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The Prairie Press

February 17, 2024

National **FFA WEEK**
FEBRUARY 17-24, 2024

Students find a community in FFA

BY BETHANY WAGONER
bwagoner@prairiepress.net

HUME —FFA is more than just a chance for high school students to get outside of a classroom, according to Mara Bosch, president of Shiloh's FFA chapter.

"It (FFA) is just one big family and that is exciting," she said.

Bosch, a senior at Shiloh High School

says that when she joined the chapter as a freshman the school's FFA class was miniscule, but during the four years she has participated in the group it has flourished in both size and popularity.

"I've always grown up in and around farming, my dad's been a farmer and my grandpa was a farmer," Bosch said. "So I've always just kind of been around farming."

The Newman native joined the school group searching for familiarity, and while farming was the draw to the FFA, her involvement and understanding of the organization grew more each year.

"Because of FFA I have had so many scholarships and college opportunities," Bosch explained. "Being in FFA has helped me in interviews and just by being able to talk to people. Being able to have these different interactions and these involvements, it's helped me to really grow as a person."

The FFA Motto is "Learning to do, doing to learn, earning to live, living to serve."

Bosch believes she has experienced each part of that motto during her time in her school's FFA chapter. She's not alone in that belief or experience either.

Shaylun Christenberry, the chapter's reporter echoes her friend's feelings about

FFA.

"Getting the kids out there, outside of a classroom, and learning to do and accomplish so many things right now, that's a big thing, a big draw," she said. "It's more than that though, we, the kids, can say 'I remember doing this in FFA and I want to pursue a career in it.'"

Christenberry says the personal experiences she has had have forced her to learn and grow in multiple ways. One of the most impactful lessons the high school junior says she has learned is that making mistakes is okay.

"You can stand on a stage and forget parts of your speech, and wing it, and know that it's okay and people are there to support you," she said. "That happened to me, and there was a community of people there who encouraged and supported me, because of FFA."



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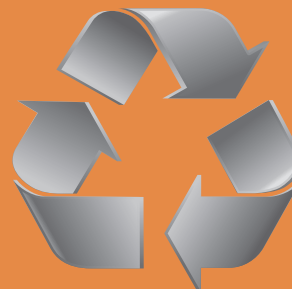
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Bethany Wagoner/The Prairie Press

Shiloh FFA members handed out lunches to hungry farmers at Effingham Equity's grain elevators in October of 2023 as one of their community service projects. Back row, left to right, Lucas Reynolds, Hunter Thompson, Will Dudley, Charlie North, Lily Thompson and agriculture teacher Emma Ennis. Standing in the front row, left to right, Macy Keys, Hennessey White, Maggie Milburn, Katie Holmes, Kennedy Brown and Lily Brown.



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When the reporter joined the school's FFA groups she says she was terrified of talking to people and struggled with communication.

"I've noticed a huge difference," she said. "I have learned so much, and noticed such a huge difference just in myself and how I can talk to people."

"I think communication and meeting people is a huge part of FFA that people might not realize," Bosch chimed in. "I know for me, I

have really learned how to interact with people because of FFA."

Bosch highlights land use surveys, farm progress shows, growing food in a greenhouse, creating harvest goodie bags, delivering food baskets, food science and several conferences as some of the most impactful, and memorable, experiences she has had because of FFA. The National and state FFA conventions rank at the top of her list.



Bethany Wagoner/The Prairie Press

Shiloh FFA officers left to right Landon Gerberding, sentinel, Brianna Reese and Mara Bosch, president.

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Students in rural areas, like Shiloh School, get the unique opportunity to meet and interact with peers who carry matching interests across the globe because of the organization's conferences.

Most states, including Illinois, hold FFA conventions at least once annually. Nationally, the National FFA Convention and Expo is held once a year in the fall.

The Shiloh FFA chapter made the trip to Indianapolis for the National Convention in November of 2023.

"When you go to these kinds of events (conventions) you're really surrounded by people who have the same interests as you," Shiloh chapter's vice president Grant North said. He says the events give him an instant sense of community. His favorite part of FFA is meeting new people.

