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FFA State Convention Begins in Minneapolis

Session highlights: Hall of Fame, Chapter Charters, Agriscience Fair Winners, Honorary State Degrees, Paisley VonBerge and Cameron Addington retiring addresses

MINNEAPOLIS — (April 20, 2026) Minnesota’s 97th Minnesota FFA Convention began today at 3M Arena at Mariucci in Minneapolis with the theme “Believe,” as the student organization celebrated member and supporter activity related to agriculture, food and natural resource education. Minneapolis welcomed over 4,200 Minnesota FFA members in grades 7-12 for the event. Students competed in 22 competitive Career Development Events and a career fair, along with workshops, prior to the opening session.

The convention’s opening session featured FFA Hall of Fame and Honorary State FFA Degree recognition, and retiring addresses from students who have led the organization for the past year. The session, sponsored by Minnesota Soybean Research & Promotion Council, was preceded by a reception for FFA alumni and supporters.

Retiring State FFA Vice President Paisley VonBerge from the Hutchinson FFA Chapter gave the first of six 2025-2026 state FFA officer team retiring addresses scheduled during the course of the convention. VonBerge told the gathered students, “Because pressure is not the weight that breaks you, it is the force that builds you and makes you shine.”

Retiring State FFA President Cameron Addington from the Cannon Falls FFA Chapter presented his retiring address during the first general session as well. “Intentionally take the time to find the silver—the people around you—and remind them of their value and worth,” said Addington.

FFA Chapter Charters Signed

Since the last state convention, three new FFA chapters have been chartered in Minnesota. The three chapters are Eden Prairie FFA, Swanville FFA and Northern Lights Community School FFA in Warba. These three chapters join the more than 220 FFA chapters and 16,000 FFA members across the state.

Hall of Fame Inductees Honored

Minnesota FFA Alumni and Supporters inducted eight individuals into the Hall of Fame for their support and dedication to state FFA initiatives and agricultural education. This year's Hall of Fame Inductees are:

- Richard Finger, retired Lewiston-Altura agriculture teacher, Rochester
- Tim Larson, agriculture teacher, Medford
- Gretchen Schleper, Upsala FFA advisor, Holdingford
- Barry Schmidt, former Montgomery-Lonsdale and Tri-City United agriculture teacher, Lakeville
- Gary Sloan, Minnesota FFA Foundation Board member, Lake Elmo
- Dr. Mary Olson, Minnesota State Fair CHS Miracle of Birth Center lead, Mora
- Thom Peterson, commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Pine City
- Bernie Van Zomeren, founder of the Alexandria FFA Alumni chapter, Alexandria

Honorary State Degrees

The Minnesota FFA Association relies on the support of exceptional teachers, individuals and companies to provide life-changing experiences for its members. Individuals who have provided outstanding service on a state level to agriculture, agricultural education or FFA are eligible for the Honorary FFA Degree. Additionally, teachers who have created exceptional agricultural education programs that motivate and inspire their students to achieve success are eligible.

The 2026 Honorary FFA Degrees were presented to:

- Tamara Berger, agriculture teacher at ROCORI, Cold Spring
- Mike Boersma, farm business management instructor, Tyler
- Lindsey Brockberg, state supervisor of AFNR, Mountain Lake
- Ashley Crowson, Minnesota FFA Leadership Development coordinator, Dodge Center
- Jenny Doering, managing director, animal agriculture at Compeer Financial, Mapleton
- Myla Donovan, agriculture and industrial technology teacher, Fosston
- Stephen Funk, agriculture teacher, Park Rapids
- Dan Glessing, Minnesota Farm Bureau Federation (MFBF) president, Waverly
- Peter Grundman, CHS, Minnesota Foundation Board of Trustees treasurer, Minneapolis
- Alec Harder, K.D.B. Trucking, Courtland
- Betsy Harwood, agriculture teacher, Windom Area
- Jamie Hugoson, R.N., Fairmont
- Sue Kulbeik, hardware store owner, Elbow Lake
- Rep. Joe McDonald, Minnesota state representative/photographer, Delano
- Dr. Robert Milligan, professor emeritus of applied economics, Lauderdale
- Teague Picht, I.T., Riverview LLP, Morris
- Aric Putnam, Minnesota state senator, chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, St. Cloud
- Dennis Sabel, Minnesota Farm Bureau director of member engagement, Eagan
- Lisa Sackreiter, agriculture teacher, Madelia
- Gerald Sonnek, farmer, Minnesota Lake
- Jason Stewig, agriculture teacher, Renville County West
- Mat Vaupel, Vaupel Farms, Threads Custom Apparel, Racine

