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Georgia brings home National Vice President, Outstanding Middle School chapter and 14 National Winners from 88th National FFA Convention

LOUISVILLE – The Georgia FFA Association’s trip to the 88th National FFA Convention was highlighted by 14 national winners, the naming of West Jackson Middle as the nation’s Outstanding Middle School FFA chapter, the election of Abbey Gretsch of Lexington as the 2015-2016 National FFA Southern Region Vice President and the retirement of Oglethorpe County native, Andy Paul, as National FFA President. Among Georgia’s national winners were six national proficiency award winners and eight national Agriscience Fair winners.

Abbey Gretsch, a member of the Athens Christian FFA chapter, was elected from a field of 41 candidates to serve as the 2015-2016 National FFA Southern Region Vice President. Gretsch went through an extensive process that included a written test, writing exercise and six rounds of interviews throughout the week. She was selected to serve on a team of six national FFA officers that will represent the more than 610,000 FFA members across the nation. Gretsch is a sophomore at the University of Georgia majoring in Agricultural Communications. She will take a one year leave of absence from college to travel more than 100,000 miles across the United States and to Japan representing Agricultural Education. Gretsch’s parents are Fred and Anne Gretsch, and her agricultural education teacher is Mrs. Sara Hughes. Gretsch is the 16th Georgian to be elected to serve as a National FFA Officer. She follows Andy Paul of Oglethorpe County, who presided over the 88th National FFA Convention, and retired from his position as 2014-2015 National FFA President. Paul was the third Georgian to serve as National FFA President.

The West Jackson Middle School FFA chapter was named the nation’s Outstanding Middle School chapter as part of the National Chapter Award program. West Jackson Middle was one of five national finalists for the award, including Pelham Middle and Madison County Middle of Georgia. Each finalist chapter had two students make a ten-minute presentation explaining their chapter’s activities in the Student, Chapter, and Community Development portions of the FFA Program of Activities. The agricultural education teacher and FFA Advisor at West Jackson Middle is Mrs. April Davis.

Erik Lovvorn of Bowdon (Agricultural Mechanics Energy Systems); John David Sheppard of Screven County (Agricultural Mechanics Fabrication & Design); Lori Edwards of Sonorville (Agriscience Research – Animal Systems); Chance Hingson of Lowndes County (Agriscience Research – Plant Systems); Ian Bennett of Lowndes County (Emerging Agriculture Technology); and Sarah Spradlin of Madison County (Environmental/Natural Resource Management) were each named national FFA proficiency award winners for the success they earned in their Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) programs. Only four students from across the nation are named National Finalists in each of the 49 proficiency areas. Georgia was third in the nation with a total of 16 national proficiency award finalists. Spradlin also won a trip to Costa Rica as part of the National FFA international studies program.

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Brinson Coggins and Jackson Sumner (Animal System – Division 4); Shaw Wacter (Environmental Systems – Division 1); Hunter Corbett (Environmental Systems – Division 2); Levi Herring and Conway McNeil (Environmental Systems – Division 3); Charity Brown and Avery Fletcher (Environmental Systems – Division 4); Chance Hingson (Food Products & Processing – Division 2); Ian Bennett and Trevor Ross (Power, Structure & Technology Systems – Division 4) and Chandler Kudyk (Social Systems – Division 2), all of Lowndes County, were each named national winners in the 2015 Agriscience Fair. Georgia had national finalists (top 15) in 22 of 24 divisions of the Agriscience Fair.

Georgia did earn four top-5 finishes in national FFA Career Development Events (CDE) at the Convention. Georgia's CDE success included the team from White County placing second in Agricultural Mechanics, the team from Sonoraville placing 2nd in Nursery/Landscape, the team from Colquitt County placing 2nd in Marketing Plan and the team from Franklin County placing 4th in Floriculture. Kevin Charette of White County (2nd place – Agricultural Mechanics) and Kevin Edwards of Sonoraville (3rd place – Nursery/Landscape) each earned top-5 individual honors.

Nineteen Georgia FFA chapters received a national 3-Star ranking, the highest ranking offered in the National Chapter Award program. Those chapters included Alcovy (Covington), Camden County, Colquitt County, East Jackson Middle (Commerce), Franklin County Middle, Harlem, Jones County, Madison County Middle, Miller County, Northeast Tift Campus (Tifton), Pelham Middle, Southeast Bulloch (Brooklet), Screven County High, Screven County Middle, Stockbridge, Thomson, Troup County, Wayne County and West Jackson Middle. The Camden County, Screven County and Wayne County chapters were each named Models of Innovation finalists in the National Chapter Award program as well.

