



# Missouri FFA TODAY

JUNE

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Braymer FFA member, Gage Swindler's, diversified SAE earned him Missouri's State Star Farmer award at this year's annual convention.



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**TO:**  
Leslie Appleton

**FROM:**  
Cabool FFA Member

## My Ag Teacher is Great Because ...

“ She encourages us and motivates us every day. She leads us and guides us through FFA, high school and life. ”

## Why I Teach Ag

“ I teach agricultural education because it cannot be contained within four classroom walls; it's a way of life. It's about cultivating curiosity, responsibility and resilience in the next generation. Agriculture connects us to the land, to each other and to the future. By teaching it, I'm not just helping students understand where their food comes



from, I'm helping them become the stewards, innovators and leaders who will shape a better tomorrow. ”

—Jessica Dobrzenski,  
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# MISSOURI FFA IN ACTION



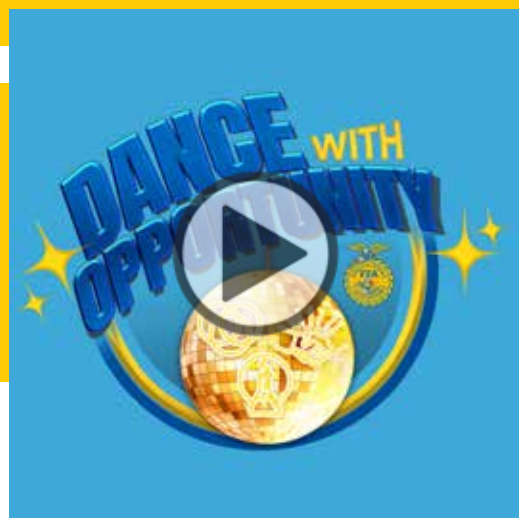
## Missouri Public Speaking Academy

The University of Central Missouri (UCM) hosted this year's Missouri FFA Public Speaking Academy. Nearly 50 members spent three days in Warrensburg at UCM where they learned how to research, write and deliver a speech. From building confidence to sharpening communication skills, these FFA members are now better prepared for their next public speaking opportunity!



## '25 CONVENTION: THAT'S A WRAP!

Click at right to view scenes from this year's 97th Missouri FFA State Convention.



## PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Ivy Elwell | State President

For most FFA members, summer is one of the busiest times of the year. It is also a time when we really get to let our SAEs shine. County, district and state fairs provide opportunities to show off all our hard work and preparation. Each horse show, livestock show or exhibition brings new opportunities for growth and experiences. Whether it is the difficulty of the pattern, a tough judge or other little bumps in the road, there are people I can always count on to help me succeed and countless volunteers that make these events possible.

FFA members count on those around them to be their support system. It may be a parent, advisor, friend, mentor or teacher. Those people help us grow and shape us into who we are. They are the people cheering you on and are often the same people picking you up when you fail. These are the people doing the chores back home while you are on that special trip.



These are the people who instill responsibility and resiliency in us. Brenè Brown once said, "What separates privilege from entitlement is gratitude." Where would you be without all the people on your FFA journey? Success comes from not only your efforts, but also the hard work, dedication and support of others.

While it is fun to win buckles and ribbons, the real value comes from all of the lessons learned. For me, it is the long hours spent working in the barn taking care of my animals that hold the most lessons and memories. It is easy to forget to say "thank you" to the ones who have helped us reach our goals. Expressing your gratitude to those who have supported and helped you grow is a simple task that speaks volumes.

None of us can achieve success alone. Join me in thanking all the FFA advisors, supporters and volunteers out there at home, in your local communities, and at the state and national levels. Send that card, say those two little words and let them know, "We couldn't do it without you!"



## UPCOMING events

**JUNE 24-26** HYPE Academy, Jefferson City

**JULY 1** Missouri State Fair Entries Due by 5 p.m.

**JULY 17-19** Gold Buckle Extravaganza, Ozark Empire Fairgrounds, Springfield

**JULY 25-AUG 3** Ozark Empire Fair, Springfield

**AUG 7-17** Missouri State Fair, Sedalia

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## CHAPTER SPOTLIGHTS

# Top Honors

*South Shelby FFA Chapter named Missouri's top chapter.*

**A** well-rounded chapter Program of Activities encompasses intentional attention to three areas: growing leaders, building communities and strengthening agriculture. The South Shelby FFA Chapter was recently recognized for excellence in all three areas. The chapter was awarded a Gold Emblem at the 97th Missouri FFA State Convention in addition to being named top chapter in the state. They received this recognition out of 365 chapters.

