot of times in the FFA world, we celebrate in the moment, but parents, administrators and community members aren't there to enjoy it — and they might not even know about it. A banquet serves as an opportunity to highlight those moments and celebrate everything these students have achieved."

Use the following eight tips from advisors, including Johnson, to host your next banquet with intention.

1 CHOOSE A THEME.



In Arizona, Willcox FFA has chosen themes ranging from race cars to rodeos and gold buckles for its annual banquet.

"Students take a lot of pride in coming up with the theme and decorating," says Amy Sanborn, the chapter's advisor. "We've had a lot of people tell us they want to come to the banquet for the theme and to see the decorations."

Choosing the theme can be a coveted responsibility, as it helps set the scene for the evening and creates a lasting first impression. Some chapters vote on the theme, while others like Munford FFA let the current chapter president make the decision.

2 WRITE A SCRIPT.

Creating a written script and giving each student a part will help keep the program on track.

"Without a script, students can get nervous and feel unsure of what to say, so they act silly," Johnson says. "If you have a script prepared for them to read from, they look more professional and feel more confident."



3 PLAN TO PRACTICE.

Munford FFA and Oregon's Harper FFA practice several times before their banquets are held. Running through the full program beforehand gives students a chance to feel comfortable with their parts and ensures a slideshow, if created, aligns with the script. Practice runs also help keep the banquet running on schedule.

"We like to keep the banquet at two hours," says Harper FFA advisor Jason Sherman. "You want to make sure there is enough time [for everything], but attendees may lose interest if you let it go for too long."





Setting aside time to review a script can help ensure your event runs smoothly.

Photography: Courtesy of Ann Johnson

4 ASK FOR HELP.



Most of the responsibilities for organizing a banquet will fall to FFA advisors and members, and Munford FFA allocates specific tasks to its officer team. The secretary sends invitations, the treasurer sends sponsorship letters, the vice president creates the slideshow and the president is responsible for putting together the script.

Although dividing responsibilities gives ownership to the students and allows them to feel a sense of pride for creating a successful banquet, recruiting additional volunteers is often essential.

To coordinate a banquet for 300 attendees, Willcox FFA gets its entire school involved. The media class designs and prints the program, the science club serves the meal and the yearbook teacher takes photos at the event. Even parents pitch in, helping with decorations and setup.

A parent volunteered to coordinate the Harper FFA silent auction and set up the software to run it, which was a huge relief to Sherman and the students who could then spend their time on other aspects of the banquet.

"Get some key people excited about the banquet," Sherman says. "It's so important to find good support,w because as an advisor, you can't do it alone. You have to surround yourself with a team."

5 FOCUS ON FOOD.



Sherman believes the menu is a key element of a successful FFA banquet. "People remember the food, so it makes everything better when you have good food," he says.

Munford FFA serves roast beef, cream potatoes, macaroni and cheese, green beans, rolls and desserts like banana pudding, chocolate cake and peanut butter cake on nice plates with fancy stemware. A local farm provides the roasts and the cafeteria staff work on the sides.

Willcox FFA, on the other hand, contracts with a local caterer. Sanborn believes letting the professionals take care of the food allows students to focus on the program.

6 EMPHASIZE EFFICIENCY.

FFA banquets are meant to bring communities together. Socializing is part of the fun, but these things shouldn't cause the banquet to run too long or overshadow the awards and student-led programming.

Sherman implemented several strategies to ensure Harper FFA banquets were fun and efficient. For example, a double-sided buffet line keeps guests moving and guarantees no one is waiting too long to eat. Placing silent auction items near the buffet line also gives guests a chance to browse items while waiting in line to fill their plates.

The chapter also placed a photo backdrop to the side of the stage. When students move off the stage to pose for photos, it prevents long pauses in the program.



As you plan your chapter's banquet setup, consider how you can maximize the space.

7 SEEK SUPPORT.

Fundraising is an essential component of most FFA banquets. Willcox FFA, Munford FFA and Harper FFA solicit items from local businesses and host silent auctions to raise money for their chapters. Harper FFA also puts flower baskets grown in its greenhouse up for auction, often raising up to $300 per basket.

Sponsors can also help offset the costs of hosting. Sanborn uses sponsorship funds to purchase banquet supplies and accepts in-kind donations such as plants to add to the decor.

You can do more when you get a sponsor to help cover things like the meal and awards," Johnson says.

Photography: Courtesy of Ann Johnson

8 CELEBRATE SUCCESSES.

A fun theme, creative decorations, delicious food and a well-run event all complement the real reason for FFA banquets: celebrating students' successes.

"First and foremost, we're there to honor the students," Sherman says. "It means a lot to them to receive their awards on stage, and I never want the fundraiser (or other parts of the banquet) to take away from the fact that we're there to honor their achievements."





Festive decor can serve as the perfect backdrop for a fun night of celebration.



SET THE STAGE

From balloons and confetti to centerpieces, streamers, cutlery and more, every great celebration needs decorations. Scan this code to shop items that can take your banquet to the next level.

A FIRST TIME FOR EVERYTHING

World Link, Inc. gives exchange students from across the globe an up-close look at agriculture and FFA. - By Lauren Quinlan

In 1978, Curtis Stutzman, a former Iowa FFA state president and Mid-Prairie FFA Alumnus, traveled internationally to the British Isles and Europe for the first time — a trip he says dramatically changed the course of his life.

Stutzman's passion for immersive experiences grew from there. In addition to hosting exchange students himself, Stutzman worked with international programs and helped the National FFA Foundation facilitate trips for members to visit places like Russia, Ukraine and Moldova for almost 10 years.

In 2002, he and his wife, Lana, founded World Link, Inc., a nonprofit international exchange scholarship program. Sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, this program places students in communities throughout the country. Participants are also required to join a leadership organization, and many decide to become FFA members.



Through their membership in the Ridgemont FFA Chapter in Ohio, exchange students Youssef Belhaj (left) and Eldar Musayev (right) wore the FFA jacket for the first time and received custom signs.

