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News Release

2026 Stars Over Iowa Winners Announced

AMES, IOWA—The 2026 Stars Over Iowa Winners were announced at the 98th Iowa FFA State Leadership Conference at Iowa State University on April 21, 2026. A Star Over Iowa was selected in each of the four different areas: Agricultural Placement, Agribusiness, Agriscience, and Agricultural Production.

The 2026 Star in Ag Placement Winner is Caleb Zuercher from the MFL MarMac FFA Chapter. Caleb is a member of the MFL MarMac FFA Chapter. His four SAE projects include Zuercher Farms, Zuercher Ag Sales, Palas Service and Repair, and Mobile Track Solutions. Through these experiences, he has developed skills in farming, agricultural sales, and mechanics. Caleb has invested 2,489 hours into his SAE projects. His responsibilities include communicating with customers, ordering parts, solving problems, and contributing to the improvement of his family's farming operation and equipment. In his workplaces, he is also responsible for diagnosing and repairing equipment and ensuring machinery is safe to operate. The skills Caleb has developed will carry over into his future career as a service technician at Mobile Track Solutions in Elkader, Iowa, as well as his continued involvement in his family's farm. Caleb was the 2025 Agricultural Mechanics Repair and Maintenance Proficiency Champion and has served two terms on the Northeast District Officer Team. After graduation, he plans to attend Hawkeye Community College, where he will double major in Diesel Technologies and Agricultural Business. Caleb is the son of Nick and Deb Zuercher. His chapter advisor is Sarah Plaht, his high school principal is Larry Meyer, and his superintendent is Tim Dugger.

Rhianna Murty of the GMG FFA Chapter is the 2026 Star in Ag Production winner. Rhianna is a member of the GMG FFA Chapter. She raises and markets Simmental and crossbred cattle. Growing up on a diversified crop and livestock farm, she gained experience raising cow-calf pairs and feeding out cattle through a beef feedlot operation. This background inspired her to start her own herd. Rhianna has grown her cattle operation to include nine cows, six replacement heifers, and three bulls. She plans to continue expanding her herd in the future. In 2025, she financed and fed out 20 head of feeder calves and plans to increase that number to 27 in 2026. Her long-term goal is to sell bulls and heifers as part of her own business while continuing to feed out cattle. She currently serves as her chapter president and is the 2026 State Beef Entrepreneurship Proficiency Award winner. After graduation, Rhianna plans to attend Iowa State University to major in Animal Science. Rhianna is the daughter of Steve and Erin Murty of Gladbrook. Her chapter advisor is Erin Murty, her high school principal is Clyde Terrance, and her superintendent is Chris Peterson.

Wyatt Kissling of the Alburnett FFA Chapter is the 2026 Star in Agribusiness. Wyatt is a member of the Alburnett FFA Chapter. For his SAE, he operates a mobile small engine repair service, specializing in the maintenance and repair of lawn mowers and small engines at customers' locations using a fully equipped, custom enclosed trailer. Wyatt's business, Bigfoot's Lawn Equipment, began in 2022 when he started acquiring, repairing, and reselling lawn mowers. His gross revenue has grown from \$4,000 in 2022 to over \$50,000 in 2025. National FFA grants have played a significant role in his success. His first grant funded the purchase of a large lot of push mowers for resale, while his second grant provided equipment, tools, and a trailer, allowing him to launch his mobile repair service. After graduation, Wyatt plans to continue expanding his business while pursuing his EMT certification as he works toward a full-time career in the fire service. Wyatt is the son of JW and Bridget Kissling. His chapter advisor is Kayla Hospodarsky, his high school principal is Thomas Trainer, and his superintendent is John Zimmerman.



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The Star in Agriscience Winner is Natalie Besler of the Beckman Catholic FFA Chapter at Dyersville. Natalie is a member of the Beckman Catholic FFA Chapter in Dyersville. Throughout her FFA involvement, she has conducted research on various agricultural issues and presented her findings at both the State and National Agriscience Fairs. Her research began with an interest in how environmental conditions affect plant growth. She studied seed storage by testing corn and soybean seeds at different temperatures, finding that room temperature produced the best growth. She also tested seed storage bags under stressors such as carbon monoxide, UV radiation, and mealworms. Expanding into freshwater systems, Natalie researched artificial reefs and determined that brown clay with a scratched texture best supported freshwater plant growth. Her current project, "*Comparative Study of Clay Texture Variability and Zebra Mussel (*Dreissena polymorpha*) Settlement on Artificial Reefs Phase II,*" builds on her prior research. She modified the clay reef design to create a hanging artificial reef, which was placed in the Mississippi River and tested against metal reefs used by the Iowa DNR. The clay reefs proved more effective in supporting zebra mussel settlement and plant growth. Through this work, Natalie has identified areas she hopes to explore further and potentially pursue as a career. She has also developed her professional communication skills, becoming a stronger speaker and writer. Natalie has been recognized as a National Agriscience Fair Top Three Finalist twice, in 2023 and 2025, and is the 2025 Iowa FFA Agriscience Plant Systems Proficiency winner. She will serve as Vice President of her FFA chapter for the upcoming year. Upon graduation in 2027, she plans to pursue a degree in Wildlife & Fisheries Management at Iowa State University. Natalie is the daughter of Alan and Jill Besler. Her chapter advisor is Dawn Mausser, her high school principal is Marcel Kielkicki, her school chaplain is Father Ley, and her superintendent is Cathy Walz.

The Stars Over Iowa program is made possible with support from Beck's Hybrids through the Iowa FFA Foundation. The National FFA Foundation sponsors cash awards for the overall star winners.

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About Iowa FFA Association

The Iowa FFA Association is a youth organization of more than 20,500 student members as part of 273 local FFA chapters across Iowa. The FFA mission 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. The Iowa FFA Association was organized by delegates from 23 schools at Iowa State College on May 17, 1929 and is an integral part of public instruction in agriculture. The Iowa Department of Education provides leadership and helps set direction for FFA as a service to local agricultural education programs. For more, visit the Iowa FFA Association online at IowaFFA.com and on social media.