



# BLUE AND GOLD

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FFA Happenings

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## New Experiences For Wayne County Chapter

THOMAS STRONG  
State Reporter

One of the most intriguing parts about agriculture education is the amount of hands-on teaching that occurs. It allows students to get a break from the normal lectures and workbooks while teaching valuable and useful skills. Each year we see more and more chapters expanding their facilities, giving students new and exciting ways to be able to learn. This year one of those chapters was the Honesdale FFA in Wayne County, Pennsylvania. Through school and community support along with various grants, Honesdale FFA was able to build a new, 2,300-square-foot greenhouse. Kayla Hack, the FFA adviser there, has also developed some new and exciting ways to learn about horticulture.

The goal of the greenhouse is to be an educational space and a production facility. The vision is for it to

continue to be a place where students can learn plant science basics and do experiments on soil versus aquaponics or light experiments — but also be where they can learn about agricultural business such as producing, marketing and selling their products. The greenhouse is a dual educational greenhouse with an aquaponics growing system and soil area.

The FFA chapter started planting in January in the aquaponics side and had tremendous success with lettuce, and various herbs including basil, sage, dill and parsley, as well as growing many other salad greens and even tomatoes. Right before schools were closed, the tomatoes in the aquaponics system took off and turned red. Additionally, on the soil side students started various vegetable seedlings and plugs for annual flowers and hanging baskets.

Students in the horticulture and plant science classes worked in the greenhouse and had a large variety of

responsibilities and were essentially a greenhouse management team.

Hack got the idea from fellow agriculture education teacher Justin Weaver of Cedar Cliff High School, who runs a similar aquaponics system.

Hack's students were split into teams: fish and water, production, and marketing. Each team had specific duties and required communication to make sure the system flowed. The students took pride and ownership in their roles, creating websites, determining treatments for sick fish and deciding on production and pricing.

The district funding and grants they received, allowed them to have an incredible facility.

Hack plans to continue to use the greenhouse as a learning tool and production facility for the horticulture class. She also hopes to use it with her intro to agriculture course, exposing young agriculture students to plant science. Additionally,



Pennsylvania FFA Photo

A member of the Honesdale FFA greenhouse marketing team giving a tour.

Honesdale has talked about sharing the space district-wide to allow for other students and teachers to get the experience growing plants. Hack also plans to work with The Cooperage Project with their Pop Up Club, a

middle school after-school program. The ideas are endless, from all the educational aspects, to the unique things they may try to grow, like a fig tree, and to being able to sell produce just as a farm stand would.

## Virtual Is the New Way of Life

THOMAS STRONG  
State Reporter

Living in the 21st century, everyone has gotten accustomed to being in the age of technology — especially Gen Z, as they do not know a world without tablets and computers being at their fingertips. No matter who you are though, the demand that we must rely on technology is new to everyone. People across the country are trying to get a sense of normalcy through all the chaos. FFA students in Pennsylvania have luckily been able to stay connected using a variety of different programs.

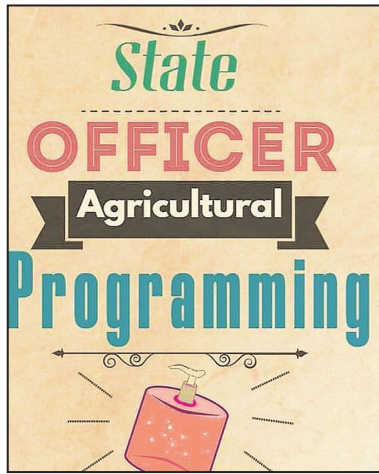
One of the newest ways that the Pennsylvania FFA Association has been able to connect with our students is what we call SOAP.

SOAP or State Officer Agricultural Programming, is a new program created by Brandon Bixler, state vice president. Bixler designed this to help agriculture education students engage in meaningful, interactive and educational content related to agriculture.

Each week through the end of the school year, a new SOAP lesson is posted on the Pennsylvania FFA social media. Students can then read the lesson and using materials around their house complete it to have the chance to win a prize. The lessons are designed to cover the diverse areas of agriculture education including animal science and plant science.