"These [exchange students] are embraced by the chapters they join," Chris Stutzman says. "Many of our program's alumni do big things, both in FFA and when they return to their home countries."

Found Family in FFA

This was the case for 2023-24 World Link, Inc. participants and Ohio FFA members Youssef Belhaj and Eldar Musayev, who joined the Ridgemont FFA Chapter, and Alise Zhuk, who joined the Elgin FFA Chapter. Despite not knowing what to expect at first, all three developed close-knit friendships with members of their chapters.

"Wearing my jacket made me feel like I was part of a big family that pushed me to become a better person," says Belhaj, who learned about FFA from an influencer in his home country of Morocco.

This strong sense of community pushed Belhaj, Musayev and Zhuk to make the most of their time in FFA. During their exchange year, Belhaj and Musayev completed agriscience fair projects, and all three competed in career and leadership development events and attended the 96th National FFA Convention & Expo.

"FFA gave me a lot of courage," says Zhuk, who grew up in Ukraine. "Everyone in my chapter knew each other really well, which pushed me to participate in everything I could."

Above all, these three agree that the key to having a successful exchange year is keeping an open mind and being willing to try new things.

"I became a better listener and learned not to compare my experiences to others,'" says Musayev, who's originally from Lithuania in northeastern Europe. "Nothing is better or worse than something else — it's just different."

Get Plugged In

More than 30,000 international students come to U.S. high schools each year through exchange programs. Reach out to these students when they arrive and invite them to an FFA event or activity. Learn more at **WorldLinkInc.org.** If you're an alumni member interested in National FFA travel opportunities, visit **FFA.org/Alumni-and-Supporters/Events/.**

Photography: Courtesy of Eldar Musayev; Getty Images, Richard Drury

A COMMUNITY SERVICE CHAMPION

PLACER FFA MEMBER JOSEPH STEFANI PROVIDES HOME-RAISED PROTEIN FOR THOSE IN NEED – AND INVITES OTHERS TO DO THE SAME. - By Mark Moore

An impactful community service project often starts with a decision to take action and make a difference. Joseph Stefani, a Placer FFA member from Auburn, Calif., did just that.

Stefani has raised and showed livestock since he was 7 years old, serving as a constant figure in the show ring during the Gold Country Fair. During the fair's livestock auction each year, Stefani watched as Feed the Hungry of Auburn, a local nonprofit, purchased animals and received donations that were used to provide high-quality protein to food banks in the area.

Although the nonprofit serves a vital need in his community,

"NOT AS MANY MEMBERS ARE INVOLVED IN RAISING LIVESTOCK, SO THIS IS A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO TRY SOMETHING NEW," STEFANI SAYS. "IT'S ALSO A GREAT WAY TO SERVE THE COMMUNITY AT THE SAME TIME."

- Joseph Stefani

Stefani learned it can always use additional food donations of beef and pork. So, he got to work.

"I wanted to make a difference, and the best way to do that was to raise more pigs," he says. "I was able to get the feed donated, and I had the knowledge and space. It was just a matter of spending a little extra time."

In addition to his show animals, Stefani raised five more pigs to market weight, then donated the processed meat to Feed the Hungry of Auburn. Although this came with its share of challenges, he persevered, knowing his efforts would be worthwhile.

"There's a bit more work involved than I originally expected, but it's a great experience," he says. "I'm getting better at it."

GROWING POTENTIAL

Stefani's actions are leaving an impact already, but he knows he can do more. He's hoping to grow this project by recruiting his fellow FFA members. "We've already secured feed donations, so all it takes is some time and effort," he says.

He also hopes the project will serve as a great learning experience for his chapter. According to Placer FFA advisor Haylee Kidd, 90% of her 250-member chapter doesn't come from a traditional farming background.

"Not as many members are involved in raising livestock, so this is a great opportunity to try something new," Stefani says. "It's also a great way to serve the community at the same time."

PUT YOUR PASSION INTO ACTION

Community service comes in all forms, and even the smallest of gestures can benefit your community, and even grow into something greater with a lasting impact. Learn how the Living to Serve platform equips FFA members and chapters nationwide to make a difference at **FFA.org/LivingtoServe/.**





Top: Joseph Stefani stands next to the five pigs he raised to produce high-quality food for members of his community. Above: Stefani received food donations to help his pigs grow and reach their target market weight.

