Our Ohio

March-April 2026 · Volume 105 Issue 4



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Our Ohio

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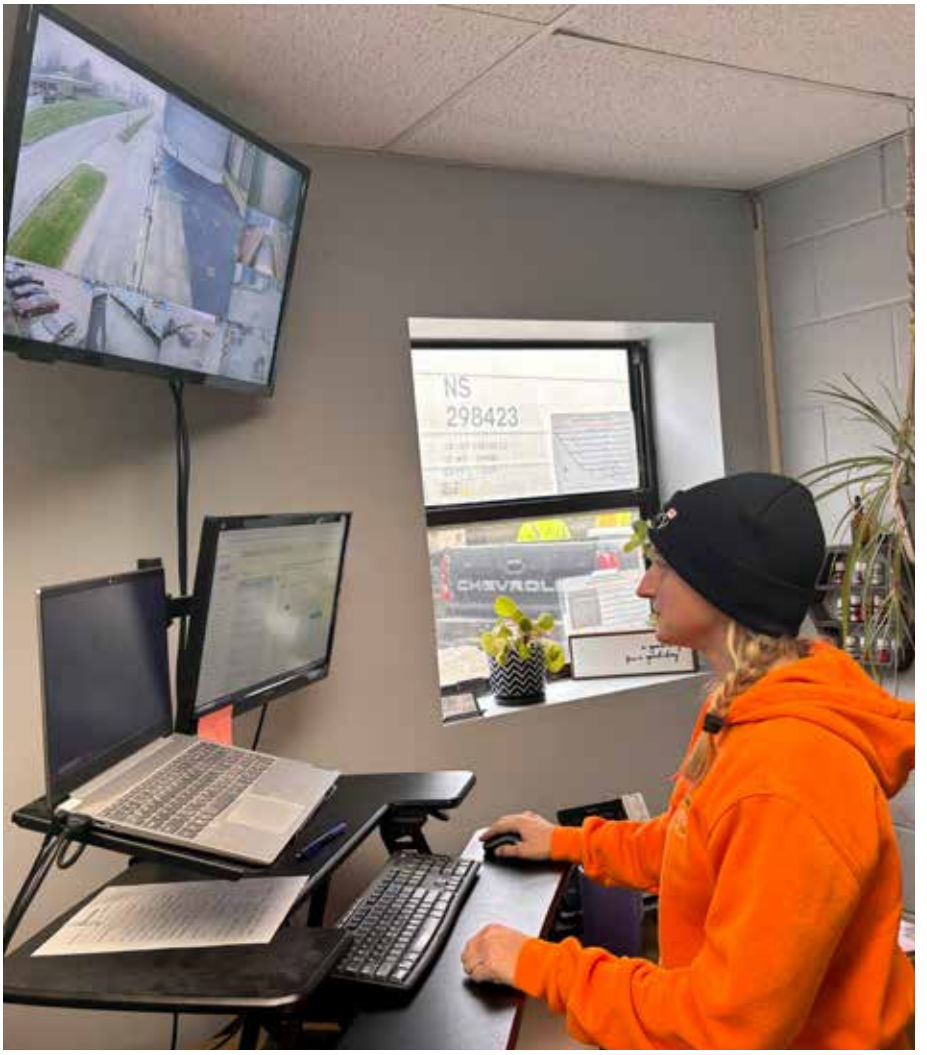
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On the cover
Soda Kiser and steer Freezerburn at the 2025 Cuyahoga County Fair. Photo submitted by Kiser.



How did Ohio Farm Bureau help launch your ag career? That is the central question in this issue. There are stories on ag career paths as diverse as the journey of a cooperative's grain branch manager to an ag journalism adventure around the world and so much more. This edition also discusses funding the organization's various opportunities for growth and includes the Ohio Farm Bureau Foundation's annual report.

Culture Statement: We are passionate advocates for Ohio agriculture and our communities. We take a proactive approach to addressing the challenges and opportunities facing our industry. We exhibit integrity and honesty at all times with respect and care for one another. We promote a culture of support by showing gratitude and encouraging professional development. We value our members, employees and partners. We embrace change and innovation while honoring our heritage. We set high expectations for communication, transparency, accountability, professionalism and outcomes. We strive to be a welcoming organization through an open and respectful exchange of ideas.

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March-April 2026



Lucas County Farm Bureau member and freelance journalist Jake Zajkowski takes us on a journey rooted in Farm Bureau that has led him on a trek across the globe. His story begins on page 35.

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OHIO SOYBEAN COUNCIL

PLANTING SOYBEANS EARLY?

Make sure to protect your soybean yield with these three management tips.

SCAN TO WATCH FULL EDUCATIONAL YOUTUBE EPISODE

Spring is here and planting preparations are underway for farmers across Ohio. The window between mid-April and mid-May typically provides fewer than 20 days of weather suitable for fieldwork, so maximizing that time is paramount to setting the season up for success. Alongside other necessary fieldwork, getting your soybeans planted early can be a challenge.

But getting the beans in the ground is just the beginning. Both abiotic and biotic stressors can be more prevalent and will impact your soybeans differently when they are planted early.

What does timely and effective management of early planted soybeans look like throughout the growing season? As part of your Ohio Soybean Checkoff at Work, Dr. Laura Lindsey weighed in on management considerations for Ohio farmers this spring.

MONITOR PLANT POPULATIONS

Early planted soybeans grow slowly, which can impact plant population and may delay canopy closure. This can cause farmers to question whether they need to replant their beans. It's recommended to wait until the v1 or v2 growth stage to get an accurate stand count and then determine whether replanting is needed. 100,000 plants per acre is a good stand count, but in Ohio 70,000-80,000 plants per acre can still achieve maximum yield potential.

BE READY TO REACT TO ABIOTIC STRESSORS

Weather in early spring can be very unfavorable, even if soil conditions and weather were good at the time of planting. Monitoring its effect on early emerging soybean plants is important. If a freeze event occurs, it is advised to wait a few days to check soybeans. If the growing points are not fully damaged, they can withstand some burn from the frost. If the growing points are burned all the way through, the plant will not survive.

Drought is also a common stressor on early planted soybeans. When beans are early planted and drought causes the soil to crust over, those plants will have trouble emerging and will result in low plant populations.

KNOW WHICH BIOTIC STRESSORS TO LOOK FOR

Bean leaf beetles are common in early planted soybeans. Insecticide seed treatment may not be as effective because of the length of time those seeds sat in wet soil conditions. Slugs and field corn maggots can also thrive in the conditions surrounding early planted soybeans, and may impact plant populations.

With the lower plant population of early planted soybeans, canopy closure will be slower, and weeds can be very competitive. Having a good weed control program is important. Pre-emergent herbicides are a useful tool, but farmers may need multiple post-emergence herbicide applications to give season long control.

Want to learn more about the science of early planting? The Ohio Soybean Council provides farmers with the research and resources to protect their investment. To hear more from Dr. Lindsay on management of early planted soybeans in Ohio, visit Ohio Soybean Council's YouTube channel or visit www.soyohio.org.

People are what make the difference. Whether it's an event, a policy effort or just a good neighbor stepping in to help, progress is driven by those who choose to invest in those around them.

I'm sure every one of us can look back and point out a mentor, a family member or a friend who, through either their words or actions, helped get us where we are today. When I think back on my own journey, there were many people or opportunities that not only helped me see more in myself but opened doors to new possibilities.

I know that I may not have been able to go to college without the generous and impactful scholarships I received going into my freshmen year at The Ohio State University. I also think about Curtis Paulson, Ph. D. and Rosemarie Rossetti, Ph. D., who were my agricultural communications professors, and Chuck Miller, my high school agriculture education teacher, who always challenged me to think differently, pushed me to be more and most importantly took the time to individually invest in me.

Investment and paying it forward is the heart of workforce development. It takes individuals, like us, stepping in to guide, encourage and support the next generation of agricultural leaders. In this issue of Our Ohio, you are going to see programs and opportunities designed to strengthen our workforce pipeline, and the best part is, every single one started because someone saw the need.

For Ohio Farm Bureau and our foundation, workforce development has long been a priority. Through strategic investments in scholarships and programs, our Youth Pathways, educational-focused programs, and partnerships are working to strengthen the pipeline from classroom to careers. Our goal is to not just create events, but provide students a connection within agriculture and a chance to keep growing.

The Ohio Farm Bureau Ambassadors Scholarship is the foundation's new, premier scholarship in 2026.



It is a $10,000 renewable award for up to three additional years. Applications are closed for that award, but many more scholarships are open until March 31. Visit ofbf.org/foundation/scholarships.

As you flip through the pages, I encourage you to see where you can help pay it forward, too. It doesn't have to be something big or even all at once. The development of our workforce can look like mentorship, providing support to our foundation, or even just volunteering with your local school, community, county Farm Bureau or agricultural youth program.

The opportunity to pay it forward is in front of all of us. Whether through giving, mentoring or staying involved, each of us has a role to play. By investing in tomorrow's workforce today, we ensure agriculture remains strong, resilient and ready for tomorrow.



Adam Sharp
Executive Vice President



Unlock hidden farmland value with legacy nutrient deductions

The following information is provided by Nationwide, your approved insurance and financial services company.

When you buy farmland, you can claim depreciation on its physical assets like fencing, farm buildings or irrigation equipment.

But those physical assets continue even as you go below the soil's surface.

Legacy nutrient deductions (LND) enable new farmland owners to also claim deductions on the nutrients within the soil on which healthy crops depend. These deductions help paint an accurate picture of farmland's crop productivity by essentially providing a value for soil nutrients. Understanding LNDs can help you maximize the value of your land by accounting for nutrients like nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium in the soil that contribute to its value for buyers, sellers and those inheriting farmland.

Nationwide is on your side

What are legacy nutrient deductions?

Legacy nutrient deductions allow landowners to claim the value of the residual soil nutrients present when they acquire a property. They essentially treat nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium not just as only key crop inputs but also depreciable assets. Much like a tractor or piece of tillage equipment, the value of these nutrients can be deducted from taxable income over time.

This tax benefit applies to both active farmers and landowners. The key is that the nutrients were in the soil at the time of purchase or inheritance.

"If you own viable agricultural property such as row crop fields, pasture, grazing lands, grassland or production timber, legacy nutrient deductions can provide substantial financial benefits," said Nicolas Post, manager of sales/education and customer service for Boa Safra Ag, LLC, a company that provides advanced tax services and scientific reporting to agricultural landowners to help them realize significant income tax deductions. "On average, LNDs offer around $1,700 per acre in

tax deductions, allowing landowners to realize immediate value from their investment and ease the transition of ownership or inheritance."

How do LNDs work?

The process starts with a professional soil analysis to determine the quantity and value of the residual nutrients. This establishes a baseline for your deduction. An agronomist or a qualified soil scientist typically conducts this assessment.

"Ensuring that the methods and processes used to collect legacy nutrient deductions are executed correctly is of the utmost importance to clients seeking to maximize their financial benefits," Post said. "The right expertise and experience helps provide clients with confidence that each deduction is properly substantiated and compliant with all regulatory requirements."

Once you have this valuation, you can claim the deduction. Depending on your specific tax situation and the relevant IRS codes, landowners may be able to deduct the full amount in one year or spread it out over several years. This flexibility allows to align the deduction with landowners' financial strategies. It makes the LNDs valuable tools for managing tax liability.

Financial benefits for farmland buyers and sellers

For land buyers, an LND can significantly reduce the effective purchase price of a property by lowering their tax burden in the years following the acquisition. This can free up capital for other investments on the farm.

"Becoming cash-positive is a top priority for agricultural landowners, and leveraging the financial advantages of LNDs can be a key strategy to achieve this goal. By unlocking immediate tax savings, landowners free up capital that can be used to invest in necessary equipment, expand their tillable acreage, or simply enjoy the peace of mind that comes from minimizing unnecessary tax payments," Post said. "This cash flow supports operational growth and long-term financial stability, making the most of your land's potential while securing your agricultural legacy."

For sellers, highlighting the potential for an LND can make a property more attractive to potential buyers. It demonstrates value beyond the acreage itself, potentially leading to a quicker sale or a stronger offer. For those who have inherited land, an LND provides a way to offset income generated from the property, such as cash rent.

Protecting your biggest asset

Legacy nutrient deductions are a smart way to get the most out of your land investment. It's a strategy that rewards careful stewardship and financial planning. Just as you plan for your financial future, it's crucial to protect the physical assets that make your operation possible.

Your farm is more than just land; it's your livelihood and your legacy. Nationwide's Land As Your Legacy helps farmers, landowners and others explore resources that help ensure farmland stays productive and sustainable for generations to come.

Talk to your tax advisor or agribusiness consultant to see if LNDs could benefit your operation.

