

Northwest completes successful showing at National FFA Convention

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
Capital Press

For the second year in a row, a representative from Oregon will serve on the National FFA Officer Team.

Kourtney Lehman, of Baker City, was elected national secretary for 2019-20 at the 92nd annual National FFA Convention & Expo, held Oct. 30 through Nov. 2 in Indianapolis.

Lehman, 21, is one of six new officers chosen from a pool of 44 finalists. Each team member will travel more than 100,000 miles over the next year, meeting with thousands of FFA students and teachers from across the country while leading conferences and promoting agricultural literacy.

The team will also travel overseas to Japan in January.

"It's been incredible," Lehman told the Capital Press. "I'm still trying to figure out if this is real, or if it's all just a dream."

Lehman grew up on her family's farm in Baker City, raising wheat, corn, potatoes and alfalfa hay. She graduated from Baker High School in 2017, and was the Oregon FFA state president from 2017-18 before heading to Oregon State University, where she studies agricultural business management.

Lehman said she is looking forward to helping other FFA members build their confidence and leadership skills.



Courtesy FFA

From left, Kolesen McCoy, president; Kourtney Lehman, secretary; Yomar Roman, southern region vice president; Mamie Hertel, central region vice president; Tess Seibel, eastern region vice president; and Lyle Logemann, western region vice president.

"I am really excited to be able to tour different states and go to their state conventions," she said.

Last year, FFA delegates elected Shea Booster, of Bend, as the western region vice president. It is the first time Oregon FFA has notched back-to-back national officers, said Lee Letsch, executive secretary of the state FFA Association.

Letsch said Oregon FFA had an overall strong showing at the national convention.

In career development and leadership development events, seven teams and individuals earned gold ratings, 12 earned silver ratings, and seven earned bronze ratings. Another 57 students earned

their American FFA degrees, one of the organization's highest honors.

"Our students always go into the national convention prepared by their agriculture teachers and schools," Letsch said. "They do a phenomenal job representing us."

Brian Field, president of Harvest Capital Company of Canby, Ore., was awarded an Honorary American Degree for his work with the organization. Daniel Bolen, an ag teacher at Elgin High School, also received an Honorary American Degree.

Other FFA students from around the Northwest also brought home a bevy of awards and accolades at the national convention.

2019-20 NATIONAL FFA OFFICER TEAM

Six representatives were elected to the 2019-20 National FFA Officer Team at the 92nd annual National FFA Convention & Expo in Indianapolis. Officers include:

- National President — Kolesen McCoy, agribusiness and applied economics major at The Ohio State University.
- National Secretary — Kourtney Lehman, agricultural business management major at Oregon State University.
- Western Region Vice President — Lyle Logemann, agricultural education major at Eastern New Mexico University.
- Eastern Region Vice President — Tess Seibel, nursing major at James Madison University.
- Central Region Vice President — Mamie Hertel, financial engineering major at Montana State University.
- Southern Region Vice President — Yomar Roman, office administration major at Universidad de Puerto Rico.

Abbie Dorhauer, of Yelm, Wash., won the national championship in the employment skills leadership development event, which simulates real-world requirements for job applications — such as cover letter and resumé writing, telephone and face-to-face interviews.

Dorhauer, a first-generation FFA member, was elected Washington FFA state treasurer earlier this year and grew up on a hobby farm with 20 head of cattle.

In other results, Washington FFA chapters won gold ratings in 16 more career development and leadership development events, including 14 top-10 finishes. Another four districts won silver ratings.

Abbie DeMeerleer, execu-

tive director of the Washington FFA Association, said the national convention is about more than just competitions for students.

"My hope is that students who attend see the larger picture of the industry and profession of agriculture, and the opportunities in front of them," DeMeerleer said.

Idaho FFA chapters earned seven gold ratings in career development and leadership development events, 10 silver ratings and seven more bronze ratings.

Clara-Leigh Evans, executive director of the Idaho FFA Association, said local FFA members also represented Idaho in 16 agricultural proficiency events. Out of those, eight earned gold ratings

and three went on to become national finalists.

National finalists included Hanna Steele, of North Fremont FFA, for agricultural communications; Carson Urrutia, of Vallivue FFA, for agricultural mechanics; and Luke Smith, of Rigby FFA, for beef production placement.

Evans said she is excited every year by the high level of performance from Idaho FFA.

"That to me all points back to the quality of our FFA advisors, agriculture education instructors, students and community support," Evans said.

Marc Beitia, an adviser with the American Falls FFA chapter in southeast Idaho, was also one of 13 people to be awarded with a National FFA VIP recipient, honoring individuals who have dedicated at least 20 years of service to FFA and agricultural education on a national level.

Beitia, an FFA adviser for 36 years, has served on the National Chapter Committee for 10 years, and was on the Board of Directors for two years. The American Falls FFA chapter was also selected as a National FFA Model of Excellence finalist last year, along with the Rigby chapter.

"We have a very progressive chapter that is actively involved in community service, and community development," Beitia said. "Our members are looked upon not only as leaders in the school, but leaders in the community."

