

# Vision of Virginia

WINTER 2024



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Virginia State Officer Adam Hawkins stands next to Virginia's National Officer Candidate Savannah Goodwin during session.

by Grace Walbroehl – VA FFA 2023-2024 State Secretary

On the first day of November of 2023, the sea of blue jackets descended into the streets of the Hoosier State Capitol once more. Each year in late October or early November, Indianapolis hosts the National FFA Convention and Expo. This year was the 96th annual convention and was one to remember for all Virginia FFA members and supporters who attended. Virginia FFA saw many successful chapters, individuals, and teams. We saw the talent of our members displayed on the national stage and witnessed Virginia's own Andrew Seibel retire from his

position as the 2022- 2023 National FFA President.

Virginia FFA is full of excellence, and this year some of that excellence was recognized on the national stage! Carroll County Middle FFA was named the 2023 National Middle School Model of Excellence winner this year at the 96th National FFA Convention and Expo. Carroll County Middle FFA promoted agricultural literacy to children in their county during the public library's "March is Ag Literacy Month" program. Each week, members presented a different



Carroll County Middle School accepts their award, winning National Middle School Model of Excellence.

## UPCOMING events

### JUNE

24-27: FFA Convention

### JULY

8-12: FFA Camp

### JULY

15-19: VAAE Conference

### JULY

26-28: Virginia Farm Bureau Young Farmers

### SEPTEMBER

27-OCT 6: State Fair of Virginia

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agriculture book with accompanying activities and take-home items for attendees. Members provided a petting zoo at the annual Back to School Bash. This interactive booth allowed parents and students to learn more about middle school FFA. We could not be more proud of all of the hard and impactful work that Carroll County Middle School FFA members and advisors are doing in their chapter and community, congratulations!

In addition to being excellent, Virginia FFA members are also incredibly talented. Three of our gifted members displayed their talents for all 70,000 national convention attendees to see - how impressive! Gary Vance from the Spotswood FFA Chapter and Franco Abud from the Courtland FFA Chapter

were a part of the National FFA Band, they rocked the stage during sessions and pre-sessions! Franco said this opportunity was “a once-in-a-lifetime experience. From stepping onto the stage in Lucas Oil Stadium, playing for the national officers, to making lifelong friends, it’s an opportunity I will remember forever.” We are thrilled Gary and Franco represented Virginia so well! Leah Moore of the Rappahannock FFA Chapter won Virginia’s talent competition with her performance of “The House That Built Me” by Miranda Lambert. Leah had the opportunity to perform both this piece and the national anthem during multiple sessions at the national convention and expo. Leah went on to place in the top 10 finalists in the national talent competition, we are beyond proud of her!



Rappahannock FFA Member Leah Moore performs her talent piece during session.



Franco Abud from Courtland FFA poses with other members of the National FFA Band.



This is member Gary Vance from Spotswood FFA posing with the instrument he played as part of the National FFA Band.



The Massanutten Technical Center FFA 3rd Place Livestock Judging Team including members Carrie Miller, Malaina Ritchie, Sarah Craun, and Brooke Knott.

Virginia FFA members also succeeded when it came time to put on their blue jackets and compete in CDEs and LDEs. We had three teams finish with a gold rating. The Massanutten Technical FFA livestock judging team placed 3rd overall. The team consisted of Carrie Miller, Malaina Ritchie, Sarah Craun, and Brooke Knott. The milk quality and products team from Sherando FFA placed 8th overall and included team members: Emma Wisecarver, Rebecca Stout, Kaydan Shomaker, and Fatima Reyes. Julia Haviland, Herschel Hoffeditz, Romney Ritchie, and Maggie Toothman made up the dairy cattle evaluation team from Broadway FFA. Their team placed 10th overall. Congratulations to all these outstanding teams for their hard work and dedication to their competitions!

More successful members! We had two proficiency finalists who were awarded for their outstanding Supervised Agricultural Experiences. Megan McClelland from the Culpeper County FFA Chapter was a finalist in the equine science proficiency area. Bruce Jones from Appomattox senior FFA was a finalist in the specialty crop production proficiency area. Virginia FFA also had three individuals



Megan Wolfcale from Eastern View FFA receives her Agriscience Fair award in the area of Social Systems.



Megan McClelland from Culpeper FFA was a finalist in the Equine Science proficiency area.