Visit AgInsightCenter.com for more resources and expert tips to help you run a successful business and maintain the safety of your operation.

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At Nationwide, our past informs our future

A message from **Kirt Walker, CEO, Nationwide**

Nationwide was formed when a group of Ohio farmers came together to get a fair price for auto insurance.

The company they founded, Farm Bureau Mutual Automobile Insurance Company, was formed on April 14, 1926 — 100 years ago this year.

And, while we're proud of the company we've become — we've grown into a Fortune 100 company that offers protection for much more than automobiles, including protecting families and their financial futures all across America — we're just as proud of our heritage with the Ohio Farm Bureau.

Nationwide® is on your side

In the photo, you can see Lee Palmer, left, the first president of Farm Bureau Mutual, Murray Lincoln, right, Executive Secretary and future Nationwide CEO, and Ezra Anstaett, seated, the company's first general agent. They are signing the first policy sold for what we know today as Nationwide.

To me, the amazing part of this photo is they had the foresight to take this picture in the first place! Remember, this is 1926. Taking a picture was not easy. It would have been scheduled and planned.

Clearly, these men wanted this moment to be captured. Why? I believe it's because they knew they were creating something special. Today, just one-half of 1% of companies celebrate 100 years in existence. It's not easy to do. And I believe the reason Nationwide still exists today is because of our beginnings.

It's no accident that we believe strongly in cooperative principles. Or that we believe our protection extends to the communities where we live and work through volunteerism and philanthropy. We learned these things from our heritage with the Ohio Farm Bureau.



Today, we're proud to be one of the few companies that has made it 100 years in business. And we're just getting started. For Nationwide, this isn't the finish line — it's the start of our next 100 years.

As we pause this year to celebrate our centennial, we remain grateful for our long-term partnership with the Ohio Farm Bureau. The future looks bright for Nationwide because we know our past informs our future.

BUCKEYE FARM NEWS



Lake County Farm Bureau member Anne Poorman was the first member enrolled in Ohio Farm Bureau Health Plans. Marking the historic occasion with her are, from left, OFBF Director of Health Services Trevor Kirkpatrick, OFBF Senior Vice President of Operations & Partnerships Michael Bailey, and OFBF President Bill Patterson. The newest member benefit is growing rapidly, giving members a new option on health care coverage. Learn more about Ohio Farm Bureau Health Plans at ohiofarmbureau.org/hcs.

ALGAL BLOOMS

The 2025 Algal Bloom on Lake Erie was mild, coming in at a 2.4 on the Severity Index. This is both consistent with what the research is saying about the progress of farmers' water quality efforts in northwest Ohio and following a trend that is promising for the future, according to Jordan Hoewischer, Ohio Farm Bureau director of water quality and research.

POLICIES AT AFBF

Ohio Farm Bureau brought forth 10 policies to be voted upon by delegates at the American Farm Bureau Annual Convention in January. All 10 were approved as national policy. Highlights included implementing policy surrounding artificial intelligence, unmanned aerial vehicles or drones and farmland preservation.

LEADER AWARDS

OFBF recently presented four members with the inaugural County Leader of Distinction Award. They were: Fred Cooke (posthumous) of Richland County, Marvin Dietsch of Williams County, Steven Knollman of Hamilton County and Michele Miller (posthumous) of Ottawa County. This award recognizes members who have had an indelible and lasting impact on their county Farm Bureau and local community.

Change to Ohio's pesticide law



House Bill 10, passed by the Ohio Legislature and signed by Gov. Mike DeWine, restores flexibility for farm families regarding restricted-use pesticide applications. Federal rule changes from 2017 required states to update their laws. Last year, Ohio lawmakers made the decision that only licensed applicators could use these products, which would have eliminated the long-standing practice of allowing supervised family members and employees to help. Ohio Farm Bureau raised concerns about the burden this created, prompting the legislative fix, according to Ohio Farm Bureau Associate General Counsel Leah Curtis. The new law again permits supervised workers and relatives to apply, mix, transport or clean equipment involving restricted-use pesticides. The Ohio Department of Agriculture is now updating rules, and supervised individuals will need additional training.

H-2A PROGRAM FIXES AIM TO STEADY FARM LABOR COSTS, NEEDS

Farmers who rely on the H-2A guest worker program are seeing some relief after recent state and federal actions, both advocated for by Farm Bureau.

In Ohio, a fix tucked into House Bill 184 corrected an oversight in the 2025 state budget that could have forced H-2A workers to complete more than 80 hours of driver training each year they returned to the U.S. Evan Callicoat, Ohio Farm Bureau director of state policy, said the revision ensures visiting workers can obtain an Ohio driver's license by presenting their valid visa and their employment form and passing the standard state exam.

Nationally, farmers have advocated for reforms to the H-2A program, particularly around wage calculations and nonwage operational costs. Last fall the U.S. Department of Labor released an interim final rule that introduced experience-based wage tiers and adjustments to offset nonwage costs.

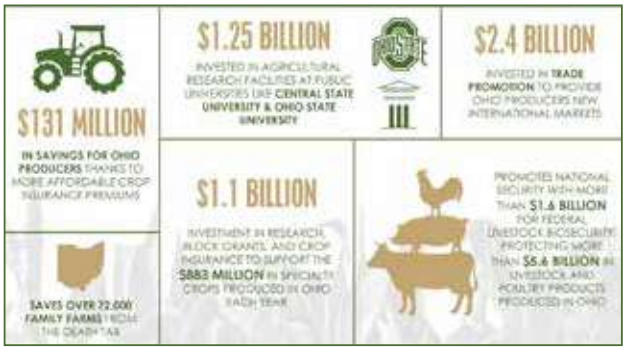
According to Brad Bales, Ohio Farm Bureau senior director of state and national policy, the changes "reduce overall labor costs for those who utilize this program," easing financial pressure on farms that depend on H-2A labor.

Demand for the H-2A program continues to surge. According to American Farm Bureau's Market Intel, in fiscal year 2025, 398,258 positions were certified nationwide, yet domestic interest remains nearly nonexistent with only 182 applicants across more than 415,000 ag jobs posted.

Persistent low unemployment and waning interest in farm work continue to drive labor shortages.

WATER REGULATION EQUITY

Ohio EPA recently proposed allowing data centers to obtain "general" National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits for their stormwater/wastewater discharges. Currently, data centers must apply for an individual NPDES permit, which is detailed and unique to their operations. Ohio Farm Bureau reached out to Ohio EPA and communicated concerns, as Ohio agriculture and other stakeholders have spent more than a decade trying to implement specific practices such as H2Ohio to improve water quality in the state.



What the One Big Beautiful Bill means for Ohio agriculture

The U.S. House Committee on Agriculture recently released an interactive map to break down how each state will potentially benefit from the One Big Beautiful Bill Act. Many of these programs are forthcoming and will help build momentum to a long-term fix of the farm economy.

Ag wins specific to Ohio per USDA:

- ARC/PLC Safety Net Investment: $1 billion
- Voluntary Conservation Program Investment: $45.9 million
- Producer Savings on Crop Insurance: $131.3 million
- Ohio Family Farms Saved From the Death Tax (Estate Tax): 72,200
- Ohio will also benefit in other federal allocations for research and trade promotion

All of the legislative wins in this reconciliation bill, along with the short-term aid of the Farm Bridge Assistance Program, will prevent many Ohio farms from closing their doors this year. Looking ahead, however, farmers still face record-low crop prices, nearly record-high input costs, market uncertainty and other farm bill programs that have not modernized since 2018.

"If we want agriculture to thrive, and finally get farmers profitable again, we need our state and federal leaders to bring long-term certainties. Our families, our communities and our nation's food security depend on it," said Adam Sharp, executive vice president for Ohio Farm Bureau.

RECENT PROPERTY TAX LEGISLATION

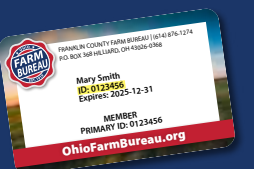
On a recent Legal with Leah podcast, Ohio Farm Bureau Associate General Counsel Leah Curtis broke down recently passed property tax legislation. A key measure, House Bill 186, changes how the school funding "20-mill floor" is calculated by limiting increases through an inflation cap rather than property value fluctuations. It also provides tax credits for recently reappraised property owners and transition funding for schools. House Bill 129 broadens what counts toward the 20-mill floor, HB 335 adds an inflation limit to inside millage and HB 309 allows county budget commissions to reduce excessive levies. Ohio Farm Bureau supports property tax reform that protects agriculture—especially CAUV—and opposes eliminating property taxes entirely due to risks of higher taxes, reduced local control and pressure on farmland.

STAY CONNECTED WITH OHIO FARM BUREAU

If you are not receiving emails from Ohio Farm Bureau, you're missing out on the full value of your membership!

HOW TO SIGN UP FOR EMAILS

- Go to **ohiofarmbureau.org/login** and enter your Member ID, which can be found below your name on your ID card.



- You will then be prompted to enter your last name and zip code that is on your membership.
- Next, you will then enter the email you would like to use and set a password for your account.



A New Classroom for Ohio Agriculture

Story by Jake Zajkowski · *Photos submitted by* The Ohio State University

Near downtown Columbus, Ohio's Waterman Agriculture and Natural Resource Laboratory has completed a major renovation aimed at the future of Ohio's livestock sector and the educating of those who rely on it.

The Multispecies Animal Learning Complex (MALC) at The Ohio State University opened in January 2025 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony, marking a significant investment in animal agriculture and public engagement.

The facility includes a new livestock arena, species holding facilities, classrooms and a robotic dairy facility. Together, the upgrades represent a critical capital investment that gives Ohio a new vessel through which to bring people and animals together.

"A lot of times people see new buildings and immediately think about the research because it's so central to our mission," said Cathann Kress, dean of Ohio State University's College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences. "But one of the other things that's really important about Waterman Lab is our ability to invite the public into the facilities and engage people in understanding more about agriculture."

Public viewing areas inside the animal barns and interactive displays are designed to give year-round visitors a firsthand look at swine, equine, poultry and ruminant animals. The occasion also reunites Ohio's most iconic dairy herd of 60 Jersey cattle back to Waterman Lab after 18 months of construction.

Currently, Waterman hosts approximately 25,000 visitors annually. College leaders hope that once MALC operates at full capacity, annual visitation could grow to nearly 100,000.

"To have a 261-acre farm in the heart of the 15th largest city, and the capital of the state, is an opportunity that should not be overlooked," said Kress.

Upgrading livestock readiness in Ohio

Education lies at the core of both Farm Bureau advocacy and Ohio State's land-grant mission.

The new site will join long standing urban OSU

> "To have a 261-acre farm in the heart of the 15th largest city, and the capital of the state, is an opportunity that should not be overlooked."
>
> CFAES Dean Cathann Kress



The Multispecies Animal Learning Complex at The Ohio State University opened in January, marking a significant investment in animal agriculture and public engagement. The upgrades represent a critical capital investment that gives Ohio a new vessel through which to bring people and animals together.

Extension programs in Columbus, along with the Controlled Environment Agriculture Research Complex and Ohio State Fairgrounds.

Even as access to working farms shrinks in urban central Ohio, agricultural literacy is expanding with Ohio State as a collaborator. CFAES will partner with OFBF on the new imAGine agriculture exhibit that will debut at this year's Ohio State Fair in the Ohio Agriculture Center.

"We are seeing a much-needed generational investment in Ohio's agricultural infrastructure," said Adam Sharp, executive vice president of the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation.

The MALC project was funded through a combination of university investment, philanthropic support from partners such as Nationwide and $10 million from the state budget—an appropriation advocated for by Ohio Farm Bureau.

"The mission and outlined plans for the facility strongly align with our organization's priorities," Sharp said. "The MALC will play a key role in attracting young people to stay in Ohio and achieve a hands-on education in modern livestock production."

Many young, new, and experienced producers inspired by Waterman are Farm Bureau members, Sharp said. Their involvement helps strengthen innovation across the state, where both Farm Bureau and Ohio State share a presence.

The multispecies facility models sustainable management practices already being adopted across the state, including a new fully autonomous dairy barn, nutrient management facility and feedstock barn.

CFAES expects the barns to show and test how emerging technologies can address ongoing challenges in livestock production, including labor shortages, animal welfare concerns and the long-term viability of agriculture in Ohio.

Strengthening community learning

New classrooms also will host Ohio 4-H programs, CFAES students and Extension teams, expanding the Waterman's role beyond traditional academic instruction.

With new partnerships with the Columbus Zoo and COSI, Ohio State hopes to accelerate agricultural literacy and the number of visitors at Waterman.

Kress explained that direct, meaningful experiences on a working farm can inspire future participation in agriculture.

