

People & Places

# Giving canola farmers a voice

Karen Sowers leads efforts to launch regional association

By MATTHEW WEAVER  
Capital Press

RICHLAND, Wash. — Every time Karen Sowers drives to Pullman from the Tri-Cities and sees the same fields planted in wheat, she wishes she could talk to the farmers about the benefits of raising canola.

An Washington State University Extension and outreach specialist in oilseeds, Sowers wants to make canola a staple for growers, not something they just think about when wheat prices are down.

Using canola as a possible rotation crop helps farmers deal with residual herbicides, weeds, improves water filtration and breaks up disease cycles, she said.

Sowers is also leading the charge to launch the Pacific Northwest Canola Association.

Nominations for producer-members on the board of directors closed Oct. 27. A ballot with all nominees will be mailed to farmers in Idaho, Oregon, Washington and Montana. Once producer-members are elected, the association will elect officers and communicate with the rest of the industry about membership, monetary support and possible board seats.

Sowers hopes to make the association a reality soon.

"I'd love to see it happen by the end of the year and then continue to grow," she said.



Karen Sowers of Richland, Wash., is spearheading the launch of the Pacific Northwest Canola Association.

"It's a voice at the local, state, national and regional level."

The association will be able to lobby for important things such as herbicide regulations or crop insurance, and seek more research funding, Sowers said.

### Farm background

Sowers' father was a plant pathologist for the USDA Agricultural Research Service in Manhattan, Kan. She worked on a wheat and sorghum farm her junior year in high school.

She knew from an early age she wanted to work with farmers.

"They're down-to-earth people," she said. "It sounds cliché, but they're working for the rest of us. Just good people."

Sowers moved to Washington 10 years ago. Bill Pan,

her major professor at WSU, called her about the opportunity to join the Washington Oilseed Cropping Systems project.

### Learning curve

Sowers remembered seeing some yellow fields in 1990, but had very little experience with canola or other oilseeds.

"The learning curve was steep, and does not ever end, but that's also a very neat thing about working with farmers," she said. "There's not a time I go and visit with a farmer where I don't learn something from them. I'm hoping it goes both ways."

"People trust her," said Ralston, Wash., farmer Curtis Hennings. "She's sharp, friendly and extremely helpful."

Hennings was involved in a previous canola association, but says the newest effort will be more active and include an executive director. An association tends to have more clout when meeting with legislators and lawmakers, Hennings said.

Anna Scharf, a U.S. Canola Association board member and president of the Willamette Valley Oilseed Producers Association, said Sowers has been "instrumental" in revitalizing the association. Willamette Valley growers rely on Sowers' work, she said.

"She's always looking for opportunities for how we can make canola bigger, better, stronger, faster and economically, where's the value for the farmers in the growth of the crop," Scharf said.



## Western Innovator

### Karen Sowers

Age: 49

Title: Extension and outreach specialist in oilseeds, Washington State University

Hometown: Manhattan, Kan.

Current location: Richland, Wash.

Education: Bachelor's degree in agronomy, soil and water conservation at Kansas State University; master's degree in soil science, Washington State University

Family: Married, one daughter, one son

Website: <http://css.wsu.edu/oilseeds/>

Sowers believes depressed wheat markets and research and education efforts have meant more canola acres.

She points to processing plants in Warden, Wash., and Rickreall, Ore., and the recent groundbreaking for a new facility in Great Falls, Mont., as positive signs. The companies are set up for more acres than currently exist, she said.

"The infrastructure is here, we're not doing a chicken before the egg thing," she said, calling demand "insatiable."

"I think canola is here to stay," she said.

# Californian named new FFA national president

Capital Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Breanna Holbert, an agricultural education major at California State University-Chico, was elected national president of FFA during the weekend.

Holbert is the first female African American elected president of the national FFA, which represents more than 650,000 students across the U.S. and its territories.

Erica Baier, an agricultural education major at Iowa State University, was elected national secretary.

Piper Merritt, an agricultural economics major at Oklahoma State University, was elected central region vice president.

Bryce Cluff, an agricultural technology and management education major at the University of Arizona, will serve as western region vice president.

Ian Bennett, majoring in agriculture and environmental systems, plant breeding and genetics at the University of Georgia, was elected southern region vice president.

Gracie Furnish, a career and technical education major at the University of Kentucky, will serve as eastern region vice president.

Each year at the National FFA Convention & Expo, six students are elected by delegates to represent the organization as national officers. Delegates elect a president, secretary and vice presidents representing the central, southern, eastern and western regions of the country.

National officers commit to a year of service to the National FFA Organization. Each officer travels



The new national FFA officers take the stage at the 90th National FFA Convention & Expo in Indianapolis.



National President  
Breanna Holbert



National Secretary  
Erica Baier



West Vice President  
Bryce Cluff



East Vice President  
Gracie Furnish



Central Vice President  
Piper Merritt



South Vice President  
Ian Bennett

more than 100,000 miles to interact with business and industry leaders, thousands of FFA members and teachers, corporate sponsors, government and education officials, state FFA leaders and the public.

The team will lead personal growth and leadership training conferences for FFA members throughout the country and help set policies that will guide the future of FFA and promote agricultural literacy.

The National FFA Organization provides leadership, personal growth and career success training through agricultural education to 653,359 student members who belong to one of 8,568 local FFA chapters throughout the U.S., Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The organization is also supported by 344,239 alumni members in 2,051 alumni chapters throughout the U.S.