Members from J. Frank Hillyard FFA Branson Arbogast & John Haviland receive their Agriscience Fair award in Power, Structure, and Technical systems.

or teams place as top 10 finalists in the Agriscience Fair competition. Ella Beagle & Avery Caffrey of J. Frank Hillyard Middle FFA were finalists in Food Products and Processing Systems. Megan Wolfcale from the Eastern View FFA chapter finished in 6th place in Social Systems. Branson Arbogast & John Haviland also come from J. Frank Hillyard Middle FFA and were finalists in the area of Power, Structure, and Technical systems. They finished 5th in their project on comparing chainsaw sharpening angles and their effectiveness. Congratulations to all these outstanding young agriculturists!

The golden key of the American FFA Degree is the highest degree that can be earned by an FFA member. It is a testament to the work they put into their supervised agricultural experiences and the leadership qualities they demonstrated during their time as an FFA member. Virginia had 69 members earn this golden achievement, congratulations to all! The Honorary American FFA degree is reserved for the supporters of agriculture, agriculture education, and FFA who have provided an extraordinary level of service on the national

level. Virginia recognized John Carpenter, Alan Grant, Margaret Jones, David Kohl, Robert Mills, Melessa Suder, Brian Cavey, and Jared Hill to receive this award. The VIP Citation recognizes those who have provided 20 years of service to the National FFA organization and agriculture education. Dr. Phillip M. Fravel was a deserving recipient of this honor.

To wrap up the week, Virginia FFA saw one of our own hang up his blue jacket for the final time. National FFA President Andrew Seibel, originally from the Lord Botetourt FFA chapter, and his team retired on the last day of convention before National FFA welcomed a new team of officers. Andrew gave an inspiring retiring address where he encouraged FFA members everywhere to lead with love as it is our greatest tool. In the words of Andrew, "Let love live!" Thank you and congratulations once more to each Virginia FFA member who attended the 96th National FFA Convention and Expo and represented our state so well. We hope to see you next year!



Pictured here are some of the Honorary American Degree Recipients from Virginia: John Carpenter, Alan Grant, Margaret Jones, David Kohl, Robert Mills, Melessa Suder, Brian Cavey, and Jared Hill. Also here is Dr. Phillip M. Fravel a recipient of the VIP Citation.



The 2022-2023 Retiring National FFA Officer Team: Andrew Seibel, Jessica Herr, Ryan Williamson, MacKenna Clifton, Karstyn Cantrell, and Gracie Murphy.



Pictured left to right Jennifer Armstrong (Virginia FFA Foundation Director), Ron Roller (Former Ag Teacher), Jimmy Hisghman (Former Ag Teacher), and Andy Seibel (Virginia FFA Executive Secretary).

by Adam Hawkins – VA FFA 2023-2024 State Sentinel

On November 7th, 2023, Virginia FFA held the state Soil Judging competition. The day started off at Signal Knob Middle School where it was announced that a Leave A Legacy fund was to be started in honor of Jimmy Hisghman. Mr. Hisghman graduated from Strasburg High School in June 1973 and began his teaching career at Strasburg High School in July 1977. Mr. Hisghman remained there until he transferred to Signal Knob Middle School to open the middle school program in 1991, where Mr. Hisghman continued to teach until his retirement in 2007. This legacy fund will support middle school CDEs at the annual Virginia FFA State convention. The contestants were then shuttled just a few miles away to Woodbine Farmers Market for the contest. For this contest, students are required to identify different



The first-place Junior team from Signal Knob Middle FFA.



The first-place Senior team from Holston FFA.

types of soil, surface thickness, and soil structure. They are also required to identify the slope gradient, rate of erosion and runoff rate then place the soil in a capability class and suggest a management plan for the land. Placing first in the Senior division is Holston FFA and placing first in the Junior division is Signal Knob Middle - Congratulations! Virginia FFA would like to thank Jimmy Hishman for coordinating the contest, Soil Scientists, Nick Livesay, and Sabrina Heltzel, with Lord Fairfax Soil and Water Conservation District. As well as Chick-fil-A on Pleasant Valley Road and Horizon Farm Credit for sponsoring the meals. Finally, Woodbine Farm Market, Rudolph Small Engine Repair, Shenandoah County Farm Bureau, Warren County Farm Bureau, and Frederick County Farm Bureau for being our Facilities and Supplies Sponsors. Without the support and help of these individuals and organizations, this contest would not have been possible - thank you!