"We think that's a real opportunity for us to recruit students and others into the dynamic workforce of agriculture and the food system," she said.

While the facility represents a renewed investment in Ohio's youth, its development has been decades in the making. Graham Cochran, associate dean of operations at CFAES, noted, "The college has been talking about something similar to this for almost the entire 30 years I've been working at Ohio State."

Among peer institutions, this site will stand out,



A ribbon cutting for the Multispecies Animal Learning Complex took place Jan. 29.

Cochran said, due to the number of species on the same site and the ability for teaching, research and outreach to happen simultaneously.

Within view of downtown Columbus, the CFAES' vision for integrated animal and cropping systems is now largely complete, with the cows finally home. But planning continues.

"We do continue to dream," Kress said. While the current renovations are finished, "part of our goal at Waterman is to always be reflecting on where Ohio agriculture is going and modeling that future."

KEY POINTS

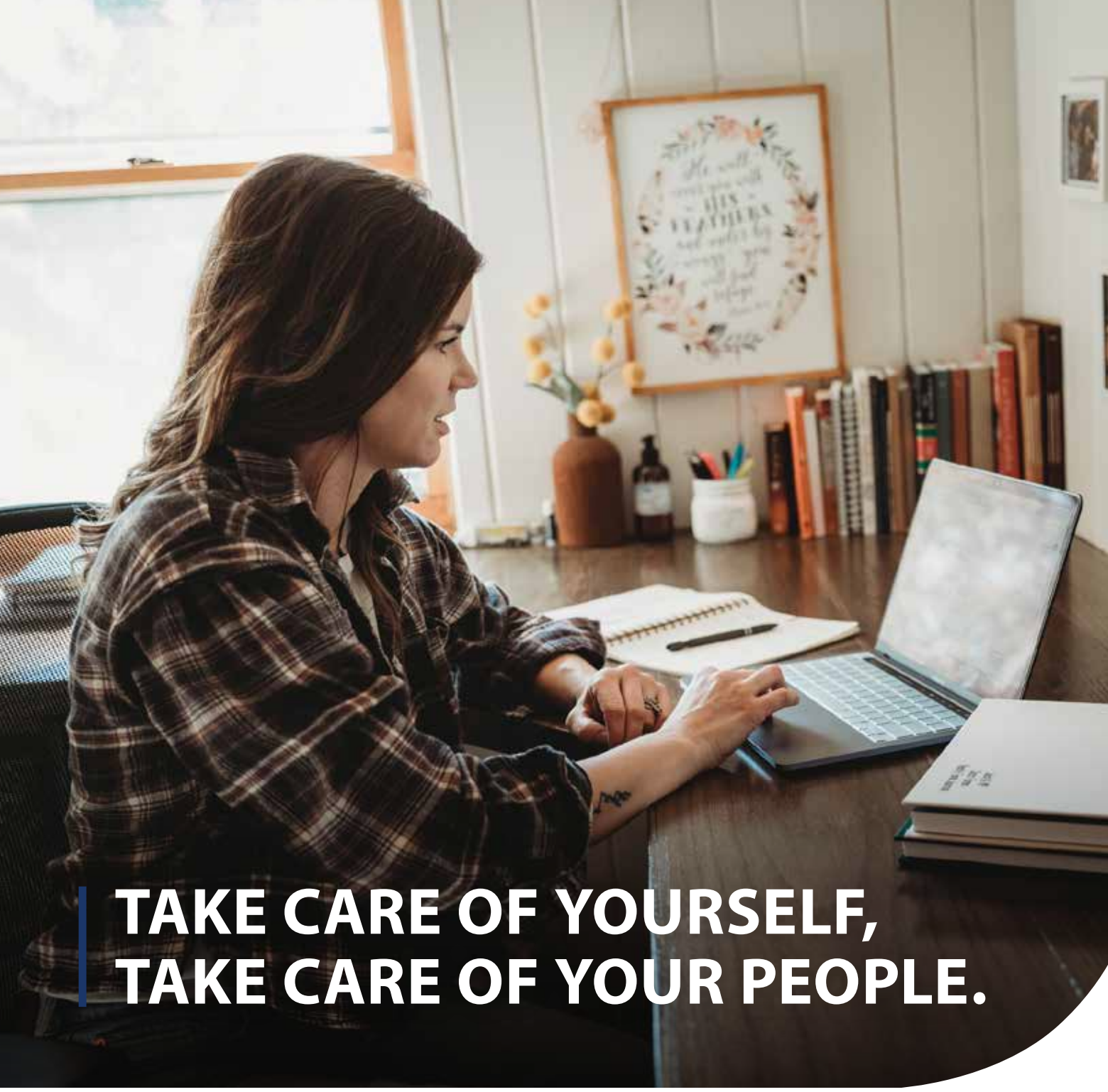
- Ohio State University opened the Multispecies Animal Learning Complex (MALC) in January, featuring livestock arenas, species barns, classrooms, and a robotic dairy facility to strengthen hands-on learning and public interaction with agriculture.
- The facility aims to grow annual visitors from 25,000 to nearly 100,000, offering interactive displays, partnerships with the Columbus Zoo and COSI, and hosting programs like Ohio 4-H to inspire future agricultural careers.
- MALC, advocated for by Ohio Farm Bureau through the state budget process, models sustainable practices and emerging technologies, while attracting young people to modern livestock production and Ohio's agricultural workforce.

WHAT'S NEXT

While the Multispecies Animal Learning Complex held its grand opening in January, livestock were introduced into the facility throughout the early spring semester.







TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF, TAKE CARE OF YOUR PEOPLE.

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HEALTH BENEFITS PLAN

Explore the Ohio Farm Bureau Health Benefits Plan Today

Ohio Farm Bureau Health Benefits Plan provides small business owners with affordable, comprehensive health care benefits for themselves and their employees. Learn more about our flexible health care coverage options tailored to meet the needs of **sole proprietors** and **small businesses** across Ohio.

SCAN THE QR CODE TO **APPLY NOW**

OFBF.org/HCS/Plans/Business/



How did Ohio Farm Bureau help launch your ag career?

We Asked. You Answered.

The ways in which Ohio Farm Bureau has played a role in helping members launch ag careers are as varied as they are rooted in the industry. Farm Bureau involvement has shaped futures, strengthened families and opened doors for generations of Ohio farmers and agricultural leaders, empowering individuals to dream bigger, lead stronger and give back to the industry they call home. Here are some of their stories.



Eric and Jackie Brooks, Athens County

In the early 1980s, Eric was elected to the Athens County Landmark Board of Directors and became involved with the Athens County Farm Bureau, and I was helping to start a Youth Farm Bureau organization. Summer of 1985, the Organization Director for the Athens County area gave us an application to fill out for Ohio Outstanding Young Farm Couple. For this application we had to fill out a five-year plan of our goals and what we wanted to achieve with our farming operation. By this time we were up to 150-200 acres and still working a full-time job. Our goal was to be farming on our own full time in five years. We were one of the four finalists Outstanding Young Couples and recognized at the annual meeting in December 1985. By December 1987, we'd reached our goal to start farming on our own. Over the years our farming operation increased to 1,400 acres of corn, soybeans and wheat, in Athens, Hocking and Meigs counties. We are now slowing down to semi retirement. Because we had the opportunity to fill out the Outstanding Young Farm Couple application, it made us realize the significance of our plans and goals, and our dreams came true.



Lincoln Deitrick, Muskingum County

The Muskingum County Farm Bureau is the first board that I've been on since 4-H. So it's been really nice getting me back involved with helping out something other than just for myself. Farm Bureau for my farming operation has helped me sharpen my ag toolbox and grain marketing decisions. It's also helped me with starting up a local meat market and being able to get more involved with bringing the farm to the customers or bringing the customers to the farm and just explaining to them what we do there and why we do it.



Katherine Brown, Stark County

I got involved with Farm Bureau wanting to become more knowledgeable about the ag industry and also wanting to be able to experience and learn more about agriculture outside of just Stark County. With that said, it's given me so many different professional and personal development opportunities along the way, one of those really impactful opportunities being Discussion Meet. I had the opportunity to compete both collegiately and then also at the Young Ag Professionals level where I was able to become our state winner and move to the national competition. One of the things that experience brought to my career is the ability to research really difficult topics, but then be able to discuss those topics with people who have different perspectives, different solutions, and really bring all those ideas to the table.



Amanda McKay, Clinton County

As a high school student, I received a Farm Bureau scholarship. That scholarship helped me jump start my career in agriculture. I was raised on a family farm in Clinton County and that scholarship helped support me through my undergraduate degree at Wilmington College and then supported me in spirit as I went on to Virginia Tech for my graduate studies. Thankfully, I was able to come back home, and land a job as the district director of Greene Soil and Water Conservation District and as an adjunct professor of agriculture at Wilmington College. It's been a real full-circle moment for me, becoming a Farm Bureau county trustee and serving on the scholarship committee so that I am able to help more students like myself get their start in agriculture and continue to succeed as adults.



'RISING STAR' DIDN'T START OUT IN AGRICULTURE

Story by Kelli Milligan Stammen

Cristen Cramer has a knack for logistics and an aptitude for learning.

Both have come in very handy as she's navigated a career in an industry she had only a tangential knowledge of growing up in Arcadia, Ohio.

Her road to becoming the grain branch manager at Legacy Farmers Cooperative in Fostoria is one she didn't have any inkling she would embark upon, and the learning curves have been steep.

"I grew up in a rural community, but I was the daughter of a nurse and a contractor," Cramer said. She was, however, surrounded by 4-H, becoming immersed in the program by showing horses in her youth.

"I grew up in it and the values, education and key factors of 4-H, but I didn't have market livestock or anything like that," she said. "I took my horse home after the fair."

So, when it came time to go to college, charting a career in agriculture wasn't on her mind. Watching her father work as a contractor, she wanted to design buildings for a living. She entered The Ohio State University as an architecture major.

But, she always kept one boot in the barn as part of the Ohio State Equestrian Team. She also worked as a farm hand and riding instructor at Autumn Rose Farm in Plain City. And, she started to notice some things.



Cramer

"I realized (architecture) wasn't for me," Cramer said, noting that there wasn't much cohesion between her and her classmates. "They weren't working in barns and then walking into class in their spurs."

She knew enough about agriculture to know she liked the people, the sense of community and the lifestyle. So, she dropped architecture as her major and decided on agribusiness with a minor in equine studies and started attending classes with "likeminded people."

She hasn't looked back.

She graduated from Ohio State in 2014 with a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture, going to "every career fair I could" to find a job in agriculture.

Learning on the job

Eventually, Cramer accepted a position as a

> “I came into the (AgriPOWER) program with limited Farm Bureau experiences or farm policy knowledge. I was a bit overwhelmed and overstimulated. I was like ‘what IS this organization?’”
>
> Cristen Cramer



Ottawa County Farm Bureau member Cristen Cramer, center, in Washington D.C. with OFBF President Bill Patterson, left, and OFBF Executive Vice President Adam Sharp when she graduated from AgriPOWER Class XIV. Cramer’s unlikely path into an ag career eventually led her to become the grain branch manger at Legacy Farmers Cooperatives in Fostoria, opposite page.

production supervisor trainee with ag giant Cargill in Kansas. She learned that she didn’t know what she didn’t know – and it was a lot.

“That first day, I had no concept about how a facility worked,” Cramer said. “I didn’t even know what a concrete bin was. I went in completely blind. I understood nothing.”

Cramer had a lot to learn, but she also had people who were willing to teach her. She moved around with Cargill a couple years before Ohio, and Legacy Farmers Cooperative, lured her back home.

First she worked in Custar, Ohio, as a grain marketer and branch manager and has now been the grain branch manager in Fostoria for almost five years. She likes the logistical aspects of the position and variety of the every day, saying no two days are alike.

And those steep learning curves? They’ve also proved to be her superpower.

“The status quo in my job is a 40-60-year-old white male, so when a contractor sees me, I’m not what they’re expecting,” Cramer said. “Mentors were open to teaching me and I want to return the favor.”

She does that in her hiring strategy in Fostoria. Anyone willing to learn the job is an ideal candidate in her view, regardless of what they may or may not know about the agriculture industry.

“ You can be a ‘city’ kid and we will teach you all you need to know if you’re willing to learn,” she said. “ I have a diverse group of employees.”

Reaching career highs

The learning has continued as Cramer has advanced in her career.

She graduated from Ohio Farm Bureau’s leadership institute AgriPOWER Class XIV in 2024 and the Ohio AgriBusiness Association’s LAUNCH program in 2022. She earned OABA’s emerging leader award in 2022.

