

Echo FFA wins big at recent spring Career Development Event

By MCKENZIE ROSE
Special to the Hermiston Herald

A bus full of enthusiastic and studied-up Echo FFA members in the early morning hours of May 1 began their journey to Corvallis, to compete with other FFA chapters at the spring Career Development Event.

And compete they did. The Echo meats evaluation team placed first overall, beating the next team by a margin of more than 200 points, and sealed a spot at the national competition.

The CDE competitions spanned three days, with veterinary science on May 1, meats evaluation (referred to simply as “meats”) on May 2 and milk quality and livestock evaluation on May 3.

While the other three Echo teams did not advance onto nationals, participants said they gained valuable experiences they look forward to applying next year to enhance performances.

This meats competition requires intense attention to detail, immense knowledge of meat cuts and characteristics, refined observation skills and much more. Participants must evaluate and identify various aspects of meat carcasses, identify retail cuts, determine the quality and yield grade of different portions, differentiate between wholesale and retail cuts’ quality and take a test on other meat features.

Juniors Lillian Wallis, Kyndra Zumwalt and Mason Murdock; sophomores Creed Russell and Taylor-Jo Hoffman; and freshman Colter Meads made up the 2022 Echo meats team.

Their coach is Raymond Smith, Echo School District superintendent. Smith has coached FFA meats teams for 21 years, 10 being with Echo.

Some members of the team competed in additional events. Meads was on both the veterinary science and livestock evaluation



Shandie Britt/Contributed Photo

The Echo FFA meats evaluation team displays its first-place banner won at the state Career Development Event in early May 2022 in Corvallis. From left, Kyndra Zumwalt, Colter Meads, Creed Russell, Oregon FFA Reporter Jessie Samarin, Mason Murdock, Taylor-Jo Hoffman and Lillian Wallis stand together.



Lindsay Murdock/Contributed Photo

The Echo FFA meats evaluation team is all smiles after performing well in its competition in early May 2022 in Corvallis. From left, Echo High District Superintendent and meats evaluation coach Raymond Smith stands with team members Taylor-Jo Hoffman, Lillian Wallis, Kyndra Zumwalt, Creed Russell, Colter Meads and Mason Murdock.

teams, Hoffman was a veterinary science member and Lillian Wallis also was a livestock evaluator. Hoffman explained why she was willing to participate in

such a difficult and complex competition.

“Considering that I eat some sort of meat every day, I thought that it would be very beneficial for me to

learn about meat and where it comes from,” she said. “Being told by my coach that I would thrive in this CDE, I decided to try it out, and I am so glad that I did.”

By placing top in the state, the team can attend the national competition in the fall in Indianapolis. Not only did Echo take top honors among the 29 teams present, but in individual performance as well. Zumwalt was the first-place individual, Russell was only one point behind her in second, Wallis achieved third, Murdock was fifth and Hoffman was ninth.

The whole Echo meats team placed in the top 10 out of 110 total competitors. “This team pulled it all together and performed very well,” Smith said. “They had a goal in mind to win the state contest and were willing to put the time and effort into it.”

The participants said when they obtained their results, they were finally able to relax. “It felt like all of that stress and worry that we had all been feeling had been lifted off of our shoulders because all of our hard work

had paid off,” Hoffman said. “It was impossible to wipe the smiles off of all of our faces for the next hour.”

“I had full faith in the abilities of my teammates,” Wallis added, “but I was very surprised to hear that we all placed in the top 10.”

This isn’t the first time an Echo meats team has advanced to nationals. The recent triumph marked Echo’s sixth meats state title in the last 11 years. Smith attributed the team’s success to the former students, who “set a tone and example that if you work hard, follow the plan and put in the time you will find success.”

And each team, he said, “has a common thread of unity and support for each other.”

Wallis elaborated on that point.

“All my teammates worked really hard to prepare for this competition and we all had strengths in different sections of the contest,” she said. “Zumwalt was well versed in meats as she worked for Mike’s Mobile Slaughter and has been doing really well in the ID portion of the contest.”

Teammates credited Smith’s coaching for playing a large role in the success.

“Knowing that we have Mr. Smith as our coach makes me confident that we will be high competitors at the national level,” Hoffman said. “Mr. Smith has proved to me that he is one of the best coaches in the country, and I am certain that he will make it his top priority for us to be more than ready by October.”

These meat experts expressed excitement for the opportunity to travel and put their skills to the test in Indianapolis in a few months.

“Our team will have to put in countless hours of practice between now and then to achieve the goals of national top ten,” Smith said, “but they’re up to the challenge.”

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