THE FEED & SEED

Helping Plant and Nourish Colorado Agricultural Education
FFA STATE OFFICER PROFILES

Who: Brooke Corliss, Executive Committee
Where: Stratton
Why: FFA is an amazing outlet to grow as a leader and meet amazing people around the country! While we are spreading knowledge about agriculture, we are also growing leaders.

Who: Brittany Fetzer, Executive Committee
Where: Haxtun
Why: Without FFA in my life, I wouldn’t be the outgoing person I am today. Being able to serve thousands in Colorado is truly humbling and is one of the most rewarding experiences I have had.

Who: Lauren Bigler, Executive Committee
Where: Windsor
Why: I am very proud to be a part of an organization whose members are renowned for not only top tier leadership, but a sense of loyalty that means our members will go the extra mile for each other. We may not be able to wear the jacket forever, but the community that FFA creates lasts a lifetime.

Who: Kathleen Marty, Executive Committee
Where: Strasburg/Byers FFA Chapter
Why: Making connections with strangers and building friendships!

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Cover photo by Janet Brophy
A New Approach
The SAE Program Transforms to Better Serve Students

Beginning in the early 20th century, agricultural education incorporated an authentic, work-based or experiential learning component. Today, the program is known as the Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) introduced and launched thousands of budding agriculturalists into professional careers.

However, as recently as 10 years ago, program administrators and educators were seeing a decline in students’ engagement with the SAE component of the ag ed program.

“When we started talking to state staff and teachers across the country, it really came down to students were not finding a purpose in the SAE component if it was just a project-focused effort,” says Michael Womochil, Program Director of Agriculture, Natural Resources & Energy with the Colorado Community College System. “What we are trying to do is move the focus of SAE back to career preparation and the work the student does in SAE is directly related to their career goal, not necessarily just an experience in agriculture.”

Womochil has served on the national committee directing this project for the past six years—and it’s been no small undertaking. Getting feedback from, then bringing together leaders from 50 states in an effort to provide a new focus for SAE has resulted in a series of resources and a new structure for the program.

“When a student comes in as a freshman, in the past when we talk about SAEs, we would say, ‘Okay, what’s your SAE project going to be?’ says Womochil. “We would immediately focus on the project. But now, what we’re doing is we’re taking them to a program called Foundational SAE. And this is where that career exploration piece happens.”

That exploration launches a program in which students examine their career choice through the rubric of employability skills for college and career readiness, personal finance management and planning, workplace safety, and agricultural literacy. Then, the student can move into a variety of SAEs: placements, ownership/entrepreneurship, research, school-based enterprises, or service learning. So, while the traditional SAEs remain, the program has been deepened and expanded to encompass a much broader view of careers in agriculture.

“I think we’ve refocused it in a way that’s making it much more meaningful for every student and not just the ones who are in agriculture when they come into the ag ed class,” Womochil says. “This is something that every kid can do regardless of where they live and what program they’re in.”
Charlie Johnson

Charlie Johnson comes from a long line of eastern Colorado ranchers. In fact, he represents the fifth generation raising cattle on the plains near Kit Carson.

“My great, great granddad founded this ranch in 1907,” Johnson says. “I went to Kit Carson High School, just like all the family before me. Very small high school, there about 30 kids in high school. I only had three in my graduating class.”

After winning the Boettcher scholarship, Johnson attended the University of Denver and studied finance and real estate—later getting his Master’s in Business Administration as well. Now, he lives back in Kit Carson with his wife and two daughters. In addition to ranching, Johnson sells crop and drought insurance.

On the board for just under a year, Johnson serves on the finance committee, looking over investments as well as examining the occasional estate gifts bequeathed to the Colorado FFA Foundation.

“I see a big gap in communication between agricultural and urban America,” Johnson says. “FFA is a great way to try to bridge that gap. We’ve just got to tell our story, and I think FFA does an admirable job of accomplishing that.”

For at least 13 years, Cinch Jeans has partnered with the Colorado FFA Foundation as a mutual benefit for two home-grown Colorado organizations.

Cinch Jeans, based in Denver, traces its history to 1918, when founder Philip Miller came West with his line of cowboy hats. Some 80 years later, in 1996, the Cinch brand was launched as a premium western brand built to complement an active lifestyle. Now, it has grown to include products favored by top rodeo athletes, those who live the western lifestyle and those inspired by it.