“Cristen is a rising star,” said Melinda Witten, president and CEO, Ohio AgriBusiness Association. “There’s no single path into agribusiness, and while hers wasn’t traditional, she has become a leading voice within our association.”

Even though she has been a member of Ohio Farm Bureau through Legacy Farmers Cooperative’s group membership, Cramer said she didn’t fully comprehend the scope of the organization until she participated in AgriPOWER. Her first day with the class was a doozy.

“That first day we walked through what Farm Bureau is,” she said. “I came into the program with limited Farm Bureau experiences or farm policy knowledge. I was a bit overwhelmed and overstimulated. I was like ‘what IS this organization?’”

She asked a lot of questions of Witten, who was the AgriPOWER director during Cramer’s cohort, soaking up all she could about the organizational structure and what all those ag acronyms meant.



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So, when Witten took on her role leading OABA in 2024, it was Cramer's turn to help sort out the alphabet soup. She was ready and willing to return the favor, having tackled the learning curve in an industry she once knew very little about, but ultimately found a place to learn and grow.

"Ohio agriculture welcomes people who are willing to learn, ask questions and get involved," Witten said. "Don't let not having an ag background stop you from exploring the opportunities this industry has to offer."

KEY POINTS

- A nontraditional path into agriculture, Cramer grew up in a rural community but without a direct farming background. Initially pursuing architecture at Ohio State, she switched to agribusiness after realizing her passion for agriculture and its community.
- Starting with little ag industry knowledge, Cramer embraced career growth through adaptability and learning. Her quest for knowledge became a strength and shaped her inclusive hiring philosophy.
- Cramer advanced through leadership programs like AgriPOWER and LAUNCH, earning recognition as an emerging leader. She now encourages others without ag backgrounds to explore opportunities in the industry.

WHAT'S NEXT

The current AgriPOWER class began in December 2025. Applications for the next class will be available this summer and due in August. **Learn more about AgriPOWER at ofbf.org/community/agripower.**

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Cooper Kiser, left, with his steer Mookie and Jake Johnson, with his steer Tim, are with retired Ohio Farm Bureau organization director and Cuyahoga County Farm Bureau board trustee Anita Cook, who has championed exposing urban kids to agriculture through her work with Stearns Homestead in Parma. Photos by Amanda Lakotish.

Sparking ag careers in an urban area

Column by Anita Cook

As in most urban areas, it is always challenging to find ways to introduce young people to the many aspects of agriculture.

While gardening and growing vegetables is easily managed, it's difficult to allow the younger generation to experience raising livestock, with city governance only allowing for chickens and rabbits within city limits.

We are fortunate in the Parma area to have a 48-acre historic farm right in the city proper. Stearns Homestead has become a home for one of the largest 4-H clubs in Cuyahoga County, where city kids can learn about and care for various livestock including cows, hogs, goats, sheep, chickens, ducks, geese and quail.

I got involved at Stearns Homestead over 20 years ago, when I realized as the Cuyahoga Farm Bureau organization director the potential for Stearns Homestead to be a learning center for youth to get up close and personal with farm animals.

Currently I serve as a trustee for the Parma Area Historical Society, which manages Stearns Homestead, and volunteer three mornings each week to feed the farm animals and get them out of their stall or barn for the day.

Helping to develop a farm tour program for school groups, preschoolers and homeschoolers to learn about animal agriculture was one of my goals when I was with Farm Bureau. Over the past 10 years, more than 15,000 youth of all ages, pre-K through high school, have visited with the Stearns Homestead farm animals during the school year and summer months. The historical society continues to offer that program each year.

Along with school farm tours, Parma Area





Soda Kiser's on-campus experience in Ohio Farm Bureau's ExploreAg program, and work showing his steer through Stearns Homestead, helped him decide to enroll at the University of Findlay.

Historical Society has been fortunate to surface some very dedicated adult volunteers who saw the potential of growing the 4-H program at Stearns Homestead. Currently the Homestead Hoofers 4-H Club has 65 members, ages 6 years to 18 years old. Besides animal projects, many Homestead Hoofers 4-H members do nonanimal projects including quilting, archery and spin fish, expanding their interests and involvement.

The reality that Stearns Homestead and the Homestead Hoofers 4-H Club could provide the opportunity for 'city kids' to raise large livestock, specifically beef steers for the Cuyahoga County Junior Fair Market auction, came to fruition in 2021.

Two Parma school students, brothers Soda Kiser and Cooper Kiser, took on the challenge that year. Every morning before school, they arrived at the farm to give their steers fresh water, feed and get them out for the day. Then in the evenings, Soda and Cooper returned to Stearns Homestead to feed, exercise and develop a connection to their steers after cleaning the barn stalls.

Soda has raised a steer each year the past four years, managing all its feed and care, and preparing the cattle for the county Junior Fair Market Auction. For his final project as a Homestead Hoofer 4-H member, he raised a crossbred steer, and earned Grand Champion at the Cuyahoga County Fair.

His brother, Cooper, raised a crossbred steer and placed Reserve Grand Champion. This year's projects are underway. Cooper has Mookie, another crossbred and another 4-Her, Jake Johnson, is raising Tim, a Maine Anjou.

Soda's participation in the ExploreAg program on-campus experience helped his decision to enroll at the University of Findlay.



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That opportunity opened doors to future ag-related careers and has helped fuel his passion to pursue his lifetime goal to raise beef cattle. His involvement in Ohio 4-H Teen Leadership Council and Ohio Beef Youth Council has helped Soda gain valuable connections in the beef cattle industry.

Soda said his future ambitions would not have been realized without the opportunities provided by Stearns Homestead and Ohio Farm Bureau.

As a trustee of the Cuyahoga County Farm Bureau, I continue to feel it is imperative that we continue to offer scholarships for students attending agriculture-related studies at the college level and encourage participation in the ExploreAg program.

ExploreAg helps youth learn about the diversity of agriculture and how they might see themselves pursuing a career in the agricultural industry, just like Soda.

Anita Cook, *who retired as an organization director at Ohio Farm Bureau in 2020, currently serves on the Cuyahoga County Farm Bureau Board of Trustees.*

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Bringing ag literacy to a younger, wider audience

Story by Katie Isler

When people hear about agriculture education, the first thought that usually comes to mind is high school agriculture class and our amazing FFA programs.

I would guess that rarely agriculture education is connected to elementary classrooms.

As an elementary educator with over 25 years of experience, I can tell you agriculture education should be in those classrooms. I have made it my goal in the last few years to share agriculture with the over 900 K-5th grade students I work with.

In 2024, I was fortunate enough to receive a scholarship from the Ohio Farm Bureau Foundation's Patterson Family Fund for Agricultural Literacy to attend the National Ag in the Classroom Conference. I was so inspired to learn about many creative ways to combine our core academics with agriculture for students as young as 5 years old. I was very fortunate to receive a national scholarship to attend the conference again in 2025 and was overwhelmed by the many new things I learned and could bring back and share with my students.

Currently, I am one of two Innovation Lab Teachers for River Valley Local Schools in Marion County, and I have embraced the opportunity to share agriculture education with my students. Just this school year, we did several units on corn – how it is raised and harvested, the different types and its many uses. We also spent time in November learning about how the food we find on our Thanksgiving table is raised.

I have used countless National Ag in the Classroom resources to teach these topics to my students, and I am so grateful to have been introduced to them on my trip to the National Ag in the Classroom conferences.



Katie Isler, center in red, with her sheep at the 2025 Ohio State Fair ag literacy initiative hosted by Ohio Farm Bureau.

Ohio Farm Bureau also offered me the opportunity to share what I learned with teachers from all over the state of Ohio. I was honored to be asked to share my experience at the Ohio State Fair, where Ohio Farm Bureau hosted teachers from all over the state in 2025. I had the chance to not only share two National Ag in the Classroom lessons, but also what I do in my own classroom. An added bonus was my family was asked to share our sheep during the teachers' visits to the livestock barn.

Teaching agriculture in an elementary classroom is a great opportunity to spark a love of the industry in our youngest learners and have them share that with those at home.

Katie Isler *is Marion County Farm Bureau member and a teacher at River Valley Local Schools.*

WHAT'S NEXT

Read more about Ohio Farm Bureau's immersive ag literacy experience with elementary school educators during the 2025 Ohio State Fair at ofb.ag/agliteracy2025osf.

Growing into Farm Bureau

There are four Collegiate Farm Bureaus in the state, at The Ohio State University, Wilmington College, Wright State University – Lake Campus and the newest at the University of Findlay. We asked each of the chapter presidents what makes their Collegiate Farm Bureau essential and unique. **Learn more about Collegiate Farm Bureaus by contacting Katie Share, Collegiate Farm Bureau coordinator, at kshare@ofbf.org.**

FARM BUREAU SEED CO.



UNIVERSITY OF FINDLAY

"The driving force behind establishing a Collegiate Farm Bureau at the University of Findlay is to help connect students to businesses and people in the agriculture communities," said Gracelyn Heider, a Greene County Farm Bureau member and president of the newly launched collegiate chapter. Heider is majoring in animal science (pre-veterinary science) at Findlay. "We are hoping this new club will allow students to find agriculture connections in their communities and open opportunities for future internships and jobs." Heider leads a new officer team that is busy brainstorming many exciting opportunities for this year, including hosting agricultural speakers and planning tours to industry facilities, as well as coordinating various workshops to help foster community involvement and preparation for future internship and job opportunities. "We would like to do service projects to give back to our agriculture community and have resume building workshops with mock interviews," Heider said.

"Collegiate Farm Bureau is like many student orgs on campus, but what sets us apart from the others is the personal and career development opportunities we provide for students. We not only have ties to a major institution, OSU, but we also have the support of the Ohio Farm Bureau," said Sarah Hoak, a Richland County Farm Bureau member and president of the collegiate chapter. Hoak is majoring in sustainable agriculture. "This allows us access to so many incredible opportunities. Along with Farm Bureau career development events, we also lead a community service event every year." Last year, the OSU chapter made and donated 24 ag literacy kits to Columbus City Schools. When presenting the kits, members interacted with elementary students and talked about agriculture. "Ag advocacy comes in many forms, and through this community service project, members got to push themselves outside of their comfort zones and see another side of agricultural advocacy," she said. Membership in Collegiate Farm Bureau offers the same member benefits as all other members, which means that each chapter has access to Farm Bureau events. "The chapter is launching its flagship experience, the D.C. Policy Experience, this spring," Hoak said. "This will allow members to experience Washington, D.C., gain exposure to policy and industry issues and build a solid foundation for proactive advocacy."

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WILMINGTON COLLEGE

"Our Collegiate Farm Bureau chapter at Wilmington College provides a connection for students to the agriculture industry through leadership, professional and career development," said Ruth Beery, a Ross County Farm Bureau member and president of the collegiate chapter. Beery is studying animal science and biology at Wilmington. "Our connections with Ohio Farm Bureau and the other state Collegiate Farm Bureaus also open up a network of industry professionals and other students who will move forward with our collegiate members as they go into their career." Wilmington Collegiate Farm Bureau was awarded a $500 mini-grant from American Farm Bureau for its etiquette dinner, which takes place annually in February. "Our annual etiquette dinner focuses on giving students an opportunity to learn more professional etiquette to use in their professional career...because of the numerous dinners that students can attend and may need prepared for in their careers, including conferences, scholarship meals or other professional events," Beery said. "February (2026) will mark the third year that we have hosted this event, and we have enjoyed improving on it year after year. It's also an important event because we invite other students that are not a part of Farm Bureau to connect to our chapter and provide an opportunity to learn about dinner etiquette with us."

FARM BUREAU SEED CO.



WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY LAKE CAMPUS

"Located within a county with deep agricultural roots, the campus offers chapter members meaningful opportunities to connect with local community members who are dedicated to the agriculture industry," said Morgan Rempfer, a Mercer County Farm Bureau member and president of the collegiate chapter. Rempfer is pursuing a bachelor of technical and applied studies with an agricultural concentration at Wright State. "The chapter fosters a supportive environment where members can share experiences and learn from one another, as many come from strong agricultural backgrounds. This collaboration helps build a lasting network of peers that continues to support students beyond graduation."Wright State University - Lake Campus was awarded a $500 mini-grant from American Farm Bureau for its Emerging Ag Conference, which takes place on March 30 this year. "The event will feature a trade show, professional development breakout sessions (new this year) and a keynote address by Katie Share, who serves as the Collegiate Farm Bureau coordinator for the Ohio Farm Bureau," Rempfer said. "We were thrilled to receive a mini-grant in support of this conference. The event is especially impactful as it attracts participation from FFA chapters, community members, area businesses and Wright State students, creating an evening rich in networking and professional development opportunities."

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ADVANCING INDUSTRY







Demonstration of drones and ag-tech equipment at CFAES' 2025 Farm Science Review.

