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spotlight

Nebraska FFA Alumni and Supporters

December 2025



**Brynn Almgren
takes us on an FFA
Overseas Trip
pg. 19**

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COVER PHOTO:
Brynn Almgren takes us on
an FFA Overseas Trip
— see story on page 19.

NEBRASKA FFA ALUMNI & SUPPORTERS

Hello Nebraska FFA Alumni and Supporters!

I should introduce myself quickly, my name's Matt Scholz, I am the president of Nebraska FFA Alumni and Supporters for the 2025-2027 term. I'm from Crete, and have proudly been on the council since 2018. During this time, I have thoroughly enjoyed seeing how the Alumni and Supporters council has grown its impact, and more importantly, enhanced the agricultural education experience in Nebraska. Foremost – I can't thank the 13 dedicated individuals and multiple representatives on the Nebraska FFA Alumni & Supporters Council enough. These volunteers are true leaders in their communities who dedicate their time and energy not only at the state level of the FFA Alumni & Supporters, but also at the local level, sharing their time and talents with their local FFA chapters and FFA Alumni & Supporters chapters. These passionate individuals keep this organization running smoothly and are instrumental in providing opportunities for the future leaders in agriculture across the state of Nebraska. In fact, your Nebraska FFA Alumni and Supporters Council continues to be recognized at the national level, multiple years in a row, for all of the work we continue to do – something I, alone, cannot do without the council. Thank you to all of my fellow council members. And thank you to all our NE FFA Alumni & Supporters members from across the state for supporting your local FFA chapter and the Nebraska FFA Alumni & Supporters.

I am extremely proud of the new opportunities we have been able to provide to FFA members and FFA Alumni and Supporters across the state through our organization in 2025 alone. At our convention in January 2026 we are introducing the first annual "Golden Idea Event Competition" which will bring event ideas from across the state in front of a panel of judges, giving the opportunity for extra funding for these events. Funding has also been approved for a teacher retention incentive program titled the "Nebraska FFA Alumni & Supporters Impact Award "Honoring Those Who Grow Those Who Grow Others." This will be for first year Ag Ed teachers to nominate and recognize someone who mentored them, by presenting them with a small token of appreciation. In December, we will be hosting a booth at the Nebraska AG Expo in Lincoln, Tuesday through Thursday, December 9-11. Our booth will be #3331 in the career fair area. Please stop by, say "hi", and see everything we have to offer. Last, but not least, we are currently working on a new one-day event which we hope to announce in January at our convention for the Memorial Day 2026 weekend.

We continue to financially support Student-Teacher scholarships, Leadership Scholarships, CDE, Proficiency, and LDE awards, and recognize FFA advisors, chap-



**Nebraska FFA Alumni & Supporters
President Matt Scholz**

ters, and individuals for their outstanding dedication and achievements. The council also hosts a booth and activities at the Nebraska State Fair and the State FFA Convention; and manages this very magazine, the Blue and Gold Spotlight. Support and work by us continues to be driven by our mission to promote, support, and enhance the improvement of agricultural education. In case you haven't heard yet – FFA membership in 2025 is over 1 million active members. The more support the Alumni and Supporters like YOU give, the more FFA members across the state thrive.

I look forward to seeing everyone at the convention in Valentine on January 16th and 17th. There is a bevy of activities lined up for manufacturing and farm tours, socials at Niobrara Valley Vineyard and Bolo Beer Company, and meals hosted by Cody-Kilgore and Valentine FFA Chapters, the weekend will conclude with our annual Awards Banquet Saturday evening. Will you bring "Amor" friends to the Valentine convention in January?

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MEET THE COUNCIL

Kevin Henrichson

Hi I'm Kevin Henrichson.

I am a Lifetime Alumni Member of the Raymond Central Alumni and Supporters, and live by Valparaiso with my wife Karen. I farm and stay active in the community serving on several boards.

I have been a State Council Member since 2004 serving as Treasure, Vice President, and President. Locally I served as Secretary for Raymond Central from 1988 until 2022.

I enjoy seeing the FFA develop Leaders in our Communities and at the State level. I have been fortunate to help evaluate speaking events and proficiency awards at the Local, District, and State levels, and travel to the National Convention several times.

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2025-26 Nebraska State Officers



Starting from left to right: Alexis Davis, Jadyn Tidyman, Kash Majerus, Jake Rezac, Josh Pierce, Meredith Ruda, and Leah Christen



Leah Christen
State Secretary, Lewiston FFA Chapter

My SAE is in diversified livestock production including beef, sheep, and goats. I have 40 cows that I run alongside my family's cow-calf operation and 30 sheep and goats that I raise with my siblings. I have participated in Discovery Speaking, Creed speaking, and Extemporaneous speaking. I have been on district and state livestock judging, livestock management, poultry evaluation, land judging, range judging, dairy evaluation, and milk quality and products teams. I attended the National FFA Convention, Nebraska State Fair, and State FFA Convention.

This year as a state FFA officer, my favorite thing is connecting with members across the state and hearing their unique stories. I especially enjoyed meeting chapter officers during COLT conference and reconnecting with many of them this fall at P2C and National FFA Convention. I am looking forward to going to Chapter Visits and meeting more members. I was selected to participate in the International Leadership Seminar for State Officer and am excited to travel to Spain in January!

I am currently a sophomore at UNL majoring in Agricultural Education and plan to be an ag teacher and FFA advisor.



Meredith Ruda
State Vice President, Logan View FFA Chapter

My Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) revolves around showing cattle. I've shown heifers since I was eight years old, and have competed at local, state, and national levels. I also help with my family's cow/calf operation. Through FFA, I've participated in public speaking and vet science. I've also been a part of livestock judging and biotech teams that have qualified for state. Attending State and National FFA Conventions have been the highlights of my time in FFA!

This year, as a state FFA officer, I have enjoyed meeting members from all around the state. My favorite moment was running the Chapter Officer Leadership Training conference and helping students grow in their leadership skills. Another experience I had was the State Officer summit in Washington, D.C., where I got to meet other state officers and see how agriculture is involved in our government. I am looking forward to meeting with even more members through Chapter Visits and State Convention!

I am currently a freshman at UNL, majoring in Agricultural Education, with plans of becoming an ag teacher and FFA advisor.



Jake Rezac
State President, Bishop Neumann FFA Chapter

My SAE is in row crop production of corn and soybeans rotation. I also have small engine repair and firewood SAEs. I have participated in Creed speaking, parliamentary procedure, employment skills, and agricultural mechanics. I was also on a national qualifying land judging team. I attended COLT conference and State Convention.

This year as a state FFA officer, I love making connections with business leaders across the state and seeing how their business is run and what gives it success. I enjoy getting to talk to members across the state and hear about how FFA has impacted their lives, and their future plans. I look forward to chapter visits and state convention where I will get to reconnect with all the members I have met this year, as well as meet more new members.

I am currently a freshman at UNL majoring in Agricultural Systems and Technology and plan to return to my family farm and take part in growing our family business, Burr Oak Contracting.



Josh Pierce
State Vice President, Pleasanton FFA Chapter

My SAE is in diversified crop production. Over the past three years, I have operated a small dryland field where I have grown corn, soybeans, and cane. In high school, I competed in ag sales, Agronomy, livestock judging, and numerous speaking events. I also had the opportunity to attend the National Convention and State Convention.

My favorite aspect of this year as a State officer has been interacting with members from across the state and witnessing the growth of this organization. Looking forward, I'm really excited for chapter visits as I will get to meet so many new members whom I have not previously met.

I'm currently a freshman at UNL, majoring in Agricultural Education, and I plan on returning to the family farm and teaching Ag.



Jadyn Tidyman

State Vice-President, Chadron FFA Chapter

My SAE is in agribusiness entrepreneurship. I have owned a leather tooling company called "Grassland Leather" for two years now and enjoy making people custom products! I have been on numerous district, and state level teams and had the honor of competing in Farm and Agribusiness management at the national level. I also attended National FFA Convention, and State FFA Convention.

This year as a state FFA officer, I love getting to hear about members' unique stories and what they love to do. It has been such an amazing experience getting to continuously meet new members while also building relationships with those I've met at the beginning of the year. I cannot wait to see members again both at chapter visits and at State FFA Convention!

I am currently a freshman at UNL majoring in Agricultural Education, with a minor in entrepreneurship and plan to be an FFA advisor and business owner.



Alexis Davis

State Vice President, York FFA Chapter

My SAE is in poultry production, where I manage and care for my own flock. Through this project, I've gained valuable hands-on experience in animal care, production, and record keeping. Along with my SAE, I've competed in several CDEs and LDEs, including Creed Speaking at the district level, Agricultural Demonstration at both districts and state, and Floriculture, Food Science, and Livestock Judging at the district level. One of my favorite experiences has been competing in Poultry Evaluation at the district, state, and national levels. Throughout my FFA journey, I've had the opportunity to attend both the Nebraska State FFA Convention and the National FFA Convention.

This year, as a State FFA Officer, I've really enjoyed connecting with members across the state and learning more about their unique FFA experiences. One of my favorite memories was at the National Convention, where we saw many Nebraska schools and had the opportunity to connect with them. I'm especially looking forward to Chapter Visits and continuing to build those relationships throughout the year.

I'm currently a freshman at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, majoring in Agricultural Education. My goal is to become an agricultural educator and FFA advisor so I can share my love for agriculture and help students discover their potential through FFA.



Kash Majerus

State Vice President, Aurora FFA Chapter

My SAE is Beef placement. I have a small herd of 10 show cows that I calve out every year. I also background a few feeder steers every year. I have participated in Senior Public Speaking, Ag Demo, Livestock Judging, Livestock Management, Meats, Poultry, and Parli Pro through my high school years. I also attended State FFA Convention and National FFA Convention.

This year as a state FFA officer, I loved meeting with our leading business owners and biggest supporters of FFA. Meeting and talking with the leading ag business really opened my eyes to the agriculture industry. I also enjoyed connecting with members throughout the year and look forward to connecting with old friends and making new ones through FFA.

I am currently a freshman at UNL majoring in Animal Science/ Pre-Vet. I plan to apply to vet school and return to a rural area in Nebraska to practice.

2024-25 STATE FFA TEAM OFFICER REFLECTIONS



Back row (left to right): Reagan Choat, Claire Woeppel, and Trey Stewart.

Front row (left to right): Brynn Almgren, Peyton Hinrichs, Calie Cockburn, and Alexa Tollman.