Photography: Courtesy of Joseph Stefani

Official Dress



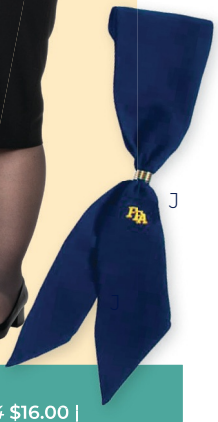
A



B C D



E F



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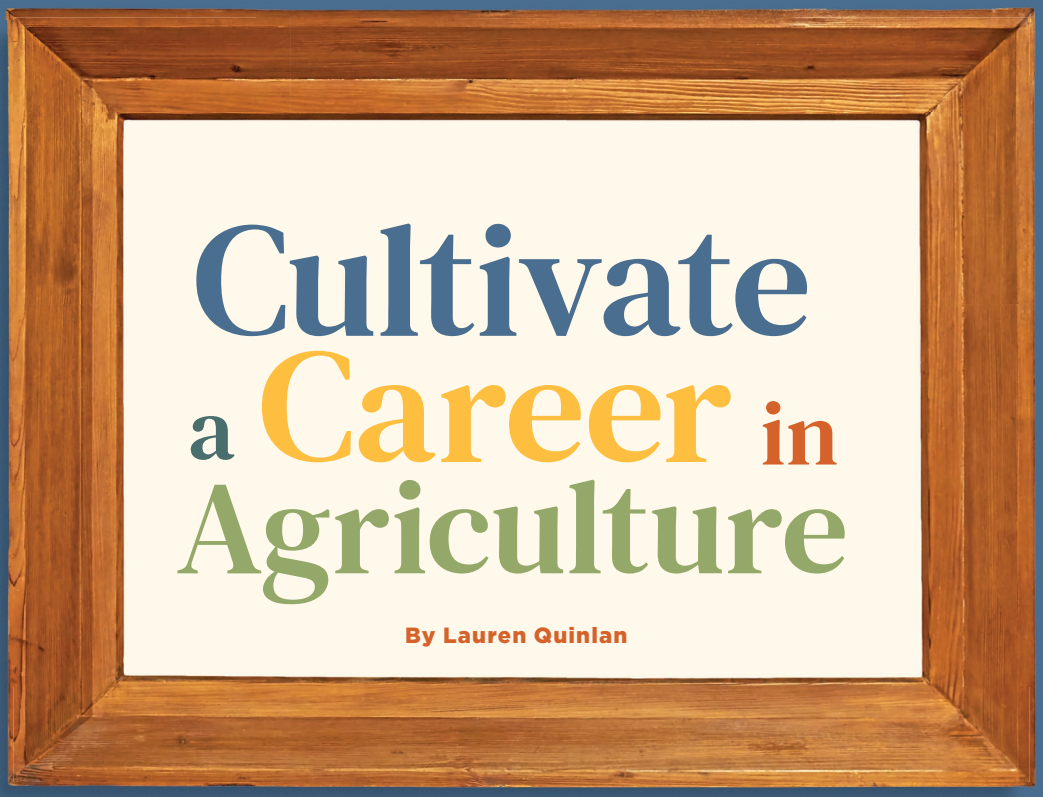


Cultivate a Career in Agriculture

By Lauren Quinlan

EXPLORE THESE FIVE PATHWAYS TO SEE WHAT YOUR FUTURE COULD LOOK LIKE — AND HOW FFA CAN HELP YOU GET THERE.

At some point in your life, chances are someone has asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" With all kinds of possibilities available, it's OK if answering (or even thinking about) this question is overwhelming. It's also possible your aspirations have shifted as you've broadened your horizons through new experiences.

However, determining your next step doesn't have to be difficult. Start by identifying where your passions and interests lie. From there, you can narrow your focus and find opportunities, such as an FFA competition, college major or career path, that align with what you like to do.

There's also great value to be found in connecting with people who can guide, support and encourage your journey.

As you start or continue your search, meet five FFA alums who have found success in each of the top five career pathways in agriculture, according to data pulled from AgCareers.com and AgExplorer. Although their backgrounds and experiences differ, they all share a common thread: FFA helped them find their futures in agriculture. Read on to see how this could be the case for you, too.



AGRICULTURAL BUSINESS PATHWAY

CONNECT BUSINESS WITH FOOD AND AGRICULTURE.

APPLY YOURSELF

EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS:

- Accounting technology
- Agricultural and applied economics
- Agricultural communications
- Business administration
- Farm and ranch management

CAREER CONSIDERATIONS:

- Account manager
- Agriculture lawyer
- Digital marketing specialist
- Logistics specialist
- Sales agronomist

POTENTIAL SAES AND PROFICIENCIES:

- Agricultural Sales
- Diversified Agricultural Production
- Specialty Animal or Crop Production

COMPETITIVE EVENTS TO TRY:

- Agronomy CDE
- Livestock Evaluation CDE
- Marketing Plan CDE

CARA CRYE WRIGHT

PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, FARM SUPPLY

When Cara Crye Wright began working on the sales team at Farm Supply, a farmer-owned cooperative with five locations on the central coast, as a college student in 1996, she didn't know this opportunity would one day lead to a full-time career — but it did.

After graduating from California Polytechnic State University with a degree in agricultural science and minors in agricultural business and agricultural communications, the Morro Bay FFA Alumna and 1995-96 California FFA state reporter began working as the cooperative's marketing coordinator. She was later promoted to vice president of communications and became Farm Supply's first female president and CEO in 2017.

In this role, Wright applies the skills she gained in FFA — team building, communication and problem solving, to name a few — as she oversees more than 125 employees and manages the cooperative's facilities, community outreach efforts and daily operations.

"I have the privilege of supporting my team through challenges and wins," says Wright, who also received an American FFA Degree. ***"The confidence I gained in FFA is invaluable, and it's contributed to my ability to speak clearly and professionally in a meeting or an event in front of hundreds of people."***

For those interested in an agricultural business career, Wright's advice is simple: The industry needs you.

"There are so many opportunities in this field, and we need smart leaders now more than ever," she says. "As our society continues to become more removed from understanding where its food comes from, the challenges our industry faces on a daily basis increase and there becomes a greater need to feed, educate and advocate around the world."

Photography: Kaylee Brooks, Farm Supply; Getty Images, Issarawat Tattong, Tomekbudujedomek



TECHNOLOGY PATHWAY

USE TECHNOLOGY TO INCREASE EFFICIENCY AND PROFITABILITY.

SHEILA (WENINGER) JAECKEL

PRECISION AGRICULTURE CONSULTANT, BALLWEG IMPLEMENT

Reflecting on her time as a Hartford FFA member in Wisconsin, Sheila (Weninger) Jaeckel says there isn't one experience that stands out to her the most. Rather, everything she participated in, including competitive events, conferences and the National FFA Talent and Chorus programs, positively influenced the direction of her chosen career path.

"Additionally, being a chapter officer taught me how to work with others and delegate tasks," Jaeckel says. "I also learned about planning and organizing through helping with various events, and the knowledge I gained through my Supervised Agricultural Experience in goat production helped me understand the importance of budgeting."

Jaeckel attended Fox Valley Technical College, where she completed an associate's degree in agribusiness science and technology with a focus on agronomy, and earned a technical diploma as a precision agriculture technician. She then completed a bachelor's degree in organizational leadership with an emphasis in applied communications from the University of Green Bay.

