Our 2020-2021 Officers

Gracie Helms - State President
Gunner Black - State Secretary
Adisyn Lyles - State Vice President
Lee Padgett - State Vice President
Victoria Gillis - State Vice President
Ashlyn Patterson - State Vice President
Greetings from Gracie Helms
2020-21 SC FFA State President

Hello South Carolina FFA members, advisors and supporters. I am honored to be serving as your State FFA President for the 2020-2021 term. I am a freshman at The University of South Carolina – Lancaster campus and am from the Central chapter in the small town of Pageland. I want to extend the warmest of welcomes on behalf of myself and the other five state officers serving along with me this year.

Along with my fellow officers, I have received extensive virtual training this year from some of the best trainers that the National FFA offers. Sadly, we have not had the typical officer experience. We want to offer our sympathy to anyone affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, whether that may be untraditional school days, a loss of extracurricular events or the sickness itself. As we all walk along this unpaved path, we wish you safety and good health in the upcoming months. Due to the pandemic, we have not been able to travel the way we would generally like to and meet our members.

We have recently been granted permission to visit your chapters, and we could not be more excited about it. You can book a state officer visit at the bottom of the SC FFA Association Officers web page. Because of this, we are hoping to start boosting our social media again with news of our visits. Please feel free to follow us on Instagram and Facebook at SC FFA Officers. I would love to hear from our members on our social media outlets, so please do not hesitate to reach out to us. We wish you all a safe and happy school year full of memories that will last a lifetime. We cannot wait to meet each and every one of you!

Gracie Helms
March 13, 2020, was a day to remember. What started as a typical day suddenly turned into one for the history books. Some SC FFA members were cramming for the Nursery/Landscape or Floriculture CDE’s to be held at Spartanburg Technical College the next morning. 76 FFA members were busy preparing for their interviews and talent portion of the Miss FFA Scholarship Pageant held later that evening. By early Friday afternoon, Clemson decided to cancel all events effective immediately; this included on campus events, FFA and 4-H events.

Cancelling FFA events and CDEs was heartbreaking, but for the safety of the students, FFA members, advisors, families and communities, it was the right decision. At this time, there was still hope that the State Convention could still be held in person.

At the end of April, realizing a majority of schools were unable to travel, it was decided the 93rd South Carolina FFA Convention would be held virtually. The convention was to be available to every South Carolina FFA member, advisor, parent, friend, administrator and supporter. By ultimately going virtual, we were given the opportunity to share the celebration and recognition of our students and programs with everyone.

As in the in-person State Convention, we wanted to find a way to personally recognize South Carolina FFA members who dedicated countless hours to their SAEs, applications, preparing for CDEs and a magnitude of other FFA related events. Each FFA member would be recognized by announcing his/her achievement and showing a photo of the winner.

To prepare for the convention, the state officers and staff met in Clemson to practice script reading and record pre-session videos in the days before filming. The state officers and staff worked with Jonathan Veit in the Clemson PSA Communication and Marketing department and Kayla Rutherford, Video & Digital Media Producer with PSA-CAFLS Communication at Clemson, to produce a quality convention. The convention filming was completed in one day in the University Relations studio at the Madrin Center in Clemson.

In addition to the General Sessions, the Virtual State Convention YouTube Channel hosted multiple workshops by past state officers and National FFA Officer Kourtney Lehman. Additionally, a virtual college fair and expo highlighting college programs that offer agricultural majors were released for all to view. The virtual convention was released June 9-11 on the SC FFA State Convention 2020 YouTube page and is still available for viewing.
Wilhelm Named Star Farmer

By Jason Gore

The 2020 SC FFA Star Farmer is Christian Wilhelm from the Laurens Chapter. Christian is the owner and operator of CW Farms, a diversified livestock enterprise in Enoree, SC.

