HELPING PLANT AND NOURISH COLORADO
AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION
A Strong Foundation
How the Foundation Supports the 3-Circle Model

Agricultural Education and FFA are more than just enrolling in a class or signing up for a club. The structure is a sequence of courses, dovetailing with real world experience and involvement in a premier leadership organization. Working within this three-component model of classroom/laboratory work, supervised agricultural experiences, and FFA chapter involvement, the ultimate goal is to develop the next generation of professionals in food, fiber, and natural resource management careers.

In the past 10 years, FFA enrollment in Colorado has almost doubled from 4,200 students to over 7,000 while Ag Ed programs have grown from 82 to 125 statewide. The Colorado FFA Foundation exists to support and nurture students, teachers, and FFA chapters within the three-circle model.

“We don’t gauge our success by how much money we raise,” says Don Thorn, Executive Director of the Foundation, “We gauge our success by how much money we invest in our mission.”

Every year for the last 11 years, the Colorado FFA Foundation has invested more money in the areas of the three-circle model than the year before.

IN THE FIELD
A great deal of focus from the Foundation is given to the Supervised Agricultural Experience program (a work based learning model) which provides students with agricultural experiences whether that be school based, worksite based, research, or individual entrepreneurship type experiences. Just last year the Foundation awarded over $205,000 to support students across Colorado who wanted to start or enhance their ag experiences.

“We used to just fund one grant program, which provided heifers for students,” Thorn says. “Now, we’re providing everything from beef heifers to funds for students to go to culinary school, to start bakery operations, therapy animal operations, sheep, swine, goats, and more. Quite a variety and diversity of agricultural experiences have developed since we expanded our program and the areas we support.”

IN THE CLASSROOM
Early on, the Foundation determined coming alongside teachers was the most critical need in the classroom. “We run the Local Teacher Success program,” Thorn says. “Which is a mentoring program for teachers in their first, second, and third year. The Foundation is also supporting CVATA, the professional organization of teachers by offsetting conference costs, helping with professional development, and keeping them current with what they’re doing.”

LEADERSHIP
Finally, the Foundation supports FFA by recognizing student excellence in awards and scholarships.

“We also do quite a bit of work reducing the cost of conference attendance, specifically the state FFA convention,” says Thorn. “The Foundation also provides quite a bit of support for the State FFA Officer Team.”

In sum, the Colorado FFA Foundation invested over $495,000 in the future of agriculture last year. Through a targeted and thoughtful approach—with the generous support of sponsors across the state—leaders were grown, communities built, and agriculture strengthened.
For 92 years the Colorado FFA Association has been making a positive difference in the lives of thousands of FFA members by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through a comprehensive agricultural education program.

The Star Partner Program is a great way for businesses and organizations to “co-brand” their products and services in the Colorado agricultural education marketplace, which includes more than 7,000 students, 150 teachers and 300+ alumni members. More than sponsorship, this program is designed to create a win-win for participants.

The Star Partner Program is designed to promote those businesses and organizations that support the health and vitality of agricultural education in Colorado and have chosen to participate in an annual partnership program rather than specific sponsorship.

To become a Star Partner, contact The Colorado FFA Foundation at 719-829-4483 or info@coloradoffafoundation.org.
Wisdom from the Owl

Eric Wellman, Ag Ed Instructor, North Park School

CoFFA: Tell us about your background and how you became an ag instructor.

Eric Wellman: I grew up on a sheep and cattle ranch in between Craig and Meeker. I went off to NJC for two years, took a year off to be a state FFA officer, and then finished up at Colorado State in Agricultural Education. And after I graduated, I had my eye on being up in Northwest Colorado. And I really liked the idea of being in a small school. What attracted me to Walden was that I could really know the kids within the building. Right now, Walden has about 170 kids Kindergarten through 12th.

CoFFA: Tell us a little about the community.