"I highly recommend trying out a career path through an internship or job shadowing experience," Jaeckel says. "For me, this was a great way to gain real-world experience and see what it was like working with different farmers and types of equipment."

Jaeckel's favorite part of her current job is that no two days at Ballweg Implement are the same. Sometimes she's in the office, helping farmers troubleshoot over the phone, while others include traveling to the field or shop to work with them face to face.

"I love seeing people's reactions when they learn how to use new technology for the first time," she adds. "Whether it's a big or small change, it's rewarding to see how amazed they are by what it can do for their operation."

APPLY YOURSELF

EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS:

- Agricultural systems technology
- Computer science
- Cyber security
- Industrial technology
- Information technology

CAREER CONSIDERATIONS:

- Agricultural engineer
- Integrated solutions consultant
- Precision agriculture specialist
- Software developer
- Technology strategist

POTENTIAL SAES AND PROFICIENCIES:

- Agriscience Research
- Agricultural Mechanics
- Agricultural Services

COMPETITIVE EVENTS TO TRY:

- Food Science and Technology CDE
- Agricultural Technology and Mechanical Systems CDE
- Meats Evaluation and Technology CDE

Photography: Courtesy of Sheila Jaeckel, Brock Vetick; Getty Images, Tomekbudujedomek

APPLY YOURSELF

EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS:

- Environmental science
- Food science
- International agriculture
- Natural resources ecology and management
- Plant and soil sciences

CAREER CONSIDERATIONS:

- Aquaculturist
- Community/urban farmer
- Environmental engineer
- Renewable energy specialist
- Wildlife biologist

POTENTIAL SAES AND PROFICIENCIES:

- Environmental Sciences and Natural Resources Management
- Landscape management
- Wildlife Production and Management

COMPETITIVE EVENTS TO TRY:

- Agricultural Issues Forum LDE
- Environmental and Natural Resources CDE
- Forestry CDE



SUSTAINABILITY PATHWAY

BALANCE ECONOMIC CONCERNS AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT.

BROCK VETICK
INNOVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY SPECIALIST, SETTJE AGRI-SERVICES AND ENGINEERING

Although Brock Vetick knew he wanted to pursue a career rooted in agriculture, he never imagined he'd find himself working in the sustainability sector.

"I love the breadth of my job and working with people in rural communities," Vetick says. ***"The word 'sustainability' can mean something different to everyone, but there's certainly a place for those who are interested in this field."***

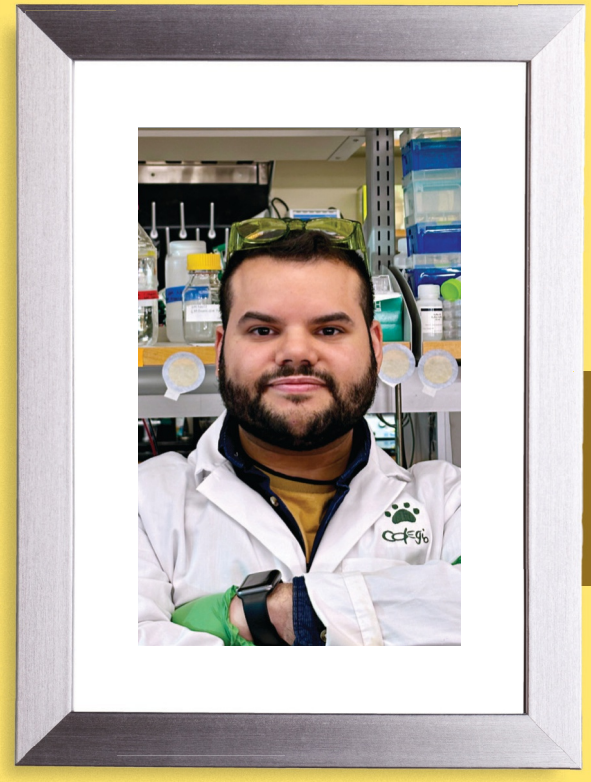
Taking advantage of opportunities he was presented with as a Lyons-Decatur Northeast FFA member in Nebraska, in addition to serving as a 2017-18 Nebraska FFA state vice president, helped Vetick branch outside of his comfort zone and strengthen his skill set.

"I grew the most from public speaking events and preparing proficiency award applications because they challenged me to think critically, learn new things and articulate my thoughts and experiences," he says.

Following high school, Vetick attended the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where he studied agricultural economics and agribusiness entrepreneurship. As his network grew, he connected with professionals at Settje Agri-Services and Engineering before accepting a position with the company.

Today, he helps improve all aspects of the design, construction and management of livestock facilities. This includes exploring new technologies and evaluating the environmental, economic and social sustainability practices of farming operations. Alongside his colleagues, Vetick also hosts a podcast called "Sustaining the Herd," which dives into topics related to innovation and sustainability in animal agriculture.

"If someone would've told me five years ago where I'd end up, I probably wouldn't have believed them," he says. "But as my FFA advisor, Kevin Anderson, taught me, it's always worth trying something to see what happens, and you'll often regret the things you didn't do more than the things you did."



BIOTECHNOLOGY PATHWAY

ENHANCE PLANTS, ANIMALS AND MICROORGANISMS TO SOLVE GLOBAL ISSUES.

MILTON SABAT GONZÁLEZ-SERRANO

PH.D. CANDIDATE, THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Milton Sabat González-Serrano credits his Su Manual Ruiz Gandía FFA advisor, Agro. Migdalia Tosado, for helping him discover a passion for agriscience research and seeing where his interests could take him.

"My FFA experiences taught me the importance of perseverance, teamwork and staying open to new ideas," he says.

The 2012-13 Puerto Rico FFA state president, 2017 national FFA officer nominating committee member and American FFA Degree recipient is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in biochemistry, along with additional training focused in molecular biophysics. Prior to beginning this course of study, he completed a bachelor's degree in animal science and pre-veterinary medicine at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez.