Through this enterprise, she raises and trains show quality horses, swine and cattle. Wilhelm pays special attention to feed rations when managing her animals. She mixes custom rations designed to provide a balanced nutritional diet and yield high-quality performance. Wilhelm takes great pride in making her animals as show ready as possible. She clips and fits her animals to give the best possible presentation.

Additionally, Wilhelm works regularly with all of her animals to prepare them for the show ring. Wilhelm has dramatically improved on her showmanship skills through her SAE project. She has learned how to best position her animals as well as how to interact with judges and others in the show ring. Wilhelm has gained a wealth of knowledge about the livestock industry through participation in showmanship events and her agricultural enterprise. She prides herself on knowing about her animals and providing high-quality care for them.

Wilhelm is an active member of the Laurens FFA Chapter, where Melanie Birchmore and Kyle Penland are her advisors. She has participated in many local and state CDEs and LDES, including livestock, horse, and dairy cattle evaluation. Wilhelm regularly volunteers in her community and is a member of Laurens County Cattlemen’s Association and 4-H.

Bradshaw Named Star in Agribusiness

By Jason Gore

The 2020 SC FFA Star in Agribusiness Award Winner is Kelsi Bradshaw from the Crescent FFA Chapter. Kelsi is a farmhand for Oak Hill Angus Farm, located in Iva, SC. Oak Hill raises bulls for private sale across the state and works to ensure the production of top-quality animals to add value to customer herds. Bradshaw manages the feeding of the herd to maintain body condition and top performance.

During her time at Oak Hill, Bradshaw has worked hard to improve her skills safely and efficiently operating equipment. She regularly uses equipment to move and put out feed, clear land and relocate farm materials quickly. Bradshaw pays close attention to even the smallest details at the farm. She checks feed bin levels regularly to ensure that feed deliveries can be scheduled as efficiently as possible and maintain optimal operations on the farm. Through her SAE, Bradshaw has gained a better understanding of cattle herd management, especially ruminant nutrition. This knowledge enables Kelsi to help maintain a healthy herd that produces high-quality cattle for customers.

Bradshaw is an active member of the Crescent FFA Chapter and Crescent Cattle Show Team. She is also a member of the American International Junior Charolais Association and South Carolina Junior Charolais Association. Her FFA advisors are Caroline Snellings and Brantley Caldwell.

Padgett Named Star in Placement

By Jason Gore

The 2020 SC FFA Star in Agricultural Placement is Lee Padgett from the Pelion FFA Chapter. Lee is employed as a farmhand with Padgett Farms located in Leesville, SC. It is a diversified agricultural operation and Padgett is actively involved across all farm activities. Padgett is responsible for tasks ranging from checking chicken house operations to fertilizer and pesticide application to equipment maintenance.

Padgett has invested the income from his placement project to start a small swine enterprise. He has purchased and raised several litters of pigs for market sale.

In addition to his work at Padgett Farms and swine operation, Padgett was an intern for the Center for Advanced Agribusiness Research at Pelion High School. As part of his duties there, Padgett managed the center’s research farm, maintaining plots of corn, peanuts, soybeans, cotton and more for class demonstrations and chapter fundraising programs.

Padgett has had the opportunity to learn several skills through his SAE. He has learned how to effectively use emerging agricultural technologies to ensure more efficient farm operations. For example, he uses GPS navigation when spraying herbicides on fields, resulting in a more efficient and safer application.

Padgett is an active agriculturalist. He is a member of the Pelion Farmer and Agribusiness Association Chapter and Lexington County Farm Bureau. He has purchased and restored multiple pieces of antique farm equipment for shows and parades. Padgett is an active member of the Pelion FFA chapter, where Frank Stover and Jesse Zeaser are his advisors. He has been a member of state winning Wildlife and Soil Judging CDE teams and a participant at numerous state and national FFA activities.
In an effort to give back to the community, promote agriculture and provide a family-friendly experience, the South Carolina State Fair held its first-ever drive through experience. The State Fair has been providing this experience for 150 years, and organizers planned on continuing the experience in a safe manner.

