



# Missouri FFA TODAY

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Cade Claycomb milked his Supervised Agriculture Experience all the way to winning a National Dairy Production Proficiency Award. Get the full story on page 13 of this issue.



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**TO:** Sara Green

**FROM:** Bell City  
FFA Member

## 2025 Missouri Teach Ag Ambassadors Announced

**T**hese agricultural education majors will work for the next several months to recruit FFA members into ag education by connecting with students at State FFA Convention, conducting workshops at FFA Camp, judging Teach Ag speaking contests and other local and regional university recruitment and FFA events. Congratulations on being selected by your universities to be a part of the Missouri Teach Ag program!

### College of the Ozarks

Hannah Evans and Rebekah Evans

### Missouri State University

Ally Golian and Aubrey Jung

### Northwest Missouri State University

Kiley Mattson and Kearsten Peterson

### Southeast Missouri State University

Hollie Bryant and Abigail Dahmer

### University of Central Missouri

Lindsey Ball and Kailey Narron

### University of Missouri

Izzy Freymuth and Annabelle Searcy

## My Ag Teacher is Great Because ...

“ She is kind. She always encourages us to do big, she helps lead us to great things; she pushes us to achieve and to get a career in agriculture. I appreciate my ag teacher so so much! ”

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# MISSOURI FFA IN ACTION




## Youth Leadership Day Hosted by Missouri Farm Bureau

More than 400 high school students, FFA members and advisors from across the state took part in Missouri Farm Bureau's (MOFB) annual Youth Leadership Day at the organization's home office in Jefferson City. FFA members visited the Capitol, met with members of the Missouri General Assembly and observed the House and Senate chambers. Participants also heard from Governor Mike Kehoe, MOFB President Garrett Hawkins, Missouri Director of Agriculture Chris Chinn and MOFB Ambassador and past state FFA officer Karson Calvin. A panel discussion featured former National FFA Advisors Larry Case and Dr. Steve Brown, past Mo FFA Advisor Dr. Terry Heimann and current State FFA Advisor Keith Dietzschold.



## CONVENTION COUNTDOWN

Click at right to watch how we plan to dance with opportunity at the 97th Missouri FFA State Convention. 



## PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Andi Belt | State President



Life can feel overwhelming at times. Between school work piling up, contest season, end-of-year events and everything in between, it often feels like we are racing from one task to the next. Our never-ending checklist seems to stretch on forever, and we are constantly chasing the next big thing. A well-known quote at North Shelby, especially during contest season, is "We're behind!" Honestly, it often felt that way. In the rush of life, it is easy to forget one of the most important things we can do for ourselves and those around us: make time to show appreciation. Without a doubt, most of us would not be where we are or who we are without the people who pushed, helped and encouraged us along the way.

FFA advisors, especially during contest season, are true champions. They spend late nights coaching teams, organizing practices and making sure we are ready for anything. They drive the bus for hours and make pit stops

for much needed food, all while managing last-minute changes and answering endless questions about the upcoming competition.

They truly deserve all the credit for holding it together, even when they are running on nothing but coffee and adrenaline. It is time we show a little appreciation for all the hard work they put in because they make it all happen behind the scenes.

When we feel busy and overwhelmed, it is easy to forget there are people around us juggling even more—our advisors, parents and teachers are constantly working behind the scenes to help us succeed. They put in the time and effort to guide, support and encourage us, often without asking for anything in return. Maybe it is time we take a moment to show them a little appreciation, because their hard work does not always get the recognition it deserves. A simple thank you can go a long way in reminding them that their efforts truly matter.



MARK YOUR  
CALENDAR!

