



## Oral History of Illinois Agriculture

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- Abstract:** Benjamin Arteman, James Ashby, Andrew Heavner, Ann Larson, and Clayton Zwilling are the officers for the Illinois State FFA. All claimed agriculture has influenced their lives, and all except Heavner grew up on a family farm. Almost everyone in the group claimed that their high school agricultural teachers played an important role in leading them in a path of greater involvement with the FFA and influenced them greatly in their lives. Despite having to take a year off between high school and college to participate as officers, all of them are excited about the various opportunities presented to them at the state and national level. Some of these opportunities include travel throughout the state and country, chances to network and connect with peers, and the chance to bring more publicity and media attention to the FFA. They are also looking forward to visiting the local chapters and going to the National Convention so they can stay connected on both a local and national level. They described the wide array of projects and various agricultural related topics that they have been exposed to thanks to the FFA. Some of this include: crop diversification, Ag marketing and aquaculture. All five agree that the FFA is not about learning how to farm, but instead is a place for personal growth. All of the interviewees plan to go into some aspect of the agriculture business after college.

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Interview with Benjamin Arteman, James Ashby, Andrew Heavner, Ann Larson,  
and Clayton Zwilling

#ISM\_47\_FFA

Interview # 1: August 12, 2008

Interviewer: Mike Maniscalco

- Maniscalco: —microphone for you guys to hand back and forth, so if you want to just hold it somewhere down here when you're talking, that'll work out really good. We're going to start out with some real easy questions, and we'll go kind of to the more and more harder ones. Some of them, I'd like to get each person's answer—you know, if you'd just passing down—and other ones, maybe one person could answer for the group, that would be good too. If that sounds agreeable to everybody.
- Ashby: (unintelligible)
- Maniscalco: What we're going to do with the interview is we're going to enter it into some software that allows us to index it from beginning to end, like a book, and basically what's going to happen is we're going to create a database, so it will be put onto the Internet, and you will be able to search this interview, all the way through this interview, through that index, or you'll be able to search across all of our interviews. So all fifty interviews that we've done, you'll be able to search across them for every time, let's say, the word "cow" is mentioned. You'll be able to search those sorts of things as well. Does that make sense to you. Okay, so I don't know who wants to start or hold on to. Okay, today is August 12, 2008. We're sitting here with all the state officers for the State of Illinois FFA. How are you guys all doing?
- Ashby: Great.
- Zwilling: Doing good today.
- Ashby: Great.
- Maniscalco: You guys have had a really busy day out here, and you must be getting a little tired now.
- Ashby: We've been here since last Thursday in the petting zoo here, working, and we've had a good time. We've been fortunate. The weather's been really good and keeps us going here. And we'll be here until this Sunday, so...
- Maniscalco: Let's start with some real easy ones first, and we'll get into some of the harder questions later. So first, could you go down the line and say what your date of birth is, and where you were born.
- Arteman: Well, my name's Ben Arteman. I was born in Urbana, Illinois, at Covenant Medical Center, and I was born May 19 of 1990.
- Heavner: Andrew Heavner. And I was born May 19, 1988 in Belleville, Illinois.
- Zwilling: Clay Zwilling. Born May 22, 1990 in Aledo, Illinois.