This year’s fair was a free experience for families to drive through the fairgrounds and experience attractions that highlighted South Carolina agriculture, history, arts and culture. No rides were available, but instead, fairgoers still had the opportunity to enjoy all their favorite fair foods with multiple food trucks available in the parking lot.

The South Carolina FFA provided an exhibit titled “1,000’s of Careers. One Blue Jacket.” The display consisted of scarecrows dressed in various agriculture careers, including a welder, Department of National Resources agent, researcher and agriculture teacher. The scarecrows were designed and created by the Buford FFA Chapter. The FFA display wanted to highlight the multitude of careers available in agriculture, natural resources, life sciences and research.

Eleven students from the John de la Howe Governors School of Agriculture showed off their livestock handling skills by demonstrating showmanship skills. The program transported multiple cattle and swine from their school farm, practiced grooming and handling skills and answered questions from cars passing by.

This year’s South Carolina State Fair is scheduled to be held Oct. 13-24, 2021.

In 1917, the Smith Hughes Act was passed to give federal funding for vocational programs. Through this funding, agriculture education began, and thus, the initial stages of our excellent youth organization called the FFA. In 1928, a group of 33 farm boys from across the nation gathered in Kansas City, Missouri, at the Baltimore Hotel at the first National FFA Convention.

We are pleased to announce that in the fall of 2020, the SC FFA Association welcomed four chapters to our roster: East Cooper Center for Advanced Studies, Governor’s School of Agriculture at John de la Howe, Jasper Career and Technology Center, and Palmetto High School.

These FFA chapters are about to embark on a journey whose destination has no end. We commend them on their willingness to become a chapter in this amazing organization. The door is now open, and all they have to do is walk through it. We welcome you to the South Carolina FFA Association and the National FFA Organization.
Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 93rd National FFA Convention & Expo was held virtually this year. However, more than 217,000 viewers and participants from around the country enjoyed the event.

The National Convention kicked off Oct. 27 with a welcome session followed by the First General Session. Attendees had the opportunity to view live general sessions on RFD-TV, The Cowboy Channel and streaming live on ffa.org. Just like in-person sessions, FFA members received recognition for their hard work, heard from this year’s National Officer Team and listened to the band and chorus perform.

Thirty-three South Carolina FFA members were awarded the highest honor an FFA member can receive, the American FFA Degree. This degree is awarded to less than one percent of FFA members, making it one of the organization’s highest honors.

Two of the South Carolina FFA’s outstanding supporters were honored with the Honorary American Degree. Representative David Hiott and Marlboro County FFA Advisor Kellon Hall received this prestigious award. It is awarded to individuals who have provided exceptional service on a national level to agriculture, agriculture education, or the FFA.

For those FFA members who registered for the convention, they were able to connect with other FFA members from around the country, watch multiple leadership development workshops, participate in 3-D FFA Blue Room and visit with more than 130 exhibitors at the expo.

While the convention concluded on Oct. 29 with the announcement of the 2020-2021 National Officer elections, any individual that registered can still access all the content and videos in case they missed any of it. All general sessions are available on ffa.org for viewing.
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The South Carolina Agricultural Educators Association was faced with a choice in the summer of 2020. It was time for their annual summer teachers’ conference. With restrictions being placed on travel for teachers and the Coronavirus limiting activities across the state, the teachers could either succumb to the events of the day, or they could find a way to overcome. The choice was to overcome. The result was the first ever SC Agriculture Teachers Virtual Conference.

On July 23, Agriculture teachers had the opportunity to assemble with teachers in their area of the state for a virtual Region meeting. Plans for the upcoming year were discussed as well as providing opportunities for feedback from teachers on their needs and suggestions for how they can assist each other. In addition, members were elected to Boards, Advisory Committees and association offices.