## UPCOMING events

- APR 23-25** Missouri FFA State Convention, Columbia
- MAY 3-10** Missouri Beef Days, Bolivar
- MAY 7** LEAD Conference Registration Due
- MAY 25-30** LEAD Conference for Chapter Officers
- MAY 31** Missouri Farm Bureau Mini Grant Applications Due
- JUNE 2-6** Missouri Agribusiness Academy
- JUNE 2-JULY 11** Missouri FFA Camp Rising Sun, Kaiser
- JUNE 3-5** Public Speaking Academy, UCM, Warrensburg
- JUNE 6-7** Area Officer Institute, FFA Camp Rising Sun, Kaiser
- JUNE 13-15** HYMAX Academy, FFA Camp Rising Sun, Kaiser
- JUNE 24-26** HYPE Academy, Jefferson City
- JULY 1** Missouri State Fair Entries Due by 5 p.m.
- JULY 25-AUG 3** Ozark Empire Fair, Springfield
- AUG 7-17** Missouri State Fair, Sedalia



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# CHAPTER SPOTLIGHTS

## Study to Success

*The national-winning Milan FFA Knowledge team shares their experiences learning about the National FFA Organization.*

**W**hat year was Future Farmers of America founded? What year was the name changed to the National FFA Organization? What are the official colors of FFA? Who is the National FFA President? Though most Greenhands learn the answers to these questions their first year in FFA, the national-winning Milan Knowledge team went beyond the basics to become experts in all things agricultural education and FFA.

"The FFA Knowledge Contest is a 100-question test over the FFA manual for the National Invitational Contest," says Milan agricultural education teacher and FFA advisor Jarred Sayer. "In Missouri, it also includes state and national officers and the Missouri FFA Fact Sheet."

Though memorization plays a large role in performance, teamwork is equally important.

"My favorite part about this contest was my team," says Kendra

Sayre, a member of the 2024 Milan Knowledge Team. "I felt like we worked really well together and got really close within this contest."

Jarred believes every student should learn the information covered in the Knowledge test and integrates it directly into his curriculum.

"I teach some of the Knowledge contest to my entire Ag 1 class," he says. "I believe the history of the organization is very important. I also incorporate some American History of things that are happening at similar times in history. Once the team is chosen, I find what that group of kids likes and that is how we study. Some groups liked taking old tests, other groups liked to be quizzed. It's a personalized approach each year."

The 2024 Knowledge team's approach was to study relentlessly.

"My team and I put in a lot of hours reading the manual and taking different types of tests," Kendra says. "I

think what makes Knowledge unique is the different types of questions there could be on a test and the way you have to study."

"Our team prepared for this contest with a lot of studying day and night, and a lot of determination," adds Jara Sanchez, another member of the team. "Knowledge taught me the history of FFA, its components and what it offers for its members."

Their hard work paid off in more ways than one. In addition to a national title, the four-person team walked away with a solid foundation to the rest of their FFA careers, Sayre says.

"I think giving students a base knowledge of FFA is a stepping stone to further success in the organization, such as running for office or going to other leadership activities. I also feel like giving freshmen a taste of success really gets them started on a future in the organization."





# State Bound Celebration

*Pleasant Hill FFA members celebrate success at their annual State Bound Dinner prior to State FFA Convention.*

**A**n FFA chapter is only as strong as the support system around it. In Pleasant Hill, the support rallies in April to celebrate students participating in State Convention.

"The State Bound Dinner is an event hosted by our FFA Booster Group," says Tyler Burgin, a Pleasant Hill agricultural education teacher and FFA advisor. "Our officer teams have expressed that competitions are the driving force behind students being involved in our chapter. Many students do not attend much in the fall of their freshman or sophomore year, and then find the opportunity to compete in Career and Leadership Development Events as a chance to really dive into an area they are interested in."

Three years ago, the Pleasant Hill FFA Booster Club wanted to find a way to support and recognize those competitive efforts.

"Our boosters wanted to do more for those students who spend hours

training, riding buses from Pleasant Hill to Paris or Hollister, meeting at 5:00 a.m., and then only having a short section of recognition at our annual banquet," Burgin explains. "What they have put together is a short program prior to State Convention to focus on every student who applied themselves to reach the state level."

