

JUNE 2024



# Missouri FFA *Today*

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## ON THE calendar

**June 3-July 12** Missouri FFA Camp, Camp Rising Sun, Kaiser

**June 4-6** Public Speaking Academy, UCM, Warrensburg

**June 7-8** Area Officer Institute, Camp Rising Sun, Kaiser

**June 14-16** HYMAX Academy, Camp Rising Sun, Kaiser

**June 25-27** HYPE Academy, Jefferson City

**July 1** Missouri State Fair Livestock Entries Due

**July 18-20** Gold Buckle Extravaganza, Springfield

**July 25-Aug 3** Ozark Empire Fair, Springfield

**Aug 8-18** Missouri State Fair, Springfield

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# Looking Beyond *the Classroom Walls*

**Integrated approach to ag education sends East Prairie FFA members into lessons outside of class.**

*In* the Missouri Bootheel, the town of East Prairie is home to flat terrain as far as the eye can see. Here, agricultural diversity and learning opportunities abound. From cotton to rice and beef cattle to poultry, members of the East Prairie FFA Chapter have the ag industry at their fingertips, an opportunity agricultural education teacher and FFA advisor Rylyn Small does not take for granted.

“Mississippi County is ranked seventh in crop production in the state, second in melons and vegetables, and sixth in grains and oilseeds,” Small explains. “Southeast

Missouri is so diverse when it comes to agriculture. Instead of the rolling hills, we have the swampy flats. We have everything from cotton and rice to corn and soybeans. This gives our program a unique opportunity to teach all aspects of agricultural education.”

Chartered in 1934, the East Prairie agricultural education program is currently made up 127 students out of a total high school population of 310. With nearly half of

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 6**

East Prairie FFA members thrive amid a diverse setting of production agriculture that features cotton and rice as well as corn and soybeans.



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# President's Perspective

*Looking* back on my year as your Missouri FFA state president, I am filled with a profound sense of gratitude and admiration for each of you. Serving in this role has been an incredible journey, and it's the dedication and passion of FFA members like you that have made it truly unforgettable.

This year has shown the strength and unity of our FFA community. From attending local chapter meetings to camp, barnwarmings, and of course State Convention, I've been inspired by your commitment to agricultural education and our association. Each one of you has played a crucial role in our collective success, demonstrating leadership, resilience, and an unwavering drive to make a difference.

Looking ahead, I encourage you to continue embracing the opportunities that FFA offers. We are currently kicking off all

of our summer activities and opportunities. I urge you to participate, because after all, you only get out what you put in. FFA Camp, HYPE, HYMAX, the State Fair and much much more await those who yearn to make the most of their FFA journey this summer. Whether you are hitting the waterfront at camp, exploring the State Fair, or sweating it out building your SAE, I challenge you to be proactive and invest in yourself this summer by doing something great.

As I pass the torch to the next generation of leaders, I do so with confidence and pride. Thank you for the incredible experiences and for your unwavering support. Keep striving for excellence, embracing change, and cultivating the future. The future of agriculture is bright, and it's in your capable hands.

*Sam Tummons*

Columbia FFA member Sam Tummons in April wrapped up a year of service to the organization as Missouri FFA State President. Tummons is an agricultural education major at the University of Missouri-Columbia.



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its high school students eager to dive into the industry, Small looks for opportunities to deepen the educational experience wherever possible.

For example, the East Prairie Agri-Center includes a barn that gives students the opportunity to house animal projects that might not be allowed at their homes due to city limit statutes. The city even rezoned the ag center as an “agriculture zone” to support this effort, and the students are proud of the hard work that takes place within those four walls.

This hands-on opportunity is just one example of the integrated ag program East Prairie students engage in.

“My favorite part of my job is seeing when students ‘get it,’” Small says. “Either they work with their animals on campus before a show or tear down a small engine for the first time. Life lessons are the most important part of my job, and it is so refreshing to see that click with my students.”

He continues, “This is only possible through the 3-circle model of agricultural education. Learning in the classroom, taking it outside of the classroom through their Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE), and applying the leadership skills from FFA in all aspects of life.”

How does he accomplish this? “Projects, projects, projects.”

“There is a time and place for lectures, but getting our hands dirty building, planting, outside fly fishing, or even working in the livestock barn, these experiences keep students engaged,” Small explains.

Not all students are destined for college, Small adds.

“While in our program, they get a taste of all aspects of agriculture,” he explains. “Whether that be personal finance management or learning a technical skill, students find their niche and map out plans to obtain their dream career. Upon graduation, many of my students are hired as farm laborers, tractor drivers, truckers, welders and deckhands on river barges.”

