

Vision of Virginia

WINTER 2025



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The State Officer Team with SOLC facilitator Lauren Bigler outside of the Blacksburg Hilton Garden Inn.

UPCOMING events

JULY

6-12: State FFA Camp

JULY

14-17: VAAE Summer Conference

JULY

14-18: National FFA Summit

AUGUST

7: VA AG Expo

SEPTEMBER

11: Appalachian Area COLT



Checkpoint Two:

PLANTING THE FINAL SEEDS FOR STATE OFFICER SUCCESS

by Jackie Diaz – VA FFA 2024-2025 State Reporter

From February 5-8, 2025, the Virginia FFA State Officer Team completed their last National FFA training as part of the State Officer Leadership Continuum (SOLC): a series of experiences designed to help maximize State Officer impact during their year of service. The officers honed in on analyzing their team dynamics and on writing effective speeches in preparation for banquet season. The State Officers can confidently say that the SOLC has made them better leaders, advocates, and facilitators, and they are grateful to Lauren for being a mentor and resource to them throughout their year.

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Digging Deep:

VIRGINIA FFA'S SOIL SHOWDOWN

by Jackie Diaz – VA FFA 2024-2025 State Reporter

The Virginia FFA State Soils Judging contest took place on November 5th, 2024, at Giles High School. The contest included identifying soil features and inferred soil characteristics, measuring landscape factors, and interpreting agricultural management practices including soil and land use. This year, five junior teams and eleven senior teams braved a series of soil pits in cold and rainy weather conditions for the opportunity to represent their chapters at State Convention in June. Congratulations to the John S. Battle state winning junior team (*team members include Abby Depaolo, Maddy Wilson, Sam Rock, and Miah Harmon*) and the Strasburg state winning senior team (*team members include Ben White, Nolan Froemel, Sadie Lineweaver, and Luci Toman*)! Thank you to Mrs. Dudding and Giles FFA for hosting this event and to Dr. Galbraith at Virginia Tech for his help with producing contest materials!



Two students work to evaluate a soil pit.



Top ten junior individuals with Dr. Galbraith in no particular order

TOP 3 JUNIOR FFA INDIVIDUALS

- 1st - Camdyn Moye
Giles
- 2nd - Zyleigh Hayden
Holston
- 3rd - Phoebe Proffitt
Holston

TOP 3 SENIOR FFA INDIVIDUALS

- 1st - Ben White
Strasburg
- 2nd - Nolan Froemel
Strasburg
- 3rd - Ayla Janney
Broadway



Top ten senior individuals with Dr. Galbraith in no particular order

HARVESTING *Insights*

by Grayson Long – VA FFA 2024-2025 State President

The Virginia FFA State Officer Team engaged in two special industry visits in November 2024. On November 7th, the officer team traveled to Charlotte, NC, to visit the Harris Teeter headquarters and corporate offices. While visiting, the senior director of produce, Karin Humanik, gave a presentation on the history of Harris Teeter and its marketing strategies to compete with other large grocery store chains. After the presentation, the state officers had the exciting opportunity to tour the corporate offices, meet with various purchasers and category managers, and tour a Harris Teeter store front. Did you know Harris Teeter donates \$.25 per CASE of participating produce back to the Virginia FFA Scholarship Fund? Virginia FFA also has a second partner that participates in this crop-

tastic program, which is the Virginia Produce Company. On November 8th, the Virginia FFA State Officer Team toured the Virginia Produce Company in Hillsville, VA. Throughout this behind-the-scenes tour, the officers learned of the detailed processes that bring fresh fruits and vegetables to our grocery store shelves. The Virginia Produce Company works diligently to assist Virginia farmers by specializing in farm management, re-packing, and shipping produce year-round! Thank you to Harris Teeter and the Virginia Produce Company for all that you do to support the Virginia FFA Association and our members. We appreciate your investment in the future of the agriculture industry and our youth here in the commonwealth!



Learning about tomato varieties from Harris Teeter's Senior Director of Produce, Karin Humanik.



Thousands of collapsed produce shipping crates at the Virginia Produce Company.