The evening consists of a catered dinner for all state participants and their families at a banquet hall in town paired with student recognition and a keynote speaker, usually a state officer.

"This event is not just for those who pushed themselves in CDEs and LDEs, but we also recognize every state degree earner, area proficiency winner, state choir participant, and anyone who has earned their way to State Convention" Burgin says.

In addition to the recognition, the dinner is a driving force of student determination.

"I like that it serves as the same 'farewell' that the sports teams often

receive," says Davin Gilsdorf, Pleasant Hill FFA member. "The State Bound Dinner also helps us prepare for state. It eases our nerves and allows us to feel recharged and ready for the coming competition. It also gives us confidence that if we made it this far, we can go further in our competition."

The event has even become goal-worthy for younger members.

"Our State Bound Dinner is an extremely important chapter event," Gilsdorf says. "While being somewhat exclusive, it gives those that get to attend an exclusive sense of praise and accomplishment that is often not received in the classroom or even after districts. It also shows other members that putting in effort and devotion can have an extremely high payoff."

Burgin and Gilsdorf agree, the dinner would not be possible without a community that rallies around its members and celebrates every one of their successes.



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# ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT



**NAME: MOLLY BERTZ LOUGHRIDGE**

**HOMETOWN:** Mayview, Missouri

**FFA CHAPTER:** Higginsville

**COLLEGE:** Kansas State University, dual major in Agricultural Communications & Journalism and Mass Communications-Advertising

**OCCUPATION:**

Digital Designer, American Angus Association

**FFA TODAY:** Tell us about yourself.

**LOUGHRIDGE:** I live in Chatsworth, Georgia, where my husband and I own a farm and garden store. We sell livestock and companion animal feed, minerals, tack, animal health supplies, seed and fertilizer as well as other home and farm supplies and equipment. Our store keeps us very busy, but we also run a large herd of commercial cattle and grow broiler chickens for Tyson. We love to serve our community and are very involved in our church and county cattlemen's association. Our family is our greatest support system and we are lucky to be able to work and farm together with them. I personally love to garden, cook, listen to podcasts and read books (when we have extra time, of course!).

**FFA TODAY:** Talk about your involvement in agriculture.

**LOUGHRIDGE:** My involvement in agriculture started at a young age. I was raised on a century farm in west central Missouri and grew up with a small herd of purebred cattle. Both of my parents were agricultural education teachers, and because of their influence I learned the importance of diversity within the agricultural industry. Since

meeting my husband, Michael, my interest and involvement in agriculture has only expanded. We have both dedicated our careers and personal interests to raising livestock, taking care of the land and the people in our community. Being involved in agriculture has taught me so much about the person I am and the impact I can have.

**FFA TODAY:** Can you share about your current occupation?

**LOUGHRIDGE:** I work for the American Angus Association as a digital designer. I manage their website, digital assets, email marketing platform, and work with others on my team to promote the value of Angus genetics and cattle in the beef industry. I work remotely, but travel to the association's headquarters in St. Joseph, Missouri often.

**FFA TODAY:** What was your favorite part of FFA?

**LOUGHRIDGE:** Being involved in FFA opens up a lot of doors to engage with others and make connections that last a lifetime. I've met individuals through FFA that have become close friends, references when looking for a job, employers who hired me and

lifelong mentors! FFA is a giant group of people with a shared interest and vision. Learning to be part of a community like the one I experienced in my home chapter and beyond was a key experience that allowed me to make connections and build community even after my days of FFA membership were over.

**FFA TODAY:** What was the greatest lesson you learned in FFA?

**LOUGHRIDGE:** FFA taught me the importance of professionalism and how to speak confidently with others. Those skills have provided me with immeasurable value, especially in the workplace. I rely on the skills I learned through my CDE and LDE participation each time I present in front of a large group or talk with a customer on the phone.

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**FFA TODAY:** What was your favorite memory from your time in FFA?

