



Members of the Ohio House Agriculture and Conservation Committee, and members of the Ohio Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, thank you for inviting me here today. I am Luke Jennings, and I have the privilege of serving as the 2023-2024 Ohio FFA State President. I'm so happy to be with you all today at, what I personally think, is one of the greatest events to happen in our state each year. Growing up, coming to the State Fair was a must-do activity. All summer long, I looked forward to exhibiting my beef cattle and market swine here in Columbus, but I would be lying if I didn't say the seemingly unending food options weren't a perk. I believe one of the beautiful things about the state fair is the wide variety of things to do which in turn attracts visitors from all over the state that are each visiting for different reasons. When you think about it, the FFA is a lot like the fair in that way.

For example, some people may come to the fair to practice their food expertise, feel the thrill of every ride, exhibit livestock or other projects, attempt to win the biggest teddy bear from a carnival game, and much more. In the FFA, members may choose to join our organization and become involved for a variety of reasons, like their deep roots in production agriculture, desire to develop leadership skills, interest in agricultural research, curiosity with urban food production, to just be apart of something greater than herself, and so much more. Just as the State Fair has something to do for everybody, the FFA welcome's every individual's unique background and contribution to their community, our organization, and the industry of agriculture. Today, I'd like to shine



a light on some Ohio FFA members that I've been able to meet that embrace the diverse opportunities our organization has to offer.

Growing up in production agriculture, Josie from Springfield saw our industry through a lens that most people don't. I can firmly say that her love for agriculture is almost as wide as her smile and she sees the importance of ensuring that every man, woman, and child knows the significance of agriculture in our everyday lives. Growing up alongside her family on their row crop and livestock operation equipped her with the passion and skills to develop an agricultural advocacy business called "Be Bright Designs" focused on sharing the story of agriculture. From stickers to shirts and everything in between, Josie is using her story and voice to amplify agriculture across the country. As a high school member of the Global Impact STEM Academy in the heart of Springfield, she sees the disconnect between urban citizens and the farm. Through a variety of career development events and leadership opportunities in the FFA, she embodies what the future of agriculture needs - education and advocacy. Not only are her product designs absolutely amazing, but her passion and dedication is impacting the lives around her every day. I've been able to meet with Josie several times over the last year and I'm always impressed on how she can use her production agriculture background in so many ways other than just on the farm.

Another student who I met this past spring is Vanessa from Peebles. Although she lives in an incredibly rural area surrounded by rolling hills of farm land, that isn't Vanessa's story. She joined the FFA as a quiet and reserved high schooler with little



connection to agriculture. However, if you were to talk to her today you'd think I was lying. Through the FFA, Vanessa has embraced every obstacle and challenge thrown at her with resilience and determination. Since she didn't join our organization with an agricultural background, it would have been easy for Vanessa to become inactive or quit FFA altogether, but she didn't. Vanessa found her green thumb and became involved in nursery operations as well as growing vegetables and other plants. She currently owns and operates Trotter's TNT Farms where she provides customers with various greenhouse plants, produce, hay and field corn. Her operation has expanded to include multiple greenhouses and several acres to grow a greater selection of plants and more of them. With the median age of farmers continuing to increase and the start-up costs for production agriculture rising, entering the field of production agriculture is becoming more difficult and daunting every day. However, Vanessa answered the call and chose to be a part of the future. She has taken advantage of every opportunity placed in front of her and it makes me so proud to know that FFA is truly teaching students how to learn by doing.

I wish that we had all day for me to tell you about all the incredible things that are happening in our organization, but with more than 29,000 Ohio FFA members I don't think that is an option. Nonetheless, I hope that just by briefly hearing Josie and Vanessa's story, you caught a glimpse as to the diversity of experiences that FFA holds. Just as agriculture is changing and growing, our organization is too. Farming, leadership, urban agriculture, community service, natural resource management,



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business entrepreneurship, and so much more; that is the FFA of today. I hope that you take time to enjoy the fair today and venture into one of the livestock barns to find an FFA member to talk about what FFA means to them. Also, I encourage you to become involved with your FFA chapters back home. I can guarantee those students will be more than happy to tell you their story. Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to speak here today and enjoy the fair.