Twelve Georgians were recognized for their support of agricultural education and the FFA as part of the Convention. Dr. Frank Flanders (Athens) and Mr. Jary Douglas were each recognized with the National FFA VIP Citation. Mr. Richard Gill (Nahunta), Senator Tyler Harper (Ocilla), Mr. Randy Hill (Millen), Mr. Bryant Oliver (Alamo), Jeff & Marsha Paul (Lexington), Mr. Scott Wheatley (Homer), Mr. Paul Wood (Atlanta) and Mr. Randy Wooten (Douglas) each received the Honorary American FFA Degree for the contribution that they make to the agricultural education program and FFA. Mr. Norman Gay of Perry was honored by the National FFA Alumni Association with the national Outstanding Alumni Achievement Award.

Seventy-seven Georgia FFA members received the prestigious American FFA Degree, the highest degree offered to an active FFA member. These students spent years developing their Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) programs to reach this honor. Those receiving the degree include: Katie Barlow (Dodge County), Johnathan Barrett (Habersham Central), Haley Barton (Chattooga County), Matthew Bishop (Hephzibah), Brandon Bly (Hephzibah), Megan Boswell (Madison County), Ethan Boyd (Mary Persons), Kathy Carpenter (Johnson County), Levi Carr (Hawkinsville), Lissi Carr (Hawkinsville), Jaky Cervantes (Tift County), Casey Chastain (White County), Cody Cleveland (Miller County), Clifton Collins (Harlem), Jordan Collins (Madison County), Calder Collum (Woodland), Kimberly Cooper (Madison County), Christopher Crump (Banks County), Morgan Dooly (Madison County), Avery Drake (Oglethorpe County), William English (North Oconee), Andrew Evans (East Hall), Palmer Flanders (Screven County), Jackson Fleet (Miller County), Dylan Freeman (White County), Joseph Gaiser (Jenkins County), Benjamin Gibson (Sonoraville), Macey Givens (Miller County), Kelly Greene (Walnut

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Grove), Abbey Gretsch (Athens Christian), Brittney Gunter (North Hall), Anna Hartley (Colquitt County), Brook Helton (White County), Michael Herrin (Ware County), Madison Hickey (Stephens County), McLane Hicks (LaFayette), Nicolette Holt (Miller County), Makinzi Hoover (Burke County), Zachary Hopper (Gilmer County), Zachary Jarrell (Elbert County), Savannah Kellett (Chattooga County), Shelby Key (Thomson), Josh Lott (Harris County), Ashton Lovett (Cook County), Jake Marlowe (Jefferson), Brittany Mason (Jeff Davis), Cody Mathis (Glascocock County), Chantell Matthews (Cass), Melissa Maynard (Chattooga County), LeAnna Miller (Southeast Bulloch), Olivia Minish (Madison County), Jonathan Mobley (Colquitt County), Lucas Nelson (Jones County), Jaime Neseemeier (Gilmer County), Josh Odom (Tift County), Johnathan Rosier (Thomson), Julia Scruggs (Chattooga County), Brandon Smith (Madison County), Ezekiel Smith (Ware County), Shelby Smith (Madison County), Kaylee Synder (Effingham County), Josie Stamps (Newton County), Zackery Tankersley (Madison County), Bailey Taylor (Stephens County), Addie Thomason (Franklin County), Austin Thompson (Habersham Central), Tyler Thornton (Brantley County), Olin Thrift (Brantley County), Zach Thrift (Brantley County), Kaylee Tillery (Tift County), Bryan Tucker (Irwin County), Arion Waters (Jenkins County), Zachary Weaver (Screven County), Haley Whiddon (Miller County), Kayla Whitehead (Athens Christian), Cody Winningham (Appling County), and Kaleb Wright (Appling County).

Four Georgia FFA members earned the opportunity to perform their musical talents at the National FFA Convention. Tara Babin (Effingham County), Hayden Echols (Madison County) and Matt Dylan Thompson (Screven County), were each selected to perform in the Talent program; while Aaron Cronon (Cedar Shoals) performed in the National FFA Band. Thompson was named the winner of the National FFA Talent competition.

The Georgia FFA Association was recognized as a membership growth state. This marks the 17th consecutive year that the Georgia FFA has increased in FFA membership. Georgia was represented in Louisville by 25 official voting delegates, and more than 1,500 local FFA members, advisors and Alumni from across the state.

More than 65,000 FFA members, advisors and guests attended the 88th National FFA Convention. The theme for the convention was *Amplify*. A complete set of results and a variety of highlights from the 88th National FFA Convention can be found by logging on to www.georgiaffa.org.

There are more than 610,000 FFA members nationwide. The Georgia Association has over 38,500 members, making it the third largest Association in the nation. Agricultural Education is proud to be part of the Georgia Department of Education. The FFA makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth, and career success through agricultural education.



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