



Missouri FFA TODAY

OCTOBER

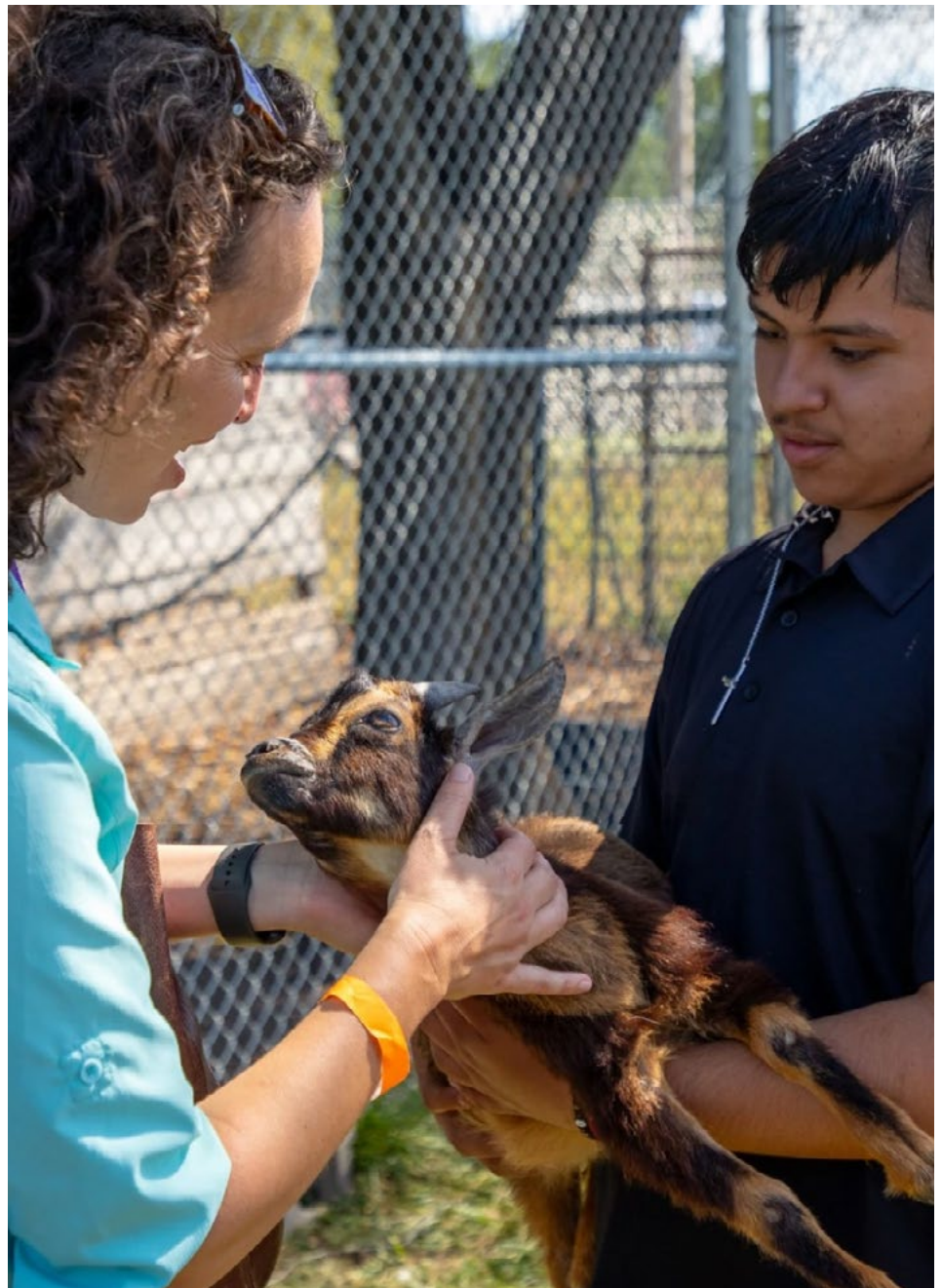
ISSUE 5

2026

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East High joins other schools across the state in hands-on farm to table education through their integrated approach to ag ed.