“Youth organizations of any kind are big to us,” says Jessica Wahlert, Marketing Manager at Cinch. “It’s not just about them coming back and being customers later. We want them to see a company that started small and grew and realize that’s how their careers start. In FFA, you start by learning the fundamentals and grow from there. We want to be a part of that growth from the ground up.”

The company provides the FFA officer team with Cinch jackets, jeans, and shirts—including white, collared shirts than can be a part of the FFA official dress code. Throughout the year, Cinch also pitches in for giveaways at the Meat and Greet in November and hosts any out-of-town FFA dignitaries at their Cinch Factory Store.

“It’s important for us to go with a group that’s going to have an end goal, work together to reach it, and help them get to that goal,” Wahlert added. “With these FFA groups, it’s just a seamless partnership for us given that their FFA leaders are just setting out with those missions each and every year, whether it’s becoming part of an office or putting on events. For us to align with a group that’s working towards that end goal is important because obviously that’s what our business does each and every day.”

What’s more, Wahlert knows the benefits of an FFA experience firsthand as she grew up in the Eaton chapter.

“As a company that grew within the Western industry, it’s important to us to make an impact on those student members, especially locally,” she added.
New Blood
How Avery Kimble is Using Her FFA Grant to Improve Her Herd’s Genetics

In the high mesa country of Montrose County, Avery Kimble and her family run registered black Angus cows and half-blood Wagyu cattle. Enrolled in the FFA program at Olathe as a sophomore, Avery and her sister have their own herd.

“I wanted to add new genetics to our herd, so I looked into the Heifer Wrangle,” Kimble says. “My advisor had told me about it and our friends in town who did it last year and they said how great of a program it is and how many opportunities you have with it.”

Simply, the Heifer Wrangle is a grant administered by the Colorado FFA Foundation for students that enables them to buy a heifer to add to an existing herd or to begin a new herd.

Kimble had her sights set on genetics from a local breeder, Lazy JP Angus, and developed a plan which she then related in the application process.

“I had to answer some questions on where I would get her, what she would be, why I wanted to get her, plans for the future of my beef operation, and how all of this relates to my career endeavors. I really went into details on why I wanted those genetics and why I chose the people I chose.”

She was awarded a grant—sponsored by the Boettcher Foundation—and purchased a heifer she named Evi. The heifer will be bred, shown at the county and state fair, and then Evi gets to be a heifer and future mom on the ranch.

“I’d like to win my class at State Fair, because she is a good heifer,” Kimble adds. “Then overall, I want her to produce. I would like for her to produce a heifer just to add to my herd and to get more of her genetics into our herd. I’m really interested in how those genetics will combine. When I graduate college I hope to become a livestock geneticist.”
Mr. and Mrs. FFA
Troy and Kristin Schneider

On Colorado’s eastern plains, near Cope, Troy and Kristin Schneider are raising irrigated corn, irrigated alfalfa, dry land wheat, beef, and boys. And much of what they’re doing has its roots in their respective FFA experiences.

Troy attended Liberty High School near Joes and served as a district officer for the High Plains FFA district. Kristen (then Hoozee), attended New Raymer.

“My mom called me ‘Ms. Mouse’ growing up because I didn’t like to open my mouth and speak in any circumstance,” Kristin says. “My FFA advisor stuck me in public speaking at the district level, my sophomore year and it got me through the ‘Ms. Mouse’ stage.

Troy, meanwhile, points to the connections made during those formative FFA years and how they’ve maintained not only as friends, but as business and industry partners as well. The most significant partnership each formed through FFA, however, was more on the romantic side.

“We were both on the nominating committee at the State FFA Convention in Lamar,” Troy says. “I walked in the room and there were two chairs open. One was next to a young lady. That was 1994, and we’re still sitting by each other today.”

Each went on to become Colorado State FFA Officers and attended Northeastern Junior College—marrying after graduating from there. After a brief stint in Fort Collins, Troy moved back to the family farm near Cope while Kristen worked at the First National Bank in Yuma.