- Laura Wyatt, Career and Technical Education coordinator at Intermediate District 287, Minneapolis

2000-2001 Minnesota FFA State Officer Team Recognized:

This convention marks the 25th year anniversary of the 2000-2001 state officer team's year of service and serves as a testament to the legacy of FFA. These individuals were recognized at the convention:

- President: Sarah Clemenson Betzold, Zumbrota-Mazeppa FFA.
- Vice President: Mark Jewell, Long Prairie FFA
- Secretary: Kris Poirier Zilliox, Montevideo FFA
- Treasurer: Mike Miron, Forest Lake FFA
- Reporter: Kellie Ladlie Benning, Albert Lea FFA
- Sentinel: Jolene Keim Hoyle, LeRoy-Ostrander FFA

Students recognized for leadership achievements

Students from across the state competed last December in various FFA Leadership Development Events, capitalizing on many hours of practice and qualifying at the regional contests. In many cases, the winners recognized for each event may be moving on to compete at the National FFA Convention:

- Creed Speaking, sponsored by the Paul Hansen family:
 - Brayden VanDkye, Russell-Tyler-Ruthton FFA
- Employment Skills, sponsored by National Grid Renewables:
 - Jilian Schoenfeld, Russell-Tyler-Ruthton FFA
- Extemporaneous Speaking, sponsored by National Grid Renewables:
 - Isaak Worm, TriCity United FFA
- Prepared Public Speaking, sponsored by Robin E. and Lori Ann Kinney:
 - Chris Schafer, Grand Rapids FFA
- Ag Issues, sponsored by Syngenta:
 - ROCORI FFA Chapter
- Conduct of Chapter Meetings, sponsored by Dr. Curtis Youngs:
 - Lewiston-Altura FFA Chapter
- Parliamentary Procedure, sponsored by Kevin Dahlman and the late Nancy Dahlman:
 - ROCORI FFA
- Minnesota Farm Bureau Discussion Meet
 - Ambra Andrist, Kasson-Mantorville FFA

Additionally, Minnesota FFA hosted invitational Creed Speaking events for Spanish, Somali and Hmong languages. The winners were:

- Spanish Creed Speaking, sponsored by the Paul Hansen family:
 - Salome Domingues Plasenia, Humboldt FFA
- Somali Creed Speaking, sponsored by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture:
 - Yassin Yasin, Marshall FFA
- Hmong Creed Speaking, sponsored by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture:
 - Marcella Lee, Highland Park FFA

Agriscience Fair Winners Recognized

The Agriscience Fair challenges students to develop research that strengthens their understanding or enhances entire sectors of agriculture, food, and natural resources. Participants competed earlier this spring as part of the Roland Peterson Agriscience Fair in cooperation with the Agricultural Education department at the College of Food, Agriculture and Natural Resource Sciences at the University of Minnesota.

