

# Kuna FFA expo gives thousands of students a glimpse of agriculture

By BRAD CARLSON  
Capital Press

KUNA, Idaho — Youngsters usually find lots to do at the multi-day Agricultural Exposition Kuna High School's FFA chapter hosts each May. Millie Padlo, a second-grader at Boise's Highlands Elementary School, on May 9 said she especially liked looking at the animals up close.

Classmate Brynn Chrisman said she liked the animals, too. "And planting seeds," she said.

The Ag Expo, which Kuna FFA members have put on for decades, gives students a way to experience the agricultural industry firsthand and begin to grasp its importance. The event draws just over 1,000 attendees during each of its four days.

"It's phenomenal," said Tonya Stern-Walls, who teaches first grade at Owyhee Elementary School in Boise. Youngsters get an early sampling of agriculture — from honeybees and ice cream to heavy equipment and technical work — while the high school students gain experience organizing the huge event, she said.

"They just don't get this experience" elsewhere, said Ann Abeyta, also an Owyhee first-grade teacher.

KHS agriculture teachers Joe Blackstock, Shawn Dygert and Travis Edwards



Brad Carlson/Capital Press  
Kuna High School freshman and FFA group leader Libby Kerr, center, with students May 9 at the Agricultural Exposition.

oversee their students, guiding attendees around lineups of big farm machinery, taking them on hayrides and seeing animals, birds, plants and Agriculture in the Classroom interpretive displays.

Attendance easily reaches capacity each year, Dygert said.

Many of the first- and second-graders on hand were experiencing agriculture up close for the first time, said KHS junior Katie Hettinga, the FFA chapter president. "They also get to see how agriculture connects to their home lives."

KHS senior Savannah Stroebel, a state FFA officer, said neither she nor Hettinga grew up in agriculture. Their first exposure to the industry came through the Ag Expo at Kuna High. They both plan to attend the University of

Idaho — Stroebel this fall as an ag education major and Hettinga the following year to study ag policy and law.

Demand is high for people with agriculture education and training, Dygert and Stroebel said.

But as a school-hosted expo theme, why agriculture?

"People have just lost track of where their food and fiber come from," Dygert said. Some are moving from urban to rural areas.

"We live this, and these kids barely get to see it," he said. "Sometimes I don't think we realize how lucky we are because we get to have this agricultural lifestyle."

In the afternoons and evenings, the expo's open house draws visitors of all ages, Dygert said.

# New Washington president: 'FFA has been my everything'

Members enjoy 'nitty-gritty' of bonding at state convention

By MATTHEW WEAVER  
Capital Press

PULLMAN, Wash. — A large group of well-wishers surrounded Sadie Aronson moments after she was named the new president of the Washington FFA Saturday at the organization's state convention.

"FFA has been my everything for the past four years," Aronson told the Capital Press. "It's been a family, it's been a gateway for me to discover my future. I really just can't wait to turn it around and make that dream come true for everybody else."

Aronson is a member of White River FFA in Buckley, Wash.

"I am thrilled, so excited to be serving the 11,000 members of Washington FFA for the next year," Aronson said. "I'm totally in shock."

Aronson said she hopes to increase membership and that she can be a key part in impacting lives.

The other new state officers who will serve with Aronson are vice president Trevor Schmitt of Chiawana FFA in Pasco, secretary Naddie Widner of Walla Walla, trea-



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press  
New Washington State FFA president Sadie Aronson of White River is surrounded by well-wishers as the state convention concludes May 12 in Pullman, Wash.

surer Kyle Johnson of Yelm, reporter Karlee Hansen of Ellensburg and sentinel Zach Schilter of Chehalis.

Widner spoke to the Capital Press as the final session began, before she was named a state officer. A senior, this was her fourth year at the convention.

"My favorite part of convention is right before the officers run down and they play really impactful, pump-up music," Widner said. "Everyone stands up and it's just such a good atmosphere to be in."

She also competed in the employment skills career and leadership development event, or CDE.

Rank-and-file FFA members from around the state

were just as excited about the convention.

Allie Siewert and Natalie Franco, both seniors at White River, have attended all four years. They competed in the agricultural issues CDE, talking about innovative agriculture versus traditional agriculture.

Siewert likes encouraging the members competing in CDEs.

Franco said she loves the overall experience.

"Throughout the year, you get to know each other, but state is really a time when you spend 24-7 together and really get to know the nitty-gritty, weird habits about other people," Franco said.



Deck Family Farm  
A sow and her piglets in the pasture of Deck Family Farm in 2015. The farm recently began selling pasture-raised pork to Crowd Cow, a Seattle-based craft meats company.

## Deck Family Farm to sell pork through craft meat distributor

Certified organic, pasture-raised pigs

By GEORGE PLAVERN  
Capital Press

Deck Family Farm, a small, organic livestock producer in the Mid-Willamette Valley, has started selling pasture-raised pork to a craft meat distributor based in Seattle that specializes in doorstep deliveries.