On the evening of July 23, the South Carolina Association of Agricultural Educators released a virtual Awards Presentation video. The ceremony was held to recognize teachers across the state for their accomplishments. Each winner was recognized virtually by presenters from across the state making the award presentations from the safety of their homes. The SCAAE officer team did their due diligence to make sure that each winner was properly recognized for their accomplishments.

Following was a series of online workshops. Workshops were held on July 28-30 and conducted live by members of the Agricultural Education Program Team as well as South Carolina ETV, Piedmont Technical College and agricultural teachers. The programs covered a range of topics from resources for managing an FFA Chapter to conducting an adult education program to eLearning opportunities and resources. All teachers attending received professional development credit. One advantage of the virtual program was that workshop attendance was not limited by facilities. As a result, average attendance at workshops was 59.

Like so many things in 2020, the SC Agricultural Conference was different. But through the perseverance of the SCAAE Board, the conference was a success nonetheless.
Hugh M. Bland, a retired agricultural educator from Edgefield, has been named recipient of the John W. Parris Agricultural Leadership Award by the SC Association of Agricultural Educators for 2020.

A graduate of Strom Thurmond High School in 1969, Bland earned B.S. and Master’s degrees in Agricultural Education at Clemson University. A National Board-Certified Teacher, Bland has served as president of the SC Association of Agricultural Educators.

Bland taught Agricultural Education at Midland Valley High School for eight years and Strom Thurmond Technology Center for 25 years. Upon retirement as a high school teacher, Bland headed up the new Diversified Agricultural Program at the Saluda Campus of Piedmont Technical College for seven years. In 2018, Bland was named Chairman of the Board of Directors of the new Governor’s School for Agriculture at the John de la Howe facilities in McCormick County.

Previously recognized as the Outstanding Teacher of the Year in South Carolina by the Clemson University Collegiate FFA Organization, Bland was also named the Outstanding Conservation Education Teacher in South Carolina by the SC Association of Conservation Districts. He was awarded the Honorary American FFA Degree by the 600,000-member National FFA Organization.

Bland holds an enviable record of accomplishments as advisor to the Midland Valley and Strom Thurmond FFA Chapters by producing 10 State FFA Star Farmer or Star Agribusiness recipients and more than 20 State FFA Championship Teams in Forestry, Ornamental Horticulture, Agronomy, Wildlife, Floriculture and Soil Judging. All of these teams competed in the national finals with two National Gold Teams in Forestry and Ornamental Horticulture. He also had six Individual National Gold Winners of Scholarships in Forestry, Ornamental Horticulture and Agronomy. Among Bland’s most outstanding Environmental Education accomplishments was producing the State Envirothon Championship Team.

The John W. Parris Agricultural Leadership Award was established several years ago by the SC Association of Agricultural Educators in honor of Mr. Parris of Columbia. A graduate of Clemson University, Parris is a nationally recognized agricultural leader and conservation visionary with more than 60 years of professional service.

The SC Association of Agricultural Educators is a professional development organization that provides continual leadership opportunities for its members and recognizes outstanding agricultural education programs and individuals throughout the state.
Growing Minds for a Growing Industry

Spartanburg Community College provides students with the knowledge and skills required for a successful career in the horticulture industry. Thanks to a widely respected campus arboretum with many gardens and greenhouse production facilities, SCC students gain hands-on experience with plant production, landscaping, nursery operations, greenhouse management and more. Students also attend conferences and field trips for diverse horticulture experiences and many complete internships with various companies such as Walt Disney World, The Greenery and the Biltmore House.

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Secondly, an Adult Agricultural Education Program establishes a tie between the local Agricultural Education chapter and producers in the community, community organizations and agencies, and agricultural businesses. It also allows teachers the opportunity to open the doors of their classrooms to the community in which the students are living to gain a better understanding of agriculture in their areas. All of these components work together to help strengthen the agriculture industry and agriculture awareness within the community.