MARK YOUR
CALENDAR!

UPCOMING events

OCT 21-24 National FFA Convention & Expo, Indianapolis

NOV 2 National FFA Scholarship Online
Application Opens

NOV 11 Veterans Day

NOV 26 Thanksgiving Day

DEC 1 FFA Affiliation Fees Due

DEC 1-5 NAAE, New Orleans

DEC 2-5 ACTE, New Orleans

DEC 6 Missouri Sheep Producers State Speaking
Contest Finals, Margaritaville Lake Resort

DEC 6 Missouri Teach Ag State Speaking Contest Finals,
Margaritaville Lake Resort

DEC 6 Missouri Farm Bureau State Speaking Contest
Finals, Margaritaville Lake Resort

DEC 9-12 60th Annual NYFEA Institute, Raleigh-Durham



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MISSOURI FFA IN ACTION



Hamilton FFA Barnyard Day

Members of the Hamilton FFA Chapter hosted their fellow students at a Barnyard Day, showcasing agriculture in their chapter and community. State Vice President Trinity Dreckshage joined them for the fun-filled day spent learning and growing.

National Convention on Deck

Missouri FFA members throughout the state are heading to Indy for the 99th National FFA Convention & Expo. The Missouri FFA State Officers are sharing their do's and don'ts for a successful trip.

Click at right to take a look!



TO:

Kaylee Lower

FROM:

Republic FFA Member

My Ag Teacher is Great Because ...

“ She pushes me to be my absolute best, even when I would rather stay within my comfort zone. She also encourages me constantly and supports my growth as a person and FFA member. Ms. Lower has taught me to always work my hardest, never give up and believe in myself. I am proud to have her as my ag teacher, but even more proud to have her as a mentor. ”



PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Ellie Samek | State President

One summer, my family took a trip to Michigan. As we drove up the Lake Michigan coast, we smelled the fresh lake air, heard seagulls squawking in the distance and saw a lighthouse standing along the shore. As I sat in the car soaking up the warm sun, I was mesmerized by the lighthouses we kept passing. Each one was designed uniquely with different patterns, different structures, different colors, but the same purpose: to shine. The lighthouses we passed stood along those shores for years, repeating the same task time and time again. As I sat there thinking about them, I thought about the times I had fallen into a similar routine and lost sight of my own purpose.

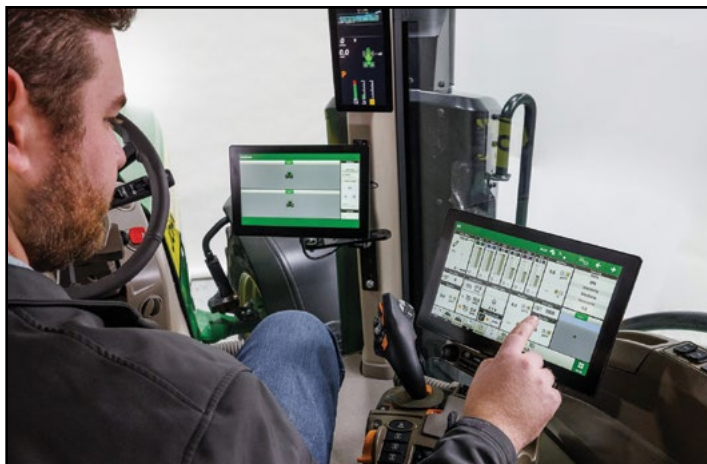


When midterms arrived, the excitement of a new year had faded, and the busy schedule began to pile up; that point of the year always made me stop and reflect on my purpose. Sometimes we become so focused on what comes next that we forget the purpose behind what we are doing right now. We go to meetings, complete assignments, fulfill responsibilities and move from one commitment to the next. In the repetition of everyday life, it can be easy to wonder if what we do really matters.