North shared with a Prairie Press team member that at a recent event, he was assigned to sit at a table with people he had never met before, and by the end of the meeting, he had exchanged contact information and made friendships that he still keeps.

"People don't judge you as much as you think they do," North said. "That is something I have really learned because of FFA, just don't be afraid to talk to people and get to know them."

The student members of Shiloh's chapter

all agree that FFA has helped them realize their community is much larger than expected.

"FFA is for everybody," Christenberry said, "It's not just for farmers anymore, the whole creed has changed."

When the organization was founded in 1925 it was known as Future Farmers of Virginia, but after three short years, it became a nationwide organization known as Future Farmers of America.

The change of the group's creed and name happened in 1988, now referred to as FFA the association boasts 850,823 members in 8,995 chapters in the United States. The chapters recognize students with diverse interests in the food, fiber and natural resource industries, encompassing science, business and technology in addition to production agriculture.

All of those skills and interests are boosted in students with hands-on learning activities throughout the year, in the classroom, and outside of it.

"I would encourage as many people as I could to get involved in FFA," Bosch said. "There are so many opportunities and so many things that you can do through FFA, it helps with your education, gives scholarships and the people you meet are so amazing and so inspiring."

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Landon Gerberding says he enjoys FFA and sees it as an experience.

"In FFA you really just feel more like a team, it is not really pointed towards just one group," he said. "You feel like everyone is working together and is kind of like a family."

The new family Gerberding discovered after joining FFA encouraged him to run for the office of sentinel. In April of 2023, he was awarded that position, a role he was not sure he wanted to have or would achieve if he chose to run.

"I learned to never give up," Gerberding said of the experience. "I was worried about running for an office, but I learned not to hold back and if I am trying to do something then I should just go for it."

As a sentinel Gerberding is stationed by the door, and ensures the door is open to all, a role that fits him well.

The door to the chapter's classroom remains open as the group gears up for FFA week and a busy calendar year in 2024. The

students are looking forward to visiting classrooms to teach AG in the class, transforming their shop into a petting zoo and driving their tractors to school.

"Tractor day is especially cool, there are like 10 different tractors that pull up into the parking lot and everyone is just so excited," Bosch said. "The whole week is just a great way for us to showcase what FFA is and why people should join it."

In addition to their busy schedule of events and lessons the chapter recently received a grant. They plan to utilize the funds to continue delivering lunches to farmers during harvest time and hope to add deliveries for field workers during spring planting too.

"We are a small school and it was kind of rough going for our chapter for a while," Bosch said. "Now that we've been able to keep the program going we're excited for the future. I know FFA has grown and evolved into this huge thing at school and it makes me really excited for the future of the school, and the chapter."



Bethany Wagoner/The Prairie Press

Standing left to right are several student members of Shiloh's FFA chapter. Logan Gerberding, Myles Watson, Clay Kibler, Ahlyssa Garwood, Landon Gerberding, Brianna Reese, Mara Bosch, Brooke Tharp, Emily Milburn, Kenzie Hales and Amaryiah Banda.

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Kansas FFA Week starts Monday

BY GRETCHEN STONE
gstone@prairiepress.net

KANSAS — FFA Week kicks off in Kansas on Monday, Feb. 19, a Presidents Day holiday devoid of agriculture-related events, but the rest of the week will make up for that.

FFA advisor Amanda Gough said the school has about 50 FFA students on their roster, six of them on the officer team. Gough has been an FFA advisor for eight years.

Illinois has 25 FFA sections; Kansas High School is one of 12 chapters within Section 18.

Gough and Katey Ehlers, chapter and section president for Kansas FFA, discussed

their plans for FFA Week, starting with a Farmers Breakfast on Feb. 20, from 7:30-8:30 a.m.

"It's open for any farmers who want to come in, enjoy a meal and be served, we've got a pretty good lineup," Ehlers said.

The meal will feature a selection of eggs, sausage, bacon, pancakes and other common breakfast sides.

The following days each are centered on a theme. For the first Dress Up Day, informally called America Day, students can wear red, white and blue. On Wednesday, Feb. 21, they can celebrate FFA by wearing the official colors of blue and gold.