South Shelby FFA Vice President Maicyn Ratliff and President Sophie Dovin were motivated to share their chapter's story with others through the Chapter Activity Award program. After many hours spent recapping priorities and events, they were proud to submit an application on behalf of their chapter and its members.

"We took a month to fill out the application," Ratliff says. "We had events that fit into each area of our POA and

shared details about how they impacted our community."

The South Shelby FFA Chapter organized several impactful community events, including the "Passion for Pigs Ham Hike," a 5K race where participants were rewarded with a ham at the finish line. Their goal for the event was to promote both fitness and local agriculture.

The chapter also hosted the "Neighbors Helping Neighbors Meal," a community gathering designed to foster fellowship over a shared meal. This event was used to raise funds to support the local Neighbors Helping Neighbors organization, a community-based initiative where neighbors voluntarily assist each other with various needs ranging from simple acts of kindness like lending tools or offering rides to more extensive support during difficult times.

Additionally, South Shelby launched "Shelby County Herald: Let's

Talk Ag," an initiative where first-year FFA members and chapter officers contributed articles to the local newspaper, sharing personal stories about how FFA has influenced their lives.

These events and others like them created a well-rounded portfolio for the South Shelby FFA Chapter, exemplifying how they grow leaders, build communities and strengthen agriculture.

South Shelby FFA advisors Kaytlyn Mefford and Mitch Schmidt sat in the stands with chapter members at Convention in excited disbelief at the results.

"We ended up getting first, which was really exciting," Dovin says. "Everyone in our chapter could hardly believe it, but we are proud we won top chapter in the state."

To learn more about the Chapter Award Program or see additional results from Convention, visit [convention.missouriffa.org](http://convention.missouriffa.org).



# Here by the Owl

*Centralia's Scott Stone named the 2024-25 Missouri Golden Owl Winner.*

**A**gricultural educators are the backbone of Missouri Agricultural Education and Missouri FFA. This year, seven exceptional ag teachers were named as finalists of the 2024-2025 Golden Owl Award® for their positive impact in the classroom and communities they serve. Of the finalists, Scott Stone, an agricultural teacher at Centralia, was named Missouri's grand prize winner and 2024-2025 Ag Educator of the Year.

"I think it's fantastic that we're recognizing ag teachers and the work they do in their community, for their students and for the ag industry," Stone says. "To be selected is very humbling."

Stone's teaching philosophy is to provide students with an environment where they feel empowered to be their authentic selves. Part of creating that environment is making sure students have the resources and opportunities

to excel. For Stone, this has meant taking on projects such as starting a local SAE grant program and partnering with organizations like the garden club to provide students with hands-on opportunities.

These efforts have proven to make a difference in the ag program, FFA chapter and community. Students and community members describe him as caring and always bringing out the best in people, while at the same time serving as a mentor and inspiration for teachers all over the state.

In addition to his support of students at the local level, Stone has been passionate about agricultural education teacher recruitment in Missouri and beyond. His efforts have ranged from serving as president for professional organizations such as Association for Career & Technical Education® (ACTE®) and National Association of Agricultural Educators

(NAAE) to dressing up in costume to address incoming sophomores during Missouri FFA's Helping Youth MaXimize their Agricultural eXperience (HYMAX) Academy at Camp Rising Sun.

Stone was pleasantly surprised at the source of his nominations.

"Some of my students actually nominated me for this award," Stone says. "Teaching is a profession where some days the students love you, and some days they don't. It was humbling to not only have them nominate me, but also to see them excited and congratulating me on this award."

Nationwide, in partnership with the Missouri FFA Foundation recognized Stone as the Golden Owl Award grand prize winner during the Missouri FFA State Convention. In addition to the title of Missouri's Ag Educator of the Year, Stone received the coveted Golden Owl Award trophy and a \$3,000 cash prize.