Innovation in every acre

By Evan Drexler

Nate Douridas, farm manager at CFAES' Molly Caren Agricultural Center, has seen vast changes in the ways farmers use technology.

The latest wave of technological transformation — and one in which CFAES is committed to preparing the next generation of Ohio farmers — is in artificial intelligence.

"Very soon, nearly all aspects of production and scale agriculture that we deal with is going to be influenced by some kind of AI-specific technology," said Douridas.

Part of the mission at the center is to use 1,500 acres of crop production space for CFAES research while staying profitable. In recent years, research has increasingly involved AI.

The John Deere See & Spray weed control system, for example, uses cameras to detect weeds in a sprayer's path, to determine a weed's species and to apply the appropriate pesticide at the correct time. Instead of broadcasting pesticide throughout an entire field, See & Spray resulted in a 60% reduction of pesticide application and a corresponding cost savings.

Douridas has also researched the Agroptimizer tool, which uses AI to suggest a change in planting dates or other factors to boost yields, as well as another AI tool that can tell farmers where and how to replant soybeans following a weather or mechanical event that disturbed their crops.

Ohio State's recently announced AI Fluency program will weave AI instruction into the undergraduate experience, so students know how to apply AI to their fields when they graduate. CFAES has introduced a digital and precision agriculture

Story continues on next page

Continued from previous page

systems specialization for undergraduates, focusing on skills in data analysis, remote sensing, sensor technology and automation.

"I think this is a clear sign that the college is updating its curriculum to meet the changing skill set needed in modern farming," said Sami Khanal, associate professor in the CFAES Department of Food, Agricultural and Biological Engineering.

CFAES hopes to produce a pipeline of graduates who know how to use AI to analyze field trial data, to program farm robots and to interpret satellite imagery.

"CFAES is not only developing new AI solutions, but it's also training students and Extension professionals to use them," Khanal said.

> "I think this is a clear sign that the college is updating its curriculum to meet the changing skill set needed in modern farming.
>
> Sami Khanal, associate professor in the CFAES Department of Food, Agricultural and Biological Engineering



A 2025 FSR exhibitor showcases precision ag information and data.



ADVANCING KNOWLEDGE

CFAES Student Ambassadors tour the MALC construction in December 2025.

MALC: Growing Ohio's next ag leaders

By Tracy Turner

CFAES' Multispecies Animal Learning Complex (MALC) houses not only animals but also future animal scientists, veterinarians and agricultural leaders — all preparing for careers critical to Ohio's $140 billion agricultural industry.

Opened in January 2026, the MALC was built in part to educate and to grow talent.

Located at CFAES' Waterman Agricultural and Natural Resources Laboratory, the facility anchors animal science education in the heart of Ohio's capital.

From K-12 visitors exploring interactive exhibits to CFAES undergraduates training with real-world systems, the facility connects people to modern animal agriculture.

Pasha Lyvers, chair of the CFAES Department of Animal Sciences, calls the MALC a "talent pipeline" that sparks early STEM interest through public viewing areas, interactive displays and hands-on demos.

"Early exposure is critical in shaping career paths," she said. "The MALC and the dairy not only spark interest, but they nurture early foundations in STEM education and build awareness of agriculture's impact on food security, the economy and society overall."

Inside are robotic milkers, automated feeding lines, manure-scraping "Roomba" systems and embedded biosecurity protocols.

"Students develop job-ready expertise through hands-on animal care, training in automated systems and learning biosecurity practices," Lyvers said. "This experiential learning ensures they meet the current and future needs of our animal industries."

Ohio's livestock sector is clamoring for graduates trained in sustainability, data-driven operations and disease prevention — gaps the MALC is designed to fill.

Julie Morris, director of CFAES animal operations, believes biosecurity is a top employer priority, and it's built into daily MALC routines, preparing students to protect animal and public health.

"The MALC was designed not just to teach animal care, but to show students the full impact of agriculture on daily life and global challenges," Lyvers said.

Five to 10 years from now, Lyvers expects graduates who see agriculture not as a rural relic but as an essential, innovative career path: "Our graduates will enter the workforce with education shaped by the latest technologies and an in-depth understanding of agriculture's role in society."



> **Agriculture is like an invisible thread that CFAES can illuminate to show students all the potential paths they can take now.**
>
> Gracie Sprague,
> agriscience education major

ADVANCING PEOPLE

4-H to CFAES: A pathway to success

By Gabe Preston

Gracie Sprague's path began like many CFAES students' paths: on a working farm.

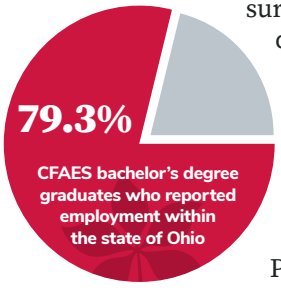
The Ottawa County native dutifully planted row crops and raised and showed pigs with Ohio 4-H youth development, eventually becoming a state officer with FFA. In fact, she earned the 2024 Agricultural Proficiency Award for Agricultural Sales – Entrepreneurship at the 97th National FFA Convention & Expo.

Sprague continued her academic career at Ohio State ATI on the CFAES Wooster campus, eventually transferring to Ohio State's Columbus campus to focus on a four-year degree in agriscience education.

"Agriculture is like an invisible thread that CFAES can illuminate to show students all the potential paths they can take now," Sprague said.

Those invisible threads are possible in large part due to Ohio 4-H, which provides educational programs to support local communities.

Sprague's journey embodies the youth-to-college-to-career pipeline that strengthens Ohio's agricultural future. In fact, per a recent CFAES survey, 79.3% of bachelor's degree graduates reported employment within the state of Ohio.



This pipeline is reinforced by the expanded collaboration between the 4-H Pathways to the Future program and CFAES, which this year provided 64 4-H educators recommendations for CFAES admissions — nearly double the amount from last year — providing deeper insight into CFAES applicants' strengths and helping more students find their place in the college.

Sprague, now a second-year agriscience education major, proudly refers to herself as a product of agriculture.

"I'm very invested in the next generation of agricultural leaders," Sprague said. She believes that investment starts in middle schools and high schools, where students are encouraged to consider opportunities like 4-H and ATI to help prepare for the workforce.



Gracie Sprague accepts the 2024 Agricultural Proficiency Award for Agricultural Sales – Entrepreneurship at the 97th National FFA Convention & Expo.

Sprague, who is currently interning with the Ohio Farm Bureau's Leadership Development department, plans to stay in Ohio after graduation, giving back to the networks that shaped her. Her journey from the farm to the competition stage to the college classroom is impressive, and while it isn't necessarily rare, lifelong student success stories like hers bode well for Ohio's future workforce.

When thinking about her future, Sprague added, "I love that I get to be a Buckeye for life." *



Robert Moore, attorney and research specialist with CFAES and OSU Extension's Farm Office, offers advice at FSR.

OSU Extension's Farm Office uncomplicates the complicated

Labor regulations, a complex mix of state and federal laws, can trip up anyone. OSU Extension's Farm Office will help farmers better understand how to navigate this portion of their business with an upcoming series on employment laws and regulations.

Along with releasing a new set of bulletins focused on employment law, the Farm Office is also launching a new Temporary Agricultural Worker Program H-2A project, which explores how traditional grain farms can use H-2A labor.

In addition, the office provides tools for workforce planning and for compliance with employment laws and succession and transition considerations. Whether building a team or strengthening an established operation, the Farm Office helps create a strong, sustainable workforce.

Use the QR code to join a new season of Farm Office Live in March.


Drone demonstration at the 2025 FSR.

Training tech-ready farmers

As technologies like variable-rate application, drone monitoring and advanced sensors become standard on Ohio farms, the skills needed in the agricultural workforce are shifting.

Today's demand is less for traditional field labor and more for data-savvy technicians who can interpret sensor outputs, manage geospatial software and troubleshoot automated equipment. Investing in upskilling current employees improves efficiency and helps farm operations stay competitive.

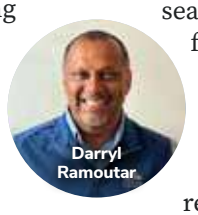
CFAES offers practical support through precision agriculture webinars and courses on GPS mapping, drone operation and farm data management.

Scan the QR code to explore upcoming training opportunities for your team.

Meet your new bite-sized training tool

The VECTOR Library — a comprehensive, online database — offers Ohio farmers and producers a centralized collection of resources designed to protect people and animals from vector-borne diseases, an increasingly important facet in today's agricultural workforce.

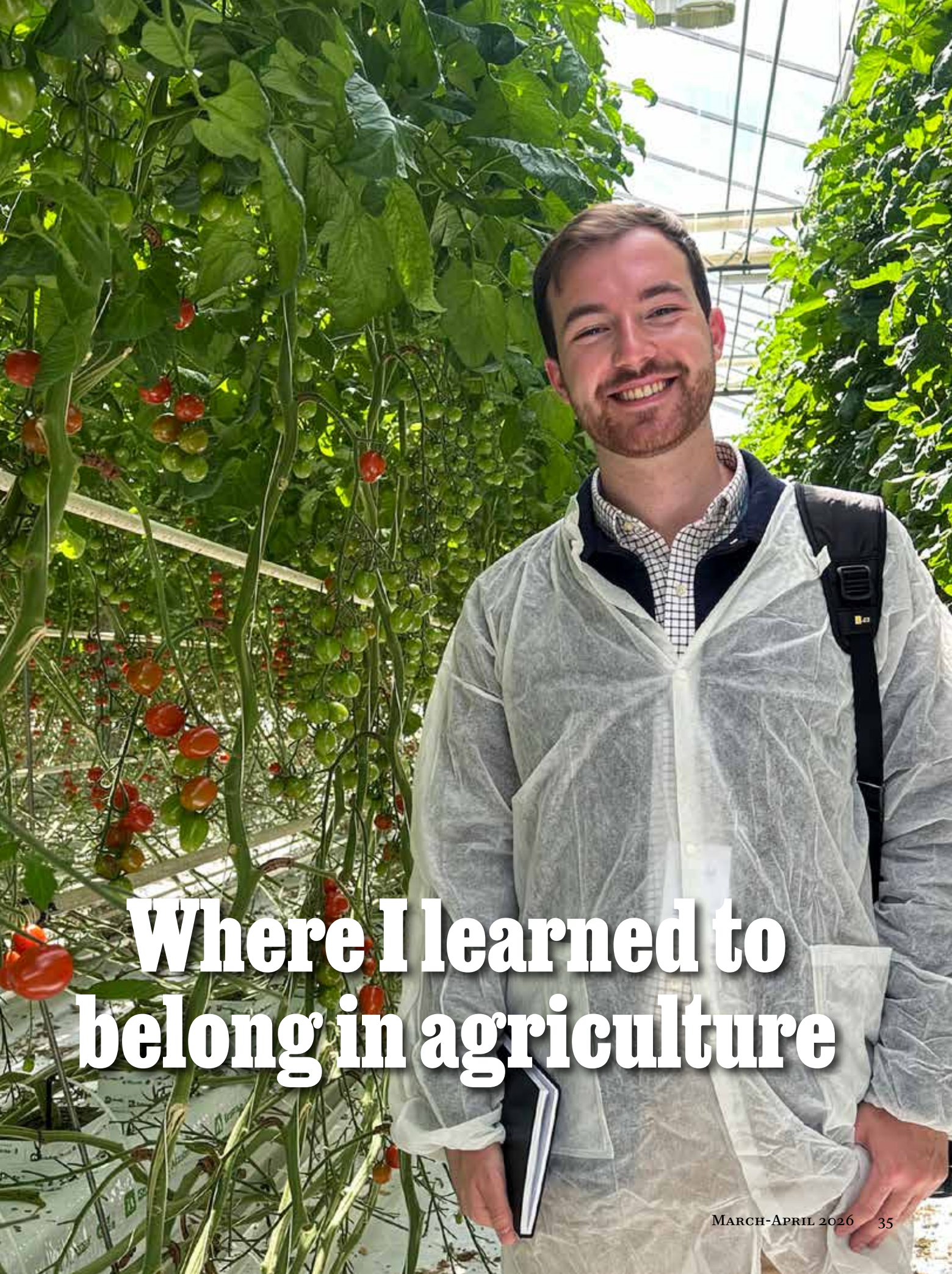
"The VECTOR Library offers resources on disease awareness, treatment guidelines, arthropod and landscape management, and practical prevention tips like EPA-approved repellents and protective clothing," said Darryl Ramoutar, a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention-funded OSU Extension educator with appointments in CFAES and Ohio State's College of Veterinary Medicine.