Winners recognized were:

- **Agriscience Research: Animal Systems**
 - Div. 1: Jori Aronson, Academy for Sciences & Agriculture FFA
 - Div. 2: Alissa Rudningen and Elsa Shaw, Kerkhoven-Murdock-Sunburg FFA
 - Div. 3: Elsie Knott, Tracy Area FFA
 - Div. 5: Cornilus McCreary, Academy for Sciences and Agriculture FFA
- **Agriscience Research: Environmental Science and Natural Resource Management Systems**
 - Div. 1: Kye Antonson, Academy for Sciences and Agriculture FFA
 - Div. 2: Alaina Rudningen and Sydney Carlson, Kerkhoven-Murdock-Sunburg FFA
 - Div. 3: Lorenzo Lopshire, Academy for Sciences and Agriculture FFA
 - Div. 4: Cooper Cassell and Christopher Cole, Academy for Sciences and Agriculture FFA
 - Div. 5: Alexandria Confer, Sleepy Eye FFA
 - Div. 6: Levi Benson and David Jamps, Academy for Sciences and Agriculture FFA
- **Agriscience Research: Food Products and Processing Systems**
 - Div. 1: Ella Capistran, Crookston FFA
 - Div. 2: Cora Doering and Madisen Ellingson, Kerkhoven-Murdock-Sunburg FFA
 - Div. 3: Joza Tlusty, Academy for Sciences and Agriculture FFA
 - Div. 4: Violet Mork and Nan Thu, St. Paul-Humboldt FFA
 - Div. 5: Siri Whiting, Academy for Sciences and Agriculture FFA
 - Div. 6: Courtney Fernholz and Ellie Bestge, Kerkhoven-Murdock-Sunburg FFA
- **Agriscience Research: Plant Systems**
 - Div. 1: Nikolai Jayasekera, Academy for Sciences and Agriculture FFA
 - Div. 2: Kendall Haala and Peyton Erickson, Sleepy Eye FFA
 - Div. 3: Becca O'Neill, Dover-Eyota FFA
 - Div. 5: Kylan Payne, Kerkhoven-Murdock-Sunburg FFA
 - Div. 6: Emily McGinty and Narissa Rohner, Kerkhoven-Murdock-Sunburg FFA
- **Agriscience Research: Power, Structural, and Technical Systems:**
 - Div. 2: Julie Meh and Judith Pwo, St. Paul-Humboldt FFA
 - Div. 3: Trexler Luell, Academy for Sciences and Agriculture
 - Div. 4: Jesse Garcia-Rodriguez and Ahmednur Hussein, St. Paul-Humboldt FFA
- **Agriscience Research: Social Science:**
 - Div. 6: Baylee Staton and Hallie Kobbermann, Benson FFA

For more information on the Minnesota FFA State Convention, visit [MNFFA.org](https://mnffa.org), or follow Minnesota FFA on its [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) pages.

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Editor's Note: Session One photos are available [here](#). Additional photos will be shared as sessions and recognition occur.

About Minnesota FFA

FFA is a national organization developing students' potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources (AFNR) education with more than one million members in all 50 states, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Minnesota FFA Association represents just over 16,000 members and over 200 high school chapters. AFNR education engages students through hands-on learning in the classroom, work-based learning opportunities known as Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) projects and FFA activities.

About Minnesota FFA Foundation

The Minnesota FFA Foundation hosts events to support more than 16,000 FFA members across Minnesota. The Minnesota FFA Foundation is incredibly honored to support the Minnesota FFA and thanks its donors and sponsors who make this possible. It is the mission of the Minnesota FFA Foundation to secure strategic partnerships and financial resources that promote and enhance premier leadership, personal growth and career success for Minnesota youth in AFNR education. To learn more about supporting Minnesota FFA through the Minnesota FFA Foundation at mnffaoundation.org.

About Minnesota FFA Alumni and Supporters

The Minnesota FFA Alumni and Supporters works to support more than 16,000 FFA members, through Alumni and Supporters Chapters. Adult membership is open to anyone interested in supporting and promoting agriculture, agricultural education and FFA at the local, state and national level. One need not have worn the blue jacket to be a member of the FFA Alumni and Supporters, whose mission is to work to secure the promise of Agriculture Education and FFA by creating an environment where people and communities can develop their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success. Learn more about the Minnesota FFA Alumni and Supporters at MNFFAAlumni.org. Learn more about the experiences of FFA members and supporters by visiting MNFFA.org and FFA.org.