Words from Claire Woeppel

2024-25 State Vice President, Chambers FFA Chapter

Greetings, I'm Claire Woeppel! For me, serving as a Nebraska FFA State Officer meant serving from my heart. My year was built on the foundation of three L words: love, leadership, and listening. I realized as the year progressed that if you simply love first, everything else will naturally follow. I met students from across the state with love, and I'm so thankful they loved me back! From the early morning drives on the way to a chapter visit, from the late night dances at the National FFA Convention, my heart was filled with some pretty special moments with extraordinary people. Grace, a member from Oakland - Craig, taught me how to lead authentically and reminded me how

powerful kindness is. Ms. Ready at Clarkson inspired me to follow my heart and always stay true to my values. The Aurora FFA Chapter taught me to always have fun along the way. Each FFA member, advisor, and supporter I met through my year of service left an impact on me. The six individuals I got to share my love with truly became my best friends through this experience. We bonded over challenges and triumphs. I will never take for granted this opportunity with my teammates. My time within the FFA will go beyond my year of service as I pursue a degree in Agriculture Education. Always remember that you are powerful beyond measure!

Words from Alexa Tollman

2024-25 State Vice President, Crawford FFA Chapter

This past year has been one of the most impactful experiences of my life, not only because of the places I've been, but because of the people I've met along the way. I'm Alexa Tollman from Crawford, Nebraska and currently a sophomore at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I served as a Nebraska FFA State Officer in 2024-2025. Serving as a state officer gave me the unique opportunity to connect with students from every corner of our state. From chapter visits and leadership workshops to state convention and everyday conversations, I had the privilege of hearing so many stories from students so passionate about agriculture. I also had the incredible honor of working alongside my fellow state officers, this team quickly became my family. Together we faced challenges, celebrated victories, and represented the Nebraska FFA Association. All in all, this year taught me how to lead with authenticity, to speak with purpose, find who I'm meant to be, and to serve with humility. I am truly grateful for this opportunity and the experiences it equipped me with to serve others. Thank you for supporting Nebraska FFA and for believing in its members.

Words from Calie Cockburn

2024-25 State Vice President, Emerson-Hubbard FFA Chapter

This past year of service as a state officer was nothing short of transformative. While connecting with students and other leaders on both the state and national levels, I have learned to lead with love, empathy, and kindness in ways I can't imagine. Moments like giving students a boost of confidence before a speech or leading groups of more than 40 students through leadership workshops gave me opportunity to grow. While this was a very impactful experience for me, it warms my heart to also know my team and I have left an impact on Nebraska FFA. We fit together like pieces of a puzzle. Where one person lacked, the other found a strength. With this dynamic we worked together to give students the best FFA experiences that we could. Conferences, LDEs and CDEs, chapter visits, and small interactions allowed us to educate and advocate. My heart belongs to this organization and I could not be more grateful to have this experience.

Words from Peyton Hinrichs

2024-25 State Vice President, Meridian FFA

My year as a state officer was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. I had the chance to meet members from every corner of Nebraska, each with their own story, passion, and spark. I learned that leadership isn't about being perfect, it's about showing up, listening, and making people feel valued. From chapter visits to convention, every moment reminded me of why I love this organization and the people in it. I grew in ways I didn't expect, finding confidence in myself while helping others do the same. Most of all, this year taught me that the real impact of FFA isn't in the titles or positions,

but in the connections we make and the moments we share. Looking back, I wouldn't trade a single memory, because each one added to the joy and growth of my journey.

Words from Reagan Choat

2024-25 State President, Plainview FFA Chapter

To call this past year "unforgettable" may sound cliché, but it is nothing short of the truth. I cannot imagine another opportunity that would have allowed me to dive more deeply into leadership and agriculture in such a fast-paced, meaningful, and fulfilling way. Serving as a state officer was a true privilege, whether it was connecting with FFA members and agricultural education students, learning from countless industry leaders, listening to the stories of dedicated agriculture educators, or gaining a deeper understanding of the communities our FFA programs serve, I was constantly reminded of what makes the Nebraska FFA Association so special. From leading workshops to helping host the 97th Nebraska FFA State Convention, every late night and early morning was made worthwhile by the chance to interact with students. Although the year went by far too quickly, I am filled with excitement to watch our association and its members continue to grow and thrive. Thank you to everyone who played a part in making this journey so special.

Words from Brynn Almgren

2024-25 State Secretary, Stuart FFA Chapter

This past year was truly a once in a lifetime experience. I can remember that day when I had the honor of running on stage and meeting my team, and my life was changed for the better. From having countless member interactions, meeting some of Nebraska's top industry leaders, connecting with state officers from other states, hosting different conferences, traveling the nation and internationally to learn more about agriculture, going to my first National FFA Convention, helping host the 97th Nebraska FFA State Convention, and everything in between, every second mattered to me. The opportunity I was given to serve this organization, and its members truly helped me grow into a better leader and a supporter for life. Although it is bittersweet having hung up my blue corduroy, I could not be more thankful and proud for the members, advisors, donors, and supporters who help make this organization so wonderful and I am so excited to watch this organization grow.

Words from Trey Stewart

2024-25 Vice President, Wisner-Pilger FFA

Some of my favorite moments as an officer came while I was doing chapter visits. The students were always full of energy and ready to learn and have a great time. I also enjoyed being able to travel across the state and see the different forms of agriculture across Nebraska.

A Snippet of History

of Agriculture Education and the FFA

Article by: Joe A. Baldassare

Retired Agriculture Teacher and Life Member of the FFA Alumni & Supporters

During the past few years, I have submitted articles in this magazine about topics researched and written by me, regarding people and events within the scope of the history of Agricultural Education, FFA or the FFA Alumni. This year, I found an interesting article in the 1983 State Convention Issue of "The Nebraska Future Farmer" Newsletter about an individual who was a pioneer in agriculture education in Nebraska. This article was written for inclusion in that publication by Richard Katt, who then was employed as a Supervisor in the Nebraska Department of Education's agriculture education division. It was well written and I did not feel I could improve it by rewriting it. I requested permission from Rich and the Nebraska State FFA Advisor to submit this transcription for publication here almost verbatim.

With respect and admiration, this issue of the Nebraska Future Farmer is dedicated to Nebraska's "FFA Pioneer,"
— Mr. Leroy D. Clements

Mr. Leroy D. Clements began his career as an Agricultural Education instructor at Stromsburg in 1923. He moved to Beatrice in 1925 where he organized the first FFA Chapter that was chartered in Nebraska. According to Mr. Clements' memoirs, "FFA wasn't the first organization of its kind." He had a group called the Junior Farmers Association when he taught at Stromsburg and Beatrice. His memoirs revealed that there were similar groups all around the nation.

Mr. Clements became a pioneer in the inception and development of the FFA.

During 1926 and 1927, Mr. Clements attended the National Congress of Vocational Agriculture Students in Kansas City, Missouri. It was at the 1927 convention that rumblings of the possibility of organizing a National Association of Vocational Agriculture students were first heard and seriously considered. The Nebraska delegation of boys responded favorably. One student of Mr. Clements was chosen to attend a meeting to consider the possibility of a National Organization.

It was the following fall when Mr. Clements attended the First National Convention of the Future Farmers of America on November 20, 1928, in Kansas City, Missouri. One of his students was elected the first Vice President of the Central Region during that first National Convention.

Mr. Clements became a staff member in agricultural education for the State of Nebraska in 1929 and remained a member of the staff until his retirement in 1962. He served as advisor of the Nebraska Future Farmers of America from 1929

through 1949. To quote from Mr. Clements memoirs "It has been a wonderful privilege and a great honor to have spent an entire lifetime with and for the Future Farmers of America through the vocational education programs. No life's work for me could have been more enjoyable or more rewarding. With almost parental pride, the steady progress and thrilling achievements of this great national organization has been constantly observed from the sidelines. A feeling of eternal gratitude shall forever prevail in my attitude towards the Vocational Agriculture Department and FFA for multitudes of true and lasting friendships with fine young people and their dedicated leaders throughout the state and nation."

It was with great pleasure that our state FFA Association recognized Mr. Clements during our 50th Annual State FFA Banquet (1978) with a plaque signifying that he was truly a "NEBRASKA FFA PIONEER."

It is ironic to note that Mr. Clements passed away on April 16, 1983 – the last day of our annual State FFA Convention. As our 1982-83 state officers retired, so did Nebraska's FFA Pioneer.

In recognition of Mr. Clements service to vocational agriculture/FFA, in the spring of 1983, a memorial scholarship was established in his honor.



Officers of the Beatrice Junior Farmers Association in 1925. Front Row: Carl Zimmerman, Secretary; Miner Uright, Vice-President; Alvin Reimer, Reporter; Rolland Miedge, President. Back Row: Harold Holubeck, Sentinel; L. D. Clements, Advisor; Harold Teagarden, Treasurer. Alvin Reimer went on to serve as First Vice-President of the newly formed Future Farmers of America in 1928.



Mr. Leroy D. Clements

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SUTHERLAND FFA CHAPTER



Participants shooting clays at the 2025 Annual Crack and Whack Tournament.

Sutherland FFA Alumni is Always Available to Help Their Agriculture Students and Teacher.

Article by: Joe Baldassare

Those of us who have been involved with Agriculture Education and FFA Alumni for a while understand how FFA Alumni can be beneficial to students in the program.

Mrs. Bailey Guenin, the agriculture teacher at Sutherland High School, told me in a recent phone interview about some of the ways The Sutherland FFA Alumni helps her, her school, and her agriculture students and FFA members. She told me that the FFA Alumni always gives financial support for FFA members who are National FFA qualifiers. They also sponsor a meal for student members who travel to the Nebraska State Convention in the spring.

Every summer in August, the FFA Alumni joins FFA members in sponsoring the Crack and Whack Annual Tournament. This event consists of a Trap Shoot with 50 clay pigeons to shoot. Later, participants go to the Golf Course and play 18 holes of golf. FFA Alumni members do the set up and planning and the

FFA members run the games at the Golf Course. This year the FFA Alumni conducted a Raffle for a Blackstone Grill.

The Beef in Schools Program provides fresh local beef to be provided year-round in Sutherland school's nutrition program. The Sutherland FFA has extra steaks and auctions them off at the FFA Labor Auction to help buy future beef for the Beef in Schools Program.

Members of the Sutherland FFA Alumni are always very helpful in assisting FFA members in FFA Contest practices and critiquing FFA members' presentations. This is necessary in helping to hone and polish the students, level of excellence.

Mrs. Guenin, who is in her second year of teaching, said, "The FFA Alumni has been very good to me. As a first-year teacher, my FFA Alumni helped to guide me with whatever I needed help with - anytime."



MEET THE COUNCIL Rachel Tagge

Council member and awards chairperson Rachel Tagge is from Osceola, Nebraska where she lives with her husband and two children. She participated extensively in FFA throughout her schooling, holds an American Degree, and just finished her sixth and final year as the chairperson for her local FFA Alumni & Supporters Chapter. A stay at home mother devoted to volunteerism and agriculture, she is passionate about supporting FFA and Alumni & Supporters across the state. Currently she serves on the Golden Idea Event committee, the Social Media Committee and the 2027 State Convention and Annual Banquet committee.