Darryl Ramoutar

The site also provides posters, videos, fact sheets and research materials that can be used to train seasonal agricultural workers, farm families, 4-H participants, school-aged youth and other Extension audiences. For farmers and educators, the VECTOR Library delivers ready-to-use tools that strengthen safety, awareness and workforce readiness across Ohio.

Scan the QR code to discover how to keep you and your crew safe this season.

CFAES provides research and related educational programs to clientele on a nondiscriminatory basis. For more information, visit cfaes.osu.edu/nondiscrimination. For an accessible format of this publication, visit cfaes.osu.edu/accessibility.



Where I learned to belong in agriculture

Column by Jake Zajkowski

Admittedly, I left Ohio in 2022. New York's farm country called me to pursue a degree in higher education.

It was new, different and one of those "leave to experience" moments in life. But there is one reason I continue to come back—a constant pulling factor: my Ohio agriculture community.

I've said this many times during my FFA career, but I have a nontraditional agriculture background. I proudly claim suburban Lucas County as home, but since the age of 12, I worked vegetable fields and began a landscaping business. I would later work at a vertical tomato greenhouse, which sparked my love for horticulture.

Core learning in those high school years came from FFA, of course. The principles of career technical education are ideals I later advocated for during my college education at Cornell University, where I am now a senior.

But from the beginning, Ohio Farm Bureau was always there—regardless of the rural-urban juxtaposition of Toledo. I attended meetings with my tomato greenhouse boss and then-state Farm Bureau trustee, Wade Smith, and met many other vegetable growers and members early on.

I knew I was different, not coming from a grain or livestock operation, which gave ample opportunity to learn about one of Ohio's largest industries when I traveled for two years as an Ohio FFA state officer. Farm Bureau soon became my next stop as an Ohio State Fair intern.

The Land and Living exhibit was my claim to fame. Fellow interns and I built the Crops and Water Path, an elaborate landscaped experience that taught visitors about water quality, cover crops and soil conservation. These principles resonated deeply with me, as someone directly impacted by Toledo's 2014 water quality crisis and a strong advocate for long-term H2Ohio investments.

The internship allowed me to engage directly with farmer members and Ohio's political landscape. I think back to the opportunity to teach the now U.S. Vice President, JD Vance, about cover crops while he was on the campaign trail for the Senate.

The individuals I met in those early years are the same farmers I call upon today when I have questions as an agriculture journalist. I think about my time on Lane Osswald's farm learning about no-till, checking out cover crop fields with Nathan Brown, or composting with Nate Andre, among others who shaped how I think about land stewardship.

I spent all four years involved in my collegiate Farm Bureau chapter at Cornell, serving as an officer



> "The individuals I met in those early years (as an Ohio Farm Bureau intern) are the same farmers I call upon today when I have questions as an agriculture journalist."
>
> Jake Zajkowski



Zajkowski working as an Ohio Farm Bureau intern at the former Land & Living Building at the Ohio State Fair.

for three. I represented New York in the national Discussion Meet competition in 2024 and helped develop an ecosystem where university students discussed agriculture policy alongside industry leaders and academic faculty across New York.

Other experiences crucial to my career include working as a constituent aide in the Ohio Legislature, joining the airwaves as a farm broadcaster for the Ohio Ag Net team and interning in international affairs with the World Food Prize Foundation.

Agriculture communications soon became not just a reality, but a rhythm. I spent a summer as a congressional reporter and editorial intern for Agri-Pulse Communications, the largest agriculture reporting team in Washington, D.C.

Now, I regularly contribute news and analysis on agrifood policy around the world as a journalist. The world became my oyster—from frequent travel to the Netherlands, inspired by their efficiency in farming, to living in Austria for six months, and reporting from Kenya and more than a dozen other countries.

I believe that any country reliant on agricultural trade must understand the global food system it participates in. Journalism, farm newspapers in particular, are central to the future of discourse on farm issues. Asking tough questions in our rural communities and commodity sectors leads to solutions that strengthen livelihoods and farm income.

Still, Ohio never left my reach. It's what I know best. For local publications such as Farm & Dairy, The Toledo Blade, Toledo Free Press and Springfield Hub, I began profiling leaders and uncovering stories I felt compelled to tell. Many of those words now live in this magazine, where I contribute as a writer for Ohio Farm Bureau.

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The Discussion Meet contest is one of several opportunities Zajkowski has taken advantage of through his involvement with Farm Bureau.

Maybe like yours, my story mirrors that of millions, where agriculture skipped a generation.

The Zajkowski potato farm that closed in 2000, before I was born, still sits as prime farmland in northern Michigan. Brown Dairy milk jugs sit on my shelf at home—the farm my grandmother grew up on in Logan, Ohio.

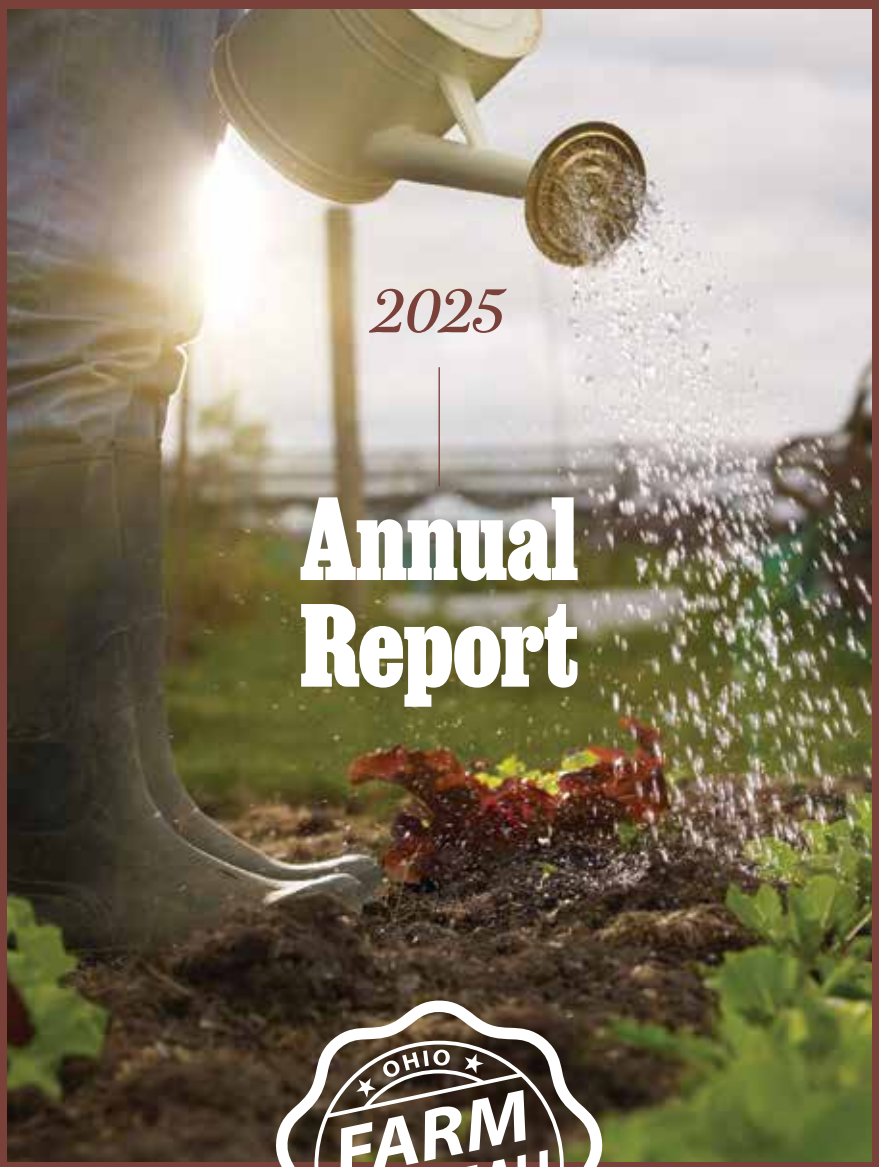
I know one day I will return to that legacy, not far from my family's roots, putting years of conversations about farm profitability and horticulture science into practice. Will those farming practices and perspectives on land use be different? Absolutely. That should be expected of the next generation of farmers. Until then, my goal is to equip the food system with the information and news it needs for transformation.

Farm Bureau, I guarantee, will be part of the next chapter—writing about farmer members across the country, reporting on ag policy developments and maybe even operating my own farm one day.

It's a great place to belong, to farm and to build a career.

Jake Zajkowski *is a Lucas County Farm Bureau member and a freelance writer for Our Ohio.*





2025

Annual Report

OHIO FARM BUREAU FOUNDATION

Dear Friends,

The future of Ohio agriculture is being shaped today by curious students, young professionals finding their footing, and members who continue to grow and lead within our industry.

As Ohio Farm Bureau Executive Vice President Adam Sharp has shared, many of you have been clear about what matters most: ensuring the next generation is educated, prepared and excited to be part of agriculture. You have asked for stronger ag literacy, meaningful leadership opportunities and clearer pathways to lifelong careers in our industry. Because of your generosity, the Ohio Farm Bureau Foundation has evolved to meet those needs.

The foundation serves as a bridge between possibility and purpose, advancing Ohio Farm Bureau's mission by investing in people at every stage of their journey. With your support, students are discovering agriculture in the classroom, young leaders are gaining confidence through scholarships and leadership development, and early-career professionals are finding direction through career exploration and professional growth opportunities.

These pathways represent real people discovering purpose, growing into leaders and building skills that last a lifetime, students discovering where they fit, and young professionals growing into community leaders who advocate for their communities and our industry. From classroom to career, the foundation is helping cultivate the next generation of Ohio agriculture.

With sincere appreciation,

Kelly Burns, Executive Director

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Our Mission

Inspiring innovation and cultivating investment in Ohio's farm and food community.

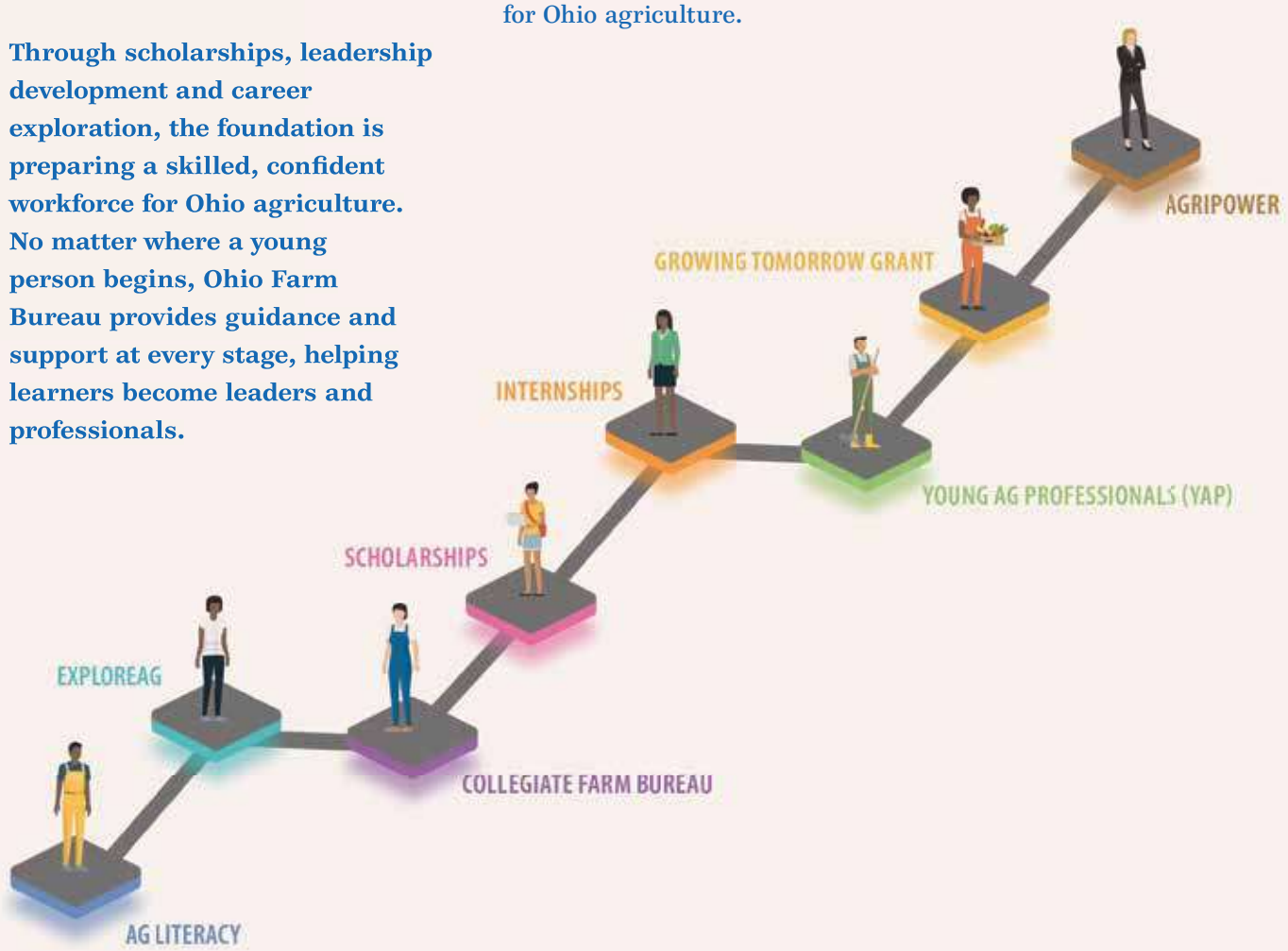
Pathways to a Rewarding Career in Agriculture



Every pathway looks different, but the Ohio Farm Bureau Foundation helps young people turn interest into opportunities.