Watching corn being processed at the Virginia Produce Company.



The Virginia FFA State Officers and the Harris Teeter corporate team.



by **Lindsay Tomlinson**

2024-2025 Virginia Agricultural Association of Educators, President

The Virginia Association of Agricultural Educators enjoyed a productive experience at the National Association of Agricultural Educators Conference in San Antonio, Texas in December. Virginia Ag Teachers attended regional meetings, professional development sessions and recognition celebrations. The group toured the Agriculture Ed Department of Texas State University -San Marcos, took a drive out to King Ranch and got to check out the Mission San Jose.

VAAE President, Lindsay Tomlinson receiving the NAAE Increase Membership Award.



Dakota Stroud, Teacher Turn the Key winner.

Mr. Dakota Stroud participated in the Teachers Turn the Key Professional Development program.



Matthew Nanny receiving the NAAE Region VI Outstanding Teacher award.

A few of Virginia's best Agriculture Educators won the following Region Awards:

- Mr. Matthew Nanny was the NAAE Region VI Outstanding Agriculture Education Teacher.
- Mrs. Mandy Curry won NAAE Region VI Ideas Unlimited Award
- Dr. Jessica Jones won NAAE Region VI Teacher Mentor



Meeting the American Farm Bureau President Zippy Duval.

by Braelyn Durbin – Virginia FFA Association

The Annual Farm Bureau Convention was held December 2nd through December 5th at the Omni Homestead Resort in Hot Springs, Virginia. This event brings together farmers, agricultural leaders, and stakeholders from across the state to celebrate the heart of Virginia's farming industry. This event, which spans several days, serves as a crucial moment for networking, education, and discussions on the pressing issues facing the agricultural community.

Each year, the Virginia Farm Bureau Convention features a series of workshops, seminars, and panels designed to address the latest challenges and trends in farming. Topics range from agricultural policy and legislative advocacy to sustainability practices, new farming technologies, and market trends. Workshops also focus on practical skills, such as crop management, livestock care, and business strategies, making the convention relevant to farmers across various sectors. The combination of traditional agricultural wisdom and new solutions provides a new approach to farming.

The Virginia Farm Bureau Convention's annual gathering is not just about education but action. Advocacy plays a vital role in the convention's agenda, with many discussions centered around the state and federal policies impacting Virginia's farmers. Virginia Farm Bureau members use this



2024 Outstanding Young Agriculturalist Award – Grayson Long from Rockingham County.

time to organize their efforts and collaborate on lobbying for legislation that supports the state's agricultural priorities.

The convention also features resolutions and policy-setting sessions where delegates vote on key issues such as environmental regulations, land use policies, and trade agreements. These decisions help shape the organization's stance on matters affecting the farming community, ensuring that the voice of Virginia's farmers is heard at the local, state, and national levels.

One of the highlights of the Virginia Farm Bureau Convention is the annual recognition of excellence within the agricultural community. Awards are given for outstanding achievements in farming, innovation, community service, and more. These recognitions serve as a testament to the dedication and hard work of farmers across Virginia, while also inspiring the next generation of agricultural leaders. These celebrations of success not only highlight the important roles farmers play in Virginia's economy but also foster a sense of pride and unity within the community.