One of SOAP's first lessons was an egg dissection, which taught students the different parts of a normal egg that you would buy at a grocery store. With not knowing how long schools will stay closed and how it will look come the new school year, SOAP may act as a meaningful way to connect with students for a while.

So many events have been canceled this springtime, the biggest of which for most FFA chapters was their end-of-year banquet. These banquets served as a time to gather all FFA members, community supporters and partners to be able to



Pennsylvania FFA photo

The SOAP logo. SOAP was created by Brandon Bixler, vice president of the Pennsylvania state FFA.

reminisce about the entire year.

Planning these banquets comes with struggles and rewards as well. Some chapters were fortunate enough to be able to hold their banquets before schools began to close. Others have had to try to find a way to provide closure on the great year that it has been.

Coming out of all this struggle have been many virtual banquets, whether pre-recorded or streamed over a virtual platform such as Zoom. When the idea first crossed many minds, there were doubts of how realistic it would be to put together a meaningful event that would live up to in-person banquets.

Even though students are not in school, FFA does not stop as new officers must be elected, awards must be given out and members should be engaged. Chapters across the state have been able to do this by meeting on video platforms to engage with one another and to provide a way to be social with others while still being safe. FFA members have once again found a way to overcome adversity and prevail through the struggle.

## New Jersey FFA Members Host 91st State Convention Online

New Jersey Department of Agriculture

TRENTON — New Jersey FFA's 91st annual convention will take place this year on May 20-22 and will be all-virtual due to COVID-19 restrictions.

The theme for the 2020 convention, normally attended by more than 400 students, is "Your Story, Your Legacy." Throughout the week, results will be compiled and sessions will be recorded leading up to the opening session Wednesday night, which will include remarks from New Jersey's agricultural secretary, Douglas Fisher. The first session, as well as sessions on Thursday and Friday, will be aired on the New Jersey FFA YouTube channel and will recognize the hard work of chapters around the state. Nearly \$22,000 in scholarships will be awarded, Honorary Garden State Degree and Distinguished Service Award recipients will be recognized, and the 2020-2021 New Jersey state officer team will be installed.

"FFA members do an outstanding job each year with their state convention, and they are proving how innovative and creative they can be by not allowing COVID-19 to stop their most important event," Fisher said. "With the convention taking place in a virtual venue, this will



New Jersey Department of Agriculture photo

Jamie Specca, president of New Jersey FFA, will give her farewell speech to members virtually.

be an exciting and enthusiastic experience."

The week will begin when state officer candidates participate in the nominating committee process on May 18-19. Students will undergo intense virtual interviews and be evaluated by six of their peers. The committee will be tasked with nominating the 2020-2021 state FFA officers who will lead the coming year.

"We are proud of how our state officer team met the many chal-

enges faced when putting together a virtual event," state FFA adviser Erin Noble said. "The time and effort they have invested in planning this convention ensures this will be a wonderful way to cap our year."

Members will have the opportunity to compete in an array of career and leadership development events by pre-recording materials and preparing entries to be submitted via Google Classroom and judged by experts in the industry. Students in public speaking events, employment skills, and Star interviews will compete live via Zoom to a panel of judges. Members and chapters have also submitted a variety of applications to highlight their hard work and successes throughout the year.

There will also be an opportunity to participate in a leadership workshop facilitated by national FFA Western Region Vice President Lyle Logemann. Invitees also can participate in the Teach Ag Signing Event, a chance to celebrate students who are committing to a degree in agricultural education in the hopes of becoming an agricultural educator.

New Jersey's 36 FFA chapters will conduct normal association business through the delegate process. Students will attend virtual meetings on Thursday morning to discuss committee business and develop reports for recommendations to be presented to the entire delegate body. The business session will be held on Thursday afternoon where delegates will vote on constitutional amendments and accept committee reports.

The YouTube sessions, which can be viewed by the public, will be at 4 p.m. Wednesday, at 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. Thursday, and at 10 a.m., 1 and 4 p.m. Friday. For the detailed convention schedule, visit: [bit.ly/2SJPntM](http://bit.ly/2SJPntM)



The logo for the 91st New Jersey FFA Association's May Convention.