Through scholarships, leadership development and career exploration, the foundation is preparing a skilled, confident workforce for Ohio agriculture. No matter where a young person begins, Ohio Farm Bureau provides guidance and support at every stage, helping learners become leaders and professionals.

The following pages show how your generosity delivers results by strengthening pathways, growing talent and building a stronger future for Ohio agriculture.



Our Impact

Ohio Farm Bureau hosted 24 K–2nd grade educators for a professional development event, **Food Roots: Where your Lunch Begins**, at the 2025 Ohio State Fair. This free, one-day professional development event was made possible through the **Patterson Family Fund for Agricultural Literacy.** The event was open to any formal educator who instructs kindergarten, first grade or second grade in Ohio, and included in-depth visits with farmers and commodity groups in each of the livestock barns, hands-on curriculum training, and a stop at Ohio Farm Bureau's Little Farmer exhibit.

"As new generations are becoming farther removed from the farm, the gap between agriculture and consumers becomes wider. Our hope is that through providing professional development events like this to Ohio educators, along with hands-on curriculum, we can show students and their educators how essential agriculture is to our everyday lives."
— **Mary Klopfenstein**, Ohio Farm Bureau Director of Leadership Development





In 2025, the Ohio Farm Bureau Foundation awarded its first **Growing Tomorrow Grant** that was created to help inspire, encourage and nurture young agricultural professionals and entrepreneurs to find creative and transformative ways to address challenges facing the agricultural sector today.

The program provided $50,000 to two businesses: Winchester Farm Exchange, a community-focused space in Canal Winchester that connects local consumers with farmers and artisans, and **Chambers Family Fab**, a Stark County-based company that designs customized livestock equipment while educating youth on best farming practices. The grant program, founded by Mike and Patti Boyert and supported by Nationwide, Farm Credit Mid-America, and countless individuals, provides grants to new or early-stage agricultural businesses. Grants focus on supporting community impact in four main areas: sustainable employment opportunities, agricultural education and awareness, environmental stewardship, and combating food insecurity.

Scan to learn more about the Winchester Farm Exchange and Chambers Family Fab.



The Ohio Farm Bureau Foundation is deeply grateful for the extraordinary generosity of **Mr. James R. Hollingshead** of Groveport. A long-standing supporter of the foundation, Jim made a gift through his estate plans. Upon his passing in January 2025, **his estate provided more than $146,000** in support for the Cindy Hollingshead Scholarship. The scholarship honors Jim's wife, Cynthia Anne (Cindy) Hollingshead, for her 39 years of service as Ohio Farm Bureau's executive secretary, as well as a lifetime of volunteerism to local government and community service.

"To some, agriculture is a business; to Jim and Cindy, it was a lifelong promise. Though they are both gone, Jim ensured Cindy's passion for agriculture lives on by funding the scholarship that is her namesake. Together, they haven't just left a memory, they've planted a legacy that will help the next generation of agricultural leaders grow."

— **Amy Burns**, niece of Jim and Cindy Hollingshead



ExploreAg, Ohio Farm Bureau's signature ag literacy and workforce development program, provides high school students with immersive experiences in agriculture and related STEM fields. Funded by the Ohio Farm Bureau Foundation, the program offers weeklong, multiday, and daylong camps where students engage with industry experts, scientists and educators.

On June 24, 2025, the annual **Ohio Farm Bureau Foundation Golf Invitational** was held at Scioto Reserve Country Club in Powell. **The event raised $115,000 for foundation scholarships, grants and programs** that support youth pathways, setting an all-time record for the annual event.



"This milestone is more than just a number; it represents real opportunities for the next generation of farmers and agricultural leaders. With these funds, we can continue to open doors for young people, showing them the value and vitality of careers in agriculture."— **Nathan Brown**,
Former president of the Ohio Farm Bureau Foundation Board of Directors and District 20 Trustee for Ohio Farm Bureau

In 2025, 123 students participated in ExploreAg.



"The engagement I saw from the ExploreAg students asking questions to understand and learn more about different aspects of agriculture was very impressive. I see great value in the immense exposure the ExploreAg agenda created for the students to get a very well-rounded look at careers in agriculture."

— **Mark Sunderman**,
CEO of Legacy Farmers Cooperative

Our Impact

CONTINUED



Wyatt Morrow from Clinton County is a senior at Wilmington College, majoring in Agricultural Communications. Wyatt has benefited from many opportunities along the pathways offered by the Ohio Farm Bureau. He has served as an ExploreAg counselor, a social media ambassador for the YAP Winter Leadership Experience, is a member of Collegiate Farm Bureau, and is the National Vice President for the Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow (ACT). Wyatt is also a 2025 recipient of the Darwin Bryan Scholarship.

"Farm Bureau has not only shaped my college experience, but it has also shaped who I am as a leader, communicator and advocate for agriculture. Every opportunity has reminded me that leadership begins when we use our voice to serve others." — **Wyatt Morrow**



Liam Joyce from Hamilton County grew up in Cincinnati. As a freshman in high school, Liam knew he wanted to pursue agriculture as a career, but didn't know where to start. Then, his school counselor sent him information on Ohio Farm Bureau's ExploreAg program. Liam participated in a weeklong camp at the Ohio State University Columbus campus in June 2025 and found his pathway into agriculture.

"Unlike most of my peers, I was not born into agriculture. So when my college counselor brought forward information on ExploreAg, I was intrigued. Looking back at my time at camp I learned so much valuable information, but I know that I am only scratching the surface of the ideas we covered." — **Liam Joyce**

Growing in Gratitude: A Night with the Ohio Farm Bureau Foundation brought nearly 100 guests together for an evening of fellowship and reflection. Scholarship recipients, foundation donors, and board members, and Federation board members gathered to celebrate the impact of the foundation's work and the power of investing in future agricultural leaders. **In 2025, the foundation and Ohio's county Farm Bureaus awarded more than $285,000 to 317 students statewide**, reinforcing a shared commitment to strengthening Ohio agriculture through education and opportunity. The evening featured meaningful remarks from scholarship recipient Wyatt Morrow and Scott Walter, a scholarship donor, who shared personal perspectives on how the foundation's support creates lasting opportunity.



At the **107th Annual Meeting** of the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation, the foundation hosted the breakfast program on day two. Through a panel discussion, guests heard from **Tim Mizer**, who along with his two brothers created the David E. Mizer Memorial Scholarship in honor of their father; **Julia and Liam Joyce**, a mother/son duo who spoke about their experience participating in ExploreAg in the summer of 2025; and **Wyatt Morrow**, a senior at Wilmington College who participated in numerous Ohio Farm Bureau programs, including ExploreAg and Collegiate Farm Bureau, and who is a 2025 scholarship recipient.

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Land Title Fraud on the Rise

By Ryan Conklin, Attorney

Recently, our office has received several questions about land title fraud. This occurs when a "title pirate" completes a land transaction without the owner's consent or knowledge, usually for financial gain. If successful, it creates complex issues that are hard to resolve.

Though relatively rare, the frequency and severity of the problems are still big enough to merit attention. Popular targets include the elderly, landowners who are sick, vacant properties, or landowners residing out of state. Additionally, land without recorded encumbrances (like farm leases, rights of first refusal, or mortgages) makes it even easier on the scammer.

The scheme often might involve obtaining a signature of a legal instrument that grants the crook an ability to complete land transactions. Alternatively, a title pirate might forge a landowner's name on legal documents. Then, the criminal consummates a sale and pockets the purchase price. Alternatively, the scammer mortgages the land and absconds with the loan proceeds, leaving the landowner with leveraged property.

Regardless of the flavor of crime committed, the scam artist relies on misrepresentations or forgery to complete the job. If closing proceeds quickly by omitting inspections, declining title insurance, using a quitclaim deed, or using a cash buyer, it is even easier to pull off the transaction. In the right conditions, this type of scam is very doable.

These options may lower the risk of title fraud for you and your loved ones:

- If available in your county, sign up for recording alerts so you receive a notification when an instrument related to your land is recorded.
- Consider putting your land in a business or trust. These entities contain additional requirements to close a sale or loan, which could prevent a fraudulent transfer from occurring.
- Establish an open line of communication among family members and caretakers. This includes disclosing phone calls, unknown visitors, items in the mail, emails, documents, and other concerning encounters.
- For landowners working with a property management company, discuss available fraud prevention measures with that group.
- If you are a farm tenant, ask your landlord to record a memorandum of lease. This could protect the landowner from fraudulent transfers, and ensure the tenant retains farming rights.
- As a hard and fast rule, ensure family members do not sign any documents without asking a relative or a professional to review it. No matter how convincing the third party might be or innocent the document might look, hidden in the text can be a path to a fraudulent transaction.
- Explore obtaining insurance against title fraud. These products can provide an easy path to fixing any fraudulent conveyance. Identity protection services could be worthwhile as well.
- Recording powers of attorney with the county recorder is a requirement for any land sale by a power of attorney. This power of attorney could contain strict language regarding use of that document and any potential revocation.

Note, this type of fraud is different than a conveyance by an authorized party who is potentially exerting undue influence. In this case, a third-party coaxes someone into granting him/her a financial power of attorney. The power of attorney then proceeds with a sale of land and either absconds with sale proceeds or receives an unreasonable fee for services. This financial power of attorney is required to act in the landowner's best interest with the sale. Failure to do so may result in legal action against the financial power of attorney.

If you or a member of your family suspects any illicit behavior related to land transfers, whether by undue influence, scam, forgery, or otherwise, contact your attorney immediately to discuss potential recourse. Additionally, your legal counsel may be the best outlet to implement preventative measures against land title fraud.

Find answers to all your agriculture law related questions at ohiofarmlaw.com.

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ExploreAg opens pathways, offers clarity

Lydia Fuchs of Belmont County, left, and Liam Joyce of Hamilton County, pictured right on the left side of the harness horse, each found the ExploreAg opportunity both unexpected and transformative.

For many Ohio high school students, the agricultural industry can feel distant—something happening in fields, labs and businesses far from their own day-to-day experiences.

But ExploreAg, a fully funded ag and STEM immersion program funded through the Ohio Farm Bureau Foundation, works to change that.

"These camps highlight the vast array of possibilities for a meaningful career in Ohio's farm and food industries, especially for students who may have never considered agriculture," said Katie Share, ExploreAg and youth development specialist at Ohio Farm Bureau. "From agronomy to communications to cutting-edge technology, agriculture is full of opportunity—and ExploreAg helps students see where they fit."

For students like Lydia Fuchs of Belmont County and Liam Joyce of Hamilton County, that opportunity felt both unexpected and transformative.

From uncertainty to direction

Fuchs, a senior at Barnesville High School, came into the program at a crossroads many high school students know well. Active in sports, leadership groups, FFA, 4-H, church and multiple clubs, she excelled everywhere—except in identifying what came next.

"I arrived with an open mind and a lot of questions," she said. Encouraged by FFA peers and social media posts about the camp, she applied hoping to find clarity.

With other ExploreAg campers, Fuchs toured a range of agricultural businesses—from Lavender Trails Farm, where agritourism blends creativity with community outreach, to greenhouse operations that showcased modern food production. A session with an agricultural communicator sparked a new interest: telling the story of agriculture.

By the end of camp, Fuchs understood that her passion for leadership, communication and community engagement had a place in the agricultural sector. She took the momentum home, applied and was accepted to become an FFA in the USA reporter, where she is one of 250 students across the country who cover all-things FFA in their chapters and community.

"By the time I graduated from ExploreAg, I had a much clearer picture of the wide range of opportunities agriculture offers and a stronger sense of how I could fit into that future," Fuchs said.

A city student finds his place

For Joyce, agriculture had always been an interest without a roadmap.

