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MEMORANDUM

DATE: Thursday, July 23, 2026

TO: National Association of Agricultural Educators Membership

FROM: Alissa F. Smith, NAAE Chief Executive Officer *AFS*

SUBJECT: Announcement of 2026 NAAE National Award and Scholarship Recipients

On behalf of the NAAE Board of Directors, it is with pleasure that I announce the names of the NAAE Award and Scholarship Recipients for 2026. As usual, the competition for these awards was substantial. The following are the **2026 National Award and Scholarship Recipients** who will be recognized December 1-5 at the 2026 NAAE Convention in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Outstanding Early Career Teacher Award

Region I	Trevor Motley, MT
Region II	Bonnie McCallister, LA
Region III	Alex Toupal, SD
Region IV	Wyatt Capps, IL
Region V	Jared Parks, NC
Region VI	Mikara Price, PA

Outstanding Agriculture Teacher Award

Region I	Heather Thomas, CA
Region II	Taylor Tillinghast, OK
Region III	Brady Duxbury, SD
Region IV	Shari Anderson, OH
Region V	Wesley Foster, TN
Region VI	Katlin Grantham, WV

Outstanding Middle/Secondary Agricultural Education Program Award

Region I	Rigby High School, ID
Region II	Stillwater High School, OK
Region III	Rugby High School, ND
Region IV	Taylor County High School, KY
Region V	Turkey Creek Middle School, FL
Region VI	Glastonbury High School, CT

Outstanding Postsecondary Agriculture Program Award

Region I	California State University, Fresno Department of Animal Sciences and Agricultural Education, CA
Region II	West Texas A&M University Agricultural Education Program, TX
Region III	University of Nebraska–Lincoln Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication, NE
Region IV	Edison State Community College Agriculture Program, OH
Region V	Chattooga County Young Farmers Chapter, GA

Ideas Unlimited Award

Region I	Tracy Brown, WA
Region II	Gracie Norris, OK
Region III	Rachelle Staehr, NE
Region IV	Riley Hintzsche, IL
Region V	Emily Haley, TN
Region VI	Amanda Gagne, PA

Teacher Mentor Award

Region I	Steven Braun, WA
Region II	Kent Mathis, AR
Region III	Elsa Schmidt, IA
Region IV	Jeremy Ryan, OH
Region V	Emily Haley, TN
Region VI	Jeffrey Billings, DE

Lifetime Achievement Award

Region I	Alan Heikkila, ID
Region II	Jonathan Rowland, AR
Region III	Jeff Voss, MN
Region IV	Bryan Garton, MO
Region V	Mike Akridge, TN
Region VI	Patricia Jepson, CT

Outstanding Service Award

Region I	Kevin Barker, ID
Region III	Natasha Mortenson, MN
Region IV	Mark Forbush, MI
Region V	Melissa Riley, GA
Region VI	Douglas Brown, PA

Visionary Impact Award

Region I	Bryan Lords, ID
Region II	Lindsey Holtzclaw, AR
Region III	Dr. Mark Balschweid, NE
Region IV	Dr. B. Allen Talbert, IN
Region V	Coastal Carolina Fair, SC
Region VI	Michael Woods, NY

NAAE Student Teacher Scholarships

Recipients of the NAAE Student Teacher Scholarships will be recognized at the Alpha Tau Alpha National Conclave held in connection with the National FFA Convention and Expo in Indianapolis, Indiana in October. Attendance is not required to receive the scholarship.

Crystal Anhalt, University of Wisconsin–River Falls
Kaitlyn Ballard, Northwest Missouri State University
Sarah Beaver, The Pennsylvania State University
Kaley Bode, South Illinois University–Carbondale
Makaela Carter, Oregon State University
RyLee Demianew, Oregon State University
Delainee Ellsworth, University of Idaho
Jesse Fulkerson, University of Kentucky
Evan Heupel, Montana State University
Rachel Hood, Kansas State University
Bridget Johnson, Iowa State University
Henry Koerner, University of Minnesota–Twin Cities
Mallory Kramer, The Ohio State University
Carly Leavitt–Hullana, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo
Gracie Lee, Purdue University
Jenna Muntz, Concordia University, Nebraska
Weston Parr, Texas A&M University
Anna Shaffer, The Pennsylvania State University
Peyton Sherron, Kansas State University
Gracie Sprague, The Ohio State University
Bobby Staudt, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College

****IMPORTANT NOTE****

Please note that NAAE XLR8 and Teachers Turn the Key program participants will be notified separately.

All special award regional winners will be recognized at the 2026 NAAE Convention, December 1-5 in New Orleans. Award winners will receive specific information regarding convention by email in the coming weeks. **Outstanding Early Career Teacher, Outstanding Agriculture Teacher, Outstanding Middle/Secondary Agricultural Education Program, and Outstanding Postsecondary Agriculture Program award winners should not take any action regarding travel, hotel, or registration arrangements until they receive further instructions from NAAE.**

If you have already pre-registered for convention, you will be reimbursed by NAAE at the conclusion of convention. Please contact Katie Wood (kwood.naae@uky.edu) to take care of your reimbursement as soon as possible.

cc: NAAE Board of Directors
State Ag Teachers' Association Presidents
State Executive Directors and Secretaries