



NATIONAL  
FFA FOUNDATION

# Blue Jackets. Bright Futures!

Fall/Winter 2016



FFA members pose at the RFD-TV expo booth during this year's National FFA Convention & Expo.

## Broadcasting a Bounty of Benefits for FFA

BY JAMI STALL

What do the shows "Cattlemen to Cattlemen," "Ag PhD," "FarmHer," and "Best of America by Horseback" have in common? They all share a home on RFD-TV.

The popular cable network airs these contemporary programs along with a bumper crop of beloved country-style classics such as "Hee Haw," "The Porter Wagoner Show," and "Nashville on the Road." But its founder and president, Patrick Gottsch, speaks with a particular fondness for its FFA coverage.

"One of our very first broadcasts was the National FFA Convention back in 1988, and it just set the stage for this network," Gottsch says. "Anybody who watches or walks into the convention gets motivated. It's one of the things that has motivated us at RFD-TV all along."

The network's mission is to serve the needs and interests of rural America and to reconnect city and country through its programming. Reaching more than 50 million U.S. homes via television and 30+ million listeners on RURAL RADIO Channel 147 on SiriusXM radio around the country (through TV, radio and online content), his com-

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### Impact FFA: Women's Giving Circle



For many of us, a gift of great magnitude is on our hearts but often beyond our individual means. Impact FFA will allow us, as a group, to grant one yearly gift that will yield greater results.

With females making up more than a third of the National FFA Organization's membership, Impact FFA members feel strongly about taking strategic steps to support young women in the industry.

This year, Impact FFA voted to provide four female agriculture teachers the opportunity to attend CASE Institute conferences. This provided new and experienced teachers with content-specific, project-based instruction for the classroom. The impact these women will have on their students as a result of this opportunity is everlasting.

Thanks to your support, Impact FFA: Women's Giving Circle helps play a part in developing and supporting women in agriculture.

Impact FFA donations help fund critical needs. Some of our current focus areas are:

- Agriculture Teachers
- Food Security
- Global Programs

Visit [FFA.org/ImpactFFA](http://FFA.org/ImpactFFA) for more information or to make a gift.



Sierra Wiles (center) and Riverton Parke FFA receive a \$7,500 prize from Culver's.

## Winning Words in Praise of Farmers

BY JAMI STALL

When college freshman Sierra Wiles talks about her FFA involvement or about her wildlife major in Purdue University's pre-vet program, it's evident that the 18-year-old has a way with words beyond her years.

Growing up in Indiana's rural Parke County around farms (and the families and businesses dependent upon them) has afforded her plenty of talking points. But last year, as a senior at Riverton Parke High School, Wiles put her written words and personal experiences into action and won first place in Culver's National "Thank You Farmers" Essay Contest.

Wiles' manuscript was chosen from nearly 600 entries. In August, John York, the owner of Culver's Restaurant in Crawfordsville, Ind., awarded the \$7,500 prize to the Riverton Parke FFA chapter. It enabled them to take a group of FFA members to the 2016 National FFA Convention & Expo in Indianapolis this past October.

"FFA has been a wonderful experience for me, and I want to continue to support it so other kids can have similar experiences," she said.

According to Wiles, the writing came fairly easy, due to her work last year as FFA chapter reporter and member of her high school yearbook staff.

"I definitely did some research and checked my facts, but a lot of it was referring to knowledge that I'd learned from FFA already."

With more than 550 family-owned and -operated restaurants in 24 states, Culver's contributes the significance of agriculture to its success — and the role FFA plays in that. The company of restaurants challenged FFA members to create essays about technology's impact on agriculture and how it will shape their future careers.

Wiles wowed the judges, writing about GPS advancements and Precision Ag, which allows farmers to respond to variables in fields, treating large fields as individual units. She praised biotechnological advancements that enable the growth of "more disease-resistant crops and healthier livestock with lower feed to meat ratios ... producing resources in more economical ways and creating more dependable sources of food" — all while minimizing environmental impacts on the land and water systems.

## Broadcasting a Bounty of Benefits for FFA

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pany casts a wide, wonderful net when it comes to coverage that caters to the heartland.

Raised on a farm in Elkhorn, Neb., Gottsch remains a farmer at heart, and he admires the work FFA does with youth. For the past 16 years, he's experienced it firsthand when RFD-TV and RURAL RADIO broadcast the national convention and expo in its entirety.

"Fifty thousand kids come to the convention, and the other 600,000 are home watching it on RFD-TV or listening to RURAL RADIO with their parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters," he says. "The biggest thrill I get during and after it is to receive all the emails from people in rural America who come across its broadcast and are so inspired."

Gottsch says viewers write RFD-TV, asking how to get an FFA chapter started in their schools and how to enroll their son or daughter or grandchild in the organization.

"When you get letters like that, you really see the impact we're having by carrying this broadcast."

RFD-TV was the first to gift the largest single donation ever made to FFA — in the amount of \$1 million. And in 2011, the company sponsored the FFA float in the Rose Bowl Parade, paying for state and national FFA officers to attend the event in Pasadena, Calif.