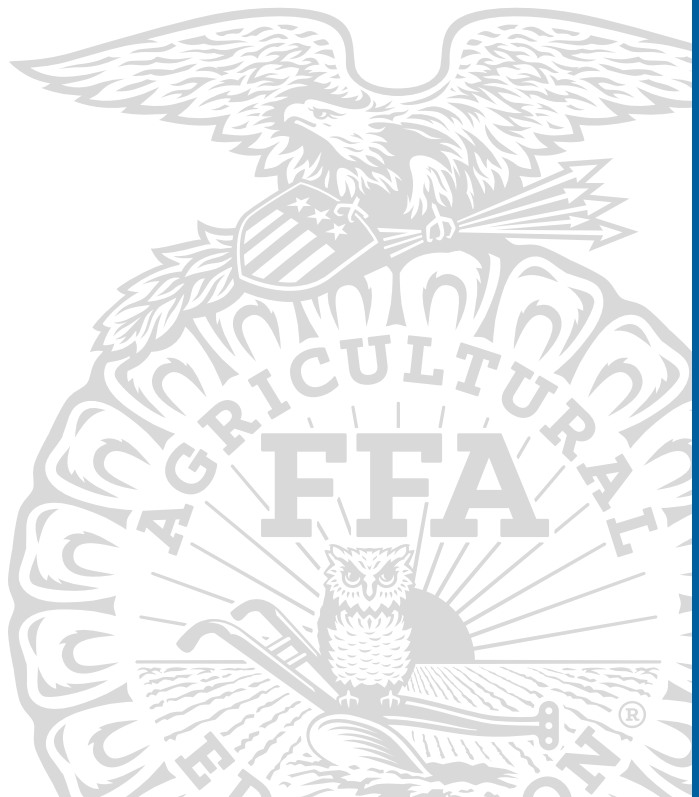
While the business of agriculture takes center stage, the convention is also a family-friendly event. The Omni Homestead Resort provides the perfect environment for families to enjoy the convention together. Children can take part in youth programs or explore the resort's activities, while adults attend sessions and meetings.

The combination of work and recreation makes the Virginia Farm Bureau Convention more than just a business event; it's a chance to strengthen personal bonds and build community relationships in a relaxing and scenic environment.

The Virginia Farm Bureau Convention is a reminder that farming is not only about the land but also about the people and the shared values that tie them together. In a rapidly changing agricultural landscape, the convention provides space for stakeholders to adapt, innovate, and work collaboratively to meet the needs of Virginia's farming community. By coming together at the Omni Homestead Resort, Virginia's farmers reaffirm their commitment to their craft and to each other, ensuring that agriculture remains a vibrant and essential part of the state's economy for years to come. As the convention continues to grow and evolve, it remains a symbol of resilience, collaboration, and progress in the face of modern challenges. We would like to thank the Virginia Farm Bureau for allowing us to be a part of this event.



Virginia Farm Bureau Delegates voting on important business.





PLANTING THE SEEDS OF *Future Success* FARM FINANCE AND CONSERVATION SEMINAR

by Allison Rhodes – VA FFA 2024-2025 State Vice President

On December 12, 2024, four of the Virginia FFA State Officers attended the “Farm Finance and Conservation Seminar” hosted by the Virginia Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry, Mr. Matt Lohr. This seminar was a time of networking, education, and reflection as attendees learned more about resources available to beginning farmers and agriculturists. The State Officers heard from several financial institutions including Farmers & Merchants Bank, First Bank and Trust, and the USDA Farm Service Agency.

Each of these organizations highlighted key components that they had to offer varying from sweep credit accounts, loans, and specialized loans and grants. Participants also had a chance to ask any questions of the businesses, and of other attendees as they utilized the networking segment of the program during lunch. This seminar was one of several being hosted around Virginia and was a wonderful resource for all participants as we learned more about how to be successful advocates for the agriculture industry.



Seminar attendees learn about the services provided by the USDA Farm Service Agency in their local offices.



State Officers stand among Secretary Matt Lohr and Special Assistant Josie Rao.



3RD ANNUAL Blue Carpet GALA

One of our amazing supporters, Rockingham Petroleum.

by Blair Rutherford – VA FFA 2024-2025 State Secretary

The 3rd annual Blue Carpet Gala was held on December 14th at Hotel Madison in Harrisonburg, VA hosted by the Virginia FFA Foundation. The event was a great time for alumni and supporters to come together in fellowship and celebration of Virginia FFA with roughly 250 in attendance. We had some special guests including Jennifer Armstrong, Virginia FFA Foundation Executive Director, Andy Seibel, Virginia FFA Association executive Secretary, Alison Jones, Virginia FFA Association Extension Specialist, Dr. Larry Case, Past National FFA Advisor, and current & past Virginia FFA State Officer Teams.

Although the gala is not open to current members, chapters and members were highlighted in a special way. Each table featured a handcrafted centerpiece from FFA Chapters across the state. Centerpieces included a card with a QR code so guests could purchase the centerpiece, with all proceeds going directly to the chapter who created it. We



Centerpieces created by an FFA Chapter.