Those lighthouses my family drove by live a very similar story. They stand in the same spot, day after day, week after week, year after year, just shining their light. That steady light guides boats safely toward shore, even when the lighthouse cannot see who needs it. The lighthouse may never know which ships it helps, but it continues to shine because that is its purpose.

In the same way, we may never know the impact of a kind word, a moment of encouragement or simply showing up for someone else. As FFA members, we each have a light to shine. Even though we may fall into the same routine, our purpose to shine still remains.

We come from different places, serve in different roles and have different goals, but we all have opportunities to make a difference. We do not have to accomplish something extraordinary every day to live with purpose and shine our lights for others.



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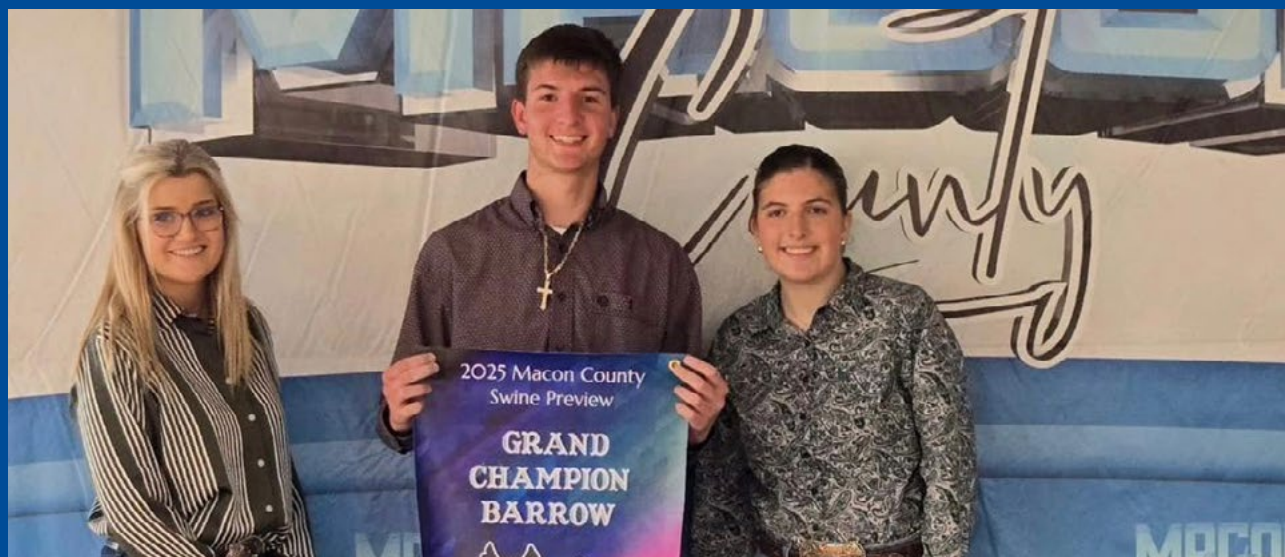
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IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Connections that Serve

Adrian FFA member Kenton Merrifield is learning that confidence, community and a willingness to serve can make a lasting impact both in and out of the blue jacket.

Leadership begins long before someone steps into an officer position. For Kenton Merrifield, the lessons started on his family's farm, where daily responsibilities raising hogs and cattle taught him the importance of hard work, dedication and teamwork. Those values now guide him in his role as president of the Adrian FFA Chapter and vice president of Area VII for the 2026-2027 school year.

With his father, older brother and older sister having worn the blue jacket before him, FFA has deep roots in Merrifield's family. Although farm responsibilities left little time for extracurricular activities growing up, he found a place to belong when he joined FFA as a freshman.

"Everybody was so supportive and friendly toward me, and I loved it," Merrifield says.

That welcoming environment helped him connect with others who shared his passion for agriculture. He values the encouragement members

offer one another, whether they have known each other for years or have just met.

Merrifield experienced that spirit firsthand at Area Officer Institute (AOI) this summer, a 24-hour weekend event at Camp Rising Sun that brings together officer teams from all 16 Missouri FFA areas for leadership development, team building and planning for the year of service ahead.