# Advocate FOR AGRICULTURE TOUR



Giles FFA members talking to each other at the Advocate for Agriculture Tour.

by Kelcey Weston – VA FFA 2023-2024 State President

In a noteworthy initiative, the Virginia FFA took a proactive step towards empowering its members by hosting a series of training sessions from November 15th to the 17th. The focus of these sessions was to equip FFA members with the essential tools necessary for engaging in meaningful and concise conversations with legislators. We were happy to host Brett Laubach to teach our students this important life skill.



Notably, the training sessions were not confined to a single location; rather, they spanned across the state with a total of five sessions held. This decentralized approach ensured accessibility for FFA members from various regions, allowing them to benefit from the training no matter which part of Virginia they live in.



Around 500 Virginia FFA members were able to attend the Advocate for Agriculture tour. The multitude of students that had this training will only help to strengthen Virginia FFA, by increasing the variety of members that get to meet with legislators. Thus, ensuring that every voice gets represented in Richmond, as laws and bills are passed that affect every student in the great state of Virginia.

The ultimate goal of the training was to provide FFA members with the skills and knowledge required to effectively communicate with legislators. Engaging in meaningful conversations with lawmakers is a crucial aspect of advocating for agricultural issues and promoting support for FFA. The training aimed to cultivate the ability to articulate concerns, ideas, and perspectives in a concise and impactful manner.



# CULTIVATING EXCELLENCE *Beyond* THE CLASSROOM



The Virginia attendees chose to fly out a day before the conference to mark seeing the Grand Canyon off their bucket lists!

by Hope Showalter – VA FFA State Staff Intern

From November 28 to December 2, the vibrant desert city of Phoenix, Arizona hosted agricultural educators from across the United States for the 2023 National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE) Convention. While at the 2023 NAAE Convention, teachers participated in countless networking events and professional development opportunities. Every good agriculture teacher knows that learning doesn't end upon completion of their college degree, but instead continues to be a career-long process! Teachers also attend awards and recognition banquets to celebrate the outstanding contribution of teachers who go above and beyond for their students, school, and community. Virginia had many teachers and guests attend this year's convention.

Mrs. Melessa Suder, agriculture teacher and FFA advisor at Eastern View High School was recognized as the 2023 NAAE Region VI Outstanding Teacher! This award recognizes teachers who possess leadership in civic, community, agriculture/agribusiness and professional activities. Agriculture teachers who receive this award are chosen through an application process for their outstanding role in conducting the highest quality agricultural education programs in the country and are seen as innovators for student success in the agriculture classroom. Regarding receiving the award, Mrs. Suder said, "I was very shocked at both the state and regional levels. I don't do what I do for things like this. I do everything for the kids and my love of agriculture and the importance of the continuation of agriculture education. I had been encouraged to apply by my peers and basically caved to the idea. I really had no clue I'd even get chosen as the state

recipient, much less the regional recipient. I'm very honored and humbled. There are many great agriculture educators out there that are deserving of this award at both levels."



Smiling with her award, Mrs. Melessa Suder poses for a picture after being recognized as the 2023 NAAE Region VI Outstanding Teacher!



The Virginia Attendees pose for a picture after receiving the Innovative Professional State Association Award.

After receiving this award, Mrs. Suder plans to continue teaching and encouraging her students to be the best they can be. “While I’ve spent 19 years in the classroom, I can’t say I’ve taught anything the same way twice. I constantly update my curriculum materials to reflect current trends in the industry. I’m still working hard with agriculture students/ FFA members to help them be successful while also encouraging them to consider something within the agriculture industry as a future career,” she said. While teaching can be a difficult job, it is a rewarding one. In Virginia and at the national level, there are support systems that teachers can turn to for growth and development. Mrs. Suder has taken advantage of these opportunities and said, “We have amazing workshops during our Winter In-Service and Summer Conference that always provide a good refresher and good ideas! Most importantly, being actively involved in VAAE/NAAE provides an amazing network of agriculture teachers with worlds of experience and advice.”

Virginia FFA would like to congratulate Mrs. Suder on this amazing accomplishment and wish her the best as she continues to provide a positive, welcoming, and innovative learning environment for her students at Eastern View! If you are a teacher and interested in attending the 2024 NAAE Convention, please contact Mr. Andy Seibel at [gseibel@vt.edu](mailto:gseibel@vt.edu).



Surrounded by cacti and other desert blooms, three Virginia teachers pose for a picture during a visit to the Desert Botanical Gardens during a morning of exploration before the start of the convention.