EW: So the Walden community is about 1,200 people in the county. And so we’re itty-bitty, rural. Mostly you’re either involved in cattle, the cattle industry by ranching, or work for the forest service, or have a connection with the forest industry. The kids still have a pretty good production ag background one way or the other. And primarily cattle. I am one of three sheep producers in the county.

CoFFA: What is your chapter known for in your community?

EW: I would say one of the things that we really focus on is our Program of Activities and how we can serve our community and our school. In the fall, one of the local loggers will donate a semi load of logs. The fire department comes and blocks it for us. And then the students and my advisory committee, we split it and then deliver it to all the senior citizens in town who have wood burning fireplaces.

CoFFA: You’re also involved in the Colorado Vocational Agriculture Teachers Association, how do you serve there?

EW: We put on two conferences throughout a year. The first one coincides with the Colorado Farm Show. We provide some in-depth workshops and really focus on providing quality professional development. What are the things Colorado teachers need, right then, right now, to go and implement something great in their classroom? The other conference is in the summer, where we provide industry tours where teachers can learn about specific sectors. Those tours help us bring relevant and current information into our classrooms.

CoFFA: You said you’re a sheep producer. Tell us about that.

EW: My side hustle is I grew up raising commercial sheep, and learning about wool quality is a big part of that. From that I have a small group of ewes that I really focus on the different colors, high quality wool products, which then I get made into yarn. I have just started a little wool business, getting into yarn shops, but it’s more of a farm to knitter platform versus them buying from a mill or anything like that.

CoFFA: Finally, what is it about Ag Ed that you love?

EW: Ag education is so broad and there’s so many different ways to connect with kids. And I think that’s what I enjoy the most is, “Okay, how can I make you feel successful?” I hope when you leave my program, you found one thing that you can feel successful in.

Edward B. Cordes Scholarship Program

The Colorado FFA Foundation recently named Erica Medrano, of Wiggins, the inaugural recipient of the Edward B. Cordes Scholarship.

The Cordes Scholarship fund will provide full tuition scholarships to cover the cost of tuition or trade school to Colorado FFA members for at least the next thirty years. One student will be picked each year and their scholarship is renewable for a total of four years of assistance. Cordes, who passed away in March, established this scholarship in honor of his FFA Advisor, Mr. Wayne Ball and Benny Mendoza. Cordes completed his bachelor’s degree at Colorado State University and master’s degree from the University of Nebraska—eventually starting his own business, Cordes & Company, and serving as the chairman of the Board of Guaranty Bank and Trust. He also served as the Chairman of the Board for the Colorado FFA Foundation.

“He took over right after we built the CoBank Center,” says DonThorn, Executive Director of the Colorado FFA Foundation. “So he oversaw the Foundation’s direction, post-capital campaign. That’s where we took on the role for SAE grants supporting and helping students to have agricultural experiences.”

Before his passing, Cordes said this of the scholarship: “This scholarship is for students that have drive and ambition, but might not be able to attend college or a trade school because of financial constraints. This fund alleviates that burden and will allow FFA members across Colorado to better themselves and better those around them—the very mission that FFA teaches all of its members—just like Mr. Ball did for me.”

In her application, Medrano exemplified the ambition Cordes referenced in her goal of becoming a veterinary technician and return to her hometown of Wiggins to serve the community she loves.

“I originally just wanted to be a vet tech and then eventually work my way up to veterinarian,” says Medrano. “But this scholarship will allow me to pursue my actual dream, instead of just settling. And now I’m going all the way.” Originally, Medrano planned to enter Front Range Community College, but now will attend Northeastern Junior College and then transfer to Colorado State University.

“It just takes so much stress off of me,” she says. “I no longer have to get three jobs to pay for my own college and I don’t have to put that type of debt on myself or if I really had to, on my family. And that just means the world to me.”
There is a lot growing at the Colorado FFA Foundation: Career development events, FFA member and advisor assistance programs, leadership opportunities, scholarships, and much more. To learn how you can help grow leaders, build communities, and strengthen agriculture, through donating your time, sharing financial gifts, or lending expertise, visit www.coloradoffafoundation.org.