During his time at the Ohio State University, González-Serrano has mentored more than 15 undergraduate and high school students in the Dr. David Wood - Applied Protein Engineering Laboratory — a full-circle opportunity that he finds incredibly rewarding.

"By listening to their aspirations, supporting their goals and nurturing their development, I helped many [students] secure successful science-focused internships and careers," he says.

In addition to mentoring, one of the many things González-Serrano enjoys about working in this field is its dynamic nature. After completing his Ph.D. this year, he hopes to leverage his knowledge to contribute to innovative solutions that address real-world challenges.

"From developing drought-resistant crops to improving food nutrition and reducing environmental impacts, biotechnology is transforming agriculture," he says. ***"This field combines biology, engineering and environmental science. Remember to stay curious, keep learning and be open to interdisciplinary collaboration."***

APPLY YOURSELF

EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS:

- Animal sciences
- Biochemistry
- Entomology
- Horticulture
- Microbiology

CAREER CONSIDERATIONS:

- Animal geneticist
- Laboratory technician
- Plant pathologist
- Quality assurance manager
- Systems administrator

POTENTIAL SAES AND PROFICIENCIES:

- Agriscience Research
- Environmental Sciences and Natural Resources Management
- Outdoor Recreation

COMPETITIVE EVENTS TO TRY:

- Agricultural Issues Forum LDE
- Food Science and Technology CDE
- Veterinary Science CDE

APPLY YOURSELF

EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS:

- Agribusiness management
- Automotive mechanics technology
- Construction management
- Electrical trades
- Welding technology

CAREER CONSIDERATIONS:

- Custom applicator
- Farrier
- Heavy equipment operator
- Livestock auctioneer
- Maintenance/service technician

POTENTIAL SAES AND PROFICIENCIES:

- Agricultural Mechanics
- Agricultural Services
- Landscape Installation

COMPETITIVE EVENTS TO TRY:

- Agricultural Technology and Mechanical Systems CDE
- Farm and Agribusiness Management CDE
- Veterinary Science CDE



SKILLED TRADES PATHWAY

APPLY SPECIALIZED KNOWLEDGE, ABILITIES AND HANDS-ON SKILLS.

MATTHEW BAXTER

WELD SHOP LEADMAN, LAND PRIDE, GREAT PLAINS MANUFACTURING

In high school, Matthew Baxter competed in every FFA Career Development Event (CDE) he could get his hands on. Livestock evaluation and land judging were his favorite CDEs, but he also tried dairy cattle evaluation and range judging. However, the Clay Center FFA Alumnus from Kansas wishes he would've tried the agricultural technology and mechanical systems CDE because it perfectly relates to his present-day career as a full-time welder.

"I'd also encourage my younger self to run for a chapter office because I've seen the value in this experience through serving on local and state FFA alumni boards," Baxter says. ***"I've found you can't be afraid to try new things, even if it's new and daunting, because you'll be better off in the long run for doing them."***

Baxter, who's been in his current role for more than 16 years, completed a nine-month welding course at Fort Hays Tech North Central. He says this educational experience exposed him to different types of welding and fabrication work and equipped him with skills such as reading and drawing blueprints — all of which prepared him for what to expect when entering the workforce full time.

During his days on the job, Baxter can be found working on all kinds of equipment, ranging from tillers to mowers, snowblowers and more, and assisting his fellow welders as the need arises.

"If you're looking for a career where you can use your hands to physically build or create something and make a good living for yourself, this pathway is definitely the way to go," Baxter says. "You can count on there being a strong demand for your skills anywhere in the world."

Photography: Courtesy of Milton Sabat González-Serrano, Matthew Baxter; Getty Images, Tomekbudujedomek, rafal olechowski
Sources: AgCareers.com and AgExplorer

SAES IN THE USA

IF YOU'RE PLANNING TO START, EXPAND OR SWITCH UP YOUR SUPERVISED AGRICULTURAL EXPERIENCE (SAE) THIS YEAR, DRAW INSPIRATION FROM THESE CREATIVE FFA MEMBERS AND ALUMS, HIGHLIGHTED BY THE 2024-25 FFA IN THE USA REPORTERS.

COMPILED BY LAUREN QUINLAN

Illustration: Getty Images, Shanina

This exclusive and expanded story features a fun twist on the beloved FFA in the USA section that began in **2017.**



Our Voice. Our Story.

The National FFA Organization takes great pride in being a student-led organization. So, who's better equipped to help tell the FFA story than our members?

This year, more than 130 FFA in the USA reporters from every corner of the country and Puerto Rico are showcasing what makes FFA (and agriculture!) special in their region. By participating in this first-of-its-kind program, these reporters have the opportunity to learn and grow as they receive top-notch training from marketing and communications professionals, access FFA-branded materials and produce captivating content that's published on FFA.org.

This talented group of storytellers are responsible for the SAE reports featured on these pages, and there's more to come. Scan this code to learn more about the FFA in the USA reporters program and access additional content, including articles and videos. New content is posted on this webpage each month, so check back often for the latest FFA news. You can also submit your story ideas to FFA.org/Submit-Your-Story.

SOUTHERN Region

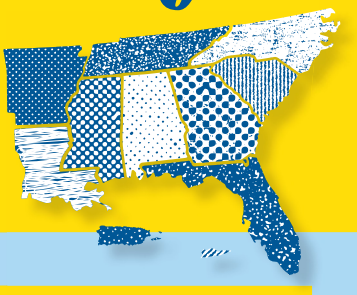


2024-25 NATIONAL FFA VICE PRESIDENT:

Jack Lingenfelter

GEORGIA

SAE: AGRICULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS





One of Many Egg-celent SAEs

By Adriana Colón, Puerto Rico

Dra. María Socorro Lacot FFA member Gabriela López stands out for her poultry production SAE. Since starting Gaby's Egg Farm in 2020, López's flock has grown to include 100 hens that lay approximately 14,000 eggs annually. In recognition of her hard work, López was featured in a calendar for Selectos, one of Puerto Rico's largest supermarket chains, and has earned scholarships to invest in her business.