Growing up in Cincinnati, he had no family ties to farming. Still, from watching agricultural shows as a child to working summers on a Texas ranch through family friends, the pull toward agriculture remained strong.

Joyce recalled seeing a combine on one of the ag shows he watched and thinking, "That's it; I want to feed America." What he didn't know was how, as a self-proclaimed "city kid," he could find his way into the industry.

He learned about ExploreAg through his school's college counselor. Initially hesitant, he decided to attend at the urging of his parents—and quickly discovered the program offered exactly what he had been searching for.

Joyce gravitated toward the program's agriscience and engineering components: auto-steer demonstrations, machinery labs and hands-on equipment use. Operating a track hoe became an ExploreAg core memory.

The experience expanded his understanding of what modern agriculture looks like—and how technology and science could enhance his future endeavors, which include working with cattle and horses. The camp's visit to a meat science facility also reshaped how he thought about connecting ranchers and consumers.

"Now I can really see where I can tie those two together," he said.

A program designed to open doors

Both Fuchs and Joyce pointed to the program's relationships as one of its strongest components. Students connect with industry professionals, ExploreAg staff and peers who share similar interests.

For Fuchs, those connections translated into new confidence and tangible next steps. For Joyce, they offered a sense of belonging.

"It was great to spend time with people who shared similar interests with me," he said.

With no cost barrier to participate, ExploreAg aims to reach students of all backgrounds—those with deep agricultural roots and those discovering the field for the first time.

Both teens say they would strongly recommend the camp to younger students, especially freshmen and sophomores who have time to explore career paths early.

"You walk into ExploreAg as one person and leave with stronger confidence, leadership skills and a clearer sense of direction for your future," Fuchs said.

KEY POINTS

- ExploreAg exposes Ohio high school students to a wide range of careers in agriculture and helps them see where they might fit.
- Students gain personal clarity and confidence through hands-on experiences and industry connections.
- The program is accessible, transformative and free.

WHAT'S NEXT

In 2026 there are multiple one-day, ExploreAg experiences in various parts of the state, kicking off with COLT Lineman Training May 29 in Mount Gilead.

A weeklong camp is offered May 31-June 5 at The Ohio State University College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences Wooster campus.

Applications for the 2026 program open March 1 and close April 30 at Exploreag.org.







Taking the youth pathways trail with Farm Bureau

Column by Wyatt Morrow

Growing up on my family's farm in Leesburg, Ohio, I knew agriculture would be a central part of my life.

But it wasn't until I joined the Wilmington College Collegiate Farm Bureau that I truly saw how my passion could translate into leadership, advocacy and a career.

Starting college in August 2023, I joined the Collegiate Farm Bureau thanks to a friend's encouragement. That first year, I attended the Ohio Farm Bureau Annual Meeting, Winter Leadership Experience and Ag Day at the Capital. These experiences introduced me to a network of mentors, industry professionals and fellow students who would become instrumental in shaping my path, building the foundation for the next steps in my youth pathways journey.

One pivotal moment came after Ag Day at the Capital in 2024. Katie Share, from the Ohio Farm Bureau staff, organized a gathering for Collegiate Farm Bureau chapters at The Ohio State University. During the event, a conversation about student organizations introduced me to the Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow (ACT). That conversation sparked action: within weeks, Wilmington had an ACT chapter, and I helped secure national affiliation and funding to attend the National ACT Professional Development Conference in January 2025. Today, I serve as National ACT vice president, a role that would not have been possible without the Ohio Farm Bureau community encouraging me to take that first step.

My experiences within the Ohio Farm Bureau haven't just expanded my leadership skills; they've

allowed me to give back. In 2025 I served as a social media ambassador during the YAP Winter Leadership Experience and was a camp counselor for ExploreAg, Ohio Farm Bureau's career exploration program for teens. These programs exemplify how Ohio Farm Bureau invests in youth, turning opportunities into experiences that shape futures.

I am incredibly grateful for the support I've received from the Ohio Farm Bureau Foundation, including being a recipient of the Darwin Bryan Scholarship as well as speaking opportunities to share my story at the Growing in Gratitude Dinner and OFBF Annual Meeting. The encouragement has enabled me to pursue opportunities that have pushed me to grow. It's thanks to this network of mentors, peers and donors that I can proudly share that I've been accepted to Oklahoma State University in the Agricultural Communications (MS) graduate program for the fall 2026 term.



Wyatt Morrow, center, speaks during a panel discussion at the Ohio Farm Bureau Foundation breakfast at OFBF's annual meeting in December about his youth pathways experiences in Farm Bureau. Morrow was an ExploreAg camp intern, pictured far left, opposite page.

Reflecting on my journey, I've learned that leadership begins with using your voice to serve others. From attending my first events with Ohio Farm Bureau to serving as an ExploreAg counselor and National ACT officer, each step has reinforced the value of mentorship, community and giving back. I am thankful to everyone in Ohio Farm Bureau who has supported me, guided me and helped me turn my passion into purpose.

Wyatt Morrow *is a Clinton County Farm Bureau member.*



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LIFE SKILLS: STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT 'ADULTING'

Story by Kathy Lynn Gray



High school students learn life skills and much more at annual event in Holmes County.

Balancing a checkbook, changing a flat tire, or whipping up a simple meal aren't skills everyone learns in a classroom.

But for juniors and seniors in Holmes County, those real-world lessons—and many more—took center stage at All In For Life Skills.

Held at the Holmes County Fairgrounds, the daylong program brought together students, educators, employers and community members with one shared goal: helping young people feel more prepared for adulthood. The annual event is a collaboration between Holmes County Farm Bureau, the West Holmes High School FFA Chapter, Ohio State University Extension in Holmes County and community partners from across the county and beyond.

The program grew out of conversations about practical life skills that don't always fit into a traditional school day.

"Teens don't always know how to change their oil or what insurance they need—the things that come with being an adult," said Kayla Jones, senior organization director, Coshocton, Holmes, Knox and Licking County Farm Bureaus. "There just isn't time to teach everything in the public schools, so this fills an important gap."

West Holmes High School has had a small program emphasizing personal growth and development for students since 2018, and FFA Advisor Jaime Chenevey was looking to expand it. Chenevey and others transformed it into a 2023 summer program for West Holmes and Hiland High School, and that was reworked in 2024 into the current program, held during the school day at the Holmes County Fairgrounds.

Behind the scenes, West Holmes FFA members contact more than 100 potential presenters, survey students about their interests and build individualized schedules so each student gets the most out of the day.

During the November 2025 event, the day opened with an inspiring keynote from Alex Sheen, founder of the nonprofit because I said I would, who shared a message of commitment, responsibility and follow-through that resonated with students and adults alike.

Then, more than 100 people made presentations to small groups of the 400 students who attended. Sessions ranged from 30 to 45 minutes and students attended five throughout the day.

"They all learn something," said Janessa Hill, OSU Extension agricultural and natural resources educator for Holmes County. "Whether it's how to sew on a button or discovering a career they hadn't considered before, they leave with a broader understanding of what's possible."

Sessions this year ranged from "Farming for the Future" to "Credit and How it Affects Your First Loan" to talks about a variety of careers, including firefighting, engineering, public service and journalism. Students have changed their future plans because of learning about a career they had not previously considered.

Career exploration is a key part of the program, including the Holmes County OhioMeansJobs and Job & Family Services Job Expo. This year, 45 local employers participated, giving students the chance to practice talking with employers and learn about opportunities close to home.

"We try to expose the students to employers

so they can learn what's available and what the opportunities are in various job fields," said Lisa VanSickle, program manager over OhioMeansJobs for Holmes County.

"Some of the students may not have had to look for work yet, so this is an opportunity to learn how to talk to an employer," she said.

Chenevey said the program is a great way for the community to interact with students.

"Often employers don't know how to reach the students, so this benefits both groups," she said. "Doors are opened for the students that they won't need to open down the road."

Putting on an event of this size takes significant community support. Jones estimates the annual cost at around $15,000, covering the fairgrounds rental, keynote speaker, meals, supplies and materials. By the end of the day, one thing was clear: All In For Life Skills was a success—because of the community that showed up.

"The passion and commitment and the desire to continue to build new things for our youth is something everyone in Holmes County stands behind," Jones said. "It takes a unique team, and we're grateful for the partnerships that make this possible."

KEY POINTS

- All In For Life Skills was created to teach juniors and seniors essential adult skills—such as financial literacy, basic car maintenance and job readiness—that are often not covered in traditional high school curricula.
- The program is a joint effort involving Holmes County Farm Bureau, OSU Extension, West Holmes FFA, schools and more than 100 local presenters and employers, giving students hands-on learning and direct exposure to career paths.
- Held annually at the Holmes County Fairgrounds and serving about 400 students, the program is sustained through grants and local sponsorships.

WHAT'S NEXT

County Farm Bureaus host events for their rural communities and local school students throughout the year. Visit ofb.ag/counties for more information.

Kathy Lynn Gray *is a freelance writer from Columbus.*



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EVENTS

MARCH
6 & 7
3/6 - 12-7 P.M.
3/7 - 9 A.M-5 P.M.

Northwest Ohio Ag Expo

Northwest Ohio county Farm Bureaus are partnering with OSU Extension and others for this inaugural event featuring farm equipment, farm vendors, ag education, food and much more. Visit go.osu.edu/nwoagexpo.

Henry County Events Center, Henry County Fairgrounds, Napoleon

MARCH
30
6 P.M.

Creating Success with Your Succession Plan

Northwest Ohio county Farm Bureaus host speakers from Paul Hall & Associates, Wright & Moore Law, OSU Extension and more to discuss succession planning resources and Ohio Farm Bureau Health Plans. Cost is free for Farm Bureau members and $30 per person at the door for the public. Dinner is included. RSVP requested. Call 567-376-9998.

Van Wert County Fairgrounds, Van Wert

MARCH
18 & 26
5:30 P.M.

Planning for the Future of Your Farm

If you are grappling with the critical issue of how to transition your farm assets to the next generation, this two-part workshop will help you actively plan for the future of your farm. Morrow County Farm Bureau is co-hosting this workshop. Cost is $35/person or $50/couple and dinner is included. Register at go.osu.edu/morrowevents.

AgCredit, Mount Gilead

MARCH
27 OR 28
8:30 A.M.-
4:30 P.M.

Preparing First Responders for Today's Agricultural Hazards

Sponsored by Montgomery County Farm Bureau, two, separate one-day training opportunities for first responders will focus on heavy machinery, confined spaces, livestock behavior, flowing grain, chemical exposures and remote response environments—designed for high-consequence, low-frequency incidents that demand specialized knowledge and operational discipline. Registration is required. Email montgomery@ofbf.org.

Jackson Township Joint Recreation Park, Farmersville

EVENTS

MARCH 25
9 A.M.-3 P.M.

FFA Innovation Expo

Join us for the FFA Innovation Expo hosted by Carroll, Harrison, Jefferson and Tuscarawas County Farm Bureaus. This all-day event, designed for FFA juniors, seniors and motivated sophomores, features keynote speaker Don Jones, state executive director of USDA Farm Service Agency and breakout sessions on agricultural innovations, career opportunities and new technologies. Registration is required. Email Kayla Scott at kscott@ofbf.org for information.

FFA Camp Muskingum, Carrollton

MARCH 28
8:30 A.M.-2:30 P.M.

Cultivating Strong Futures Conference

This conference, sponsored by Northeast Ohio county Farm Bureaus, is dedicated to helping farms of all sizes, ag business owners and landowners navigate the ever-changing agricultural landscape. With expert-led breakout sessions, valuable industry insights and networking opportunities, this event is designed to provide practical knowledge. Registration is required. Email nefarmbu@ofbf.org.

Grand Valley High School, Orwell

APRIL 24 & 25
8 A.M.-4 P.M.

Chainsaw Safety Hands-On Workshop

Two workshops are being offered through the Northeast Ohio Woodland Wednesday partners, including Northeast Ohio county Farm Bureaus, designed to help participants gain confidence and awareness when working with a chainsaw. Attendees will learn general safety principles, proper handling techniques and best practice. Registration is required. Space is limited. Email nefarmbu@ofbf.org.

Auburn Township Adam Hall, Chagrin Falls

What BWC safety meetings, policy discussions, etc. are happening in your county?

County Farm Bureaus host various events throughout the year, and all of them are opportunities to engage with other Farm Bureau members, fellow farmers, ag enthusiasts and your friends and neighbors.

Information about all these events and more can be found on your county Farm Bureau webpage at **ofb.ag/counties.**

Be sure to update your membership information — including the email address you check regularly — in your profile at ohiofarmbureau.org.

No internet? No problem. Call 614-249-2400 and follow the prompts to contact your county Farm Bureau and become an involved member today!

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