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# ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT



**NAME:** Hadley Williams

**HOMETOWN:** Green City, Missouri

**FFA CHAPTER:** Green City

**COLLEGE:** University of Missouri,  
Doctor of Veterinary Medicine

**OCCUPATION:**

Associate Veterinarian at Unionville  
Veterinary Clinic, Unionville,  
Missouri

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

**WILLIAMS:** I was raised on a cow-calf operation in Green City with my parents and younger brother, Camden. Growing up showing cattle, my brother and I established Williams Brothers Simmentals where we sell seed-stock bulls throughout the Midwest. During high school and college, I was extremely involved in extracurriculars. After graduating from vet school last spring, I married my wife, Nicolette, in July and together we welcomed our son, Conley, to the family this May.

**FFA TODAY:** Tell us about your involvement in agriculture.

**WILLIAMS:** My involvement in agriculture is relatively diverse, as our family runs registered and commercial Simmental cattle, markets hay to local producers and runs a 9,600-head contract nursery hog barn with Smithfield. Additionally, being a veterinarian, I have the privilege of working with local cattlemen and cattlemen to ensure we are raising a safe, healthy and sustainable product

for consumers while also making it profitable for producers.

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

**WILLIAMS:** I am a veterinarian employed by the Unionville Veterinary Clinic in Unionville, Missouri. The majority of my work is involved with cattle, but I do work with small animal clients as well. Being in a rural community, fewer practicing veterinarians exist, so it's vital to be diverse in my knowledge to fill the need.

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

**WILLIAMS:** Picking my favorite part of FFA is extremely difficult, as there were a lot of different things I loved, but overall I would have to say the friendships I developed and continue to have today would be my favorite part.

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

**WILLIAMS:** The greatest lesson I learned in FFA is to not be afraid to

try a new challenge. Once you are willing to step out of your comfort zone, exponential personal growth occurs. You'll truly be surprised what you can accomplish when taking that initial step.

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

**WILLIAMS:** My favorite memory from my time in FFA would be the year I served as a state officer. Words can't describe the honor it was to give back to the organization that had given so much to me throughout high school in terms of personal growth and lifelong impact. Additionally, I can remember as a member how much I looked up to the state officers and being able to be that role model to fellow members was a great honor as well.

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

**WILLIAMS:** The impact FFA has had on where I am today is significant. Being a veterinarian, public speaking is vital in a client/patient relationship. Additionally, with my patients not being able to tell me what or where something is hurting, I have to be able to communicate with clients in order to determine what is wrong. Lastly, being able to explain the diagnosis and prognosis with clients is vital to ensure the patient is being treated at home effectively. Therefore, if it wasn't for the foundation FFA gave me through public speaking and giving reasons on judging teams, I wouldn't be as confident when talking with clients as I am today.

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

**WILLIAMS:** My advice for current FFA members would be to get involved! There is something in FFA for everyone. However, the most important is YOU! With FFA, you'll get out of it what you put into it. Abdul Kalam once said, "Without your involvement you can't succeed, with your involvement you can't fail."



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## DIVERSIFIED FOR SUCCESS

*Learn how Braymer FFA member Gage Swindler's diversified SAE helped him earn the State Star Farmer award.*

**G**age Swindler of the Braymer FFA Chapter was named State Star Farmer at the 97th Missouri FFA State Convention. Swindler's Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) involves managing diversified livestock, featuring beef, swine, and poultry operations.

His beef project involves a registered Angus and Gelbvieh cow-calf herd, where he markets bulls and show heifers, sells feeder calves and uses both artificial insemination and embryo transfer. His swine operation is a farrow-to-finish system utilizing Chester White and Berkshire genetics, with hogs sold as feeder pigs or butchered and marketed directly to consumers. His poultry operation includes laying hens and broilers, which he hatches, processes, and sells independently.

Swindler says he is proud his hard work has led to this distinction.

"It feels like all my years of owning and raising livestock has come together and paid off."

This award has not come without hard work.

"I put in time before school, after school, between practices," Swindler says. "Raising livestock is an all-day venture. My love for agriculture keeps me going. I always strive to make improvements and grow my operation. It is what I love to do."

As an FFA member, Swindler is an accomplished public speaker and has participated in various leadership development events and contest teams. Swindler plans to attend the University of Missouri to pursue a degree in agribusiness management. He intends to expand his SAE and remain active in the agricultural industry throughout college and beyond with plans to expand his family's farming operation while also working to build his own. Swindler hopes to pursue a career in agriculture business in the future.