# STATE OFFICERS TAKE ON *Virginia Beach!*



Virginia FFA State Officers at Virginia Beach.

by Anne Kathryn Martz  
*VA FFA 2023-2024 State Vice President*

To wrap up the month of November, the State Officers were invited to attend the Annual Virginia Farm Bureau State Convention in Virginia Beach! There was so much to see and take in during our visit to the East Coast, between the beautifully decorated hotels and the incredibly festive atmosphere, this was a convention for the books! The officers were able to share meals with many stakeholders, supporters, and representatives for agricultural companies, located in not only Virginia but throughout the country. During

their visit, they were able to sit in on different competitions, such as the Virginia Farm Bureau Discussion Meet Finals, and the infamous “Bull Pen.” They were able to listen in on the Virginia Young Farmers and Ranchers Excellence in Agriculture winners, Thomas and Rachel Henley, as they practiced giving their state-winning presentations ahead of the American Farm Bureau Convention, where they placed third on the national level! Officers were also able to attend the meetings of the voting delegates,



Virginia FFA State Officers set up with the VA FFA Foundation Booth.



Virginia FFA State Officers with Director of Virginia Cooperative Extension, Dr. Michael Gutter.

listening to the delegates vote and voice their opinions on the decisions that affect us all. The recommendations that they decided on will eventually be taken to our government officials, where they will hopefully be put into action. It was quite the opportunity to be able to interact and converse with so many advocates for agriculture!



Virginia FFA State Officers with Farm Bureau Federation President, Zippy Duvall.



Virginia FFA State Officers with MANNRS students.

Throughout the Convention, the state officers were able to sit in on many different sessions, hearing from many different industry professionals and award winners. This included Jason Brown, who during the Farm to Table Luncheon shared the gospel and an encouraging message about why he chose to leave his professional football career to settle down and become a farmer. We also heard from the American Farm Bureau Federation President, Zippy Duvall, as he gave some encouraging remarks to farmers and agriculturalists throughout the state. Wayne Pryor, Virginia Farm Bureau President followed behind, providing additional commentary on Virginia Farmers and how they are continuing to invest in agriculture's future. During the Fellowship Luncheon, attendees were able to hear from the 2023 Virginia Distinguished Farm Bureau Woman, Keighley Gore, as she spoke about her excitement for the future of agriculture. Our very own 2023

Virginia Farm Bureau Outstanding Young Agriculturalist Anne Kathryn (AK) Martz, gave her speech during the Tuesday night dinner. She spoke about the importance of agricultural education, and how education is the key to growing agriculture for the future.

Finally, the delegates and attendees were able to listen to Governor Youngkin's words, noting the importance of youth-led organizations and Virginia Agriculture in the Classroom. We cannot wait to return next year!



Anne Kathryn Martz accepting her Outstanding Young Agriculturalist Award!



VIRGINIA  
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2ND ANNUAL

# Blue Carpet GALA



by **Jadyn Smith** – VA FFA 2023-2024 State Treasurer

On December 8th, the Virginia FFA Foundation hosted its second annual FFA Blue Carpet Gala at the Boar's Head Resort in Charlottesville, Virginia. The event served as a wonderful opportunity for FFA alumni and supporters to come together in fellowship.

To commence the evening, past state officers had the honor of leading the opening ceremony once more, each stationed at their respective offices. The distinguished officers included President Andrew Siebel, Secretary Andrew Smith, Vice President Tess Siebel, Treasurer Ainsley Davis, Reporter Morgan Slaven, and the esteemed Dr. Case serving as the advisor. Delegate Bobby Orrock expertly fulfilled the role of emcee. These individuals represented FFA admirably, leaving a lasting impact on the event.

This year, multiple schools contributed items for the auction and played key roles in organizing the Gala. A special thanks to Walter S. Knewman for donating a cured ham to be auctioned. Walter S. Knewman's annual tradition of curing hams not only contributes to students' understanding of the meat industry but also raises funds for the school—a fantastic initiative that allows members to delve into the industries that sustain us. Carroll County High School excelled in creating stunning floral displays that adorned the gala. Their meticulous work with garlands and floral centerpieces on every table added a touch of elegance to the event.



Dr. Larry Case.



VA FFA State President, Kelcey Weston.

The 2022-2023 State Officer team reunited at this year's gala, playing a vital role in ensuring its seamless execution. Overall, this event could not have been possible without the amazingly detailed and intentional work of the Virginia FFA Gala committee, including Jennifer Armstrong, Rebekah Slabach, Alison Jones, Greta Liskey, Beth Breeding, and Keighley Gore. We extend our sincere gratitude to Andy Siebel, Alec Jones, Jeff Rhodes, and Debbie Rhodes for their invaluable assistance in post-event cleanup and for consistently demonstrating exemplary dedication by consistently going above and beyond.