Board of Directors.

owe a huge thank you to Sarah Jo Jones and her chapter members at Carroll County High School who organized this program. The following chapters crafted centerpieces featured at the Gala: C.L. Payne, Central, Eastern View, Fort Defiance, Giles, Honaker, Holston, Liberty, RCCTC, Valley Career & Technical, Warren County, Millbrook, Stuarts Draft, East Rockingham, and Read Mountain.

A highlight of the night was a record-breaking fundraising of over \$108,000! These funds will directly impact and benefit the 15,000 FFA members across the state as it furthers our mission to “make a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education.” FFA members are encouraged to send thank-you letters to our outstanding supporters.



Dr. Larry Case.



A TRIP Around the World: INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP SEMINAR FOR STATE OFFICERS 2025

The state officers are ready for their train ride!

by 2024-2025 Virginia FFA State Officers

In January, the Virginia FFA State Officers embarked on a journey across continents for the International Leadership Seminar for State Officers. This year's ILSSO was spent in Spain & Portugal. The National FFA Organization defines ILSSO as a program that “develops an awareness of global agriculture and enhances the cultural competency of travelers.” To be considered for this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, state officers completed an application. Virginia FFA was honored to have all seven officers apply and be accepted.

During the months leading up to ILSSO, participants completed an eight-week course to learn about the agriculture and culture of Spain & Portugal. Once accepted into the ILSSO program, participants were assigned modules of coursework to complete every two weeks. Coursework included Duolingo assignments of practicing both Spanish and Portuguese, reading comprehension tests of excerpts about Spanish and Portuguese history and

government, the seven elements of culture, and creating social media posts to advocate about the opportunity and our questions about it. Our work was then graded each week and evaluated for the opportunity to receive up to \$850 in scholarship funds towards the trip.

Following months of preparation, Virginia FFA State Officers set off for their journey, beginning with a train ride from our nation's capital to Newark, New Jersey, where they joined state officers from all over the country. The group of 75 completed a supplemental training session upon arrival. The training curriculum focused on being a courteous traveler while also being mindful of the cultural setting. The training also provided time to get to know fellow

travelers, meet our travel leaders, and break into smaller travel groups made up of officers from all different states.





The state officers are ready for their train ride!

Ganados Ruigan

Our 2nd day in Spain provided us with an early opportunity to compare Spanish agriculture to American practices. We visited and toured Ganados Ruigan, which is a 6,000 head, 172-acre Limousin and Charolais farm that has been in operation for 50 years. The farmer and his daughter (who is a future vet!) only spoke Spanish, so our tour guides translated. They both explained to us the importance of feed efficiency within their operation and the management practices they must implement in compliance with Spain's regulations. For example, their cattle are not castrated or dehorned, and the use of growth promoting implants/hormones is illegal. Antibiotics are allowed to be used; however, regulations require a very low rate. Unlike the United States, Spain has little to no pastureland for grazing or hay production. Therefore, cattle in Spain are on feed for a longer period of time than American cattle. Some of the bulls we saw during our tour were still being fed for slaughter at 22 months old. This was our first ag-focused visit of our trip, so our group asked lots of questions, allowing us adequate time to compare practices, learn about Spanish regulations, and dive head-first into the culture.

John Deere Parla Innovation Center

This John Deere Parla Innovation Center opened in 2022 and is the first of its kind in Europe. The purpose of this facility is to research high value (specialty) crops such as almonds, pistachios, olives, etc. They research ways to overcome the three main challenges: high labor costs, high water usage, and high production costs. While at the center, we watched a presentation and were introduced to multiple new crop spraying technologies, including GUSS (Global Unmanned Spraying System) and Smart Apply. Both of which were originally developed in the United States!



John Deere Parla Innovation Center: Us with GUSS!

Agriculture Attaché

Our travel group had the honor of meeting with the Agriculture Attaché for Spain and Portugal who works in the U.S. Embassy in Madrid and is employed through the USDA. She spoke to us about her job responsibilities, Spanish & Portuguese agriculture and trade relationships between the United States and European Union. Fun Fact: Spain is the highest purchaser of almonds and sunflower seeds from the United States.