Left: Farm fresh eggs Gabriela López collected from her chickens.
Above right: López shows off her Official Dress.

Photography: Copyright © FFA, Courtesy of Gabriela López; Getty Images, Shanina, nunawwoofy, Zoonar

Cultivating Knowledge in Plant Care

By Jazmin Palma, North Carolina

Josiah Saravia from the Millbrook FFA Chapter interns at the Atlantic Gardening Company. By caring for rare and exotic plants, Saravia is deepening his specialty horticulture knowledge through a plant systems-focused SAE.

State Officers Spill the Tea

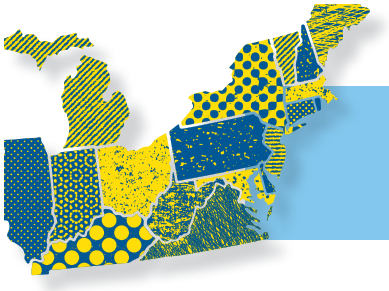
By Zoey Symons, Louisiana

Representing the Winnfield FFA Chapter, 2024-25 Louisiana FFA State Officers Jasmine Jones and Emily Nevils host a podcast named Area Real Estate. This agricultural communications SAE features insights and encouragement for members considering running for an area office.

Paving a Path

By Paige Pardue, Tennessee

Mason Duke developed an interest in agriculture by playing a video game called Farming Simulator. Now, the Munford FFA member is pursuing an agriculture services SAE related to aerial application and maintenance.



EASTERN Region



2024-25 NATIONAL FFA VICE PRESIDENT:

Caroline Groth

KENTUCKY

SAE: SHEEP PRODUCTION

"Hooked" on Fishing

By Lucy Chorman, Delaware

Four years ago, Lake Forest FFA member Forrest Kent-Teichmann discovered an outdoor recreation SAE opportunity close to home: working on a charter fishing boat. In addition to learning the ropes on the boat, she's applying skills such as public speaking and relationship building to deepen her connections.



EASTERN Region



Above: Cian Cribbs leads a group of students through a lesson about ice cream. Below left: Cribbs' FFA experiences helped equip him for the future.

A Place to Advocate

By Morgan Keith, Indiana



When Cian Cribbs' advisor noticed he spent a lot of time helping in the special education classroom, she encouraged him to connect this to an agricultural education SAE. As a result, the Whiteland FFA Alumnus prepared and delivered weekly lessons about agriculture. This process helped him learn how to cater to each student's needs and manage his time and resources effectively. A current student at Spalding University, Cribbs plans to incorporate his passion for special education into his plan of study.

Grease and Glory

By Elizabeth Lilyea, New York

Andrew Curtis Szalach, a Cazenovia Aggies FFA member and 2024-25 New York FFA state treasurer, chose an agricultural mechanics SAE focused on restoring classic tractors. To help organize his project load and create a compelling agricultural proficiency application, he's learned the importance of keeping meticulous records.

Taxidermy Triumph

By Taylor Johnson, Ohio

Sixteen-year-old Nate Emmons' interest in wildlife management is widely recognized among his friends and family. As an Evergreen FFA member, Emmons strengthened his SAE and sharpened his skills by researching, practicing and seeking guidance from others in the field of taxidermy.



Photography: Copyright © FFA, Courtesy of Cian Cribbs; Getty Images, ryasick, Adam Smigielski, Shanina

CENTRAL Region



2024-25 NATIONAL FFA VICE PRESIDENT:

Mary Schrieber

WISCONSIN

SAE: SPECIALITY ANIMAL PRODUCTION (BEEKEEPING)

Blooming Opportunities

By Ada Nelson, Iowa

Third-year Ames FFA member Julia Mortvedt has played a role in her family's business, Iowa Lavender, since it started in May 2020. Her multifaceted SAE also includes raising dairy goats that she shows at fairs and teaches guests about at the lavender farm.



BRING YOUR

Passion.

WE'LL PROVIDE THE REST.

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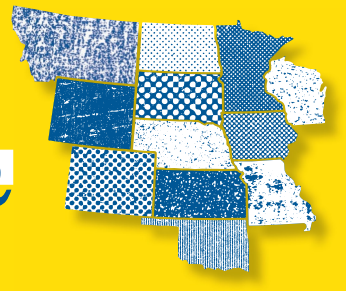
Schedule a campus tour to discover how you can turn your passion into your future career in the **Ferguson College of Agriculture.**

FERGUSON COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE

CENTRAL Region



Alexander Timm tends to his Chesnut tree seedlings.



Seeds for the Future

By Luke McCrea, Minnesota

Alexander Timm's forestry SAE is more than a business — it's also a conservation effort. This Bethlehem Academy FFA member runs a nursery in his backyard, where he plants acorns and raises saplings until they're ready to be sold. Looking ahead, Timm hopes to bring the Chestnut tree to his state, and believes FFA gives him the tools needed to make his goal a reality.



The Bucking Bull Business

By Citlali Calixto, Colorado

Lacey Taylor, a Highland FFA member, follows in her family members' footsteps by raising bulls for competitions through Buckers Unlimited. Her SAE has strengthened her confidence and helped her become a more empowered individual.

Chasing Dreams

By Lillian Hulse, Kansas

Entrepreneur Katie Aubert is funding her future with an agribusiness SAE. The Rossville FFA member offers goat pasture clearing services through 5A Goat Rental.

Photography: Copyright © FFA, Courtesy of Alexander Timm, Tessa Camacho; Getty Images, Visivasnc, Dmytro Leshchenko, Shanina

WESTERN Region



2024-25 NATIONAL FFA VICE PRESIDENT:

Abigale Jacobsen

CALIFORNIA

SAE: EQUINE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Aspire for Greatness

By Jayda Goodson, New Mexico

Isaac Corral received two goats for his sixth birthday, which sparked an interest for a goat production — entrepreneurship SAE. Corral's dedication to his projects is evident both in and out of the show ring, and he plans to continue his involvement in agriculture in the future.