The highlight of the Gala was its record-breaking fundraising achievement, reaching \$105,000! These funds will significantly contribute to advancing agricultural education for FFA members throughout the state. A heartfelt thank you to everyone who attended, and special gratitude to our donors and supporters. Virginia FFA encourages you to express your appreciation by sending a thank-you note to any supporter of Virginia FFA; they would undoubtedly appreciate hearing from the students they are supporting!

# AGRICULTURE IN *Action*

by Kirin Miller – VA FFA 2023-2024 State Vice President  
and Hope Showalter – VA FFA State Staff Intern

When you think of someone you look up to in FFA, what qualities do they have? Maybe they mentor underclassmen to show them the ropes of something they have never tried before, or maybe they always take opportunities given to them to learn about agriculture and improve their skills. Virginia FFA has started a new feature to recognize those exceptional students for working hard on their SAEs, volunteering their free time for the good of their community, and being creative in their agricultural endeavors. Out of all the candidates nominated, the first three students have earned their recognition! Check out a small portion of their stories below!



Elizabeth Hodges trims the nails of a dog at her veterinary assistant job.

## December

### Elizabeth Hodges

12th Grade - Lord Botetourt High School

Throughout her time in high school, Elizabeth has been heavily involved in FFA through serving as a chapter officer for three years and participating in various Career and Development Events (CDEs). Recently, Elizabeth has been combining her love for animals with her future career aspirations through her job as a Veterinary Assistant at Hanging Rock Animal Hospital. In this job, she assists with providing initial contact to clients and patients, bringing patients to the exam room, and working with the veterinarian to perform exams. Another important aspect of her job includes building relationships with clients and patients. Her time in FFA has greatly prepared her for her future. Elizabeth said, "My experiences with FFA warmed me up with meeting people and being able to comfortably talk to people without getting so nervous. I have also had many experiences with hard work which really helps in the veterinary field. In my opinion, FFA has greatly prepared me for my career and life!"

## January

### Brent Wetzel

12th Grade - James Wood High School

During the summer of 2023, Brent's Ag Teacher and FFA Advisor, Mrs. Emily Roy, reached out about an exciting opportunity. Interested in starting a program similar to PALS (Partners in Active Learning Support), Mrs. Roy and Brent worked together to create a program called ACES (Agriculture Connects Every Student). The program currently includes 39 high school mentors for 56 third-grade students at a local elementary school. After helping start ACES, Mrs. Roy worked with the school board to create a paid position for Brent to be in charge of writing the curriculum and training the other mentors. "Monthly, I look over the curriculum that the third-grade classes are going through that month and then I start looking at county ag curriculum and finding ways to relate it. I collaborate a lot with my advisor to create the activity and lesson plan. After solidifying the curriculum, we create a presentation to teach the mentors during a monthly meeting so that they each feel prepared to teach their mentee on a one-on-one basis," said Brent.



Brent Wetzel helps a third grader with an agriculture activity in class.



Hunter Whitten rides a small bull at a rodeo.

## February

### Hunter Whitten

Sixth Grade - Mecklenburg County Middle School

Hunter began forging his own path in the agriculture industry at a young age through inspiration from other family members. Hunter said, "My uncle rode bucking horses when he was in his teens, and I wanted to be like him. I started out riding sheep and had to work my way up. I've been riding for about six years now!" Once Hunter entered sixth grade, he decided to tie his bull riding interests to his SAE project by learning about rodeo stock contracting. He said, "I thought I would be interested in being a stock contractor when I saw them working the bulls through the back alleys, so I reached out to anyone and everyone that I could to learn more." Through this SAE, Hunter works with various mentors like Battle's End Bucking Bulls and DC Cattle to learn the ends and outs of what being a stock contractor entails. "I've learned what they do on a daily basis and how much it takes to put on a rodeo. I even helped plan a rodeo with True Grit Rodeo which entailed a lot such as building an arena, picking up rocks, tying flank ropes, feeding bulls, and hanging sponsor signs. My favorite part of helping plan was getting to watch all of the bull riders and barrel racers and stock contractors arrive."