These hands-on skills are of benefit to students both inside and out of the ag industry.

“We always encourage others

who might not have the slightest interest in ag to join FFA, and it gives them different skills they then find useful in the real world,” says Sandy Miranda, junior at East Prairie High School. “My favorite part about the East Prairie ag program is that it tries to include everyone and gives different opportunities to students, including those who aren’t yet interested in agriculture.”

Ellyana Castleman, senior at East Prairie High School, adds that the diversity of hands-on experiences creates space for everyone to join in.

“Some may be working on the boats, others making fishing rods, some studying insects, others walking their show animals,” Castleman says.

While this robust educational integration helps shape the ag education experience, East Prairie FFA members still know how to have fun.

“My favorite activity in our chapter is one we do every year,” says

Kevin Mainord, junior at East Prairie High School. “It’s called Watermelon Bust. We throw watermelons at each other, and we make games out of it.”

Barnwarming is another favorite event.

“Barnwarming is a dance held by our chapter in the ag shop,” Miranda says. “The best parts of Barnwarming are having fun line dancing, laughing, and spending the night with friends.”

“Leading up to Barnwarming, Mr. Small taught us numerous line dances so we wouldn’t make fools of ourselves,” Castleman adds. “We did either way though, and it was wonderful.”

A well-rounded ag program moves these fun experiences and life lessons beyond high school, instilling values that last a lifetime.

“I want our program to be known for building students into better human beings for our local community,” Small says. “I want families to see a difference in their child after going through our program.”

This community impact starts long before students graduate. Kevin Mainord, a junior FFA member, says this servant spirit is something to be proud of.

According to East Prairie FFA Advisor and Ag Education Instructor Rylenn Small, “There is a time and place for lectures, but getting our hands dirty building, planting, outside fly fishing or even working in the livestock barn (provides) experiences to keep students engaged.”



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“We do a lot of things in class and out of class for the community and the school,” Mainord says. “Members of our FFA chapter aren’t afraid to jump in and get the job done.”

Whether it be community service projects, Food for America or Ag Education on the Move, East Prairie FFA members make a big splash in their local community and beyond.

### Rylynn Small: NAAE Early Career Teacher of the Year

Named Missouri’s 2023 National Association of Agricultural Educators Early (NAAE) Career Teacher of the Year, Rylynn Small focuses on the big picture for his students. This big picture includes obtaining as many resources as possible to prepare his students for college or careers after their time in the East Prairie ag program.

“When I started teaching seven years ago, our program had itty bitty classrooms and a shop that we could only fit 15 kids into at once,” Small says. “Mississippi County is the second poorest county in the state of Missouri and our kids didn’t have access to things other kids did.”

He noticed this gap in resources and started in on his own solution – writing grants.

“I have a good story to tell in each grant application,” he continues. “I write about our kids because they are worth it and easy to write about.”

From production agriculture to welding, East Prairie agriculture education instructor and FFA advisor Rylynn Small works to provide students a well-rounded experience that will benefit them beyond high school.



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## Yia Yang

**HOME FFA CHAPTER:**  
Wheaton FFA

**WHAT YIA DOES:**

Yia is the genotyping team lead with Benson Hill, an ag technology company specializing in the natural diversity of plants.

**WHAT YIA LEARNED IN FFA:**

Through his experiences in FFA, Yia learned the importance of education and how much work is necessary to develop skills needed for careers in the ag industry.



# INDUSTRY LEVEL Skills

*Daily* chores on a commercial broiler and cow-calf farm in Wheaton, Missouri sparked Yia Yang's passion for agriculture and set the trajectory of his future career. After his family moved to the small town in southwest Missouri in 2003, Yang settled in, learning more about the agricultural industry each day, including becoming very familiar with the National FFA Organization.

"I come from a big family with three sisters and two brothers," Yang says. "I am the fifth out of six in my family. All of my siblings were active in FFA, so I was introduced at a young age."

Once he entered high school, Yang followed in his sibling's footsteps and joined the local FFA chapter. Led by his advisors Eric Roller and David Bolton, the opportunities he was presented with seemed endless, including the chance to grow a Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) from the daily chores that started it all.

While agriculture remained at the heart of his involvement in FFA, the leadership side of the organization quickly rose through the ranks.

"My favorite part of FFA was people development, learning about the different opportunities out there and making lifelong friendships," Yang explains. "While in FFA, I went to WLC, attended

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## Yia Yang shares how his well-rounded FFA experience prepared him for a fulfilling career in the ag industry

By Brandelyn Twellman

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Missouri FFA Camp, went to Missouri Agribusiness Academy and participated in multiple Career and Leadership Development Events. I also volunteered for many local events, such as our food drive during Halloween and toy drive during the holidays."