Lei-ing a Legacy

By Nicholas Nishimura, Hawaii

Kohala High FFA member and 2024-25 Hawaii FFA State President Kenneth Matsuda is overseeing a community lei garden. Through his SAE, Matsuda hopes to promote and preserve native species as well as connect his community to agricultural education.

The Cat's Meow

By Samanatha Aarup, Arizona

Angelina Smith, a senior AAEC-Estrella Mountain FFA member, has spent the past four years growing her small animal production and care SAE. She fosters kittens with the Buckeye Animal Rescue and Kennel (BARK) organization.



Tessa Camacho (right) accepts her agriscience research award during the 2024 California State FFA Leadership Conference.



Ashes to Innovation

By Ethan Lopez, California

Tessa Camacho's award-winning agriscience SAE involves testing horticultural charcoal to determine if it boosts the germination rate of floor-level plants after a forest fire. Living in an area prone to wildfires, this O'Neals Minarets FFA member wants to use her research to help her community. By learning how to overcome challenges and embrace collaboration, she's achieved significant success in FFA and laid the foundation for her dream career as an agriculture educator.

UNLOCKED LEADERSHIP POTENTIAL

Each summer, the Washington Leadership Conference inspires changemakers to take action. - By Jodi Helmer

When Daren Deftereos signed up for the Washington Leadership Conference (WLC) in Washington, D.C., it wasn't just because of the tours of the National Mall, U.S. Capitol and Smithsonian Museums. The Hanford FFA member from California hoped attending the conference would help him develop leadership skills.

"I'm always trying to be a better person and a better leader," he says.

WLC includes opportunities to explore the nation's capital while engaging with legislators and honing leadership skills. The conference culminates with members creating Living to Serve plans, which outline civic engagement projects they will implement in their communities after the conference.

"It pushes students outside of their comfort zone and allows them to meet others from all over the country," says national FFA program specialist Payton Carter. "It also empowers them to come home and make a difference."

People-Focused Passion Projects

Students are encouraged to let their passions guide their Living to Serve plans. Past projects have ranged from hosting food drives to fishing outings with veterans. In 2024, Kuna FFA member Audrey Schwisow developed a plan to create mental health spaces in schools.

"There's a lot of stressful moments at schools," Schwisow says. "A lot of students in my Idaho school who are struggling go into the bathroom. So, having a safe space to step away for a minute would really help."

Deftereos' Living to Serve plan includes using social media as a tool for spreading positivity and hope, and he left WLC ready to bring his ideas to life.

"The coolest part about being at a national conference was meeting people from a lot of different backgrounds," he says.

Schwisow, who left WLC with new friends from Wisconsin, Missouri and North Carolina, says, "Creating those connections with others around the country was really cool. I enjoyed hearing about their backgrounds and how their chapters worked."

After the conference, students are invited to join a Facebook group that includes all past WLC participants to share updates on their plans. Carter also posts information about National FFA grants that could help fund community service projects.

"You can come home and use what you learned to help improve your chapter and your community," Carter says. "Any student who's thinking of going [to WLC] should take the chance to get a new perspective and see what FFA is like outside of their community."

Make Plans to Attend

Spend this summer investing in your personal growth by attending WLC (or another FFA conference near you!). Scan this code to access everything related to WLC, including 2025 dates, helpful resources and participant testimonials.

Parkview FFA Alumna Emily Sheehan from Wisconsin chats with workshop attendees during the 2024 Washington Leadership Conference.



Photography: Courtesy of Payton Carter

BREAKING DOWN LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Evelyn Tzul Tomas shares her FFA experiences with students at her school.



This Alabama FFA member uses translation skills to help non-English speakers learn about FFA and get involved in their chapter. – By Jessica Walker Boehm

When bilingual student Evelyn Tzul Tomas realized many of her Spanish-speaking peers were unable to get involved in FFA due to a language barrier, she saw a simple solution that she was uniquely qualified to provide: translation.

"My Hispanic friends were curious about my involvement with Albertville Middle School FFA," says Tomas, who spent part of her childhood in Guatemala and is now a freshman at Albertville High School in Alabama and an Albertville FFA member. "They didn't understand what it was about because they were still learning English. As a result, they couldn't take advantage of an incredible opportunity."

With the support of her former advisor, Ramona Weeks, Tomas took on her first translation project as an eighth grader at Albertville Middle School.

"Evelyn took slides I'd created [about FFA] and translated them into Spanish," says Weeks, who has since accepted an agriscience instructor position at Cullman High School and now serves as the Cullman FFA advisor. "This was the first time we'd been able to reach this particular group of English language learners, and it was the beginning of a new era for the chapter."

Today, many of those Spanish-speaking students are finding their niche in FFA. One popular area of interest is the National Spanish Creed Invitational, Weeks says, which was first held as a national-level contest in 2023 during the 96th National FFA Convention & Expo.

"National FFA is committed to inclusivity and has made that clear by continuing to expand the ways members can showcase and celebrate their cultural heritage," Weeks says.

Both Tomas and Weeks share that inclusionary commitment and are happy to see their efforts bringing new students to FFA.

"We elected officers in the spring of 2024, and several Haitian students applied and now hold officer positions [in the Albertville Middle School FFA]," Weeks says. "It's an important reminder that agriculture is truly a universal cord that ties us all together, regardless of our differences and individual backgrounds. When you show the door is open for everyone, more people walk through."

As she reflects on her involvement in bridging the gap between non-native English speakers and FFA, Tomas says it's been rewarding to help other students discover something so valuable that they might have otherwise missed out on.

"My friends are always thanking me for introducing them to FFA," she says. "It makes me feel good. It's one thing to share something you love, but to watch someone else fall in love with it, too – that's even better."