Agriculture Attaché, Karisha Kuypers.

“Giant” Windmills

One of our most anticipated visits took place on Day 4 at the Consuegra windmills and castle. Although no one knows exactly when the windmills were built, they were primarily used by farmers to grind grain until being retired in the 1980's and restored as a historic landmark. The view of the Castilla-La Mancha region of Spain from on top of the mountain was unlike anything we had ever seen before! The windmills are famous for being featured in *Don Quixote*, an early 17th-century Spanish novel. In the novel, Don Quixote mistakes the windmills for giants and attempts to fight them.” It may be safe to assume that this stop was a group favorite, as an abundance of pictures were taken by the group.



The beautiful views of Consuegra.

Using Olive It

The remainder of evening five was spent learning about olives and more specifically olive oil at the PICUALIA Olive Oil Company. We began by experiencing an olive oil tasting followed by a delicious lunch. Then we walked to the olive grove to learn more about how the olives are grown and the trees are maintained throughout the year. Did you know that “eating olives” and “oil olives” come from separate varieties? Or that only 2% of the blooms on an olive tree will turn into a mature, harvestable olive? After exploring the grove, we were taken on a tour of the factory and walked through the step-by-step process of making olive oil. This particular oil factory uses every single part of the olive whether it be burning the pits for energy, using the water to rinse the olives, or the skins for compost to return back to the trees. This olive oil cooperative was such a neat operation!



Say Cheese!

Everybody say “cheese!”

On day 5 we had the pleasure of touring the Levasa dairy farm which is a 5th generation 40,000 head dairy cattle operation. Similar to dairy farmers in the United States, Levasa uses a carousel system to milk their cattle, artificial insemination to breed their herd, and even video cameras to watch for laboring females. Levasa is well known for their bagged milk and up to 20 varieties of cheese they produce from a mixture of sheep, goat, and cattle milk. Not only did we get to tour the barns, but we also got to learn about the milk bagging and cheese making process and sample both!



PICUALIA Olive Oil Company.

Cork and Pork!

Our adventures on day ten were filled with pork and cork. First was a tour of the Ériz Iberian Ham facility where we saw the entire Iberian ham process from start to finish. First, we viewed the live Iberian pigs out in the field and learned about their nutrition and management practices. Next, we were taken into the processing facility to learn how the hams are salted, dried, cured and packaged. Then last but certainly not least we got to taste the difference between grain fed ham, acorn fed ham, and loin meat. All Iberian ham is sliced very thin and sold at an average price of \$55/kilo. This is because the total process from baby piglet to processed ham takes around five years.

After a lengthy bus ride, we arrived in Portugal and experienced a wonderful tour of a cork processing facility. This third-generation business buys harvested cork from local farmers and turns it into just about anything from wine stoppers all the way to furniture. Cork is not only waterproof but also fireproof, and flexible. Cork trees are all hand harvested using an axe in order to only “peel off” the outer layer of cork bark. Trees are first harvested when they are 25 years old and then again, every 9 years. Cork trees on average live to be 220 years old, some however have been known to live all the way up to 300 years old!



The dry-aging process of Iberian Ham.



Lots o' cork.



Upon arriving home, our state officers were eager to share all that we had learned with our sponsors through presentations. This once-in-a-lifetime opportunity would not be possible without our wonderful sponsors: John Deere, Bunge, and National FFA. Other sponsors include local Farm Bureaus, Young Farmer chapters, the Virginia FFA Foundation, and several Ruritan clubs and personal supporters. Each donation, whether big or small, had a huge impact on making this trip so special.