Initially nervous about meeting officers from across the state, he soon realized he was not alone.

"It was easy for me to see that everyone else was nervous too, but our confidence definitely grew as the energy grew throughout the weekend," Merrifield says.

As area officers began participating in workshops, their enthusiasm encouraged others to join in, Merrifield explains. Over the course of AOI, he discovered how a little confidence could open doors to meaningful relationships and

irreplaceable memories. His advice to fellow members reflects that lesson.

"Don't be the one who people turn around to when they walk into a room, be the one who people walk up to," Merrifield says.

Throughout his senior year, Merrifield looks forward to serving his chapter and area while competing with Adrian's livestock judging team. He also plans to pass his supervised agricultural experience, Blue Jacket Honey, to another member after graduation.

"It's already a well-established project," Merrifield says. "I want to be able to pass it off to someone else who can benefit from it and continue to grow it."

From raising hogs and cattle to stepping up as a leader in the blue jacket, Merrifield has learned leadership means more than reaching personal goals. It means building confidence, creating connections and helping others find their place in FFA.



From Setbacks to Success

Abigail Dahlbeck shares her journey to National FFA Convention.

By Addison Smith, West Plains FFA

FFA is a place where success and failure meet to create leaders. Throughout her agricultural journey, Abigail Dahlbeck has taken her failures and the lessons learned in stride. With a smile and positive attitude, she has moved forward to success.

Dahlbeck is a member of the East Prairie FFA Chapter, serving as the 2026-2027 Chapter President. She also serves as Area XV First Vice President. Dahlbeck's involvement spans past both her chapter and area, as she has reached champion level at the Missouri FFA State Convention not once, but twice.

In the spring of 2025, Dahlbeck competed in Division II Prepared Public Speaking. Her topic focused on the importance of mental health in agriculturalists. She placed third in the area competition and secured a spot at the 97th Missouri FFA Convention with second place at districts. Coming to state without

receiving any previous first places at the local levels, she set the goal to make it past the preliminary round of the competition. Not only did she make it past this round, but she won. Dahlbeck's previous competitions where she came short only encouraged her to try harder.

"Coming up short has been a great reminder of humility and has taught me how to lose with gracefulness," Dahlbeck says.

Bringing a previous championship and many lessons learned, Dahlbeck competed in Advanced Prepared Public Speaking at the 98th Missouri FFA Convention. In her speech, she brought her own hometown experience and expertise to advocate for the harsh realities of rural healthcare. Dahlbeck was named the 2026 Advanced Prepared Public Speaking champion and will represent Missouri as an advanced prepared public speaking competitor at the 99th National FFA

Convention this October.

Dahlbeck recognizes the fact that public speaking is the number one fear. She admits it is scary, but valuable. Her advice to members is to take the first step. Dahlbeck is an inspiration to all with her smile and positive attitude. She proves that everyone has the ability to come back from a loss as a champion.

"I have grown immensely from each loss," Dahlbeck says. "Losses have taught me that sometimes there are bigger plans than what I know. Learning how to accept the bigger plan is something I think is so beautiful. While winning is fun, I am thankful for the losses that have taught me so much."

EDITOR'S NOTE: Addison Smith is a 2026 State Convention Social Media Intern. Story was written as part of her social media internship.

FOUNDATION SPOTLIGHT



Roger Gardner

HOMETOWN: Harrisonville, Missouri

FFA CHAPTER: Harrisonville FFA

STATE OFFICER TEAM: State Secretary, 1929-1980

MO FFA FOUNDATION: Tell us about your time in FFA.

ROGER: My dad was an agriculture teacher, so FFA was introduced to me early in life. I don't know of another organization that provides the same kind of well-rounded opportunities that FFA does. It gives students the chance to compete, but also to develop skills that will be useful for a lifetime and to experience what the real world can look like. The FFA motto is really lived out in a very real way, and my experiences later in life have made it easy to draw a line back to the lessons and opportunities I received through FFA.