Special to The Prairie Press

Members of Kansas High School's FFA chapter attended the National FFA convention in November of 2023. In the front row, from left are, Austin Bolton, Connor Johnson, Trevyn Cummins, Laila Shoot, Taylor Salvato, Ralynn Tate, Lainet Ehlers, Cara Phillips, Brookelyn Gough and Karter Brown

That day is also Ag in the Classroom, where FFA officers and volunteers plan a lesson for elementary school students that lasts 10 to 15 minutes. They will stop in at young kids' classrooms and teach that small lesson probably in animal sciences, such as cattle or pigs. Teaching volunteers will wear blue and gold that day for the classroom lessons.

Any FFA student can volunteer to teach Ag in the Classroom, as long as the session is not during one of their core classes.

On the next Dress Up Day, on Thursday, Feb. 22, everyone can wear camouflage and Carhartts.

That is also a Petting Zoo; one FFA officer is working on borrowing animals for the day, to sit in the shop with them, for visits with students. Right now, the zoo list stands at two calves, a couple piglets, some lambs, ducks, chickens and a couple of rabbits.

Color Wars day will be Friday, Feb. 23, with each class assigned different colors they will be asked to wear, with Ag Olympics that afternoon, at a full school assembly, with lots of games that are "as Ag related as we can make them," Ehlers said.

Gough said that they try to make it a whole school celebration.

"This is what we do pretty much every year," she said. "We're all about tradition, we don't change it up too much."

OTHER KANSAS FFA NEWS

Students Lainey Ehlers and Ralynn Tate both competed in proficiency interviews with individual project records. Ehlers will move onto District 4 competition in Deca-

tur, in March.

Also, the second FFA advisor for Kansas, Jennifer Staley, is leading the final stages of construction on a small greenhouse.

Ehlers and Tate described their records and the separate projects they've worked on for the past one and two years, respectively.

Ehlers' focus is in equine science. "It is a placement book, not entrepreneurship, which means I work for someone and I get paid," she said.

She writes each chore and task she completes with the horses each weekend, listing all the steps she takes, and updates the book every single time she works.

Tate is completing a lawn management entrepreneurship. She cares for Grandview Cemetery, completing mowing, weed-eating and general care. She enters her paychecks and hours worked every other weekend and other needed details.

Keeping track of the records isn't complicated, they said, it's simply knowing the process of starting it. The work outside of the records is the time-consuming part, Tate said.

"Next year, they can both apply for state degrees, if they have enough hours and money invested in their projects," Staley said.

Meanwhile, on the greenhouse, Staley said a local charity sponsored that structure, which is already up at Kansas High, but not finished. Water, gas and electricity still must be finished for the structure.

Students will get to work at the greenhouse outside of school hours, and earn time and money.



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From left to right, Kansas FFA members pose at the 2023 National convention, Connor Johnson, Trevyn Cummins, Karter Brown, Lainey Ehlers, Laila Shoot, Brookelyn Gough, Cara Phillips, Ralynn Tate, Taylor Salvato and Austin Bolton.



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"We're very excited to have an outdoor lab for the kids to be able to learn hands-on marketable skills for greenhouse management," she said.

It is a 9 foot by 12 foot building with polycarbonate twin panel sheeting.

"We're hoping to make it a whole community thing," Staley said.

It would allow students kindergarten

through 12th grade to plant their own gardens, and learn about photosynthesis and plant growth, and where their food originates.

It might also provide opportunities for container plants, for adults, and a hydroponic garden table.

"We really appreciate the community's support in getting our greenhouse built and put together," she said.

Growing toward tomorrow

Chrisman FFA celebrates long legacy and new opportunities for students

BY **ROBBY TUCKER**
rtucker@prairiepress.net

CHRISMAN - Much like the FFA chapter she now oversees, Chrisman High School's agriculture teacher and FFA advisor Jennifer Honnold has ties to agriculture that stretch across generations. On her dad's side, nearly every male member of her family chipped in on the family dairy farm just outside of Oakland. On her mother's side, several uncles and cousins raise livestock and bail hay.