"It gave us an opportunity to take the FFA message to 145 million people worldwide," Gottsch says. "I think we had FFA members from 48 out of 50 states come to Pasadena to march ahead of the float."

Additionally, RFD-TV sponsored 160 Native American FFA members to attend the convention and expo several years ago. "I was really moved by this,

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## Giving Back: The Stiths



The National FFA Organization wouldn't be where it is today without the help of generous donors and sponsors like Glenn and Maggie Stith of Ankeny, Iowa.

Glenn grew up on a family farm in Kentucky and was an FFA member in high school. Since being an FFA member Glenn has made giving back to FFA a top priority, including stints serving as chair of the foundation's sponsors' board, board of trustees and Individual Giving Council.

Maggie shares the same sentiment toward FFA. Having worked for the National FFA Foundation for nine years, she has seen firsthand the impact FFA has not only on members but society as a whole. "I have seen how FFA responsibly allocates its resources to grow leaders, build communities and strengthen agriculture," Maggie said. "Meeting and working with so many donors, teachers and members motivates and informs our giving because we have seen the results: young people who have a strong commitment to community, leadership, sound science and giving back."

In 2013, the Stiths announced their planned gift with the foundation. This gift is designed to provide scholarships to FFA members each year and allows future FFA members to attend the Washington Leadership Conference, in Washington, D.C., free of charge.

"The most satisfying thing I can do is give back and help young people achieve their dreams and have an opportunity to enjoy a wonderful career like I've had," Glenn said. "I take a great deal of pleasure in contributing. There is no greater satisfaction than being able to give back to a good cause like FFA."



Former FFA member Earl Sears and his wife, Gwen, were honored as 25-year Milestone Supporters during this year's national convention and expo.

## A Cherished Commitment

BY JAMI STALL

"If I could wave a flag, it would say, 'We Need Good Leadership!' and FFA is providing that, without a doubt," said Earl Sears. "If there's anything this country and the world needs, it is good leadership."

As a former FFA member and someone who began his career as a vocational agriculture instructor, Sears can attest to the skills FFA instills. Though he's not one to boast, his wife, Gwen, proudly points out that Earl graduated from his Brownfield, Texas, high school at just 16 years old, and then from college at 20 years old.

"Right out of college he was hired at Lamesa High School, and he was the youngest teacher there," Gwen said. "Then he started the first FFA chapter there, and it's still going strong."

Earl tells how it began—that Gwen was in nurses training at Texas Tech while he was an "aggie," and that they met there in a required bacteriology class. Each of them recites the timeline as if retelling scenes from their favorite love story.

Which it is.

"We fell in love in college," he said.

But as fate would have it, conflict ensued. Gwen was forced to return home to Beaumont, Texas, due to an illness. A

bit later, Earl graduated and then landed the Lamesa teaching job. But it didn't take the two star-crossed lovers long to realize the 612 miles between them was far too many.

"So she joined me during my second year as a vo-ag teacher," Earl said. They tied the knot and along the way, made a commitment to each other and FFA.

Fast forward to this year. The Sears are celebrated for being 25-year Milestone Supporters of FFA. Now in their 80s and toasting their 67th wedding anniversary, the two look back fondly on much success and extensive travels.

Earl went on to enjoy a meaningful career at the National Cotton Council of America, eventually becoming its executive vice president. Gwen has remained an active FFA supporter, a volunteer with Habitat for Humanity and the chief cook and bottle washer, as she raised four children and successfully dotes on seven grandchildren.

Earl and Gwen retired to Memphis, Tenn., but throughout the years, their FFA support has continued wherever their journey led them.

"It was a means to work with other students, doing what I loved. And while traveling for the Cotton Council, I found it was not uncommon to encounter

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Thank you for believing in the future of agriculture.

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because a lot of those students had never been on a plane before; some had never been off the reservation,” Gottsch says. “To see their faces when they saw 50,000 other kids in the blue jackets, I think it made quite an impression on them.”

RFD-TV continues to support FFA, Gottsch explains, because it’s a mutually beneficial relationship. “We’ve had a lot of success in the last 16 years, so fortunately we’re in a position where we can be generous to FFA. It’s the future of agriculture and the future of this country that we care about.”

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strong leaders who came from FFA programs,” Earl says. “FFA helped me build my debate and speaking skills and leadership abilities that enabled me to speak to thousands and help save an important industry — cotton. I was able to travel the world and become a successful businessman because of FFA.”

Gwen says she and Earl established a scholarship for a special Lamesa High School student who needs financial assistance just as her husband did more than 70 years ago.

“We’ve been very blessed. It’s been a good life, and we’ve had wonderful places to live,” Gwen said. “We hope to help another boy or girl from Lamesa so they can have the opportunities Earl had through FFA.”

## Every Gift Matters

This holiday season,  
make a difference in the life of a  
young person while giving in  
honor or in memory of a loved one.

To learn more, visit [Donate.FFA.org](https://www.FFA.org/Donate)