# Hands-On Learning

*Ag education students in Pleasant Hill dive deep into food science thanks to a grant from the Missouri FFA Foundation.*

**“L**earning to Do, Doing to Learn, Earning to Live, Living to Serve” - these four stanzas serve as the motto of the National FFA Organization and a model for many agricultural education students. While each piece holds a deep significance, the Missouri FFA Foundation recognizes that a strong foundation of learning by doing is necessary in the ever-changing agricultural industry. With the goal of capitalizing on unique opportunities through experiential learning, the Foundation offers Learning by Doing Grants ranging from \$1,000-\$5,000 that focus on either technology enhancement or workforce development projects.

Last fall, the Pleasant Hill agricultural education program was awarded a workforce development grant, which allowed them to equip their food science lab. Tyler Burgin, the ag teacher at Pleasant Hill, explained in his grant application that a recent bond issue had allowed for the construction of the lab, but didn't include enough funding to buy sufficient equipment for many of the lessons essential to the curriculum. With the grant funds, students now learn to process, package and preserve foods using a food processor, vacuum sealer, dehydrator, sous vide equipment, meat grinder, slicer and smoker.

“Having industry standard equipment allows for better understanding of career opportunities in the food science industry, and we plan to work to implement labs and curriculum to further our hands-on opportunities,” Burgin says.

In addition to learning hands-on skills, students can use the results of their lessons as fundraisers, for instance selling bacon they cured, sliced and packaged to help fund additional class lessons and activities.

“The biggest accomplishment has been implementing creative labs where students get to research and apply their learning to hands-on units,” Burgin explains. “Students in the preservation labs were able to truly test different methods of keeping food

shelf stable. In the brat and sausage lab, students are creating a detailed recipe to develop a tasty product that is capable of being preserved to industry standards.”

When asked what he was most excited about students being able to do now and in the future because of

**CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE**



**The Missouri FFA Foundation awarded the Pleasant Hill FFA Chapter a workforce development grant to equip the school's food science lab.**





## GIVE TODAY!

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### CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

receiving the grant, Burgin said, "We have had a number of students create plans to participate in the agriscience fair next year using this new equipment. Applying their learning in the classroom to something specific they are interested in and taking it further with equipment now available is very exciting.

I feel the learning we've been able to implement has sparked interest for students to take on their own experimentation and take it a level further."

"The Foundation is fortunate to have donors who believe in the future of agriculture and the need to educate

the next generation," says Heather Dimitt-Fletcher, Executive Director. "Through their support, we've developed a classroom grant program that has an incredible impact on students all over Missouri."

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# WHICH ICE CREAM FLAVOR ARE YOU?

## 1. What is your favorite way to eat ice cream?

- a. Cup
- b. Cone
- c. Waffle Cone
- d. Chocolate-dipped Cone

## 2. Pick a summer FFA event:

- a. Camp
- b. Public Speaking Academy
- c. HYMAX
- d. HYPE

## 3. Pick a summer FFA activity:

- a. Mud Volleyball
- b. Float Trip
- c. Water Park
- d. Ice Cream Social

## 4. Pick a STAR category:

- a. Farmer
- b. Placement
- c. Agribusiness
- d. Agriscience



## 7. How would you describe yourself?

- a. Calm
- b. Hardworking
- c. Funny
- d. Confident

## 8. Pick a summer BBQ side:

- a. Sweet Corn
- b. Potato Salad
- c. Baked Beans
- d. Coleslaw

## 5. What is your favorite subject in school?

- a. Math
- b. Science
- c. History
- d. English

## 9. Pick a dessert:

- a. Brownies
- b. Pie
- c. Cake
- d. Ice Cream

## 6. Pick a word to describe your summer:

- a. Relaxing
- b. Busy
- c. Fun
- d. Adventurous

## 10. Pick a color:

- a. Blue
- b. Red
- c. Pink
- d. Yellow

## RESULTS:

If you picked mostly A's: You're Vanilla! You're looking forward to a slower pace this summer. You enjoy traditional summer activities and sharing them with friends and family. Sit back and relax this summer!

If you picked mostly B's: You're Chocolate! You're looking forward to a summer balanced with relaxation and excitement. You enjoy having fun. Be sure to take advantage of fun activities this summer!

If you picked mostly C's: You're Strawberry! You're looking forward to trying new things this summer. You like to think outside of the box and step outside of your comfort zone. Check something off of the bucket list this summer!

If you picked mostly D's: You're Cookies and Cream! You're looking forward to finding adventure this summer. You live for the thrill of new experiences. Go find some of that adventure this summer!



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