As the agricultural industry continues to evolve worldwide, it is important for those involved in our local communities to stay abreast of the changes that are occurring. Producers never stop learning and never stop looking for an advantage. Consumers are always looking for answers to help make informed decisions concerning their livelihood and purchases. Adult Agricultural Education is a great way to educate and strengthen the agricultural community as a whole and to build relationships between the school and community of producers and consumers.

In South Carolina, Adult Agricultural Education classes and activities have always been a very important component in building the complete agricultural program. Supervised by the local Agricultural Education Advisors, Adult Education is offered as an extension of the high school agricultural education program. These programs may look different from community to community, but the focus remains the same. The South Carolina Farmer and Agribusiness Association, an affiliate of the National Young Farmer Educational Association, is designed to aid interested adults through systematic and organized educational programs on agriculture and agribusiness.

There are many advantages to having an Adult Agricultural Education Program. A major advantage, and the primary focus, is that it serves agriculture in the community by developing agricultural leaders, educates the public about agriculture, provides very valuable educational opportunities to the community, provides a forum for discussion on issues that affect producers and communities, and could increase income and stability of local producers. It also gives community members a platform to be recognized across the state for the work they are doing.

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Everybody knows the song, “Old McDonald had a farm.” Well, that song is about my dad. He’s the McDonald that had the farm . . . and the cows, and the peacocks, the ducks, the hogs and the mules. I’m the McDonald that took my passion for agriculture, which developed at a young age, and turned it into a career as an agricultural education teacher. Often, people believe teachers of elective courses are not concerned with literacy. However, that is not the case. When teaching an elective course, one has to come up with creative ways to motivate students to engage in content literacy. I have found that I can foster student literacy through community engagement of my students.

One of the cornerstones of agricultural education programs is the desire to create productive citizens who serve their community. Through the Agricultural Education Program and Future Farmers of America (FFA) at Manning High School, students are molded into model citizens that willingly give back to their community through various events and community partnerships that continue throughout the year. The motto of FFA reads “Learning to Do, Doing to Learn, Earning to Live, Living to Serve.” The last line, “living to serve” is one that I think the students grasp without even realizing it because it becomes so embedded in our work in and out of the classroom. When you connect the last line of the motto with the first line, “learning to do,” students are equipped with the tools needed to successfully give back to the community that made them.

Through various in class activities, articles from agriculture magazines, and hands-on experiences students gain content knowledge they can put to use and pass on to younger students in one of our strongest community partnerships at Manning Early Childhood Center (MECC). Students within the agriculture program are able to explain the content that they have learned throughout the semester in a way the younger students are able to understand and use as they work on the raised bed garden at MECC. My students are able to teach these younger students how to transfer this knowledge into a useful skill, i.e. importance of fertilizer, plant parts, etc., that can be used in the school garden. When my students are explaining to 4 and 5 year olds the needs of plants and seeing that the younger kids actually understand it, it brings me joy. As a teacher, being able to see the products of our toil is always rewarding.

Having good role models for students to emulate is important. Through a consistent partnership with the Clarendon County Master Gardeners, my agriculture students have learned ways to pass on agriculture knowledge to others. The master gardeners model the ways in which experiential knowledge can be transferred through shared gardening experiences. My students then use what they have learned in their interactions with the master gardeners with the students at MECC. The master gardener volunteers are able to bring in their real-world knowledge and experiences to help enhance the students’ understanding of not only the task-at-hand but
meaningful life experiences. Through this partnership, students are able to experience what it feels like to have someone giving back to the community and investing in the students at our school. As a result, students are more willing and eager to gain a better understanding of agriculture so that they can pay it forward.

Several students have gained a new appreciation for different aspects of agriculture because of these partnerships and have taken additional steps to further enhance their knowledge through research. Students are more willing to engage in learning, because they want to be able to share their knowledge with younger students and understand the information they learn from the master gardeners. As a result of community partnerships, students learn to use the agriculture content vocabulary which supports their learning in my class and future agricultural classes they may take in the future.

