



KANSAS FFA ASSOCIATION

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Hello Chairman Rahjes, and members of the House Committee of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

My name is Jory Ratzlaff, currently serving as the Kansas FFA State President. I'm originally from Galva, KS. Today, I'm joined at the podium by; Hayley Hines State Vice-President from Parker; and in the audience are Quinn Browning State Secretary from La Cygne; Zoe Rhodes State Treasurer from Girard; Mason Springer State Reporter from Neodesha; and Natalee Bray State Sentinel from Scandia.

It is an honor to stand before you today as we celebrate National FFA Week. Before I begin, Representative Minnix gave a friend of mine a prompt last week, and I'd like to take his advice. I ask, how many of you in this room are FFA Alumni? I've traveled much this year, and everywhere I go I'm always amazed by just how many past FFA members I meet. It's inspiring to see. FFA has been a part of so many lives and continues to shape the future of agriculture, leadership, and communities throughout Kansas.

National FFA Week provides an opportunity for us to reflect on the growth of our organization and the Kansas FFA Association. Today, Kansas FFA has more than 13,700 members, a record, and is present in over 232 chapters across the state, with more still to come. In fact, at least one FFA chapter is located in 103 of the 105 counties in Kansas. From the smallest rural communities to the larger urban centers, FFA plays a pivotal role in shaping our students into the leaders and professionals of tomorrow.

FFA functions via three avenues, the classroom and laboratory, FFA Career and Leadership Development Events, and Supervised Agricultural Experiences, or SAEs. All three work in tandem to provide members with different ways to gain and apply their

knowledge in the field of agriculture. While in High School, I didn't just learn in the classroom; I actively engaged in the world around me, discovered ways to serve my community, put my knowledge to the test in the field of Agriscience, learned about soil, experimented with soil, and developed a project centered around the different properties of soil. Through this 3-Circle Model, those in FFA are developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth, and career success.

FFA members in Kansas are developing their leadership skills through real-world experiences. Whether serving as an officer for their local chapter, competing in leadership development events, or working together on community service projects, students are learning how to take initiative, empower others, and lead with integrity. These skills are vital not only in agriculture but also in life, as so many situations demand individuals with the potential for leadership.

Students are afforded countless opportunities for personal growth. Whether learning traditional agriculture skills—such as caring for livestock or growing crops—learning and understanding the economics of the industry and how to start a business, or involving themselves in the continual advancement of technology and the strive for innovation. I'm reminded of where my journey in FFA started. In a rural community, surrounded by agriculture, but with little knowledge of the industry myself. Now I find myself majoring in Agricultural Engineering, learning more about agriculture than I ever thought possible. Beyond these skills, FFA produces an understanding of time management, teamwork, and perseverance, ensuring that members leave the organization better equipped for life's challenges.

The agriculture industry is the backbone of Kansas' economy. FFA's focus on career readiness ensures that Kansas students are well-prepared to enter the workforce or continue their education. Whether students choose to pursue careers in agricultural education, science,

engineering, or policy, or if their career path takes them to someplace outside of agriculture, Kansas FFA members cultivate the necessary skills, experience, and determination needed to excel in an ever-evolving industry.

As we celebrate National FFA Week, it is important to look toward the future. The future of agriculture and agricultural education is bright, but it also presents challenges. Kansas is known for its rich agricultural heritage, but we face issues such as increasing demand for food, water conservation, climate change, and technological advancements. The next generation of agricultural leaders, those currently involved in Kansas FFA, will play a vital role in addressing these challenges.

During National FFA Week, we have the opportunity to advocate for all that FFA represents; agricultural education, leadership development, and career readiness. This week offers the chance to highlight the incredible impact that agricultural education has on our members, our communities, and our economy. Together, we can continue to raise awareness about the importance of these programs, celebrate the success of our young leaders, and tell the story of those in agriculture, and the crucial role they play in shaping Kansas and our nation's future.

Let us advocate for the future of FFA and its members, ensuring that the next generation of agricultural leaders has the support they need to thrive. By doing so, we invest not only in the next generation but in the future of Kansas agriculture.

I speak and share the story of the incredible impact that FFA has on the lives of members. How it can change not only an individual, but a school, and community. And today I stand next to a National FFA Proficiency Winner, one whose Supervised Agricultural Experience did just that.

Throughout my lifetime I have been surrounded by agriculture. My love for the industry ran deep through many generations, until one day I decided to break the bale spike on my dad's tractor. I was completely mortified and still have yet to drive a tractor since. However, from that day I knew that I still wanted to have a tie to the industry, even if that meant I wasn't going to be actively riding in the tractor each day.

During my freshman year, I had the opportunity to receive my first blue jacket after successfully memorizing the FFA Creed. The next task I needed to tackle was finding my own Supervised Agricultural Experience. I quickly began brainstorming and identified a need in my community. A fight to make an impact on food insecurity. My freshman year was the first semester back from COVID, and students sitting next to me in class were leaving school hungry at the end of the day. After recognizing this issue, I decided to help make a difference and start my school's first student-led food pantry. I named the pantry Panthers Helping Panthers with the idea that students at Paola High School would be helping fellow students receive basic necessities. After four years of hard work I was able to raise over \$14,000 in donations. I also partnered with the animal science class at my high school to raise chickens and pigs as a protein source for the food pantry and a learning opportunity for the students enrolled in the class. The success of Panthers Helping Panthers was not measured by tangible outcomes, it was measured through community involvement and engagement, students learning how to care for livestock, and most importantly by the lives changed by something as simple as a meal on the table. Since graduating from PHS, I have passed down the food pantry to my sister and continue to mentor her throughout the process of helping others. Because of my passion for serving others through Panthers Helping Panthers, I am now studying nursing at Kansas State University in hopes of becoming a nurse anesthetist.

There is a valuable lesson to be learned about identifying a problem and working diligently to find a solution. FFA provides members with the skills necessary to make a difference not only in the classroom, but in their communities as well.

Members of the Committee, I thank you for your time, your dedication to our state, and your support for agricultural education and Kansas FFA. Happy National FFA Week, thank you. Mr. Chairman, we stand for questions.