“Then we had some changing dynamics here on the farm where we either needed to bring in a hired hand or I could be at home full time on the farm,” Kristin says. “At that point I just came home. It was actually a good time as far as the age of our kids. Our oldest was just getting out of junior high and into high school and all of the things that involves with them, so since then I’ve just been here on the farm doing whatever needs to be done.”

Together, they’ve made a great team for the farm, each bringing different experiences and perspectives to bear on the business.

“We both knew what we grew up with on our farms, but FFA also exposed us to things we weren’t familiar with on different types of farms. Between Troy’s and my relationship actually we always joke that he taught me about irrigation and I taught him about cows. FFA can expose you to all sorts of different parts of agriculture.”

Troy serves as the president of the Colorado Corn Administrative Committee and claims his time in FFA shaped the way he is able to serve in that capacity, as well.

“FFA was that foundation that I still lean on to this day,” he says. “That network of knowing people is one thing, but also the ability, the parliamentary procedure, the public speaking, the broader view of what agriculture meant and what it means today is huge. The ability to run a meeting, the ability to understand how to move things forward. And also, not that I’ve done everything right, but learning from my mistakes how to be a better team member when it comes to being an officer or just being a board member.”

And now, the Schneiders are seeing their sons benefit from FFA in some of the same ways they did. While their oldest son has graduated, the younger sons attend Arickaree High School. All three boys either were or are active in the FFA program there.

“The kids have been very fortunate to have a good solid FFA chapter to be in,” Troy says.
Wisdom from the Owl
Courtney Mayo, Agriculture Instructor, Green Mountain High School

CoFFA: Tell us about how you became interested in being an Agriculture instructor.

Courtney Mayo: Well, I always knew I wanted to be a teacher. But I didn’t necessarily know in what way or what platform I wanted to do that. So I actually went to CSU and I started as an equine science major. And I figured out that was my hobby, that was not what I wanted to do for a career. I enrolled in the education college but I did not want to teach to a test. I was actually just walking through the College of Ag at CSU and there was this door open and there was this really cool bulletin board right next to it. And it asked all these questions like, “Do you like to teach and work with kids?” And, “Do you like to be outside?” And all of these questions that were ... I was like, “Yes, yes, yes.” And it read, “You should be an agriculture education instructor.”

CoFFA: So you didn’t have any background in FFA?

Courtney Mayo: In third grade my family moved to Colorado in the suburbs of Denver. And I went to an urban school, which didn’t have any agriculture programs so subsequently it did not have FFA either.

CoFFA: Tell me about the program at Green Mountain?

Courtney Mayo: We are located in Lakewood, so we’re one of the first urban programs. So this is our fifth year. I started it five years ago. And we are unique because we are an urban program. I don’t have traditional agricultural students. Kids come in and call anything that they see that’s livestock a cow. And they think all cows are black and white. They don’t understand where their food comes from. They don’t even know what agriculture is. You asked them to define it and they don’t know. We’re unique just in that sense, that we don’t have the traditional agricultural students. We don’t have the traditional backgrounds and ties to agriculture. And this is my dream job. I graduated from CSU and I didn’t go into ag education right away because I wanted to teach where kids needed it. I wanted to teach in a city and in an urban area where ... We needed to close that producer/consumer gap and this is where it’s happening.

CoFFA: How are the students responding?

Courtney Mayo: Like a light bulb turning on, just a connection to the world around them. Right now, they don’t see how they’re connected to the natural world and how their everyday life is dependent on agriculture and the natural resources. So it’s always fun. And once they start learning about how agriculture affects their life and how much they depend upon it and where they would be without it, even in their future careers, where their careers would be without it, they just look at me and say, “We feel like we’ve been in a hole. Why hasn’t anybody told us this? Why don’t we know about this?” They say, “We feel so left out and so secluded—we just do not know anything.” By the end it’s really cool for them to come back and look ... because I would make them look at all of their classwork from the very beginning, the very first week of school. And they are surprised, “Look at what I thought I knew.”
There is a lot growing at the Colorado FFA Foundation: Career development events, FFA member and advisor assistance programs, leadership opportunities, scholarships, and much more. To learn how you can help grow leaders, build communities, and strengthen agriculture, through donating your time, sharing financial gifts, or lending expertise, visit www.coloradoffafoundation.org.