NEW CENTRAL REGION REPRESENTATIVE

Nebraska FFA Alumni & Supporter Council Member Jill Goedeken Selected to Serve on National FFA Alumni and Supporters Advisory Committee.

Our very own Jill F. Goedeken has been selected to serve a three-year term as the **Central Region Representative** on the **National FFA Alumni and Supporters Advisory Committee**, a prestigious national leadership role that supports the continued growth and engagement of FFA alumni and supporters across the country.

The National FFA Alumni and Supporters Advisory Committee plays a key role in guiding the strategic direction of alumni engagement, supporting agricultural education, and strengthening connections between local and state FFA chapters, Alumni and Supporter chapters, and industry partners. As Central Region Representative, Goedeken will serve as a voice for FFA Alumni and Supporters from states across the region, providing ideas and feedback on national initiatives and helping to build stronger networks that sustain agricultural education and FFA programs.

"I am honored to represent the Central Region and contribute to the ongoing success of FFA Alumni and Supporters," said Goedeken. "Supporting FFA has had a tremendous impact on my life, and I'm excited to help others continue to connect, give back, and support the next generation of agricultural leaders."

Goedeken's term will span from **2026 through 2029**, during which she will collaborate with fellow committee members and National FFA staff to advance programs that strengthen alumni

involvement, foster advocacy for agricultural education, and support local and state FFA initiatives nationwide.

The **National FFA Alumni and Supporters organization** is dedicated to connecting former FFA members and supporters with opportunities to advocate for and assist agricultural education. Through volunteerism, mentorship, and financial support, members play a crucial role in sustaining FFA's mission of developing students' potential for premier leadership, personal growth, and career success through agricultural education.

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BRYNN ALMGREN FFA OVERSEAS TRIP

Article by: Macey Peterworth

“ Truly seeing how connected and genuine agriculturalists are, was the biggest thing I took back. ”

When Brynn Almgren boarded a plane for Europe last January, she expected to see olive groves, vineyards, and historic architecture. What she didn't expect was to come home with a deeper understanding of global agriculture and a renewed passion for her own.

As one of just 75 FFA members selected nationwide for the International Leadership Seminar for State Officers (ILSSO), Almgren spent nearly two weeks exploring the agricultural industries of Spain and Portugal alongside other current and past state officers. The group toured farms, met with producers and learned firsthand how international policies, culture and climate shape the way people grow food around the world.

“It meant a lot to them that we were not there just to be tourists, but there to learn,” Almgren said. “We were young students who wanted to be involved in agriculture because they don't have that in Spain and Portugal. Nobody has a passion for agriculture there like we do here in Nebraska. So, it was so touching to me to see just how much we affected them just by being interested in what they were doing.”

Each day began with breakfast and a full schedule of two to three industry visits, ranging from dairy and beef cattle operation to olive oil and cork production facilities. The students traveled across the Iberian Peninsula, starting in Madrid, heading south toward the Mediterranean, and finishing in Lisbon, logging plenty of bus hours but soaking in a diverse range of agricultural systems along the way.

For Almgren, the most memorable moments came during visits to dairy and beef operations. Though the work looked familiar to what she sees back home in Nebraska, the emotion behind it was something else entirely.

“At one point in time the beef cattle operator started crying when I was talking to him,” Almgren said. “He was just so touched that not only are we 75 college age students who are wanting to learn about a totally



Brynn Almgren



Brynn (on the far right) meeting with European agriculturists.

different culture and a totally different environment, but still coming over to learn about agriculture."

She also noticed how different European agriculture can be from that of the United States. While U.S. producers often rely on technology and efficiency practices, European farmers face stricter Union-wide regulation. Hormone use, GMOs and even cattle castration are banned in much of Europe and operations risk closure if caught breaking those rules. Those differences made her reflect on how policy and culture influence every part of the food system.

"It really opened my eyes," Almgren said. "I've never really thought about international agriculture. I came from a small farming community and agriculture was always a part of my life and to see the huge impact agriculture has not just on the United States, but like worldwide was really eye opening."

The trip wasn't without challenges, especially when it came to language. Though Almgren had studied Spanish, speaking with native speakers was intimidating and adjusting to Portuguese overnight added another layer of complexity. But through it all, she said she learned the importance of patience, humility, and connection.

One highlight came when she met a John Deere executive in Spain who immediately recognized Nebraska as the home of the company's tractor testing facility.



Brynn & other college students learning more about European agriculture.

"That was crazy that this CEO of the Spanish facility of John Deere knew where Nebraska was and what we do," Almgren said. "Knowing the impact that the US has worldwide, but also truly seeing how connected and genuine agriculturalists are, was the biggest thing I took back."

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“ Nobody has a passion for agriculture there like we do here in Nebraska. ”

The experience reminded Almgren that agriculture is more than an industry, it's a community built on shared dedication. Seeing that devotion firsthand helped her understand what true passion for one's work really looks like.

"No matter what your passion is, it can be your world," Almgren said. "That's truly what it was for the agriculturalist. Their passion was what they were doing, whether it was farming cork or being an Iberian ham producer, that was their passion and it like really showed."

Outside of FFA, Almgren is a sophomore at University of Nebraska-Lincoln majoring in Nutrition and Exercise Science (Pre-Physical Therapy) with a minor in Entrepreneurship through UNL's Engler program. Almgren is also a member of Kappa Delta sorority and serves on the Engler Recruit Team. When Almgren is not studying or volunteering, she enjoys spending time with her family and friends.

Looking back, Almgren hopes other young people take away one message from her experience: never stop looking beyond your own community.

"Don't limit yourself to what's in your community," Almgren said. "Truly look outside and find opportunities to learn something from somewhere or someone else."



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CLAIRE STUTZMAN NEBRASKA STATE STAR IN AG PLACEMENT



Claire Stutzman is Named the Nebraska State Star in Ag Placement at the 2025 Nebraska FFA Convention.

High Level of Accomplishments and Even Higher Goals

Article by: Joe Baldassare

Claire Stutzman, a student with a high level of achievement, near the top of her class academically, was the winner of this prestigious honor at the Nebraska State FFA Convention this April.

Her father, Sam Stutzman, manages a successful swine farrowing operation, and her mother, Melissa Stutzman, is a teacher in the West Point-Beemer school district. Claire is the oldest of four children. She has two younger sisters and a brother.

Claire has been a very active member of the West Point FFA Chapter and has participated in many CDE and LDE activities including Public Speaking, Livestock Management, Conduct of Chapter Meetings and Parliamentary Procedure. She applied for Swine Placement proficiency and was alternate to the top at state twice. Some of her other school activities included Girls Golf, Future Problem Solvers, Speech Team, and Quiz Bowl.

Claire's SAE program included working for Ronnfeldt Farms,



Claire Processing Newborn Pigs in the Farrowing Room.

a confinement swine operation, starting in the eighth grade and continuing throughout high school. She was always a trustworthy and dedicated employee. Her primary tasks included running the farrowing room. She focused on honing her swine management skills and broadening her knowledge of being a good steward of her sows and litters.

According to her agriculture teacher and FFA advisor, Mr. Lee Schroeder; "Claire set her goals high from the start" and "always tries to stay up to date with records and never gets behind on them." "What sets her apart is a diligent dedication to doing the right thing all the time. She is an outstanding member and student."

She is currently attending Kansas State University and is majoring in Animal Science, and plans in her future to attend Veterinary School at KSU. Claire has set her career goals high and wishes to become a "Veterinary Swine Specialist" in her future.

PARKER NAPIER NEBRASKA STATE STAR IN AGRIBUSINESS



Parker's Lawn Mowing Business

Article by: Macey Peterworth

Fifth grade wasn't full of fractions and photosynthesis for Parker Napier but instead his mind was set on getting a loan to buy his first mower. Napier started his business, Parker's Lawn Mowing, back in 2017 only offering mowing at first but is now a full-service lawn care business in Ewing, Neb.

Napier was named State Star in Agribusiness for his business, Parker's Lawn Mowing, at the 97th Nebraska FFA Convention.

"Being named state star in agribusiness was one of my top 3 moments," Napier said. "There's no better feeling than hearing your name called in front of thousands of people."

Currently, Napier's business services 30 yards, 2 cemeteries and over 80 customers. Napier said his equipment consists of 5 mowers, a 20 foot landscape trailer, multiple weed eaters, blowers, a 100 gallon gas tank, fertilizer spreaders, sprayers, dethatches and lots more.

"When I first started I only had one mower and 5 customers," Napier said. "My services have changed also from starting my business only offering mowing, I now include mowing, dethatching, fertilizing, reseeding, sprinkler setup, aerating, tree trimming, and fall cleanups."

Article continues on the next page...





Napier graduated from Summerland Public Schools in May 2025. Summerland Public Schools is a merger consisting of the Clearwater, Ewing and Orchard communities, that opened back in 2021.

"My first year at Summerland, 2021-2022, was the first year that Summerland FFA was all together under one roof," Summerland FFA Chapter Advisor, Jacob Goldfuss said. "FFA was new to everyone besides the kids from Orchard, so it took some time to gain confidence and traction as a young chapter."

During Napier's freshman year, Goldfuss approached him after learning about his mowing business and discussed the opportunity to keep his records in AET to apply for his proficiency.

"At the time it sounded like a lot of work and I didn't want to do it," Napier said. "Eventually he got me talked into it, and after spending days and days doing records we finally got it finished."

"I am happy that he listened to me when I told him to apply and believed me when I told him I thought he could win," Goldfuss said. "He wasn't afraid to take advantage of an opportunity presented

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to him and never gave up no matter how long the application was or how tired he got."

Napier started this business when he was 14, so he couldn't drive yet. Napier said he had to have his dad drive him around and take him to dump grass.

"A challenge I have faced running this business was when I couldn't drive," Napier said. "That really made things hard for me because I always had to schedule my work when my dad was available."

Napier said FFA has really taught him communication. Competing in AgSales taught him how to be a businessman, Napier also said when his FFA chapter sold Brevant seed to local farmers, it really built his confidence and took him out of his shell.

"I think the biggest way I have seen him grow is his confidence," Goldfuss said. "Through the application and interview process I watched him become so much more confident in him and his business."

Napier's FFA advisor, Goldfuss, said what really made Napier's project stand out was the size and volume of the business. The town of Ewing relies on Parker's Lawn Mowing and Napier takes a lot of pride in giving back to his community.

"The kid really loves his hometown; he loves Ewing and is proud to be from there," Goldfuss said. "He has an entry in the parade every summer, donates t-shirts/jerseys every year to the t-ball baseball and softball programs and has apparel people can buy and wear."

Napier said through his experience he has learned many things. From basic accounting skills to record keeping, Napier said he wants to use these skills to build onto his current business to include custom drone applicators.