# CHECKING OFF Checkpoint 2



The officer team pictured with their facilitator for checkpoint 2, Sydnee Mason.

by Nate Zerkel – VA FFA 2023-2024 State Vice President

On January 18th, the officer team showed up in Culpeper ready for their Checkpoint 2 officer training. At Checkpoint 2 the officer team learned about team dynamics and public speaking. The State Officers learned the different aspects of working in a team and how to maintain peace and productivity in team dynamics. Liberti Sell said, “Checkpoint 2 gave us the opportunity to grow as a team as we learned ways to work together. We learned many skills that we can use during our time as state officers as well as experiences outside of FFA.” Needless to say, team dynamics play a huge role in the success as a team. The officer team also learned about how to efficiently and effectively write and deliver speeches. As FFA Day at the Capitol was approaching quickly, they wanted to

be sure their speaking skills were sharp. “As an FFA member that did not participate in any public speaking contests growing up, I truly learned so much and feel more prepared to take on any public speaking I encounter in the future.” said Kelcey Weston. State Officer Facilitator, Sydnee Mason, was amazing at giving constructive feedback and pushing the team to be their best in all aspects! While in Culpeper, the officer team was able to sit in on parts of a VAAE conference where they made new connections and interacted with agriculture teachers from across the state! Needless to say it was a very exciting and impactful weekend. Thank you to everyone who made Checkpoint 2 Training and the VAAE Conference possible!



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# Discoveries DOWN UNDER

by State Officer Team – VA FFA 2023-2024

It's hard to remember what summer temperatures feel like during the blustery winter storms in Virginia. The state officer team had the opportunity to experience that hot weather for a period of time at the beginning of January with an educational trip to Australia! The International Leadership Seminar for State Officers provided us with countless learning opportunities in the agriculture field of a different country.



The team after our tour of the Australian Parliament House.

## Rice Production

by Kirin Miller – VA FFA 2023-2024 State Vice President

Braving the dry and extreme heat of Griffith, we surveyed something many of us had never seen before, a rice farm. This particular farm grows the seed to be sent to other farms to grow the grain. The main variety we observed was Topaz, and the family uses an automated irrigation system to water the crop. The first crop in Australia has been advancing as far as genetics go because the process to breed a different type has been cut down from 12 to 6 years long!

## U.S.D.A. Embassy

by Kirin Miller – VA FFA 2023-2024 State Vice President

One morning in Australia, participants heard from three foreign agriculture service workers who provided us with insight into how international trade works there. For example, \$1.25 billion U.S.D. was exported to Australia last year because it is the world's 12th largest market. Since one-fifth of their land is desert and they are in the Southern hemisphere, there is a seasonal advantage for crops.



A rice farm on the driest continent, how cool! (Inset: The tiny white tip of a rice seed emerges from inside of the stalk.)



Family Owned sheep and angus beef production.



Asking questions and getting insight from a family owned Sheep Operation.

## Oh my *curd*, it's time to talk about milk!

by Jady Smith – VA FFA 2023-2024 State Treasurer

One thing that Australian dairy has in common with the United States is the number of dairies has drastically decreased. But the amount of milk produced by the dairies that are left significantly increased. This increase in milk production is due to many factors including the quality of the grain, along with selective breeding done by dairy producers. We can understand certain traits a cow may have based on her genetics and even have the ability to decide if her next calf will be male or female because of semen analysis technologies that enable us to sex the semen and select which will be Artificially Inseminated. Most dairy producers would agree that the well-being of a cow is the biggest factor in how much milk she will produce. So providing the highest quality feed, ensuring a low stress lifestyle, and plenty of access to shade and water increases the amount of milk she makes. All these little details lead to a cow that is healthy, happy, and a farmer with full milk tanks!

## The Culture of Kindness

by Grace Walbroehl – VA FFA 2023-2024 State Secretary

Perhaps it was that Australian sunshine, but upon stepping outside of the airport in Sydney, everyone had the same reaction. “Everything and everyone is so bright here!” Kind and smiling faces everywhere you turn. Colorful buildings filled with the sounds of laughter and joy. I do not believe any of us were expecting to jump into such a welcoming culture. However, that sentiment remained true for the duration of our journey through Australia. Whether it was our joyful tour guides and coach (bus) drivers who were willing to share their wealth of knowledge or the incredibly hospitable families who invited us into their homes and onto their farms, the Australian people were nothing but kind. In addition to this, one thing that stood out was how laid-back and easygoing Australian people tend to be. It is even extremely common for people to leave their homes barefoot! This relaxed and kind culture was hard to say goodbye to, but we believe we brought some of it back to share!