- Ashby: And I'm Austin Ashby, and I was born January 23 of 1990 in Clinton, Iowa.
- Larson: Annie Larson, born in Dekalb, Illinois, on June 14, 1990.
- Maniscalco: So how many of you were born into farm—you know, grew up on farms? Show of hands? Everybody but—except for one. So maybe you could kind of give us a real brief description, each of you, of your farm, and then maybe we'll go to you and (inaudible speech) kind of you're experiencing with that.
- Arteman: Well, I'm the fourth-generation farmer in my family. My dad and my grandpa ran our family farm. We plant corn and soybeans. I also had beef cattle up until about, oh, probably fifteen, eighteen years ago. So we're mostly corn and soybeans. I plant a little bit of wheat every once in a while.
- Zwilling: I come from a cattle background. I'm a fifth-generation Shorthorn breeder, and my family's been involved in agriculture and farming basically since, I think, the dawn of the Zwilling and Lloyd family existence. But I come from a cattle background, also. I had some grandparents bring some hogs over from England. My great-grandfather was actually the first one to bring Hampshires and Land-Raised hogs to Mercer County, Illinois, and my great-grandfather also brought over Shorthorn cattle in the early 1800s and brought those over to Illinois. So I come from a farm background, primarily based with cattle and hogs, but also a small grain operation as well.
- Ashby: Well, I also come from a cattle background in Northwest Illinois. My grandfather and my uncle both raise cattle. My grandfather's been doing it—he's actually—was dairy farmer for the first few years he was in the farming industry, and he's also gotten into beef cattle now. We have a lot of cross-bred cattle. We have a commercial cow-calf herd. We raised a lot of Red Angus cattle, as well, as well as have a grain operation. We have corn, soybeans, wheat, oats, as well as hay, so we're pretty diverse in that area. And I've also raised a few Yorkshire hogs for a couple years as well, so...
- Larson: Well, I come from a fifth-generation farm as well, and we farm about 900 to 1,000 acres of owned and rented crops, including corn, soybeans, hay, and wheat. And I own a small purebred flock of Dorset ewes, and that's pretty much my background in farming.
- Heavner: And I don't come from a farm. I kind of got introduced to the whole agriculture industry from my father. He was my ag teacher in high school and really pushed me into this whole field, and probably without him, I probably wouldn't be sitting here in this interview today. So that's, I guess, how I got started into the field.
- Maniscalco: Okay, so now, having experience in agriculture, through ag education with your father, how many of your parents think you're going to go into ag education or go for agriscience in college? Would you mind going across and just saying where you're going to go to college and what exactly you're going for?
- Arteman: Well, I'm going to Southern Illinois University in Carbondale next year. I'm currently majoring in animal science and pre-vet, but that might change, so I don't know yet.
- Heavner: I am going to Southwestern Illinois College in Belleville for probably a year to get my Associate's in science, then I'm going to transfer to either SIU, U of I, or Florida, and major in ag education.

- Zwilling: I'm going to Lake Land Junior College for two years—going to be on the livestock judging team there at Lake Land, major in ag transfer at Lake Land, and then transfer to a four-year university to get a degree in ag education and possibly animal sciences double major. I want to start off being a high school agriculture teacher and also have a small herd of purebred Shorthorn cattle and show pigs. But ultimately, I'd like to be a high school ag teacher and maybe on in the future, even run for a political office later in my career. So.
- Ashby: I plan on attending Blackhawk East Junior College in Kewanee, Illinois, for my first two years, majoring in agriculture business and getting my Associate's in that, and then transferring to University of Illinois to complete my major in ag business, get my Bachelor's.
- Larson: Right now, I'm planning on going to Iowa State University, but that could possibly change. No matter where I go, I'm going to attend a four-year university to major in agricultural communications, hopefully be a public relations representative at an ag company, and maybe get a minor in curriculum planning so that in the future, I could work for Farm Bureau or Extension Services, in like ag literacy or ag awareness.
- Maniscalco: So now, with most of you growing up on farms (inaudible speech), I'm sure you didn't (inaudible speech) getting coddled. I'm sure you guys all had chores. What were the good chores?
- Zwilling: Well, for me, I'd have to say I always enjoyed going out and feeding the cattle, and my real passion's with the show pigs, so every day that I get to go up—get up and wake up and go out and feed and wash show pigs out, those were the best chores for me. When I was younger, I really enjoyed baling hay, but as I get older, I find that that's not so much fun anymore; it's more labor-intensive and a little tiring. But I think just working with the livestock in general is probably my favorite chore.
- Arteman: Well, now, I don't guess you'd call it a chore, but driving the tractor is probably the best. I have lots of chores, from walking beans to scooping bins, but I guess driving the tractor is my favorite part of working on the farm. As Clay said, I like baling hay, too, even though it is labor intensive. I've baled hay for the past three summers, so I like it.
- Heavner: I'd have to say my favorite chores probably came in the wintertime. I come from an area where we get quite a bit of snow, and I kind of enjoyed being out in the snow and feeding the cattle. We have our cattle out in the fields in the wintertime, so I kind of enjoy going out and having a little fun and doing chores at the same time. So my favorite time to do chores is probably in the wintertime, feeding cattle and working with the livestock. So.
- Larson: My favorite chore would probably come around early spring, and it's right around lambing season, and barn checks were definitely the most fun, because you'd walk out there and sometimes there wouldn't be anything, but more times than not, you'd see a lamb or something good that you could help, and that's always really exciting, to get something new on your farm.
- Maniscalco: Now, of course, to follow that, what's the bad chores?
- Arteman: The worst chore for me is walking beans. Usually walking beans comes in the very middle of the summer and in the hottest days, and cutting volunteer corn or whatever. So that's the worst.
- Zwilling: I'd have to say the worst chore for me, most people probably don't do, but my grandpa had a very significant impact on my life and was very labor-intensive, so when I was young, and still to this day, one of the chores we have to do is take a spade out to the pasture and cut thistles.