MO FFA FOUNDATION: What stood out from your time as a Missouri FFA State Officer?

ROGER: Serving as a Missouri FFA State Officer was an incredible honor. That experience put me in a position to do things at a relatively young age that are pretty rare and gave me the opportunity to take advantage of experiences that could make a larger impact on the organization.

MO FFA FOUNDATION: What

opportunities do you hope future FFA members have access to?

ROGER: FFA provides opportunities for students to develop their thinking, exercise good judgment and common sense, and grow in ways that are very applicable to life. There are so many opportunities for personal growth and development, and those experiences remain valuable even if a student ultimately chooses a career outside of agriculture. The skills and experiences you gain through FFA can be applied throughout your life.

MO FFA FOUNDATION: Why do you believe investing in FFA members is an investment in the future of agriculture?

ROGER: If you know anything about the FFA program, not just the education but the experiences it provides, the answer is somewhat self-explanatory. The value students can gain from these opportunities is tremendous. I think that is especially true for students who choose to become involved at the officer level. The leadership experiences they receive are incredibly valuable

and directly applicable to the type of experiences they will encounter later in life. Those opportunities are valuable not only to students who will pursue careers in agriculture, but to anyone who chooses to take advantage of what FFA has to offer.

MO FFA FOUNDATION: What do you hope your pledge to the Missouri FFA Foundation makes possible for today's FFA members?

ROGER: I really just wanted to support the programs in a general way. I think extracurricular activities are under a lot of financial pressure, especially because much of their funding has to come from sources outside of the school. I wanted my gift to help provide the resources necessary to keep agricultural education programs and FFA chapters strong, continuing to give students the opportunities they deserve.



NATIONAL FFA CONVENTION TRIVIA

Many Missouri FFA members travel to the National FFA Convention and Expo in October each year. Test your Convention knowledge below!

1. In what year was the first National FFA Convention held?

- A. 1928
- B. 1935
- C. 1941
- D. 1952

2. What city hosted the first National FFA Convention?

- A. Kansas City, Missouri
- B. Louisville, Kentucky
- C. Indianapolis, Indiana
- D. Chicago, Illinois

3. What is the official name of FFA's highest degree of membership?

- A. State FFA Degree
- B. American FFA Degree
- C. National FFA Degree
- D. Honorary FFA Degree

4. What year did the National FFA Convention first welcome more than 50,000 attendees?

- A. 1998
- B. 2006
- C. 2013
- D. 2018

5. Who is serving as the 2025-2026 National FFA President?

- A. Trey Myers
- B. Joey Nowotny
- C. T. Wayne Williams
- D. Claire Woeppel

ANSWER KEY

- 1. A
- 2. A
- 3. B
- 4. C
- 5. A



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STATE OFFICER BLOG

Your Own Set of Patches

By Lindsey Magruder, Missouri FFA State Vice President

My senior year of high school, I was nominated to prepare and give a speech at the graduation ceremony that would be taking place in May. I had no idea what to write about that could include memories of the last four years and the future of all of my fellow classmates. As weeks went on, instead of working on my speech, I decided to make a custom graduation dress full of handsewn patches that represented me and my highschool experience.

On this dress, I sewed "FFA." I created a patch for NHS and the musical Wizard of Oz I participated in. I sewed a "4.0" patch alongside a pencil and a grad cap, as well as a lyric

from my all time favorite artist, Noah Kahan, that says "You're Gonna Go Far." This dress encompassed parts of me, my time in high school and memories I will take with me for the rest of my life.

However, I wasn't the only one with my own set of patches. Maybe physically, but each and every one of my classmates who would be walking the stage had their own set of patches that looked completely different from mine.

Just like my graduation dress, we all have our own set of patches that make us unique. Some of our patches are bright and celebratory of the days we felt on top of the world from winning a speaking competition

or being surprised by our score when logging into the judging card. Others are marked with tougher fabric that represents not placing the way we had hoped or not getting the officer position we applied for. Remember these years in the blue jacket are shaping us and the patches we will take with us for the rest of our lives. No one will have the same set of patches that you can bring to the table. Be uniquely yourself, and carry your patches with pride.