These service opportunities and leadership events helped Yang step out of his comfort zone and eventually pursue leadership roles within the organization.

"During my FFA career, I held many officer titles such as Chapter Secretary, Chapter President and Area XI Vice President," Yang says.

He also served as a 2014-2015 Missouri FFA state vice president.

Yang's robust involvement in FFA left

him with many life lessons and a skillset that continues to serve him to this day.

"I have many great memories from FFA, learned a lot of hard lessons and have lifelong friends," he says. "It taught me how to be a leader, how to get through hard times, who I am and that there are no limits in life. Most importantly, it taught me it takes a strong work ethic to get to where you want to be."

Still, Yang's most lasting takeaway was a lesson in the importance of communication.

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“This is an important soft skill that has helped me in my personal life and professional career,” Yang explains. “It has also elevated my leadership skills and allowed me to expand my network.”

Moving past high school and into his freshman year of college at the University of Missouri in Columbia, Yang graduated with a bachelor’s degree in plant sciences and a master’s degree in plant breeding, genetics and genomics. Today, Yang gets to work in his passion area: agricultural research.

“I am currently leading the Genotyping team at Benson Hill,” Yang explains. “Benson Hill is an ag tech company aimed

at breeding better soybean varieties. My role is a mixture of science and business. I started out as a scientist and have now moved onto a leadership and project management role.

“FFA helped me develop my leadership and communication skills to an industry level. Participating in public speaking contests prepared me for future leadership positions while career development events taught me the importance of education and how much work it takes to develop the skills needed to work in the ag industry.”

Beyond these lessons, FFA shaped Yang’s character and provided experiences he pulls from still today.

“FFA has greatly helped develop who I am today. It taught me to go beyond my

limitations, how to overcome failure, not be scared to put myself out there, how to rely on others and how to connect to others in our industry and beyond.”

Yang says the first step to deriving these same lessons from the organization is to put yourself out there.

“Don’t be afraid to fail,” he says. “The important thing is not that you failed or how many times you failed, but it is that you overcome those failures. Never put a limit on yourself and what you think you can do. The world is a big place and full of opportunities, so don’t limit yourself and your potential.”

## Did you know?

Former FFA member **Yia Yang** (left and below) says FFA taught him how to be a leader and how to navigate through tough times. Yang was raised on a broiler and cow/calf operation, but soared through leadership opportunities made possible through FFA. He's a past state FFA officer.

“(FFA) taught me how to be a leader, how to get through hard times, who I am and that there are no limits in life. Most importantly, (FFA) taught me it takes a strong work ethic to get to where you want to be.”

—Yia Yang

Genotyping Team Lead

Benson Hill

Former Wheaton FFA Member



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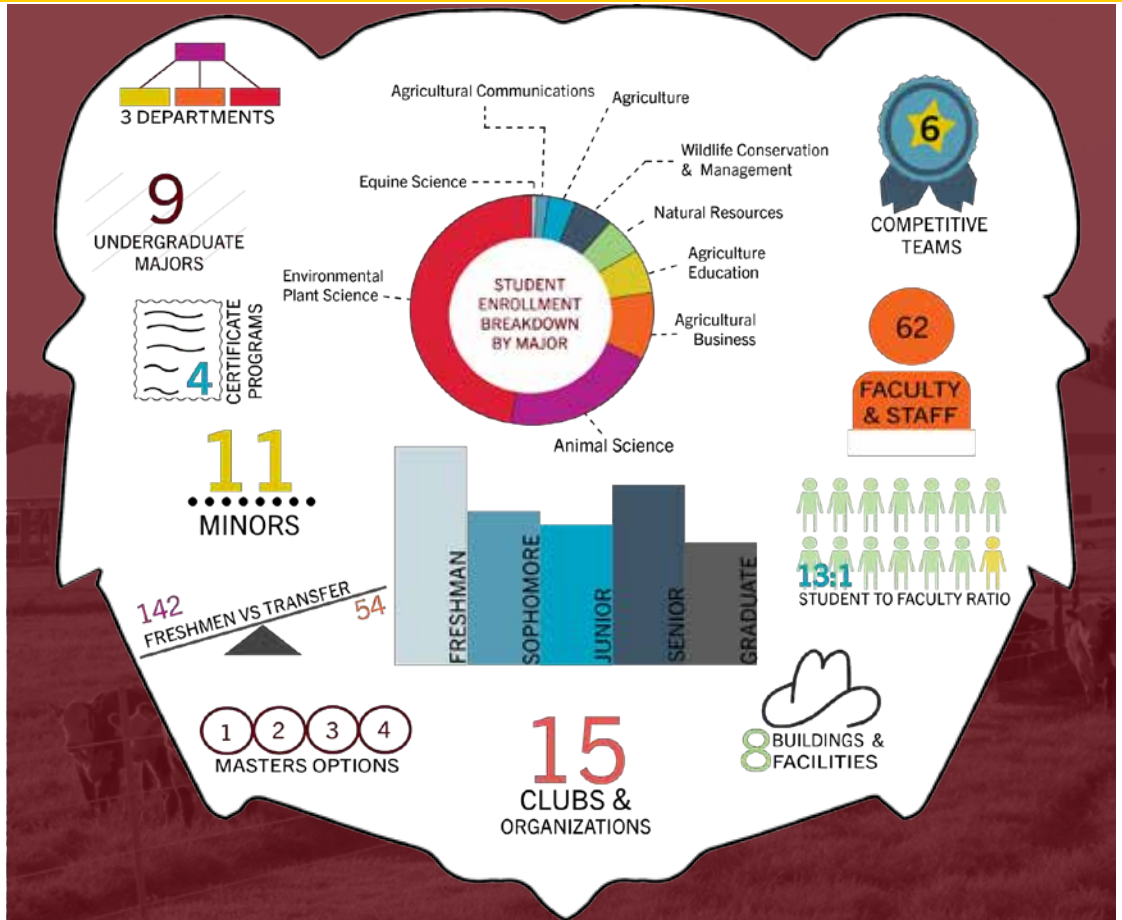