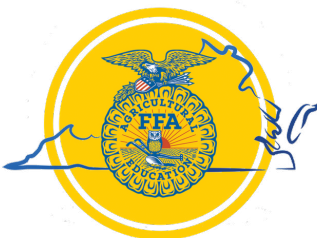
Advocate FOR AGRICULTURE TOUR



Members across the state work together to enhance their advocacy skills.

by Blair Rutherford – VA FFA 2024-2025 State Secretary

In November, over 700 Virginia FFA Members attended one of five advocacy training sessions during the Agriculture Leaders Conference Series. Led by Andrew Seibel, Past National FFA President, members learned and practiced key advocacy components including introducing themselves and others, effectively communicating their unique FFA story, crafting a message, and writing quality thank you notes. These skills will not only help members while in FFA but are professional skills that will help them succeed beyond the blue jacket.



Members who attended the advocacy training then had the opportunity to practice those advocacy skills on Capitol Hill for Virginia FFA Day at the Capitol on January 23rd. Members were better equipped to speak to legislators and arrived at the Capitol confident in sharing their stories and advocating for agricultural education after attending the training.

The Agriculture Leaders Conference Series would not have been possible without Andrew Seibel, who facilitated each training to ensure members left feeling confident in sharing their FFA story, along with our generous sponsors, Farm Credit, The Giant Company, and Augusta, Greene, Hanover, and Russell County Farm Bureaus.



A big thank you to Andrew Seibel, along with our sponsors, Farm Credit, The Giant Company, and Augusta, Greene, Hanover, and Russell County Farm Bureaus.



Seibel gives direction on introducing others.



Members practice speaking in front of their peers.



Members collaborate to craft a message.



Members seek guidance from their advisor.



Chapter members worked together to determine their chapter purpose.



Each participant was given a workbook to assist with organizing their ideas.

Advocacy at its finest: FFA DAY AT THE CAPITAL



FFA members sitting in the viewing chambers during the House of Representatives session.

by Keller Cooley – VA FFA 2024-2025 State Vice President

FFA Day at the Capital was held on January 24, 2025, in Richmond, Virginia. FFA members from all over the Commonwealth were able to partake in this tremendous event if they participated in an advocacy training back in the fall. With this training, they learned how to build a high-quality “elevator speech” to present to both the Senators and Representatives of Virginia, highlighting what they were advocating for on the state and local levels. In the morning, we had all the members start in the hotel’s conference room for orientation and to receive local apple butter for their visits that day with their Senators and Representatives. After

lunch, in both the Senate and House of Representatives, we had a member from each chapter in attendance for Day at the Capitol to split between both chambers to gain recognition of FFA during their session. Directly following the recognition during the session, all the FFA members made their way to the Capitol Hill steps to take a group picture, see Governor Glenn Youngkin and First Lady Suzanne Youngkin stop by, and give greetings along with some of his cabinet members. This final group activity rounded out a very prosperous and productive FFA Day at the Capitol!



This was the group picture of all the FFA members along with Governor Youngkin, the First Lady, and all of his cabinet secretaries in the picture signifying the connection that Governor Youngkin has made with youth-led organizations like FFA during his term.



Governor Youngkin and the First Lady giving the FFA members a touching speech on the importance of agriculture and how the skills that FFA teaches every member of the Organization greatly benefits both the future of the Agricultural Industry but also the future of society.



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#SUPPORTVAFFA #DRIVEFOR1000

TESS Seibel LEGACY FUND

by VA FFA Staff

Tess Seibel was elected National FFA Eastern Region Vice President in November of 2019. In March 2020, her year of service was disrupted as the COVID-19 Pandemic forced the cancellation of FFA events at every level, including chapter meetings, contests, and conventions nationwide. Tess and her officer team were tasked with leading over 760,000 students during a generation-defining time in their lives. During this year, Tess completed her national officer duties virtually and supported thousands of students through projects, including "Project Embrace Fully," where she mailed over 200 hand-written letters of encouragement to strangers nominated by their friends and family. That fall, the 93rd National FFA Convention was canceled for the first time since WWII and held virtually. Although in a different format, this convention reached students at every level, with over 217,000 viewers and participants. Tess helped redefine what it meant to be in a leadership position during adversity and demonstrated servant leadership at its heart.



The Tess Seibel Legacy Fund honors the immeasurable work Tess has dedicated to youth in agriculture.



"The FFA makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth, and career success."

~ FFA Mission Statement



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