"Some advice I would give other FFA members is to just stick with it," Napier said. "I wasn't a fan of AET and plugging in all of my records at all. There were so many times where I asked myself if this was even worth it, but as you can see it is. In the end all I can say is work hard, keep good records, and stick with it."



MEET THE COUNCIL

Jill Goedeken

Jill F. Goedeken has been a member of the Nebraska FFA Alumni & Supporters Council since 2004. She is a true example that you do not have to have worn the "Blue Jacket" to be passionate about FFA. Having seen the impact FFA had on the lives of their three children, Jill became involved first at the local level with the Lakeview FFA Alumni & Supporters, and then with the encouragement of friend and neighbor Bob Clausen, she became involved at the state level. Over the years she has held numerous offices and served on numerous committees at both the local and state levels. She feels very privileged to have had the opportunity to serve as the director of the Nebraska State FFA chorus at the state convention for 16 years. Jill also served on the Nebraska FFA Foundation Board. She has been the recipient of the Honorary Chapter and State degrees, the Lakeview FFA Foundation and Outstanding Service Award, the Nebraska Outstanding Achievement Award and the Al Sick Distinguished Service Award.

In her life, Jill is passionate about her faith, her family, agriculture, and education. She has spent her life passionate about these things and finding ways to support and be of service to all of them. She strives to be of assistance to any FFA member, FFA Advisor, FFA Chapter, or FFA Alumni & Supporters Chapter that she comes into contact with. Her passion for youth, education, and agriculture are all combined into one awesome organization – FFA.

Jill and her husband Roger have three grown children, Bryan & Deidre and grandchildren Donovan, Mecklen, Liam, and Rosalie of Plaza, North Dakota; Kyle & Jill and grandchildren Kade and Kendall of Platte Center, NE; and Jasey & Darren Reinhart and grandchildren Kole, Luke, and Emma of Columbus, NE. The Goedekens operate a grain and cow-calf farming operation north of Columbus. Jill retired from teaching music at Lakeview Community Schools in 2022.

Jill feels that FFA has been a true blessing to her children, and that the FFA Alumni & Supporters has been a blessing to her too. This FFA Alumni & Supporters life member, who never wore the "Blue Jacket", could not be more grateful for this organization that has enabled her to learn, grow, and share her passion with others.



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&
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2026 NEBRASKA FFA ALUMNI & SUPPORTERS ANNUAL CONFERENCE / AWARDS BANQUET

January 16 & 17, 2026 • Valentine, NE

Friday, January 16th

Nebraska FFA Alumni & Supporters

Council Meeting 8:00 a.m.

Niobrara Lodge, 803 East Hwy 20,
Valentine, NE (Registration Packets available)

Plus One Manufacturing, 12:30 p.m.
39476 US Hwy 20, Valentine, NE

Tour CSS Farms, 2:15 p.m.
35550 Boiling Springs Road, Cody, NE

Tour C Market,
101 Cherry Street, Cody, NE
(Store run by Cody-Kilgore Students)

Tour Sandhills Boot Company,
102 N Walnut Street, Cody, NE

Supper hosted by Cody-Kilgore FFA Chapter
(Registration Packets available)

Friday evening Social at Bolo Beer Company,
420 East 1st Street, Valentine, NE

Saturday, January 17th

Nebraska FFA Alumni & Supporters

Annual Meeting 8:00 a.m.

Niobrara Lodge, 803 East Hwy 20,
Valentine, NE (Registration Packets available)

Saturday Morning Tours 9:00 a.m.
(Tour #1 attendees & Tour #2 attendees will switch locations
following lunch)

- Tour #1 - Golden Prairie Bison,
39953 NE 12, Valentine, NE
(\$25 fee for this tour)

- Tour #2 - Shop & Explore Valentine,
 - Centennial Hall Museum,
3rd & Malcolm Street
 - Broken Spoke Boutique,
205 North Main Street
 - Plains Trading Company Booksellers,
269 N Main Street
 - Young's Western Wear,
143 N Main Street

Lunch hosted by Valentine FFA 11:30 p.m.
(Registration Packets Available)

Luncheon Guest Speakers

- Student Teacher Scholarship Recipients
- Leadership Scholarship Recipients

Tour Niobrara Valley Vineyards 3:30 p.m.
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Pre-Banquet Social 5:00 p.m.
Niobrara Valley Vineyards

Awards Banquet 6:00 p.m.
Niobrara Valley Vineyards

Dinner
Dessert Auction
Awards Presentation
Silent & Live Auctions

Online Registration Available Beginning November 1st at:

<https://bit.ly/2026FFAAAlumniSupportersConventionRegistration>

Early Bird Registration Fee - \$50.00 – November 1st - December 31, 2025

Late Registration Fee - \$60.00 – January 1 - January 9, 2026

Housing available at:

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Room Rate: \$95 + tax & fees Suite Rate: \$100 + tax & fees

Hotel Reservation Deadline - January 1, 2026



The 2026 NE FFA Alumni & Supporters Community Service project will be a food drive for the Valentine Extra Helpings Food Pantry.

We encourage all in attendance to bring a non-perishable, long shelf-life food item to support this project.



Extra Helpings Food Pantry

Conference Schedule Subject to Change

NE FFA ALUMNI & SUPPORTERS CONFERENCE REGISTRATION

1. If registering online, please register individually.

Online registration will open November 1st at:

<https://bit.ly/2026FFAAAlumniSupportersConventionRegistration>

2. To register with paper registration form, fill out the form below and send along with payment to NE FFA Alumni & Supporters, 1871 Hwy 6, Saronville, NE 68975.
3. Early Bird Registration (November 1, through December 31, 2025) \$50.00.
4. Late Registration (January 1, 2026 through January 9, 2026) will be \$60.00.
5. Conference fee is due to NE FFA Alumni & Supporters, 1871 Hwy 6, Saronville, NE 68975 by January 11, 2026



NEBRASKA FFA ALUMNI AND SUPPORTERS

Last Name: _____

First Name: _____

Address, City, State, Zip: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

Which FFA Chapter, FFA Alumni & Supporters Chapter, or Agri-Business do you represent?

I am...

- An FFA Advisor
- An FFA Alumni & Supporters Member
- An Agri-Business Representative
- A supporter of the FFA program
- Other

I will attend the following (choose all that apply)

- Friday 12:30 p.m. Plus One Manufacturing
- Friday 2:15 p.m. Tour CSS Farms
- Friday p.m. Tour C Market
- Friday p.m. Tour Sandhills Boot Company
- Friday 7:00 p.m. Supper hosted by Cody-Kilgore FFA Chapter
- Friday Evening Social at Bolo Beer Company
- Saturday 8:00 a.m. Nebraska FFA Alumni & Supporters Annual Meeting
- *Saturday a.m. or p.m. Tour Golden Prairie Bison (\$25 admission)
- *Saturday a.m. or p.m. Shop Valentine
- Saturday 11:30 a.m. Lunch hosted by Valentine FFA Chapter
- Saturday 3:30 p.m. Tour Niobrara Valley Vineyards
- Saturday 5:00 p.m. Pre-Banquet Social
- Saturday 6:00 p.m. Awards Banquet

**The group will be divided into two groups. These tours will be offered again in the afternoon following lunch*

Fees

- Early Bird Registration \$50 - November 1 - December 31, 2025
- Late Registration \$60 - January 1-9, 2026
- Golden Prairie Bison Tour \$25

The 2026 NE FFA Alumni & Supporters Community Service project will be a food drive for the Valentine Extra Helpings Food Pantry. We encourage all in attendance to bring a non-perishable, long shelf-life food item to support this project.



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NEBRASKA FFA ALUMNI & SUPPORTERS EARN ACCOLADES AT THE 98TH NATIONAL FFA CONVENTION



National FFA Alumni & Supporters Outstanding Achievement Award goes to Dr. Matt Kreifels

The National FFA Alumni and Supporters Outstanding Achievement Award is the highest award presented to an individual. The purpose of the Outstanding Achievement Award is to recognize individual FFA Alumni members for their outstanding leadership and service to agricultural education, FFA, and FFA Alumni and Supporters. This is a very prestigious honor given to no more than three individuals per year at the national level.

Matt Kreifels is one of three 2025 recipients of the National Outstanding Achievement Award. Dr. Kreifels began his professional career as a student teacher in Ord, Nebraska in the fall semester of 2000. Following his student teaching experience and an International Exchange Program to Russia, he was the agriculture education instructor and FFA Advisor at Blair Community Schools from 2001 to 2010. While there he taught over 1,900 students in Agribusiness, Agricultural Entrepreneurship, Agriscience, Human Relations, Animal Science, Advanced Animal Science, Plant & Soil Science, and Horticulture. He grew the FFA chapter from 11 to 78 members with 16 State FFA Degrees, two state champion Creed Speakers, a state champion livestock judging team, 11 American Degrees, a National Proficiency Winner, and a Star Finalist.

From 2010-2018, Matt held a dual position as an ALEC Faculty member at the University of Nebraska Lincoln, and an Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources Career Field Specialist (Agricultural Education State Supervisor) with the Nebraska Department of Education.

Currently, Dr. Matt Kreifels serves as the program coordinator for the ALEC Agricultural Education and Skilled and Technical

Sciences teacher preparation program at the University of Nebraska Lincoln.

Colleague Stacie Turnbull writes, "Matt has demonstrated unwavering dedication to the values of leadership, service, and education that are at the core of FFA's vision. One of Matt's hallmark contributions has been to truly hear the needs of teachers and to then bring others together to help meet those needs. Matt works tirelessly to strengthen connections between stakeholders, community members, and teachers, to significantly enrich the FFA experience for countless students and their Advisors. Moreover, his ability to inspire others to contribute their time and resources to FFA initiatives exemplifies the spirit of service celebrated by this award. His many initiatives have had a tangible and lasting impact on both students and educators, creating a ripple effect of positive change throughout Nebraska."



Awards Chair, Rachel Tagge accepts the Gold Rating Award Certificate for the Nebraska FFA Alumni & Supporters Association.

Nebraska FFA Alumni & Supporters Association Recieves Gold Rating for Outstanding FFA Alumni & Supporters State Association Award

The Outstanding FFA Alumni Association Awards acknowledge the state association's outstanding service and achievements in meeting quality standards. This award is judged on a state's efforts and support in the areas of local chapter development, FFA Alumni member development, advocacy, Team Ag Ed, and business operations.



Rachel Tagge, Awards Chair of the Nebraska FFA Alumni & Supporters Association receives the 100% Lifetime Member State FFA Officer Team award.

100% Lifetime Member State FFA Officer Team

The Nebraska FFA Alumni & Supporters Association was recognized as one of ten states whose FFA Officer Team members are all Life members of the FFA Alumni & Supporters. Each year the Nebraska Association presents the Nebraska FFA State Officer team with their life memberships at the Alumni & Supporters Awards Banquet.