**LOUGHRIDGE:** I loved attending state and national conventions! Seeing so many other students in a blue jacket and making new friendships in a new place was always the highlight of the year.

**FFA TODAY:** How did FFA impact where you are today?

**LOUGHRIDGE:** FFA gave me personal growth, friendships and experiences during my time in high school, college and beyond. It's difficult to measure the seeds that were planted during my FFA membership and where those blooms have taken me. I feel so blessed to have had so many wonderful experiences through FFA. I know they've changed the trajectory of my life for the better.

**FFA TODAY:** Who is your biggest influence?

**LOUGHRIDGE:** Bret and Lorin Fahrmeier (Lexington, Missouri) are some of my closest friends and mentors. What started out as a summer job picking vegetables and selling at farmers markets for them turned into a second family for me. Their son, Murphy, was the ringbearer in our wedding, and we visit them almost every time we travel home. Bret and Lorin offer suggestions and encouragement when Michael and I talk about business ideas for our store, and we love watching their kids show cattle, farm and excel in their activities. It's friendship and family all in one!

**FFA TODAY:** What advice do you have for current FFA members?

**LOUGHRIDGE:** You have to be willing to give to get. Jump in and try something new. Work hard to get to attend that upcoming conference or event. Those experiences and the people you meet there will change your life! It's worth working for.



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# TOP PRIZE: HANDS-ON DAIRY SAE

*Learn how Trenton FFA member Cade Claycomb milked his SAE to the top, winning the National FFA Dairy Production Proficiency at the 97th National FFA Convention.*

**C**ade Claycomb of Trenton won the National FFA Dairy Production Proficiency Award at the 97th National FFA Convention and Expo. Claycomb's Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) involves raising registered Jersey cows. Starting with five Jerseys, Claycomb aggressively expanded his dairy operation, growing his herd to 42 registered females. Developing high-quality genetics has always been a priority, which led the up and coming dairy producer to work with Trans Ova Genetics through the IVF embryo transfer process to breed most of his registered cattle.

Today, Claycomb's dairy herd averages 9,400 pounds of milk production per week. He markets milk through the Dairy Farmers of America cooperative, in addition to selling to Hiland Dairy Foods in Kansas City for use in milk products like fluid milk and Belfonte Ice Cream.

Though Jerseys are his main focus, Claycomb also owns five fall-calving black Angus cows. He has plans to retain heifers and grow this herd in the future.

As an FFA member, Claycomb participated in the Grasslands, Dairy Cattle Evaluation and Forestry CDEs,

all of which paired nicely with his hands-on SAE experience. He currently attends Oklahoma State University, pursuing a degree in agriculture communications.





# Here by the Owl..

## Golden Owl Award Finalists Named

**H**ave you ever asked an FFA member who inspires, challenges and motivates them? It would be a safe bet if you anticipated many saying it is their ag teacher. Missouri agricultural education is consistently recognized as one of the top in the country. Our teachers are a primary reason for this distinction.

To honor our teachers, the Missouri FFA Foundation partners with Nationwide® to offer the Golden Owl Award® program. Through the program, students, parents and fellow teachers can nominate outstanding agricultural educators.

This year's program received almost 400 nominations. From those, 18 teachers were selected as semi-finalists who moved onto a second round of competition, during which seven finalists from across the state were chosen. In late March and early April, each finalist was surprised at school and presented with a \$500 cash prize. Meet our 2024 finalists:

### Northeast

For over 27 years, Scott Stone has taught ag ed at Centralia. His philosophy is to create an environment where



students feel empowered to be their authentic selves. As the percentage of his students growing up in agriculture

dropped from 78% to 6%, he realized ensuring they had meaningful Supervised Agriculture Experience (SAE) projects had to be a priority. Along with his teaching partners, the Centralia FFA Alumni & Boosters and local businesses, he helped develop a local SAE grant program for students. Stone's commitment is also seen through his community involvement, such as

being a founder of the Avenue of Flags, a project dedicated to honoring veterans, serving on the rural water board, working with the Centralia Flower and Garden Club to keep public spaces beautified, and being on the Centralia Fair Board.