And I remember days in the summer where I'd just go out and cut thistles all day. And the other thing is round sleeves bales in the middle of the summer when it's about 100 degrees and you're handling hot plastic hay sleeves. That gets pretty hot and can get pretty miserable at times.

Ashby: I'd have to say probably the worst chore is we have a cow-calf operation, it's probably in the springtime when all the cows are calving, and we put them in calving barns and calving pens, it's probably cleaning out the calving pens after they've calved—had a calf—is probably the worst chore for me.

Larson: I think the worst chore for me is right before showtime, you have to wash all of the lambs to get them ready to go be trimmed for show, and it's definitely an experience to wash a lamb, because they don't really appreciate it, and you only wash them right before a show, so they're pretty dirty, and they hold a lot of water, and you get pretty soaked, so it's not so much fun unless you do it with fun people. So.

Maniscalco: Great. Well, you know, there's one common thing between all of you, and that's that you're all in the FFA. So can you guys kind of tell me how you got started? Each of you probably has an individual story of how you got started in the FFA.

Arteman: Well, as I said earlier, I'm a fourth-generation farmer in my family, so naturally I took an ag class when I got to high school. My ag teacher had a pretty big impact on my life. And I was kind of shy until he made me do the public speaking contest as a freshman. And after that, after I actually got second place in the state of Illinois as a freshman in the Creed Speaking Contest, and after that, I opened up and knew that I could, you know, go out there and meet people. So it had that positive impact, and it's opened me up, allowed me to become more confident myself. And last year, I ran for section president and was elected Section Sixteen president and thought that I should continue on this year with a major state office, so I ran and was elected this year. So that's my career.

Heavner: In June every year, the state FFA elects their new officers, and the week after that, the ag teachers have their yearly conference in Springfield or Decatur or wherever they choose to have it that year. I remember when I was about ten years old, I was at the ag teacher's conference, sitting in the hot tub with the major state officer team, talking to them all, and they were like, "Oh, are you going to be in FFA when you're older?" and at the time, I was really unsure, didn't really know what to say, because I wasn't from an ag field. And as I got older, got into eighth grade, started taking an ag class with my dad, I really enjoyed it, and he kind of reminded me when those state officers were talking to me about it and how I should probably take it in high school. And that's kind of—was the deciding factor. My dad kind of pushed me into it, and then I had just been around it all my life, and I kind of just felt right at home.