Jill Goedeken (Left) representing Lakeview FFA Alumni & Supporters accepts the Outstanding FFA Alumni & Supporters Silver Rating Chapter Award



Hailee Nelson (Left) representing Raymond Central FFA Alumni & Supporters accepts the Outstanding FFA Alumni & Supporters Silver Rating Chapter Award

Outstanding FFA Alumni & Supporters Chapter Award Lakeview & Raymond Central Receive Silver Rating

The Outstanding FFA Alumni and Supporters Chapter Awards honor local FFA Alumni Chapters for outstanding accomplishments and serve to encourage other FFA Alumni Chapters to further their own achievements. Applications are judged on Business Operations for Alumni & Supporters, Member Development, Advocacy for Agriculture Education, Agricultural Education and FFA Program Development, and Student Development



The Nebraska Delegation attending the National FFA Alumni and Supporters activities during the National FFA Convention were: (Left to Right) Matt Kreifels, Syracuse; Jill Goedeken, representing the Nebraska FFA Alumni & Supporters Council and Lakeview; Mark Nelson, Vicki Nelson, Dolly Hornung, Hailee Nelson, Les Hornung, Raymond Central; and Rachel Tagge, representing the Nebraska FFA Alumni & Supporters and Osceola.



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NATIONAL FFA CONVENTION RESULTS FOR 2025

Agriscience Fair

CHAPTER	STUDENTS
Elgin	Kierstyn Eisenhauer
Elgin	Brooke, Kinney & Aubrie Parks
Elm Creek	Reece Steiner
Freeman	Elijah Jensen & Carter Fricke
Johnson County Central	Briana Robeson & Riley Wellensiek
Johnson County Central	Ashley Beethe & Catherine Wendt
Johnson County Central	Molly Weber & Saige Rother
Johnson-Brock	Addison Grotrian & Lauren Behrends
Johnson-Brock	Charlotte Mutschke
Johnson-Brock	Noah Mutschke & Elliott Brommer
Johnson-Brock	Craig Anthony
Johnson-Brock	Katelyn Melvin
Norris	Avery Davis & Colten Navratil
Norris	Ava Schmutte & Olivia Zoubek
Norris	Mikayla Brenner
O'Neill	Suhani Chaudhari
West Holt	Elizabeth Olson & Ansley Cadwallader

Career Development Events and Leadership Development Events

CHAPTER	STUDENTS
Alliance	Kayel Lambert, Seth Meyring, Josie Sanders, Rozlyn Wills
Blue Hill	Carter Auten, Jack Canterbury, Tate Kosse, Billy Zimmerman
Central	Erika Donahue, Kiara Eppenbach, Marissa Tvrdy, Carlee Wolfe
Centura	Mason Janda
Emerson-Hubbard	Rachael Bousquet, Emelia Harral, Makayla Horak, Ava Luber, Rylinn Mitchell, Emily Stamm
Eustis-Farnam	Ashley Easterday, Haley Morain, Gage Rupp, Eli Schimmels
Eustis-Farnam	Hunter Kugler, Christian Maurer, Lauryn Ruda, Malakai White
Freeman	Kinley Bolyard, Wyatt Dorn, Andrew Jensen, Case Richardson
Gothenburg	Brooklyn Reiman
Gothenburg	Carson Reiman
Kearney	Rachel Covert, Savannah Kelliher, Jazmin Recroft, Alexia Saulsbury
Overton	Mason Dutro, Toby Orvis, Parker Walahoski, Paige Walahoski
Schuyler	Bela Jedlicka, Abigail Reyna, Addison Vavricek, Allison Vavricek
Stuart	Max Alder, Annie Ludwig, Thomas Paxton, Klaire Ramm, Paityn Sheffield, Kyra Tubbs, Brook Wallinger
Stuart	Dawson Heiser, Addisyn Ketteler, Luke Ludwig, MaKayla Menke, Benjamin Paxton, Hunter Tubbs
Sutherland	Zayn Green, Kaid Hogan, Keigan Kershner, Marshall Patrick
Tri County	Parker Person, Garrett Smidt, Jason Wehrman, Jacob Wollenburg
Wayne	Allan Brenner, Drew Miller, Lanee Rethwisch, Elijah Stecki
West Holt	Mason Crumrine, Nicholas Hansen, Lincoln Konrad, Drake Nemetz

DIVISION	RESULTS
Food Products and Processing Systems: Div 3	9th Place
Plant Systems: Div 4	9th Place
Social Science: Div 1	6th Place
Social Science: Div 2	10th Place
Environ Services/Natural Resource Systems: Div 6	8th Place
Food Products and Processing Systems: Div 6	6th Place
Power, Structural and Technical Systems: Div 6	3rd Place
Animal Systems: Div 4	9th Place
Food Products and Processing Systems: Div 5	7th Place
Plant Systems: Div 2	7th Place
Power, Structural and Technical Systems: Div 1	2nd Place
Social Science: Div 3	5th Place
Animal Systems: Div 6	9th Place
Plant Systems: Div 6	7th Place
Social Science: Div 5	10th Place
Plant Systems: Div 5	4th Place
Power, Structural and Technical Systems: Div 4	

West Holt	Kearsten Keogh, Aila Nowlin, Claire Sholes	Marketing Plan	Silver Team
York	Creighton Carlson, Carter Heath, Maggie McCarthy, Kali Wardyn	Agricultural Sales	Silver Team
York	Milan Babcock, Alexis Davis, Gladis Rodriguez, Lila Suhr	Poultry Evaluation	Silver Team

Proficiency Awards

CHAPTER	STUDENTS	RESULTS
Centennial	Cora Hoffschneider	Gold, 1st Place
St Paul	Sam Wells	Gold, Finalist

National FFA Band

Torin Baker	Colbie Brown
Kathryn Bartruff	Fyn Fasbender
Mavrix Butterfield	Mia Heyden
Trayton Christiansen	Connor King
Ayden Hunzeker	Brekyn Peterson
Josue Juan	
Emily Lyons	
Aiden Masek	
Layla Miller	
Makenna Quick	
Ryder Rezac	
Xavier Rudnik	

National FFA Chorus

DIVISION	RESULTS
Agricultural Sales - Entrepreneurship	Gold, 1st Place
Grain Production - Entrepreneurship/Placement	Gold, Finalist



National Talent Participant

Justin Eisenmann



JAYDEN RUF NEBRASKA'S STATE STAR IN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION



Rooted in Tradition, Ready for Tomorrow

Article by: Katy Wolff

At just 19 years old, Jayden Ruf already carries the weight of generations on his shoulders—and the drive to shape what comes next. Raised in a family deeply rooted in agriculture, Ruf lives with his brother in a new house on land they have worked hard to expand. Together, they are building a future that honors tradition while embracing innovation.

Ruf's journey into FFA felt like a natural extension of his upbringing. "Farming and ag—it's what I do, what I know," he said. Long before high school, he and his older brother Jordan Ruf had already purchased their first group of cows. Furthermore, when Jordan won the State Star award, Ruf saw a path he was eager to follow. "We already had the groundwork laid down," he said. "I wanted to chase it, too."

That early involvement with cattle gave Ruf a head start on his Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) through Cambridge FFA, but it also taught him one of the most valuable lessons of his FFA journey: the importance of record keeping. "We weren't great at it at first," he admitted. "But over the years, we got better. Now I know how important it is to have everything documented—especially when you are trying to grow something real."

Ruf's SAE also gave him real-world skills beyond the farm. "Interviewing was a big one," he said. "It is important to be able to talk to people—especially adults in the ag world. That is a skill everyone should practice."

While Ruf noted his improved communication skills, his advisor Rhiley Whipple saw something deeper unfolding as Ruf began to shoulder increasing obligations to his family, school work, and the farm. "I was always amazed at how well Jayden balanced his school life with his work and home life. I know that is a very hard balance for a high school student, but Jayden took on the responsibility of his growing SAE and everything that came with it with pure grit and determination."

Putting together the State Star application was no small feat either. "Just looking at it, I was like, 'Wow,'" Ruf said. "Individually entering every cow—it was painstaking. The actual farming part is easy. This was the hard part: getting all the records together."

As Ruf wrestled with the records, Whipple was there—not just as an advisor, but as a champion of his story. Whipple notes, "Jayden has the most incredible work ethic paired with the biggest heart. He works extremely hard to reach his goals and get things done. It was my job to remind Jayden that his project was awesome and his hard work deserved this type of recognition."

Ruf spent countless hours with Whipple, preparing for interviews, refining his records, and building a project that reflected both his work ethic and his family's legacy. "She never let me give up," he said. "We had the same end goal, and she was always there helping me hash out the details."

That shared commitment paid off. Jordan and Jayden Ruf became Whipple's first two State Star winners—a milestone that added both pride and pressure. "Dad, Grandpa, my brother—they were all helping me go through the numbers, supporting me," Ruf said. "I felt a lot of pressure to win, but I wanted to make them proud."

When his name was finally called, the moment was surreal. "It was nerve-wracking," he said. "We gave up Saturdays and evenings working on it. When I heard it, I was shocked. I have never experienced anything like that before. It was so rewarding."

Ruf's advice to younger FFA members is simple but heartfelt: "It's worth it. Don't give up. Keep your records straight and narrow. Have them ready—so when it's time, you're not scrambling."

Looking ahead, Ruf has big plans. He is considering getting his pilot's license to spray crops commercially and for their own operation and added he is currently working obtaining a commercial driver's license (CDL).

For Jayden Ruf, agriculture is not just a career—it is a calling. From junior high cattle purchases to state-level recognition, his story is one of grit, gratitude, and growth. And as he continues to build on his family's legacy, Ruf is proving that the future of farming is in good hands.



MEET THE COUNCIL

Matt McElfresh

Matt McElfresh is an Ag Property Claim Representative with Farm Bureau, where he applies his deep understanding of agriculture, education, and rural communities to support producers across Nebraska. Before joining Farm Bureau, Matt spent ten years as an educator, combining his passion for coaching with his commitment to developing future leaders. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Education from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and a Master's in Education Administration from the University of Nebraska at Kearney. A native of Sutton, Nebraska, Matt's agricultural roots run deep—he was an active member of FFA throughout high school and served as a State Vice President on the 2007–2008 Nebraska FFA Officer Team.

Since graduating college, Matt has remained dedicated to agricultural education, volunteering his time to help judge and coordinate state FFA events. He and his wife, Paige, are currently building a home outside of Seward, Nebraska, where they are raising their two young children, Mara and Rafe. When he's not working or volunteering, Matt enjoys spending time outdoors golfing, fishing, and hunting.