Crowd Cow, launched in 2015 by startup entrepreneurs Ethan Lowry and Joe Heitzeberg, announced in April the company would add pork to its line of meat products, including bacon, sausage, chorizo, ribs and pork chops.

Customers on the West Coast will get their orders from Deck Family Farm, of Junction City, Ore. The farm, run by John and Christine Deck, raises Wattle-Berkshire crossbreed pigs on more than 300 acres of certified organic pastures, along with beef cows, chickens and lambs.

In addition to raising livestock, Christine Deck said the operation focuses heavily on environmental stewardship. Over the last 15 years, Deck Family Farm has planted 60,000 trees and restored more than a mile of riparian corridors in the Long Tom River watershed.

"We're pretty serious about doing things right," Deck said.

Deck Family Farm typically sells directly to consumers at farmers' markets, or through the farm's own community-supported agriculture model.

While their products are more expensive than buying meat at the grocery store,

Deck said their customers are "voting with their dollar to make a difference in the environment, and their ecosystem."

"We don't sell to consumers. We sell to citizen eaters," she said. "Our buyers and us work together to do the right thing."

The deal with Crowd Cow allows them to focus more time on farming and less on marketing, Deck said.

The farm began talking with Crowd Cow about four years ago, though purchases only started within the last six months.

Crowd Cow, as its name suggests, got its start in beef, buying cows from small, independent farms. Animals are bought one at a time, individually crowd-funded by buyers, with cuts of meat shipped to their homes.

The company announced in April it would add pork to its line of products — expanding into "Crowd Sow." In a prepared statement, Heitzeberg, CEO and co-founder of Crowd Cow, said they are looking forward to partnering with small-scale producers who are preserving heritage breeds and bringing their flavors to American eaters.

"We're excited to be part of the transformation away from traditionally raised American meat and into ethically minded consumerism," Heitzeberg said.

West Coast buyers will receive pork from Deck Family Farm, while those from east of the Rocky Mountains will receive purebred Berkshire pork from Autumn's Harvest Farm in Upstate New York.

For more information, visit [www.crowdcow.com](http://www.crowdcow.com).

## Study to track animals fouling Washington shellfish

Is it livestock? Wildlife? Humans?

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

Farm animals, wildlife, humans and pets are presumably polluting Puget Sound shellfish beds with fecal matter, and a Seattle company has been hired to rank the sources of bacteria in two bays.

Herrera Environmental Consultants signed a \$200,000 contract last week with the Washington State Conservation Commission. During the next year, the company and its partners will analyze the DNA of fecal bacteria in a pair of contaminated bays in Pierce County.

Herrera's project manager, Rob Zisette, said Friday the results should identify the species polluting the bays and their relative contributions. It's unlikely the tests they will produce exact percentages. "Ideally that's what you're going to get, but realistically, no," he said.

Tracking the source of fecal bacteria is an experimental and expensive technology, but one whose supporters say could help clarify the land-use practices that need the most attention in a watershed. State lawmakers authorized the grant.

The conservation commission says the results should inform clean-up measures such as repairing septic tanks, cleaning up after pets or managing livestock.

Currently, the Department of Ecology does not use the technique, called microbial



Don Jenkins/Capital Press  
The Washington State Conservation Commission has awarded a \$200,000 grant to an environmental consultant for an experimental project to identify the sources of fecal matter fouling shellfish beds.

source tracking. The department points to its experimental nature and cost.

Ecology's special assistant on water quality, Kelly Susewind, said people look to DNA testing to precisely sort out pollution sources. "People ask, 'How do you know it's me?'" he said. "It's a legitimate desire."

"I think people are looking for a silver bullet," Susewind said. "We aren't quite there yet."

Herrera's project faces budget and scientific limits. Still, Zisette, said he hopes it will show Ecology and other agencies that it's useful in finding problems.

Herrera has tested Washington waters before to identify the sources of fecal coliform. According to a 2007 report from Ecology, Herrera found bovine

fecal material was dominant at midstream and downstream stations in the Willapa River on the southwest Washington coast.

Zisette said he presented the results to livestock owners and that they welcomed the evidence, rather than conjecture.

In its proposal, Herrera listed Rocky Bay, Vaughn Bay, Filucy Bay and Burley Lagoon as possible places to test water. The budget will allow for testing at two of them, Zisette said. The two have not been picked.

The plan is to take 11 water samples from 12 sites in two bays. Each sample will be tested for up to five species. The cost limits the sampling.

The DNA for humans and animals such as cows, pigs, horses, dogs, chickens, geese and gulls can be identified. There's also the ruminant category, a classification that Zisette said he doesn't like because it doesn't distinguish between sheep, goats and deer.

The project is scheduled to be done by June 2019.

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