Zwilling: My story's pretty similar to Ben's. Coming from a farm background, it seemed only natural to join the FFA, even though FFA is much more than farming. But my brother also had a big influence. He joined FFA when he was a freshman, and he was a great role model. He was the section president and was very competitive when he was in FFA, so I really looked up to him. When he was a senior in high school, I was a freshman, so when I joined FFA, he was actually the chapter president, so I had someone there to look up to. My advisor also had a very significant part in my FFA career in pushing me and helping me be as successful as I was and where I am today. Actually, two weeks before elections, my ag teacher told me that he was going to be moving into a different field of agriculture, and so that just really kind of—it

was—I was proud of him for moving on, but it was also kind of disheartening for me at the same time. But he's always there to help me out, and I think all of us can say the same of our ag teachers. But my FFA time is basically based on the influence of my brother and my ag advisor.

Ashby: I'd say how I best got started is, once again, my grandfather is a major influence in my life, was always telling me how he was in FFA in the late fifties and early sixties and how it's changed so much since then and kind of encouraged me to want to be a part of that, as well as, as I got into junior high, I had a lot of older members that I looked up to that kind of pushed me to join the organization when I got into high school. And when I went to that first freshman contest, met some of the—a couple of the section presidents at that time, and a few of the major state officers later in the year, and they kind of pushed me to want to be in the position I am today, and I kind of just picked it up and ran with it and haven't looked back since. So.

Larson: My story's a little bit different. At my school, when you get all your core classes done, you can take one more selective class, and since I did live on a farm and thought I'd give FFA a try, so I took an intro to ag class, just the basics of agriculture. And once I took that, I was pretty much hooked on the FFA and the idea of agriculture. So it was really that first class, and my sophomore year, I got a new ag teacher in my school, and she's really helped me out a lot, so that's what really kept me in it after I took that first ag class.

--: (unintelligible)

Maniscalco: Oh, we're losing battery.

(break in recording)

Maniscalco: Okay, so each of you are now state officers. That's a lot of responsibility and a big job. Why did you take this on, you know? I mean, you could just do your projects and (inaudible speech) and become—what was it that made you want to do that extra stuff?

Zwilling: You want to start, Ben?

Arteman: Sure. We've all graduated high school, so this isn't interfering with our classes this year, but we are required to take a year off and put off college for a year. With this comes a lot of responsibility—we're not home but every two weeks on a weekend, which, you know, that's kind of hard, but it's definitely worth it. I know the networking that we get out of this, the people we meet, the opportunities we're presented with are absolutely amazing, and the scholarship opportunities are pretty nice as well. I'm not going to have to pay for very much of my schooling at Southern, so that's pretty awesome.

Heavner: A little bit of like what Ben said, and I think all of us can agree, is we're going to have so many different opportunities after our year as a state officer, just from people that we meet, whether it's jobs or school or whatever, or we're just—you know, it's endless. And I mean, a lot of people look at it as the opportunity to meet people and all that. I think a little bit of it for me also was I had a lot of people who really wanted me to run for state office and become a state officer, and a lot of it, I think, was I didn't want to let them down, and I felt I kind of owed it to them to run. So a little bit of the opportunity, and then I just didn't want to let my friends and family down, and my peers, and everyone around me in my community.

Zwilling: It was tough for me to make the decision to run for state office. I had the opportunity to go to Lake Land College next fall and try out for the state 4-H Livestock Judging Team and have a

lot of opportunities with that. But when it came down to it, I realized that this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and when I started thinking about the reason I wanted to run, it was because the FFA has had such a large impact on my life, and how I wanted to give back to the organization that had given so much to me. And I thought as a state officer, I could influence, you know, members and people outside the agriculture industry as well in a positive way, talking about what our organization does. And I think the others can agree that this organization has had a significant impact on our lives, and we would not be the people we are today without the things we've learned and the experiences we've had. So when I finally made the decision, I went in with the mentality and the idea that I was going to do this for the members and I was going to do this so that other people could experience what I'd experienced in the FFA.