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FARM TO SCHOOL

Classroom to Community

University City agricultural education students are exploring hydroponic farming thanks to grant funding from the Missouri FFA Foundation.

Agriculture education is growing in a new way at University City High School, where students are gaining hands-on experience with hydroponic farming through a fully operational SMART Farm System. The project is creating opportunities for students to explore food production, develop technical skills and connect agriculture with business and marketing in a new way.

Installed on a new concrete pad, the SMART Farm System is designed to give students practical experience growing crops in a controlled environment. With the system now operational, students have already toured the container farm through their agriculture classes and begun harvesting its first crop.

The school is partnering with Fresh Harvest 365, which is contracted to provide maintenance and certified hydroponic technicians during the first 18 months. As students and staff learn alongside the technicians, the goal is to build the

knowledge and experience needed to operate the system independently over time.

Agriculture teachers Pam Lester and Matt Tuths, along with staff volunteers, will help guide that process. Some students are using their Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAEs) to work directly in the container farm, learn from certified technicians and complete online learning modules as they work toward hydroponics certification. The school plans to track course completion to evaluate student progress.

The project also extends learning beyond growing crops. This summer, students and staff harvested, packaged and sold basil and lettuce from the SMART Farm System at a local farmers market. Business, marketing and entrepreneurship classes are collaborating on plans to market the produce, while graphic design students are expected to help develop a wrap for the container.

These partnerships demonstrate how agricultural education can connect multiple career and technical education pathways. Students can explore not only food production, but also the business, marketing and design skills that help bring a product from production to the customer.

Community support has also played an important role, with the project receiving approval from the University City Council and the University City Historical Society.

During Farm to School Month, University City's SMART Farm System highlights how schools can create meaningful connections between agriculture, education and local food systems. By giving students the chance to grow, harvest and market fresh produce, the project offers a practical way to explore agriculture and the many opportunities it holds for the future.



Down on the School Farm

Agricultural education in Carthage is gaining hands-on upgrades at a school farm through grant funding from the Missouri FFA Foundation.

Learning about agriculture is becoming more than a lesson in the classroom for students in Carthage. Thanks to a growing school farm, students will have the opportunity to experience agriculture firsthand, from caring for livestock to growing crops and exploring how food is grown to experiencing the technology and careers that keep the industry moving.

The Carthage School District purchased 25 acres adjoining Carthage High School and the Carthage Technical Center in summer 2025, turning a long-standing community vision into reality. Approximately 15 acres are being developed into a school farm that will serve as an extension of the district's agricultural education program.

During the 2025-26 school year, the district constructed a machine shed and livestock handling facility, laying the groundwork for future hands-on learning. Upcoming improvements include fencing to establish livestock areas and an outdoor classroom pavilion where

students can learn directly on the farm.

The project represents an important step toward connecting classroom instruction with real-world experience. The program serves approximately 240 students from Carthage and Webb City, many of whom do not come from traditional farm backgrounds.

The school farm will create opportunities for students to develop skills in animal science, plant science, equipment operation and natural resource management. Students will also practice problem-solving, teamwork, responsibility and agricultural safety while applying what they learn to authentic situations.

The project is designed to benefit younger students, too. Through partnerships with elementary and middle school teachers, the farm will introduce students in grades K-8 to food production, plants, animals and agricultural careers. These early experiences can help students recognize the role agriculture plays in their everyday lives and explore

opportunities available through agricultural education and FFA.

As the school farm continues to develop, it will provide more than additional space for agricultural instruction. It will create a place where students can learn by doing, discover their interests and build skills for the future while raising crops and livestock and learning to grow their own food.

These program developments highlight how connecting students with agriculture can strengthen both education and community. By bringing agricultural experiences directly to campus, Carthage is helping students understand where food comes from, how agriculture supports their region and how they can become part of its future.