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# OWL Inspired

**Paris' Josh Bondy Presented First Missouri Golden Owl Award.**

*Inspiring*

minds and  
creating  
a family  
atmosphere are

two ways Josh Bondy transforms his students during their time in the blue jackets. The Paris High School agriculture education instructor and FFA advisor has 21 years educating students about agriculture under his belt. His passion for the ag industry began while being involved in 4-H and FFA.

After high school graduation, Bondy made the decision to attend the University of Missouri to major in agriculture education. It wasn't until 2003, while student teaching at Bolivar High School, that he truly fell in love with every aspect of education. Ultimately, he settled in at Paris High School where he has taught for the last 17 years. There, Bondy has created a place for each of his students to feel included through hands-on learning experiences.

During the 2024 Missouri FFA State Convention, Bondy was named the Missouri Agriculture Educator of the Year, receiving the Golden Owl Award for his excellence inside the classroom. Missouri FFA Foundation Intern Katie Fredrickson recently caught up with Bondy to learn what he says is most important in educating the future of the agriculture industry.

**KF:** What does receiving the Golden Owl Award mean to you?

**JB:** It is an amazing way to recognize ag teachers who have a big vision and purpose in mind for their chapters. Teachers give a lot of their heart and mind to students. It is an extraordinary thing to recognize educators who make a difference in students' lives. Ag teachers create a strong community, and there are many great ag educators who also deserve this award; many of them are my good friends. I'll always remember my girls walking onto the stage when I was awarded the Golden Owl Award.



**KF:** What have been some of the challenges you have faced while teaching?

**JB:** The biggest challenge is showing students they all have a place within our program and providing opportunities to them. The students who are involved say it feels different in our building.

**KF:** What changes have happened during the years you have taught ag? How did you adapt to those changes?

**JB:** The way that students communicate has changed over the years. To adapt to their needs, I must communicate in many different ways and make sure I'm connecting with them.

**KF:** What has been your favorite part about being in the profession?

**JB:** Building connections with other teachers and students. Teaching for 21 years, I have seen students graduate, marry, have children, and start careers. It is rewarding to watch students that I poured into become successful and start their own lives. The connection with other ag teachers is something that is unmatched in any other industry. Many of my good friends are ag teachers. We create lifelong friendships in this

profession and truly create a family atmosphere.

**KF:** What are your future plans for the Paris ag education program?

**JB:** Currently, we are in the middle of an ag building remodel. Our community passed a \$2 million no tax bond that will allow us to create a banquet center and a food science lab. This will let us offer students more hands-on experiences catering food for community and school events and meetings. The remodel will also let us host events in our building, providing something our community does not currently have. I also want to expand our program to offer students more hands-on experiences outside of the classroom, such as planting a garden or caring for animals. This would provide students with a wider variety of SAE options.

The Golden Owl Award is a program of the Missouri FFA Foundation. If you'd like to help support the recruitment, development, and retention of outstanding agriculture education teachers, please consider donating to the Foundation at: <https://donorbox.org/moffafoundation>.



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