A PLACE TO BELONG

The National FFA Organization is committed to fostering a welcoming, supportive, engaging and growth-focused environment for all students. Scan this code to learn more about FFA for All.



The Albertville Middle School FFA officer team helped Ramona Weeks (far left) and Evelyn Tzul Tomas (center) create an impactful program for agriculture students and FFA members.

Photography: Courtesy of Ramona Weeks and Pam Ancelet

ON THE RECORD: CORY REINLE

This Nestlé USA senior manager applies skills gained in FFA to help people form connections with where their food comes from.

– By Jessica Mozo

“Don’t be afraid to move and take chances, and don’t keep knowledge to yourself.”

– CORY REINLE



One of Corey Reinle’s favorite things about FFA is the bonds he formed with fellow members. He applies this people-focused mentality in his current role by coaching his colleagues and helping them find success.

A Kentucky FFA Alumnus from Nelson County, Cory Reinle currently works as a senior manager in procurement for Nestlé USA, the world’s largest food and beverage company and a National FFA corporate partner. He attributes his interest in agriculture and his foundation for career success to his FFA involvement.

Q: What was your FFA experience like?

A: Taking a freshman agriscience class in 2002 was my introduction to FFA. I didn’t even mean to sign up for that class – it was a mistake. During the first day, the teacher ran in and started telling us about agriculture. More than 20 years later, I still remember his passion for agricultural education.

I had worked on my grandparents’ farm growing up, but I never took agriculture seriously. That class opened up the idea of agribusiness being a career option for me, and the experiences and training I gained through FFA competitions and speaking engagements helped build the foundation for my career.

Q: What path did you take after high school?

A: When I graduated in 2006, I knew I wanted to be on the business side of agriculture. I studied agricultural economics at the University of Kentucky, then went to the University of Florida and got a master’s degree in agribusiness.

In Florida, I was introduced to the fresh produce industry with citrus and vegetables and my career took root. I worked as a produce buyer for a grocery store, and later worked on the supply side of fresh produce. For the next 10 years, I did supply chain management for two fresh produce companies, where I bought and coordinated with farms to sell vegetables to big grocery stores.

Q: What do you like about your current job at Nestlé USA?

A: I love getting to coach people, develop my teams and see their success. I love working at the largest food and beverage manufacturer in the world, while still being connected to the farm and knowing where our food comes from.

Q: What advice would you give to current FFA members?

A: Continue your education. Keep developing and trying new things. Don’t be afraid to move and take chances, and don’t keep knowledge to yourself. There’s an opportunity to engage with the public who want to learn more, and it’s up to us to take our stories to them.



Competing in the Marketing Plan Career Development Event as a Nelson County FFA member sparked Reinle’s (second from left) interest in the paths agriculture products can take from the farm to market.

Photography: Courtesy of Cory Reinle; Getty Images, Tanja Ivanova

MEDIA CENTER

ARTS & CULTURE IN AGRICULTURE

– By Lauren Quinlan

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

PODCASTS

As you prepare for a future in agriculture, check out these five podcasts created with young professionals in mind.

The TopSoil Podcast

Tune in each week as Continuum Ag Founder and CEO Mitchell Hora and his team members dig into a range of topics such as carbon intensity, soil health, precision agriculture and more.

Off-Farm Income

Host Matt Brechwald interviews agriculturists, including FFA members and alumni, who've paved paths in entrepreneurship and covers additional topics and issues like rural crime.

Future of Agriculture

In this podcast, Tim Hammerich interviews farmers, founders, innovators and company leaders who provide a glimpse of the latest news related to topics like agriculture technology, sustainability and the future of food.

15 Minutes With a Farmer

This weekly series produced by Successful Farming includes quick conversations with farmers located nationwide who share their background and involvement in agriculture as well as nuggets of wisdom, life lessons and industry success stories.

Leaders of the West

Each week, host Jessie Jarvis shares her personal experiences as well as stories and testimonials from innovators and changemakers in agriculture.

SOCIAL MEDIA

The Whole Farmer

Emily Grant, an Eastern Hancock FFA Alumna, past Indiana FFA district president and national agricultural communications proficiency finalist, is raising awareness for the mental, physical and social well-being of farmers. She created an Instagram account and Facebook page called "The Whole Farmer" after attending the Washington Leadership Conference. Now a freshman at Purdue University studying agricultural communications and animal sciences, Grant plans to work with the Purdue Extension Farm Stress team in the future and continue her involvement with Grit and Grace Nation.



BLOG

Pride in Agriculture

Founded by Ryan Goodman, an advocate, cattle rancher and agricultural communicator, this platform aims to elevate the voices and experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals who are involved in agriculture. Goodman also shares resources for those looking to serve as allies. You can follow Pride in Agriculture on Instagram and Facebook.

Courtesy of Emily Grant



National NFA President Adolphus Pinson (right) exchanges his NFA jacket for an FFA jacket from National FFA President Kenneth Kennedy (left) during the 1965 merger ceremony.

FFA Moment

1935 & 1965

SHINING LIGHT ON A STORIED HISTORY

Scholars nationwide are committed to preserving the history of NFA and recognizing its historical significance. Scan this code to access a full collection of digitized archives created by students and faculty at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University.

Ninety years ago, the New Farmers of America (NFA) was founded at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, and David Simmons was elected as the first national NFA president. Designed to provide leadership opportunities for Black agriculture students, this organization's roots were shaped by influential educator, author and civil rights leader Booker T. Washington.

After its founding in 1935, NFA grew to 1,004 chapters in 12 states and more than 50,000 members before it was brought under the authority of the U.S. Department of Education in 1941. In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law. One year later, in 1965, NFA merged with the Future Farmers of America (now known as the National FFA Organization).

As our organization continues to evolve and look toward the future, it's important to reflect on where we've been and the actions, decisions and moments that shaped where we are today. Scan this code to learn more about NFA and the lasting impact of its merger with FFA.

Photography: Courtesy of IUPUI Ruth Lilly Special Collections and Archives

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