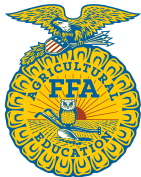


The State Officer team in front of the Sydney Opera House on day 1.

## Uncovering the Sails of the Sydney Opera House

by **Liberti Sell** – VA FFA 2023-2024 State Reporter

The Sydney Opera House has stood proudly along the shores of Sydney for the past 50 years, serving as one of the most inspirational pieces of art in the architectural industry. This masterpiece was not built overnight but over 14 years due to different powers in government, having to switch architects, as well as going over budget. Architect Jørn Utzon was the original architect on the job who submitted his design and won for its creative nature. Utzon submitted a design that had 2 grand concert halls side by side one for large musical and dance theatrics while the other was for drama and smaller musical productions, both with the sails facing the harbor. The Sydney Opera House is made up of 1,056,006 tiles covering the sails. The size of the sails is not a coincidence either. Each was designed with the intention to be able to create a full circle when the sails are laid next to each other. This beautiful piece of art continues to inspire and surprise people to this day. They are constantly making this structure the best it can possibly be. Being that it truly was built from the ground up, you could say it is one of the most groundbreaking buildings in Sydney.



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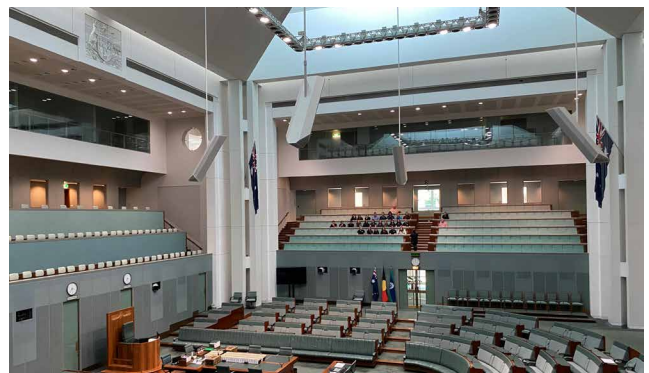


The Australian Parliament House.

## Parliament House

by **Liberti Sell** – VA FFA 2023-2024 State Reporter

The Parliament House in Australia incorporates traditional and modern architecture. The courtyard in the front is lined with flags and towering marble pillars. The Australia House of Parliament is a beautiful blend of modern and traditional architecture. From marble pillars to a flag-lined court it shows the blend of natural beauty with its structure. This was done to purposefully symbolize the connection of democracy to the people. The Parliament House is located in the heart of Canberra, it stands tall and symbolizes openness, inviting the citizens and visitors to witness the nation's government and how it works. To me, it was a way to appreciate the many facets of art, architecture, and democracy on “Capitol Hill”. It was opened in 1988 by Queen Elizabeth II and serves as a way for the nation's representatives to gather. Within the Parliament House, there is a Visitors Gallery that allows the public to have a front-row seat to parliamentary processes and sessions. This gives Australians a front-row seat to witness democracy in action. It is far more than just a brick-and-mortar structure, it is a structure of architectural brilliance that evolves with the changing tides of politics and society. The people get to witness the changes and be a part of that in a magnificently structured building. Parliament House is a tall inviting building for both Australians and global visitors to witness and share the pulse of a nation in action.

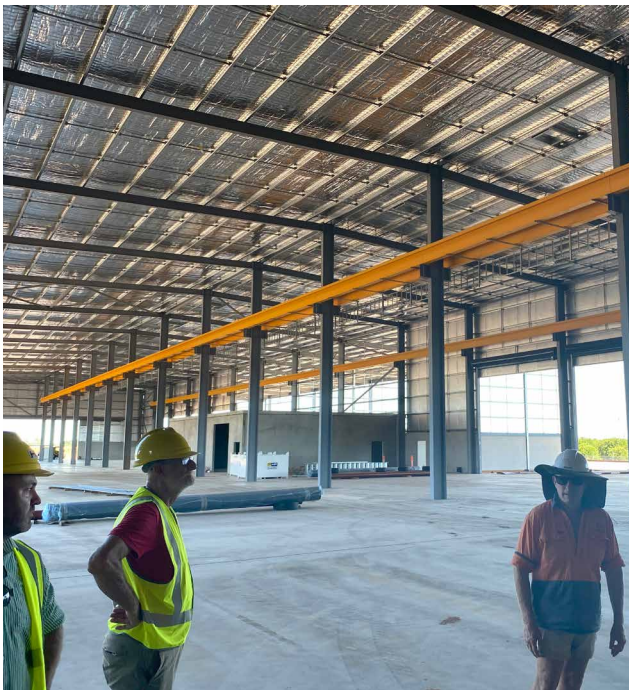


Australian Parliament Chambers.