Honnold, a native of Kansas, Ill., found herself bit by the agricultural bug fairly early in life. Her lifelong dream of teaching became intertwined with an appreciation for the farm life just before high school.

"I joined my eighth-grade ag class at Kansas, and that was the lightbulb moment (when) I knew that's what I was meant to do," Honnold recalled.

After high school, Honnold attended Lake Land College and eventually Western Illinois University to pursue her dream of sharing the trade she loved with young students. Honnold arrived in Chrisman in the 2022-23 school year after gaining eight years of prior ag education experience.

The community has accepted and supported Honnold and her students.

"Chrisman has been phenomenal to come into. The community members reach out whether they want to donate something or help out, or if they may need help with something, they're not scared to ask and they want this town to survive," said Honnold. "They are doing everything they can to get these FFA members and students in this school to be involved within the community."

Chrisman's support of farm and agricultural education stretches back 95 years according to Honnold. Just a year after the National FFA Organization was first established in 1928 in Kansas City, Mo., Chrisman formed its own chapter in 1929. Honnold has

enjoyed stepping into Chrisman FFA's storied legacy while continuing to preserve it.

"I remember being able to look in the room (at Kansas) and seeing my dad's name on the wall, and my grandpa's name and my great uncle's name on the wall, and that was just the coolest feeling," Honnold explained. "So being able to come to a school that's been here so long and having students come in and look at these walls and have that same feeling of, 'Oh, that's my uncle, that's my dad,' and then telling me all the stories... hearing the history has been phenomenal. That has been my favorite part of being here."

While generations of aspiring agriculturalists have come and gone in Chrisman, the FFA's mission remains the same. Honnold and other FFA advisors hope to equip students with the tools to become successful, responsible people, whatever corner of the ag industry they enter.

FFA curriculum and events focus on providing participants with opportunities to meet and network with farmers and other FFA chapters while developing sustainable agricultural techniques, business practices and leadership skills. The National FFA Organization, known as Future Farmers of America before 1988, still bears the original acronym but has widened its approach to introduce students to careers not just in farm production, but animal nutrition, agronomy, engineering, mechanics, horticulture and even agricultural law.

Advisors like Honnold do their best to introduce students to the wide and varied landscape of agriculture career opportunities through competitions, events and field trips.

"That's been the big push, and even FFA are pushing more of the ag science-based contests and career options," she explained. "It's not just 'Hey, you have to have a cow in your backyard to be an FFA member,' and that's been a big shift."

To record their agriculture adventures, high school FFA members are required to keep SAEs, or Supervised Agriculture Experiences: journal entries describing their projects, including detailed records of procedures and expenses.

SAEs are used to give FFA members real-world bookkeeping experience while also serving as a metric for FFA competitions. Eight members of Honnold's crew recorded more than 10,000 hours of work on their FFA projects entering this year's competition. Seven advanced to the district competition for their efforts.

"When it comes to the students, I'll say these FFA members - they're phenomenal," said Honnold. "We're a small school and they're involved in so many clubs, organizations and sports, and they still find time to participate in their FFA events and help plan FFA Week."

One demographic participating in FFA at an increased rate is women - a development Honnold is excited to see. In FFA clubs around the country, more girls are taking an interest in the various facets of agriculture, so much so that female students make up the majority of FFA leadership and officers nationwide, per Honnold.

In her youth, Honnold experienced some of the challenges experienced by women who enter into the farming, livestock and feed industries.

"It used to be if you wanted knowledge you had to go talk to some grumpy old farmers, and farmers didn't like talking to young ladies about ag," she explained. "I had my own hay baling company when I was in high school... trying to sell hay to another farmer producer, they would just look at me and be like 'You're a little girl.'"

Now, the landscape is changing.

"I think supporting women in agriculture has changed so much in the last 20 years that we are seeing more women producers and more women starting their own agribusiness companies. The support is there." Honnold explained, later adding, "I think a lot of it's just providing those equal opportunities. We all hear the phrase life isn't fair. Okay, we get that. But women in ag are not afraid to work hard."