Agriculture is an important part of today’s society that is sometimes overlooked. As the global population increases, we need to make sure that our appreciation for what agriculture provides continues to increase so that we have future generations who are interested in agriculture and want to contribute to the field of agriculture. There are many initiatives and programs that are in place to encourage the younger generations to be more interested in agriculture. Through partnerships with different agricultural organizations, the youth are being exposed to the many different aspects of agriculture. My challenge to you is expose your students to some of the many different avenues that lead to the wonderful world of agriculture.
FFA Members Kackley and Padgett Earn SC Conservation Society Scholarships

By John W. Parris

FFA members Virginia Kackley of Summerville and Lee T. Padgett of Pelion have each been awarded a $1,000 college scholarship by the South Carolina Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society, according to Hugh Caldwell, Secretary-Treasurer of the organization.

A 2019-20 State FFA Vice President, Kackley also served as president of the Ashley Ridge High School FFA Chapter and held other leadership positions in the chapter while in high school. The Regional winner of the 2019 FFA Extemporaneous Speaking Competition, Virginia competed in the state finals. She was also a member of the Ashley Ridge FFA Wildlife Management team and Tool Identification team and competed at the state level.

Padgett, a 2020-21 State FFA Vice President, served as president of the Pelion FFA Chapter during his senior year in high school. He was named Mr. FFA in South Carolina early this year and recognized as the State FFA Star in Agricultural Placement during the recent state FFA convention. A member of the state championship FFA Land Judging team and the Wildlife Management team, Lee participated in the national finals in both competitions.

“Virginia and Lee are definitely at the top of the list of outstanding FFA members in South Carolina as evidenced by their superb leadership ability, impressive academic achievement and successful involvement in the FFA Organization,” Mr. Caldwell said.

A freshman at North Carolina State University, Kackley is majoring in Agricultural Science, and Padgett is a freshman at Clemson University majoring in Agricultural Mechanization and Business.

“The mission of the FFA is to make a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through Agricultural Education,” Mr. Caldwell emphasized.

“The South Carolina Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society is pleased to honor Virginia and Lee by making a financial contribution toward their university expenses,” he added.

Hall Wins Clark Woods Distinguished Teacher Award

By Jason Gore

Kellon Hall was named the recipient of the 2020 SCAAE Clark Woods Distinguished Teacher Award during the 2020 SC Association of Agricultural Educators Summer Conference.

Hall has served as the agriculture teacher and FFA advisor at Marlboro County High School for 42 years. During his time in the classroom, Hall has trained award winning career development event teams and had numerous students recognized at the local and state level. He has served as a mentor to teachers in both his region and the state throughout his career, and he has served his region by planning and coordinating invitational tractor operations. Hall has always gone out of his way to provide advice and support to his fellow teachers and is a strong advocate for his profession. He has been previously recognized with the Honorary State FFA Degree and received the Honorary American FFA Degree during the 2020 National FFA Convention and Expo. Hall resides in Cheraw with his wife and has four children and four grandchildren.

The Clark Woods Distinguished Teacher Award is named for the late Clark Woods, agricultural educator at Hillcrest High School. The award is presented based on voting by agricultural educators across South Carolina.
Brodie had always loved the outdoors, plants — and FFA. When he came to Clemson he found that all his interests could come together in one even bigger passion — feeding the world.

At Clemson, Brodie conducted research on plant pathology with professors who shared his goals. He then applied that research to the campus' Tiger Gardens where he also taught nutrition and sustainability. Brodie is now in graduate school, with plans to travel to third-world countries to help them solve their food crises.

It’s a big task. But with knowledge, enthusiasm and the support of his mentors, Brodie is up to the challenge.

Learn more about Brodie’s story at clemson.edu/moments.
we thank you!

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