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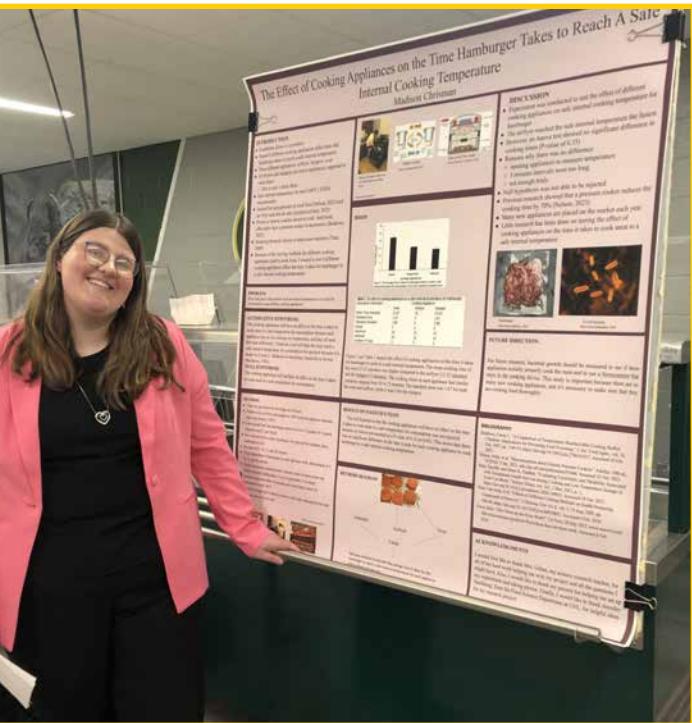


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MADISON CHRISMAN NEBRASKA'S STATE STAR IN AGRISCIENCE



No Ag Background, No Problem: Madison Chrisman's Rise to Nebraska's State Star in Agriscience

Article by: Katy Wolff

When Madison (Maddie) Chrisman first heard about FFA in middle school, she was convinced it wasn't for her. "I remember thinking, 'I'm never going to do FFA. I don't belong there,'" she laughs. But just a few years later, Chrisman is now a Central City FFA Alumni and stood on stage as Nebraska's 2025 State Star in Agriscience—a title earned through three years of rigorous research, mentorship, and personal growth.

Now, a freshman at the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK), Chrisman is soft-spoken but confident, with a clear passion for science and a noteworthy depth of knowledge. Her journey into agriscience began with encouragement from her parents and a willingness to try something new. "I didn't grow up in an ag background," Chrisman explains. "But I had friends in FFA, and I thought, why not?"

This shift was powerful. From doubting she belonged to standing center stage, Chrisman's journey did not just defy expectations—it inspired them. As her FFA advisor Jessica Brondel put it, "as a non-traditional agriculture student, she has demonstrated remarkable growth in her agricultural knowledge, her enthusiasm for research, and her commitment to helping others through her work."

Chrisman's first real inspiration came during an agriscience competition, followed by a sophomore-year biology project that would shape her future. She names her science teacher, Ms. Gillan, as a major influence. "She has such a strong science background. She sparked my interest in research."

Her FFA advisor, Alex Stocker, saw that spark early on. "Maddie is a really dedicated student who genuinely enjoyed doing research," Stocker says. "She had a lot of guidance and encouragement from her science teacher, Ms. Chelle Gillan who had a lot of connections and resources for Maddie to use and take her research to the next level."

With these connections, Chrisman reached out to researchers at the USDA Meat Animal Research Center (MARC) in Clay Center. That email led to a meeting with mentor Matt Crouse—and the beginning of a long-term engagement in scientific exploration.

Over the next three years, Chrisman completed not just one, but three major research projects:

- **Sophomore Year:** Chrisman tested dietary supplements in cows—methionine and guanidinoacetic acid—to evaluate their impact on calf performance.

- **Junior Year:** Chrisman compared cooking appliances (air fryer, Instapot, oven) to determine which appliance reached safe internal temperatures fastest in beef patties.
- **Senior Year:** Chrisman studied antibody transfer in lambs, analyzing variables like litter size, birth weight, dam age, and offspring sex.

Her favorite? "Definitely the sophomore year project," she says. "There were so many moving parts. I worked with lab techs, my mentor, and got my first real glimpse of what it's like to work in a lab."

During her busiest months, Chrisman spent full days at MARC weekly, balancing research with volleyball and other activities. "Some days I'd be up at six and not home until eleven," she recalls. "Even when I wasn't in the lab, I'd be on Zoom for hours."

The hands-on experiences taught her the intricate details of working in a lab. "The first skill I learned was how to use a pipette," Chrisman says. "It's so basic, but now in college labs, it's second nature." She also learned how to handle blood and serum samples—skills that will serve her well as she pursues a career as a physician's assistant.

Chrisman also credits her mentors—Matt Crouse and Dr. Brian Vander Ley—for providing not just supplies and lab space, but mentorship including guidance on data collection, statistics, and scientific writing. "They were passionate about their work, and that really inspired me," she says.

According to Stocker, "Maddie developed a lot of skills that not a lot of students get the opportunity to learn and participate in as a high school student." Brondel added, "Through her SAE projects, Maddie became more independent, developed a stronger work ethic, and learned to communicate her ideas clearly. Her confidence and professionalism have grown alongside her technical skills, making her a well-rounded and driven young leader."

The dedication to complete her projects carried into the State Star application. "The hardest part was just sitting down and

doing it," Chrisman admits. "Time management was huge. I tried to do something every day and keep my records updated."

Chrisman's FFA advisors also played a role supporting the application process. Stocker and Brondel encouraged her to apply for the State Star award. According to Stocker, "we both realized that she had a really good research project and a lot of experiences that would be extremely worthy of being a star candidate."

Chrisman's FFA experience extended far beyond research. She competed in poultry judging (placing third at state), participated in career development events, and served on her chapter's officer team for three years—first as reporter, then secretary, and finally president. "FFA taught me leadership, teamwork, and how to speak up," she says. "Even though I didn't grow up in ag, I learned so much."

Her advice to students without an ag background? "There are so many opportunities, even if you start knowing nothing. FFA isn't just about farming—it's about finding your path, learning about yourself, and growing as a leader."

Chrisman's time in FFA didn't just teach her how to run experiments—it taught her how to manage time, communicate with mentors, and stay curious. Her early efforts helped lay the groundwork for a career as a physician's assistant. "The skills I've gained—especially time management and knowing how to talk to professionals—will help me every step of the way."

Though Chrisman's long-term goal is to become a physician's assistant, she's not done with research. "I still want to do more—I'm just not sure what kind yet," she says. "College is full of possibilities, and I'm excited to get involved in campus research and see where science takes me next."

STUDENT TEACHER SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT ERICA BROWN



This fall, I had the incredible opportunity to complete my student teaching experience at Scottsbluff High School under the guidance of Mr. Alan Held. During my time there, I taught a range of agricultural education courses, including Introduction to Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources; Basic Welding; Plant Science; Power Structure Technology; and Animal Biology. My students ranged from freshmen discovering agriculture for the first time to seniors preparing for life beyond high school, each bringing their own energy and enthusiasm to the ag classroom.

One of the highlights of my experience was coaching Scottsbluff's Conduct of Chapter Meetings (CCM) team. Working with the freshmen members allowed me to grow as a future FFA advisor while helping them strengthen their leadership, communication, and teamwork skills. Watching their confidence build and their excitement for FFA grow throughout the season was incredibly rewarding.

Another memorable experience was attending the National FFA Convention & Expo in Indianapolis, this time as an advisor rather than a student. For some of our members, it was their first convention, and for others, their first flight. Experiencing the event through their eyes reminded me just how powerful FFA can be in shaping students' goals, passions, and sense of belonging within the organization.

My semester at Scottsbluff was filled with growth, learning, and a few welding sparks along the way. This experience reaffirmed why I chose to pursue agricultural education: to make a difference in students' lives and help them discover their potential in agriculture and beyond. I'm so grateful to the students, staff, and community of Scottsbluff for welcoming me with open arms and making my student teaching experience one I'll never forget.

Nebraska agricultural education continues to make an impact across the state, and I feel incredibly fortunate to have started my teaching journey in a program and community that truly represent the best of what Nebraska FFA stands for.



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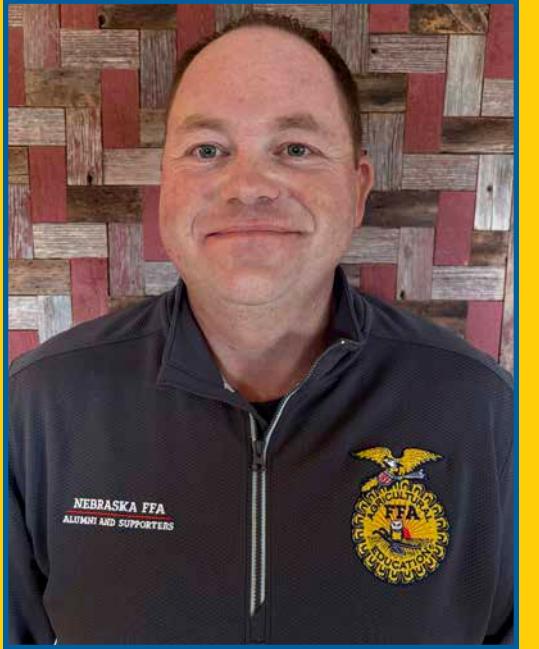
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MEET THE COUNCIL

BRETT NUNNENKAMP



Brett Nunnenkamp grew up on his family's farm west of Sutton, Nebraska and still resides today, where his passion for agriculture took root at an early age. A 2002 graduate of Sutton High School and a 2006 graduate of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Brett began his agricultural journey in 1996 when he started growing pumpkins for his SAE project, The Country Pumpkin, LLC. What began as a small venture blossomed into a thriving agribusiness encompassing 10 acres and more than 60 varieties of pumpkins, squash, and gourds—most sold right from the farm.

Brett's hard work and entrepreneurial spirit earned him recognition as the Nebraska State Star in Agribusiness (2002) and the American Star in Agribusiness (2005). After over two decades of success in the pumpkin business, he chose to retire from full-time pumpkin production in 2019 to focus on his family's corn and soybean operation, as well as their cow-calf herd, which includes both registered Simmental and commercial cattle.

FFA played a major role in shaping Brett's leadership and dedication to agriculture, and in 2016 he was elected to serve on the council. In 2019, he was elected Treasurer, a position he continues to hold today. Brett is also involved with the Sutton FFA Alumni Chapter, a Clay County Farm Bureau Board Member, and Trinity Lutheran Church Treasurer. When he's not busy on the farm, Brett enjoys spending time with his four nieces—Collins, Oakley, Porter, and Landyn—and his nephew, McCoy, with hopes that they too will become future FFA members.



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CORA HOFFSCHNEIDER NATIONAL PROFICIENCY FINALIST IN AG SALES & ENTREPRENEURSHIP



"The ugliest trees are cut from the trunk into smaller branches to be sold as cuttings, and to use for the decorated porch pots. The stems are then stored in tubs of water to keep them fresh until they are used. When operating a chainsaw, it is important to follow the safety precautions of wearing leather gloves, safety glasses, boots, and hair pulled back."