Family owned grain operation.



The soon to be largest John Deere dealership in Australia under construction.

## John Deere

by Anne Kathryn Martz – VA FFA 2023-2024 State Vice President

The international travelers had the opportunity to visit two different Hutcheon & Pearce John Deere locations! The first location was a shop located in the center of town, and the ILSSO participants were able to do a walk-through (complete with a shopping stop, of course), where they were able to see the shop and look at all of the cool equipment while it was being worked on. The second location that they visited is a construction site for the newest branch of the Hutcheon & Pearce brand, soon to become the biggest John Deere location in Australia! The participants were able to wander around this huge facility, taking in the progress that has been made in just six months. The building will hopefully be finished in July of this year. The new John Deere site backs up to a citrus packing plant, so the travelers were able to squeeze in a short tour of the facility and enjoy some of the sweet mid-summer fruits in the hot midday heat! What a day this was!

## The Future of Agriculture in the Land Down Under

by Grace Walbroehl – VA FFA 2023-2024 State Secretary

If you've found yourself wondering if Australia has anything similar to FFA, you are in luck! The answer is yes, Australia has the Future Farmers Network. Both organizations work towards involving young people in the future of agriculture; however, there are some key differences. The Future Farmers Network or FFN is a relatively young organization only getting its start in 2002. Instead of being geared towards students, Future Farmers Network is an organization for young adults aged 18-35. It was founded with the vision of supporting the development of every young person in Australian agriculture and other rural industries. We were lucky enough to learn more about the FFN from three regional directors. Caitlin McConnel (Queensland), Claudia Mitchell (New South Whales), and Jessica Loughland (Victoria) all shared their empowering agriculture stories and how the FFN gave them the connections and knowledge to reach their full potential as agriculturists. Ms. McConell, a lawyer, farmer, and advocate shared her admiration for FFA. She was inspired by the work we do to inform people that "while planting and harvesting are important to agriculture it is also a business, science, and art." Our team enjoyed seeing how FFA provides brothers and sisters with the common desire for agriculture advocacy not only across our country, but the world as well.



Kirin and Australian dairy cattle.

## Pepperton Poll Dorset and White Suffolk Stud

by Anne Kathryn Martz – VA FFA 2023-2024 State Vice President

Since 1994 Roger and Dianne Trewick have owned and operated Pepperton Poll Dorset and White Suffolk Stud. As per the name, they raise polled Dorset and White Suffolk stud lambs. They use Lambplan, an Australian livestock recording system, to keep track of their flock and produce their desired lambs with certain characteristics. The ILSSO travelers were fortunate enough to have the opportunity to tour the farm and talk to the owners. While there, travelers were provided with refreshments prepared by the family owning the farm, along with a little introduction and Q&A opportunity. After the refreshments, they walked over to the barn and sorting areas to see how everything worked. Participants were surprised by a demonstration of how their flock sorting system works in their barn and a show from the well-trained sheep dogs. Overall, it turned out to be a very exciting and informative visit!

## Aussie ranchers keep MOOvin' towards better beef

by Jady Smith – VA FFA 2023-2024 State Treasurer

Australia's beef industry is constantly changing with the demands of the market. The newest trend is grass-fed beef. While these labels may seem more appealing to the consumer, the average Aussie farmer or rancher may experience some setbacks while finishing beef cattle on grass when the climate can reach extreme temperatures in the summertime, making steady weight gain more difficult to attain. But with new efforts to make grazing land more efficient, and nutritious for our bovine friends, it has become increasingly easier to put on a final finishing weight before going on to be processed. One difficulty that Reiland Angus, an Angus farm that focuses on producing quality breeding bulls, spoke about was the difficulty of finding a bull that fits all the criteria for their

breeding stock. Since their cattle are also strictly grass, the father of the next generation of calves had to display certain qualities that will keep the calves at a low birth weight, structurally correct, temperamentally correct, quick growth with only pasture grazing, along with many other crucial traits. Reiland's strict standards have pushed them to be a very competitive Angus bull producer, with customers all across Australia and internationally. Despite the unique set of challenges Australian beef producers face, they are sure to always rise to the occasion in order to keep producing the best beef possible.



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