Young women and men in the Chrisman FFA will have an opportunity to showcase some of their hard work and dedication to the community this week. Beginning today, Feb. 17, FFA Week runs until Saturday, Feb.

24.

Chrisman's 98 junior high and high school FFA members kick off the weeklong celebration on Monday, Feb. 19, and will participate in plenty of events in their respective schools and out in the community.

"It's kind of the week for us to show our history," Honnold explained. "It just gives the kids a week here to be excited to be FFA members and especially Chrisman FFA members, because a lot of our contests (are not) like a sporting event. Parents can't come watch, your friends can't come watch, so this gives everybody the opportunity to see what we're doing."



Special to The Prairie Press

Chrisman FFA members had to identify agricultural and home uses for soil as well as different types of soil and the corresponding slopes. The team placed third in the Section 18 contest. Pictured are, back row, left to right, Landen Alexander, Seth Ellis and Hayden Spesard. Third row, Statler Mitchell, Gage Tingley and Garrett Well. Second row, Emma Brown and Dylan Lucas. Front row, from left, Autumn Ellis, Morgan Simpson, Izzy Barrett, Gracie Smith and Bentley Wolfe.

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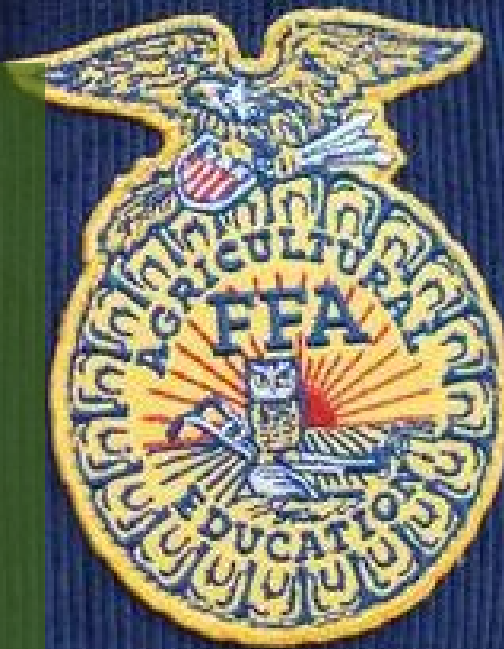
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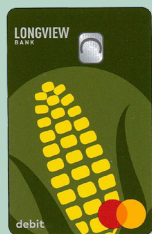


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Honnold had nothing but praise for Chrisman's support of FFA Week. Whether by showing up to an event or leaving an encouraging comment on social media, the community can find plenty of ways to support the next generation of agriculturalists.

"The students see that (support) and that

gives them that little extra encouragement that everything that they're doing is not locked away in a closet," said Honnold.

Whether during FFA Week or throughout the rest of the year, Honnold hopes her students, just like the plants and animals that draw them together, grow as a result of her program.



Special to The Prairie Press

An Agronomy CDE event was hosted by Parkland College earlier in the school year. Chrisman FFA students identified crops, weeds, equipment and insects while judging grain. Pictured from left to right in front are Autumn Ellis, Dylan Lucas and Brayden Stiff. Back row, Statler Mitchell, Gavin McCord, Gage Tingley, Garrett Wells, Hayden Spesard, Kolson Owen and Landen Douglas.

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“We hit a wide variety of careers that allows the students to see a lot of different options that may not (lead) straight to college, but provides them solid opportunities – because agriculture is not going anywhere,” she ex-

plained, adding that the projects, networking opportunities and SAEs all play a part in preparing students for a bright future in ag. “It’s just helping them grow themselves, whether it’s learning how to public speak,



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Members of Chrisman High School’s FFA chapter traveled to Indianapolis to network with fellow FFA members from across the country. Students attended general sessions, a career show and toured the Indianapolis Motor Speedway before heading home. Front row, from left to right are Remington Laughead, Addison Phipps and Olivia Radke. Second row are Dylan Lucas, Gage Tingley, Hayden Spesard and Landen Alexander. Back row are Connor Rhoads, Statler Mitchell and Garrett Wells.