"The tree shaker is located in the back of the shed to make it easier to transport the purchased trees to the customer's vehicle. I make sure all dead needles and any other materials are out of the trees before they are netted and taken inside to decorate. While I am not always the operator of the tree shaker, I shake the trees when business is slow or when I am preparing to go on a delivery route. It is important to wear safety glasses and leather gloves when operating the tree shaker."

2025 NATIONAL AWARD WINNER Christmas Trees, A First Step to an Entrepreneurial Future

Article by: Joe Baldassare

Centennial FFA member, Cora Hoffschneider, is the daughter of Chad and Lana Hoffschneider, and was raised on a family farm South of Waco, Nebraska. She is the oldest of three children and has had outstanding support and encouragement from both of her parents. Her mother who, also works at a bank, is a past Nebraska State FFA Officer.

Cora had an excellent record of FFA participation. She did almost everything she could do, and was an active FFA member all her years in FFA. She held chapter offices for three years and was the Chapter President in her senior year. Her participation in Leadership Development Events included Livestock Evaluation, Dairy Evaluation, Farm Business

Management, both of which she competed at the state level. She competed in Floriculture, Ag Sales, Junior Prepared Public Speaking, Conduct of Chapter Meetings, Agriscience Fair, Employment Skills, and Parliamentary Procedure contests. CDE contest participation included Livestock Management and Farm Business Management. She tried at as many contests as she could, and was a frequent qualifier for state contests. Cora achieved the Nebraska State FFA Degree and the American FFA Degree. FFA activities were not her only focus. School and community activities also comprised a large part of her interest. Cora was a leader and active participant in her 4-H Club projects.



"In my second year of business, I started making decorated porch pots with the trimmings from the trees. I add lots of greenery into a flower pot and add a bow and other Christmas fillers such as sparkly sticks and birch wood. I price them based on the cost of input. This year, I added floral bouquets that I created in a glass vase with greenery from the trees along with red roses and baby's breath. Through these products, I have been able to utilize my creativity and eye for design."

She was active in her church and youth group. At school, she competed on the Track Team, Softball Team, and the Dance Team. She was a member of the Student Council, and was also inducted into the National Honor Society.

She started a more traditional Supervised Agriculture Experience program with show Lambs at the beginning of her Agriculture Education FFA experience, but Cora decided that she wanted to start a new unique entrepreneurship enterprise selling Christmas trees. She continued with her lamb project, but purchased trees from Minnesota and resold them from her family's farm. Learning about the trees, how to merchandise them, and discovering how to sell other related items expanded her skills. She decided to diversify her products: As well as selling the trees, she made wreaths from the excess tree branches with home-made bows, and also made and marketed Porch Pots. She learned to keep accurate financial records. She learned about taxes when she discovered she had earned enough from the sale of trees and related seasonal products, that she needed to file for income taxes. Her younger brother plans to continue with this SAE program in the future.

Cora's Agricultural Teacher and FFA Advisor at Centennial High School, Ms. Holly Luettel, said of her, "Cora is an ideal example of a student who is successful because she works hard, takes initiative, and is not afraid of something new." and "I teased her that I might fail her in Agriculture class so she would never leave."

As a student at the University of Nebraska Cora is majoring in Agriculture Business. She was accepted into the Engler Agribusiness Entrepreneurship Program in the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources.



"Decorating the wreaths with bows is an 'extra' for my business. My grandma and I work together in making all of the bows for every wreath. Customers like it when the wreaths come with a bow because it is less work for them, and they like the ribbons that we pick out. I attach the bows using wire and pipe cleaners. They are easy to remove if the customer doesn't like them. We use a combination of different ribbons so we have something for everyone."

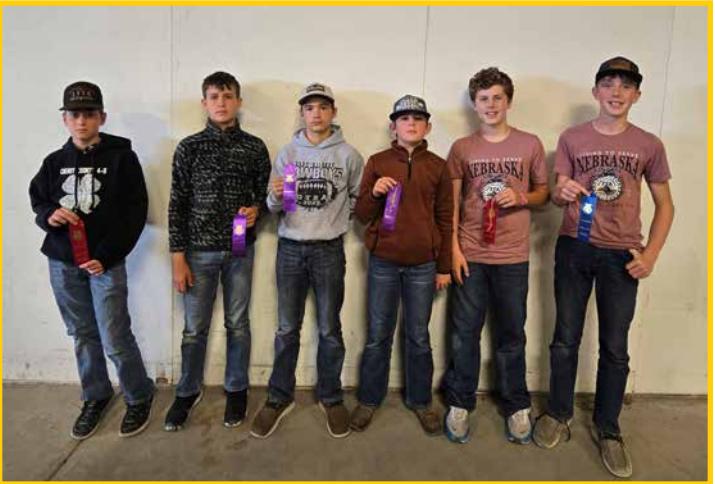
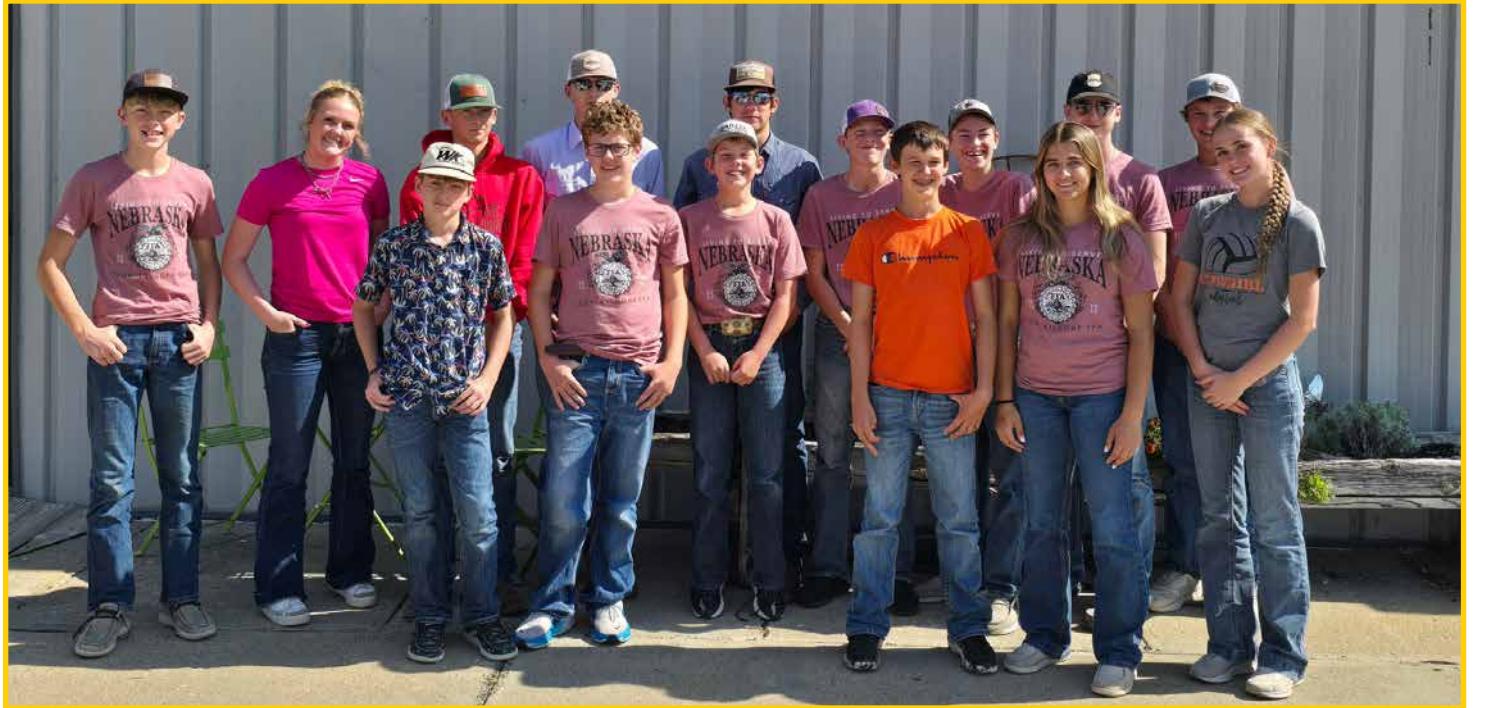
"While my family members are helping me with other tasks in the shed, I am running the cash register and talking with customers. Customers wait in line to checkout with their products, and I process their transactions. I use a sales receipt book to track all of the transactions. I am very friendly and talkative with my customers. While this is happening, my dad helps run the tree shaker, which shakes all of the dead needles out of the trees before they go to each of the customers' homes."



"The wreaths come off the delivery truck in a stack tied together with twine. Each stack contains four wreaths. Once taken off of the delivery truck, the piles of wreaths are taken apart and laid on the floor to get misted with water, face side up. This helps keep them looking fresh and alive. All of the trees also get laid on the ground, sorted out by kind and height. After all the trees and wreaths are unloaded from the truck, then we start to organize and set everything up in a neat manner."

Addendum: On October 30, 2025 at the National FFA Convention in Indianapolis, Indiana, Cora was awarded the National FFA Proficiency Award in Agricultural Sales – Entrepreneurship for 2025.

CODY-KILGORE FFA CHAPTER TO HOST FRIDAY EVENING MEAL



2026 State FFA Alumni & Supporters Conference Meal to be held at Cody-Kilgore High School

Article by: Jill Goedeken

Cody-Kilgore High School will be the site of our Friday, January 16th evening meal during the 2026 State FFA Alumni and Supporters Conference. Located in Cherry County, the high school has an enrollment of just 56 students. Even though they are a small sized school, FFA Advisor, Justin Nollette, says they are big at heart and the entire school population is involved in numerous activities.

One of the things he is most proud of about Cody-Kilgore is the fact that the kids are involved in everything. The students are able to balance being in band, one act, sports, and FFA and be competitive in all activities. Students in the Cody-Kilgore FFA Chapter are well known for, and take great pride in, giving speeches and the FFA Creed. They have also been very successful in proficiencies, LDE's, and earning their State Degrees.

In their FFA District, Cody-Kilgore has been very successful not only in LDE's, but also Livestock Judging. Being a livestock judge himself, Mr. Nollette has coached his Junior High Livestock Judging teams to first and second place in the District the last two years proving that he has a really good group of young members coming up in the future. Cody-Kilgore FFA can also boast about their Champion Proficiency in Poultry Production and having the District Champion in Ag Mechanics several years in a row.

Community support is a big asset to the Cody-Kilgore FFA Chapter and in turn the Cody-Kilgore FFA Chapter supports the

community. Whether it be fruit sales, greenhouse sales, or the labor auction, the community supports the FFA 100%. In turn, the Cody-Kilgore FFA supports the community through the greenhouse which provides potted plants to all the community businesses as a way to thank them for their support.