Oregon dairyman joins panel to testify on state of organic agriculture

'Origin of livestock' rule needs clarification, says Steve Pierson

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
Capital Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. — An organic dairy farmer from Oregon's Willamette Valley is pushing the USDA to finalize its proposed rule for transitioning livestock under the National Organic Program, saying inconsistent interpretation of the standard has put his operation at a competitive disadvantage.

Steve Pierson, of Sar-Ben Farms in St. Paul, Ore., was part of a panel that testified Oct. 30 before Congress about the state of organic agriculture.

The panel provided grower perspectives to the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Biotechnology, Horticulture, and Research, which has jurisdiction over organics. According to the Organic Trade Association, U.S. organic sales topped \$50 billion for the first time 2018, including \$47.9 billion in organic food sales.

Pierson serves as a member of the board of directors for Organic Valley, the country's largest organic farming co-op. His testimony focused on challenges in the dairy industry, such as regulatory uncertainty over organic standards.

Specifically, Pierson highlighted the need to clarify the "Origin of Livestock" rule, which guides how dairies transition to producing organic milk.

The USDA issued its proposed Origin of Livestock rule in 2015. It allows dairy farms to transition cattle from conventional to



Steve Pierson

organic over a 12-month period, where the animals are raised using organic farming practices — that is, they eat organic feed, graze on organic pasture for at least 120 days and cannot be given any growth hormones, among other requirements.

Pierson said the rule is meant to be a one-time event, but a few organic certifiers and producers have interpreted the standard differently, using the 12-month period multiple times to continuously transition new herds from conventional to organic.

Rather than raising cattle 100% organic from birth, Pierson said farms will raise calves conventionally during the first year before beginning the organic transition in year two. The difference in cost is estimated to be \$623 per animal.

For Sar-Ben Farms, which became certified organic in 2005 and milks 300 cows, that puts them at a disadvantage of \$45,000 per year, Pierson said.

"This is not a widespread

practice," Pierson told the Capital Press. "Very few milk buyers will even allow this. Organic Valley will certainly not let any of our producers do that."

The USDA reopened its public comment period for the 2015 proposal on Oct. 1, which will run for 60 days through Dec. 2.

Pierson said lawmakers he met with in Washington, D.C. — including Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore.; Rep. Kurt Schrader, D-Ore.; and Rep. Collin Peterson, D-Minn., chairman of the House Agriculture Committee — were "in lockstep, 100%, that this is a technicality that needs to be addressed."

"It's a fairly technical point that we're trying to clear up," Pierson said. "We're not really asking for a lot. It's just clear and precise interpretations to make sure we're all playing by the same rules on a level playing field."

Adam Warthesen, director of government and industry affairs for Organic Valley, said misinterpretation of the Origin of Livestock rule threatens to put the vast majority of dairies in Oregon that are following the one-time herd transition at the same financial disadvantage as Sar-Ben Farms.

"We shouldn't have two different interpretations (of the rule). That's just ridiculous," Warthesen said.

Out of 1,570 comments originally submitted on USDA's 2015 proposal, Warthesen said 1,565 supported a one-time transition standard, while just five opposed it.

Final briefs filed fighting grizzly relisting

By **DAN WHEAT**
Capital Press

A legal foundation representing ranchers has filed its final brief defending its standing to appeal a relisting of Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem grizzly bears as a threatened species.

"Ranching families face mounting losses of sheep and cattle and more frequent attacks on humans as grizzly bears continue to swell in number and expand their territory," said Cody J. Wisniewski, attorney for Mountain States Legal Foundation in Lakewood, Colo.

"Even farmers' operations have been disrupted by grizzly bears taking up residence in their fields," he said.

Families live in fear, he said, not just of the grizzlies but of what trouble they could be in if they attempt to defend themselves against an attack.

"Strict Endangered Species Act laws mean they could face prosecution, fines and even imprisonment if they attempt to defend themselves from an attack," Wisniewski said.

Mary Thoman, of W&M Thoman Ranches, and her family have raised sheep in Western Wyoming for more than a century but gave up graz-

ing lands after their losses became too great and a ranch employee was nearly killed by a grizzly, Wisniewski said.

Charles Price's ranch is jeopardized by "devastating cattle losses" to grizzlies and Price advocates non-lethal, state management, he said.

Recovery of Yellowstone grizzlies prompted the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, under the Obama and Trump administrations, to attempt delisting the bears.

Both were blocked in court.

The most recent was the Sept. 24, 2018, ruling by U.S. District Court Judge Dana Christensen, in Missoula, Mont., reinstating Yellowstone grizzlies as a threatened species after USFWS delisted

them in 2017.

Christensen also ordered USFWS to conduct a "comprehensive review" of the effect of a delisting on the entire species in the lower 48 states.

The U.S. Department of Justice and USFWS is contesting the scope, but not some level of review, while MSLF says the ESA does not require such a review and that it is without legal foundation.

Christensen "improperly expanded the scope of the ESA" and substituted his judgment of science over the agency, Wisniewski said.

Now environmental groups and tribes argue that since the federal government is not pursuing a full appeal of the ruling that the ranchers lack standing to do so, he said.

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