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Chrisman Junior High FFA members identified cheese and milk flavors, completed the California Mastitis Test and identified the difference between real and artificial dairy products earlier this year. The team placed fourth overall at state with Autumn Ellis placing fifth as a Superior Individual. From left to right are Kenzley Stiff, Sandra Burmood, Casen Rogers, Gracie Cash and Autumn Ellis.

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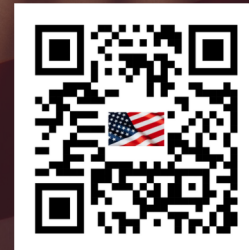
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or keep records in their SAE, it's just helping build their future and build those skills that they can use the rest of their lives," she explained.

CHRISMAN FFA WEEK SCHEDULE OF PUBLIC EVENTS

■ Wednesday, Feb. 21 - 11 a.m. - 2 p.m. Chili Day hosted in the Chrisman High School Ag Shop.

■ Thursday, Feb. 22 - 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. FFA Barnyard Day (animal meet and greet) hosted in the Chrisman High School Ag Shop.

» **MORE PICTURES, C19**

Paris FFA competes

BY AUBREY WILSON
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FFA Section 18 members from Paris High School competed in interviews on Feb. 1 and 2. Nine students went to compete and six ended up advancing to district interviews.

Students are interviewed on their record books, knowledge of the book, as well as certain questions about their area, which may not be included in their record book.

The record book is a book of complete records of a student's supervised AG experience (SAE).



Keen Brinkerhoff was recommended for a State FFA Degree.

The six Paris chapter FFA members will be advancing to the District interview competition.

Moving on is Mallaree Burgin with knowledge in Agricultural Processing, Jay Peterson with knowledge in Beef Production, Landen Taylor with knowledge in Forest Management and Products, Jace Hand with knowledge in Grain Production, Savannah Cash with knowledge in Small Animal Production and Care and Logan Dick with knowledge in Turf Grass Management.

During their district interviews Jay Peterson was awarded the Section 18 Star Degree in AG Placement and Logan Dick was awarded the Star Degree in AG Business.

Section 18 is made up of Chapters from

Armstrong, Bismarck - Henning - Rossville - Alvin, Chrisman, Georgetown, Ridge Farm, Homefires, Hoopston Area, Kansas, Oakland, Oakwood, Paris, Salt Fork and Shiloh. Paris FFA student Kindall Plummer acts as a section-wide secretary and Paris FFA member Logan Dick acts as sentinel for the whole of section 18.

The process for interviews starts at the beginning of the year, every FFA member is required to be involved in a project or business and then keep financial and journal records of what they do throughout the year.

Advancing FFA member and sentinel for section 18, Logan Dick, believes the interviews are important.

"People don't realize how much work goes into it," he said.



Special to The Prairie Press
Logan Dick advanced from Section 18 Interviews to District, also earning a State Degree and was selected as the Section 18 Star in AG Business.



Special to The Prairie Press

Jay Peterson advanced from Section 18 Interviews to District, also earning a State Degree and was selected as the Section 18 Star in AG Placement.

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The interviews open up networking possibilities and help with the student's public speaking skills. Each interview takes 10 to 15 minutes and is judged by three to four Section 18 teachers. Members talk about their

records, what they did all year, and what they plan to do moving forward. Students are required to wear their official FFA dress uniforms for the interview and need to have their record books filled out in preparation.

After completing section interviews members then move on to district interviews, then State and the highest competition for interviews is nationals.

Kiarra Englum and Amy Shupe are in

charge of the Paris FFA chapter.

"I'm glad to see students moving on and being recognized for all their work," Englum said.

District interviews begin March 6.