A very unique feature about the community of Cody is their grocery store, the Circle C Market which, according to Facebook, "is the result of a community wanting to provide a unique learning lab for the youth and provide a vital service to the community." This fully school-run grocery store is coordinated by the school's business teacher, Liz Ravenscroft, who also teaches an entrepreneurship class that works with the FFA greenhouse in marketing their plants. Employment opportunities provided by Circle C Market include checking out groceries and stocking shelves all during after school hours and during the summer months. The Circle C Market is one of the Agri-Business tour stops during the Nebraska FFA Alumni & Supporters Conference.

Mr. Nollette says, "We are looking forward to having the FFA Alumni and Supporters come to Cody, Nebraska. Not many people have ever seen Cody. They get about as far as Valentine and that's as far as they go. It will be great to have people around to see our chapter and we're looking forward to the great opportunity for our FFA Chapter members to learn and grow as individuals while interacting with former FFA members."



NATIONAL PROFICIENCY FINALIST IN GRAIN PRODUCTION



Sixth Generation Farmer, Sam Wells, is National Proficiency Finalist in Grain Production

Article by: Jill Goedeken

2017 marked the beginning of Sam Wells' career as an employee of Wells Brothers Farm in St. Paul, Nebraska. Beginning with entry level jobs such as rouging corn, power washing farm equipment, laying irrigation pipe, moving bales, and mowing, Sam has moved up the ladder in this grain production enterprise to making agronomic decisions, monitoring irrigation water quality, soil testing and nutrient management, precision agriculture, and has incorporated technology into every aspect of the operation. With an initial goal of earning some spending money and possibly saving some money for his education after high school, Sam has become a real asset to the operation and an integral part of Wells Brothers Farm.

Wells Brothers Farm is located in the North Loup River Valley just north of Elba. The flat fertile soil on their farm is the perfect setting for this FFA member to excel in his Supervised Agricultural Experience. Wells Brothers Farm raises corn, soybeans, alfalfa, and cattle. Sam's National Proficiency Finalist area of Grain Production only includes the grain enterprise of this operation. Sam says the main areas of focus of his grain production placement proficiency during his FFA career were agronomic decision making, communication, equipment operation, and education.

Sam's number one focus has been agronomic decision making. He says, "I am always identifying weeds, insects, and diseases. I do the majority of the crop scouting on the Wells Family Farm, and I contribute a great deal to our fertilizer application rates, our chemical applications, and basically everything agronomic."

Communication is another skill that is a strength that Sam Wells exhibits while performing the duties required on the farm.

Being a team leader and communicator is important to the success of the Wells Brothers Farm and Sam has a lot of experience in this area. "I have younger cousins and siblings in the operation and it's my job to be a great team leader especially when it comes to irrigation season. I am the leader of irrigation crews, laying pipe with people who don't have a lot of experience with that. It is my duty to be an excellent communicator and team leader and I'm proud of the job I've done in leading the team and teaching the members of the team the proper techniques." Sam's brother Jacob and sister Jillian are also part of the operation along with his cousins Garrett and Caden.

The third focus for Sam on the Wells Brothers Farm is being a great equipment operator. While working on the farm he has harrowed, stock chopped, strip-tilled, pulled the disc with the John Deere 4440, run the grain cart, and used the Great Plains 20 foot drill while planting the rye crop. Sam says, "I need to know what's going on and how to operate every piece of equipment in many different situations and be able to react to those situations properly."

Sam says, "My number one growth objective that I want to focus on is marketing. I watch markets everyday looking for trends. I want to learn how to market the Wells Family grain the best way possible in the future. I've been trying to learn a lot about grain

marketing, futures, how to trade, and how to ask for bids. That's one thing that I've prioritized for 2025. I need to learn to be a great marketer in order to get the most out of every bushel we raise."

Being a mentor to his cousins has led him to pursue a career as an Agriculture Educator. Attending Iowa Western Community College, he enjoys teaching others younger than himself which has prepared him for a future leadership role in the classroom. St Paul FFA Advisor, Mr. Boyd Bowder, shared that Sam helped prepare the Agronomy Team for competition which earned Sam the State Agronomy Champion title and the St. Paul Agronomy Team a second place finish at the State Competition.

Sam is quick to sing his praises for Mr. Bowder. He says, "Mr. Bowder is probably the single biggest influence on my life. He was an amazing mentor to me. The reason why I want to be an Agriculture Educator is because of Boyd Bowder. He brings a certain energy to the room that is contagious. He is a self-less



I just want to be a bright light in the industry and I want to be a positive influence on others.

person who often times doesn't sleep at night because he cares about his kids. He's always going to lift you up and send you uplifting texts. He is a premier Agricultural Educator in the State of Nebraska."

The admiration goes both ways. Boyd Bowder says of Sam, "He is a hardworking individual who loves everything about grain production whether it's from the integral first steps such as soil preparation and nutrient replacement all the way through harvest. He has a hand in making the Wells Brothers operation high quality and the best it can be."

Sam Wells has had an illustrious FFA career. Besides being the Chapter president, his list of individual and team awards includes: State Champion Agronomy, State Range Judging Champion, Ag Communication Top Ten, 2nd place Diversified Crop Production, 2nd place State Agronomy Team, State Forestry Champion Team and National Silver medal. Mr. Bowder says, "If there was an FFA activity going on, Sam was involved. He was a great student to have be a part of our chapter."

At the 98th National FFA Convention Sam Wells also received his American FFA Degree which with being a National Proficiency Finalist was the perfect culmination to his FFA career.

Sam gives much credit for his success to his grandpa Errol, his dad Justin, and his two uncles Kent & Jay, who have mentored him through the years. "I wouldn't be a National Finalist without their help with the application and the years of experience on Wells Brothers Farm."

When looking to the future Sam says, "My main goal in life is to positively impact the Agricultural Industry. Whether that's in the classroom or in production agriculture, I just want to positively impact the industry. I don't know if there's a place for me on the farm, but I know I can for sure be an impact in the classroom. If there's a place for me back on the farm, I'll 100% be a part of Wells Brothers Farm, but if not I'm perfectly okay with impacting the youth and the future of agriculture by being in the classroom.

I just want to be a bright light in the industry and I want to be a positive influence on others."



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VALENTINE FFA CHAPTER SPOTLIGHT

Article by: Whitney Winter



Valentine FFA chapter, from the city of hearts, has stolen their community's heart in their efforts in preparing the future generations of leaders and innovators. The chapter was formed in 1953 and has grown into an award-winning chapter under the current advisement of Brent Nollette, Ag Teacher & FFA Advisor, and Shawna Houdek, Ag Teacher & Co-FFA Advisor. The Valentine FFA Chapter was awarded the top secondary program in the state of Nebraska in 2023.

When Nollette moved to Valentine in 2014, he began cultivating a curriculum to aid in creating the next generations of agricultural leaders and pioneers. When 2020 rolled around and Houdek joined the Valentine FFA chapter as co-advisor, she assisted

in developing hands-on learning opportunities thorough the enhancement of the shop's equipment, building a greenhouse, creating a cow/calf animal lab, and establishing a food lab.

What began as the animal lab has hence grown into an enterprise which finishes calves the chapter raises. The Ag Business classes then sell retail cuts of meat to the community. This expansion has "created community support for this project that includes working with a local landowners and feed store to provide us with feed and space to house the animals and ultimately creating income for the FFA chapter," Houdek said.

Nollette and Houdek both agreed they continue to see great success amongst their members as "they continue to reach their



poles and barrels, running gates, sorting calves, and working the stripping chutes.

The Annual Heart City Bull Bash is another event chapter members volunteer to help with. According to Houdek, members help set up panels and pens for the bulls on Valentine's Main Street and assist with the livestock judging contest.

Not only can you see members volunteer to help their community in autumn, raking leaves across the city, but also their school. Members can be seen busy working the concession stand during their annual alumni hamburger feed at the Homecoming football game.

If you cannot see these outgoing FFA members, maybe you have heard about their accomplishments on the radio waves. This year RioMax sponsored a radio show highlighting the local FFA chapters. Members prepare local FFA news from competition results to calendar updates and agriculture tidbits, to be recorded every other week on the radio.

The 2025-2026 chapter officers include President Reeves Witte, Vice President Grace Murphy, Secretary Annalena Nelson, Treasurer River Doyle, Sentinel Garrett Cumbow, Reporter Haddie Mundorf, and Parliamentarian Blake Boone.

Alongside the advisors and chapter officers, members plan in serving the Saturday noon meal at the 2026 Nebraska FFA Alumni Convention which will be held January 16th and 17th in Valentine. The chapter will also help out, as needed, with the banquet which will be held at Niobrara Valley Vineyards.



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ARTHUR COUNTY FFA CHAPTER



Not just cattle and more cattle, Arthur County FFA Chapter has a diverse cross section of interests and abilities.

Article by: Jill Goedeken

Even though the Arthur County FFA Chapter is located in the Sandhills of Nebraska, not every Arthur County FFA member's Supervised Agriculture Experience is focused on cattle. "We're more than just cows and plows!" says Kristin Rut, chapter advisor. "We're very proud of the fact that we have a lot of diversity in what our FFA members are interested in."

When taking a moment to reflect back on the success of the chapter it is evident that the Chapter's niches are speaking events such as Public Speaking, Natural Resource Speaking, Creed Speaking, Ag Demo, and the Livestock Management Career Development Event. Since 2019, Arthur County FFA has the bragging rights to four state champions in Ag Demo, three state champions in Natural Resource speaking, a state champion in Cooperative Speaking, Creed Speaking, Livestock Management, and a second place at state in Senior Public Speaking. They also earned the top silver at state in Parliamentary Procedure, not to mention numerous winners at the district level.

These accolades didn't come without challenges however. Like any other small school the students at Arthur County High School are involved in everything that is available to them. This brings about the reason for the biggest challenge of coordinating practice times. At the time of this interview, Arthur County FFA members were busy preparing for District LDE's. The normal school week for the Wolves is Monday through Thursday from 7:40 a.m. to 3:46 p.m. so the coaches and sponsors of the extra-curricular activities schedule practices on Friday. Students may



member myself. That is where I found my passion!" She finds great pleasure in instilling in her students the desire to want to be better, which doesn't always mean winning, it is just that burning desire to be better, do better, and achieve more. Along with that comes learning what it means to work hard for what you want to get out of it. She impresses on her students that if it doesn't interest them, it's okay not to do something. "Showing up is not enough!"

Mrs. Rut said that she asks herself quite frequently, "What is my drive? What is my passion? What is my purpose here? My purpose with the kids in the Ag Education program here at Arthur County is just to expose them to as much as I can. Give them diverse opportunities so that they have a big pool of resources to choose from so that they can find their passion." And one more piece of advice that she lives by and shares with her students is, "Go where your passion is and go hard!"



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