### Northwest

Randy Plattner currently teaches in Chillicothe. He has been an ag teacher for 25 years. Over the past few years, Plattner saw his program's course offerings needed an upgrade, and he added coursework in emerging ag



technologies and veterinary science. During his years teaching, he has been active in his community too, serving on three different county fair boards and multiple positions in his church, belonging to the Chamber of Commerce, and a 4-H leader. Plattner considers his students part of his extended family, whether that means helping with a trailer on the highway in the middle of the night or counseling them through challenges in relationships. His dedication for students is shown through his nominations that repeatedly talked about the care he shows them, as well as his willingness to lend a hand to anyone who asks.

### Central

For 17 years, Gary Reichel has taught ag ed, the last four in California. Reichel saw unique opportunities to grow the program in California by adding food science coursework, which allows for Farm to Fork instruction. Students take care of hogs as a part of their animal science classes, then when a local processor



returns the carcasses, the students learn to cut and cure hams, bacon, pork chops and more. A partnership with a local livestock operation has led to a bottle calf program where students receive animal husbandry experience. Changes such as these have led to a 30% growth in the ag program. It is no wonder his nominations talk about his passion for agriculture and his willingness to jump in to help any student, at any time.

### Southeast

In Rylyn Small's ag education department in East Prairie, there is a



"Skills Succeed Wall of Fame" which is a daily reminder to both him and his students that the skills learned in that program provide a springboard to

success despite obstacles they may face. It is a testament to his belief that he has a responsibility to ensure he has helped every student develop skills that will make them successful. This personal mission is reflected in his nominations, which describe how he empowers students, even some that would not normally have considered taking an ag class, to work toward achieving their dreams. As one nomination said, "his confidence in his students inspires them to grow, leading to increased enrollment and diverse demographic participation in programs." His mission has also motivated Small to write for numerous grants to support the needs of his program, securing more than \$750,500!

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## Southwest

Jay Shepherd in Mount Vernon is in year 26 as an ag teacher. He learned early in his career about the importance of being involved in the community. Consistently, his nominations describe his devotion to his students and



the numerous ways his past students are making the community a better place in their professional lives, many of whom credit Shepherd for guiding their choices. His relationship with the community paid off when a bond issue was passed that designated \$1.2 million for the redesign and expansion of the ag ed building, while local donors and alumni funded the construction of an animal science lab and planting of an orchard to benefit the ag program.

## South Central District

Tonya Jedlicka, who currently teaches in West Plains, has 26 years of experience as an ag teacher. Her driving force has consistently been a belief that fostering growth in young individuals and working to help shape them into responsible, engaged citizens is one of the keys to being a teacher. This belief is apparent in Jedlicka's nominations, where she is repeatedly described as tireless in supporting her students, an outstanding role model and devoted to helping her students achieve their goals. It is also apparent in her actions, such as launching a community fundraising initiative to build a new ag building and in writing a grant to fund a 20x40 greenhouse.



## Adult Education


Michael Slater facilitates the Adult Ag Ed program in Chillicothe. While he started out as a high school ag teacher,


now his days are spent working directly with farmers through both the adult farm management program and the Chillicothe Young Farmers program. It is high praise indeed that his recommendations included comments such as, "He is a sharp young man" and "He was helpful in my family having some difficult succession planning conversations."

Slater also serves as a Farm Bureau member and on the Grundy County Fair Board.




On Thursday, April 24 at the Missouri FFA State Convention, all seven finalists will be recognized, with one named the Missouri Agriculture Educator of the Year. That winner will receive a \$3,000 cash prize and the Golden Owl Award trophy. To learn more about the Golden Owl program, including this year's honorees, visit <https://missouriffa.org/mo-ffa-foundation/golden-owl>.





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