Special to The Prairie Press

Nine members of the Paris FFA participated in Section 18 Interviews, pictured from left to right, Kindall Plummer, Kymberley Klyaic, Landen Taylor, Jay Peterson, John Heelen, Logan Dick, Jace Hand, Mallaree Burgin and Savannah Cash



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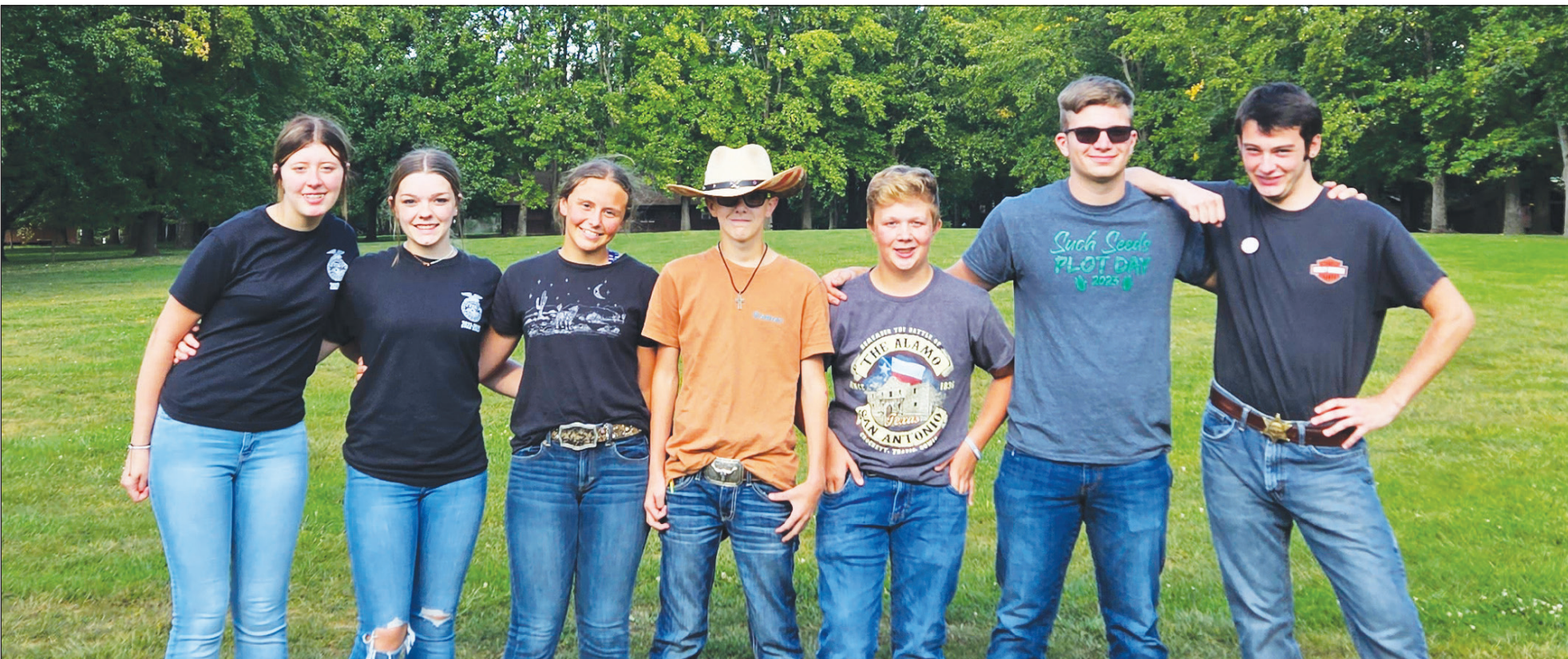
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Members of Chrisman's FFA Chapter traveled to Allerton Park in Monticello, Ill. to identify trees, use forestry tools, read maps, measure trees and more. Chrisman earned third place in the Section 18 forestry event. Pictured from left to right are Emma Brown, Gracie Cash, Morgan Simpson, Bentley Wolfe, Dylan Lucas, Garrett Wells and Bradley Beck.



Special to The Prairie Press

Black Hawk East College hosted the Illinois State FFA Horse Judging CDE this year. Chrisman's junior high FFA chapter earned high marks, earning a fifth-place finish for its equine evaluations. Morgan Simpson earned a fourth-place Superior Individual commendation. Pictured from left to right are Illinois FFA Treasurer Benjamin Bremmer, Dylan Lucas, Casen Rogers, Morgan Simpson, Bentley Wolfe, Sandra Burmood, Autumn Ellis and Mikenna Wheeler.



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