# FFA announces 2017 ag proficiency winners

INDIANAPOLIS — Winners of the 2017 National Agricultural Proficiency Awards were announced Oct. 27 during the sixth general session at the 90th National FFA Convention & Expo. Awards were given in 47 categories. Following are the winners from Western states:

- Diversified Horticulture, Entrepreneurship/Placement: Jimmy Joey Reyes of the Dayton FFA chapter in Oregon works on his family's 15.8-acre container and bare root nursery operation and landscape maintenance company. As a child, he would go with his father to help mow lawns and prune landscapes. He began in the nursery as a general field worker, tasked with weeding, irrigating and transplanting plants. He is now the assistant manager. Jimmy plans to pursue a degree in horticulture and agriculture business management. He is supported by his parents, Victoria and Rufino, and his FFA advisor, Mitch Coleman. This award is sponsored by the Toro Co. and Wilbur-Ellis Co.
- Environmental Science and Natural Resources, Entrepreneurship/Placement: Margaret Mackin of the Rigby FFA Chapter in Idaho works for a family business, consulting with landowners and developers, including ranchers and other agricultural producers, to comply with government regulations, particularly those of the Environmental Protection Agency. She helps clients avoid wetland violations, defend against allegations and more. Margaret hopes to study finance in college and become a financial advisor. She is supported by her parents, Susan and William, and her FFA advisors, Robert Hale, Holly Fuller and Lex Godfrey. This award is sponsored by CHS.
- Grain Production, Placement: Joel Baltazar Mendoza of the Hamilton City FFA Chapter in California has a supervised agricultural experience that includes rice field preparation, planting trials, collecting field data and harvesting the crop. Starting his freshman year, he began working with his father as a rice researcher. Starting with simpler tasks, Joel eventually learned to spray, irrigate, clean and dry seed, ship and harvest. He hopes to major in plant science at California State University at Chico. He is supported by his parents, Lorena and Baltazar, and his FFA advisors, Janice Lohse and Ryan Bentz. This award is sponsored by BASF.
- Veterinary Science, Entrepreneurship/Placement: Katrina Siems of the Morro Bay FFA Chapter in California works for Los Osos Pet Hospital as a kennel technician. Growing up in a household with several pets, she was drawn to the veterinarian. She feeds boarding animals, walks the dogs, and cleans up after closing. She eventually took on the responsibilities of holding dogs for blood draws and giving insulin shots. Katrina plans to attend the University of California-Davis to study animal science with the goal of eventually becoming a veterinarian. She is supported by her parents, Alice and Chris, and her FFA advisor, Peggy Flynn. This award is sponsored by the American Veterinary Medical Association, Blue Buffalo and Tractor Supply Co.

## Calendar

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### Monday-Tuesday Nov. 6-7

Washington Dairy Conference & Trade Show. Yakima Convention Center, 10 N. Eighth St., Yakima, Wash. Annual meeting activities, plus time to catch up with fellow producers, sponsors and exhibitors. The Dairy Women will host their scholarship auction. Both the Dairy Federation and the Dairy Women will hold annual membership meetings. The Dairy Farmers of Washington will hold

their board meeting. Website: <http://wastatedairy.com/>

### Wednesday, Nov. 8

Sustainable Community Stewards Volunteer Training. 6-9:15 p.m. McCollum Park, 600 128th St. SE, Everett, Wash. Cost: \$30 Website: <http://extension.wsu.edu/snohomish/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2012/11/2017-SCS-Application-form.doc>

### Tuesday, Nov. 7

Sage Grouse Public Meeting. 5-8 p.m. Harney County Community Center, 484 N Broadway Ave., Burns, Ore. The Bureau of Land Management will host a public meeting to solicit comments and provide information on greater sage grouse land management issues. The meeting will begin with an over-

view followed by an open house. Participants will be encouraged to speak with BLM staff on various topics related to the greater sage grouse. In addition to comments on the issues and planning criteria, the BLM would like to receive comments on whether the planning effort should occur through state-by-state amendment processes and decisions. Participants will have the opportunity to provide written comments during the meeting, online at: <http://bit.ly/GRSGPlanning>. Comments can also be submitted via email at: [BLM\\_sagegrouseplanning@blm.gov](mailto:BLM_sagegrouseplanning@blm.gov)

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### Wednesday-Thursday Nov. 8-9

United Dairymen of Idaho-Dairy West Annual Meeting. Boise Center, 850 W. Front St., Boise, Idaho. This year's theme is "Pioneers by Nature" and includes an expo, Milk Quality Awards banquet, presentations and the Dairy Hall of Fame banquet. Website: <http://idahodairy.com/annual-meeting/>

Pacific Northwest Ag Industry Expo (AGIE). 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Wednesday and 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Thursday. TRAC Center, 6600 Burden Blvd., Pasco, Wash. The expo includes a trade show, classes on pesticide use

and CPR and drone demonstrations. Website: <http://www.washingtonag-network.com/pnw-agie/>

### Friday, Nov. 10

Central Oregon Ag Seminar. 10:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Pronghorn Resort, 65600 Pronghorn Club Drive, Bend, Ore. Join friends and colleagues in Central Oregon at the annual ag seminar in the Bend area presented by Schwabe, Williamson & Wyatt; Harvest Capital; and Geffen Mesher. Topics Include Organizing Your Agri-Business; Organizing Your Finances and Financial Statements; Water Rights: Knowing What You Have and Making the Most of Them; Organizing Your Affairs: Estate Planning for Farms and Ranches; and Organizing for Tax Effects: Entity Selection and Dissolution. Website: RSVP at <http://bit.ly/2y92rtc>

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### Index

California.....8  
Dairy.....14  
Idaho.....9  
Markets.....13  
Opinion.....6  
Oregon.....5  
Washington.....11

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