Beyond the Textbook

East High students experience agriculture from farm to table with an integrated approach to ag education.

At East High School in Kansas City, agriculture lessons extend far beyond textbooks. Students plant seeds, raise animals, harvest fruit and discover how the food they eat connects to the work happening around them.

The school's agricultural education program has grown significantly since Andrew Killen revived it in 2017, bringing new life to a greenhouse and animal facilities that had sat largely unused. Today, the program provides students with opportunities to explore agriculture through science, creativity and hands-on experiences.

Currently, 120 students are enrolled in at least one agriculture course, including Food Science, Floriculture, Landscaping, Animal Science and Agricultural Science. Instructors Killen, Sheryl Palmieri and Aaron Kick guide students through classroom lessons and practical activities that allow them to apply what they learn in the classroom in a hands-on way.

For many students, the

connection between growing food and preparing meals becomes clear through projects in Food Science. The school's orchard contains 40 fruit trees, including apple, pear, pawpaw, persimmon and jujube. Students learn to care for the trees, determine when fruit is ready to harvest and preserve produce for later use. Recently, diced jujube fruit grown on campus found its way into oatmeal cookies prepared by students.

The same approach is carried throughout the program. For example, floriculture students grow flowers and learn to propagate plants from cuttings, while others tend gardens planted directly in the ground and in raised beds. Three elevated beds provide accessible gardening opportunities for students with disabilities.

Animal science students care for chickens, turkeys and goats, learning about animal husbandry through daily responsibilities.

These experiences introduce students to the many steps involved in producing food, from caring for

plants and animals to preparing and preserving what is harvested. The program also offers paid internships for advanced students who help maintain the campus during weekends and school breaks.

East High's agricultural campus is continuing to expand, with plans for additional courses in natural resource conservation and veterinary science. School leaders are also working toward opening the program to more students across Kansas City Public Schools.

For Palmieri, agricultural education provides lessons that reach every student, regardless of whether they pursue a career in the industry. Everyone eats, making it important for students to understand food and where it comes from.

East High demonstrates how bringing food production into students' daily learning can build practical skills, encourage curiosity and strengthen their understanding of the journey from farm to table.

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Hands-On Success

How State Star in Agricultural Placement Giovanni Ubaldo looked beyond traditional skills in agricultural production to gain in-depth experiences in equipment and technology.

Agriculture extends beyond tending to crops and caring for livestock.

It also involves understanding the equipment, technology and infrastructure that make modern agricultural production possible.

Tipton FFA member Giovanni Ubaldo has spent four years learning exactly that, building his skills through hands-on work in poultry facilities and agricultural construction. His commitment to learning the industry from multiple angles earned him the title of 2026 Missouri FFA State Star in Agricultural Placement.

His agricultural journey began at Hentges Farms, where he gained experience in layer and pullet production. Collecting eggs, checking barns and monitoring equipment gave him an understanding of daily farm operations and the importance

of maintaining a healthy environment for birds.

As he became more experienced, Ubaldo transitioned into equipment installation and maintenance. He now helps install production systems, troubleshoot equipment and complete renovation and construction projects working alongside his father at MGH Ubaldo LLC.

This shift in responsibilities provided an opportunity to expand his knowledge. MGH Ubaldo LLC focuses on electrical work and equipment installation for poultry barns, allowing Ubaldo to participate in projects from the beginning stages of construction through installation. This role has introduced him to electrical systems, plumbing, framing and the computerized technology used to manage poultry facilities.

Each project presents a different set of challenges. Equipment shortages, construction delays and unexpected changes have taught Ubaldo to think critically, communicate effectively and adjust when plans change.

Through his Supervised Agricultural Experience, Ubaldo has developed a combination of agricultural knowledge and technical skills that will serve him well as he continues pursuing opportunities in the industry. His experience demonstrates how agricultural careers can blend traditional livestock production with skilled trades and modern technology, in addition to the hands-on nature of agricultural education.



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