- Ashby: A little bit of the same—not quite as much with me, though—is that it's just that unbelievable drive to want to influence others as I was influenced growing up as an FFA member—as a younger member and even as a kid—by people in the agricultural industry, and other FFA members, and other leaders of the organization. Just, you know, I was influenced so much and impacted so much by so many different people, and this was my one opportunity to try and give back to them and try and influence others as they influenced me. And that was one of the biggest things that, you know, made me want to take on these responsibilities is that, you know, I had that unbelievable drive to want to impact other people, and this was the best shot—you know, the biggest thing you could do to do that.
- Larson: I don't know really what hasn't been said here, but really, having the opportunity just to impact at least one member the way we were impacted during our careers, just taking on the opportunity to do that is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. And just to have the chance to talk to members every day and see what's going on in the state of Illinois in agriculture and ag education is amazing. And I know that we get personal opportunities: we get to go to China and experience agriculture there, and we get a lot of opportunities through colleges and stuff. But I know that one of the biggest things for me is just going up and being able to talk one-on-one with members about their experiences and what they're up to, and really, that's why I did it, is just to connect with people, and like the way that leaders in this organization in the past has connected with me. So really just the opportunity to connect to members.
- Maniscalco: And following off of what you just said, Annie, what—have you gotten an opportunity to talk to (inaudible speech) so far?
- Zwilling: We've had a few activities that we've done here recently. The second week of July, we spent an entire week in Washington, D.C. with members from Illinois FFA on what's called the Heritage and Cooperatives trip. To basically sum that up, it's an awards program for chapters that fill out what's called the Heritage and Cooperative Award. The Heritage Award is an award that the Illinois Farm Bureau and its affiliates give out for chapters that demonstrate heritage—things like flag-raising, teaching the public how to fold flags. Cooperative is basically an FFA chapter that works its own cooperative or has a cooperative with another agriculture business. That was one opportunity we got to meet with members.
- Just recently, we returned from FFA Leadership Camp. There's about 300 members there that we got to talk to and visit with on a one-on-one basis. And then I know three of the officers went to ICCCTSO, which is a conference for all the career technical organizations in Illinois, where they got to meet with other members. And while they were there, Austin and I were in

Washington, D.C. once again for State Presidents' Conference, in which we got to talk to a lot of other presidents from other states and got to visit with a lot of other FFA members from other states and talk about what they did in their states as well. So.

- Maniscalco: So you haven't really gotten to hit the ground yet and meet everybody in Illinois (inaudible speech). What are the things you're looking forward to? What are some of the events.
- Arteman: Well, I hate to say it, but every one of us—there's 17,000 members in the state of Illinois, so every one of us isn't going to meet every member. But here in September, we're going to start doing what we call chapter visits, where one of us will go to a section, like I'm going to visit Section Nineteen for my first week, and during the visit, myself and the section officers go and visit all the schools in that section. So that gives us an opportunity to see how the organization works at the chapter level or at the school level, and we could interact with the members that you wouldn't normally see at some of the major state events. So I'm looking forward to chapter visits.
- Heavner: I think that there's a lot of things throughout this year that we can really look forward to, and my teammates can probably vouch for me when I say this, that I'm a pretty competitive person at heart. And my chapter—we go to a few state CDEs, but I'm excited because I'm going to get to go to all the state CDEs and watch and see all the chapters and a lot of them compete at the state level and see that shine in those kids' eyes whenever they're competing and whenever they're trying to win that first place in the state contest. So I'm kind of looking forward to that a little bit, but there's a lot of other things that are on our plates that I think that we can look forward to also.
- Zwilling: Similar to Andrew, I'm really looking forward to the state contest because there's a lot of FFA members there we get to talk to. The one that might be slightly different, and it's really kind of sad to think about, is the next year's state FFA convention. We've got a lot of time and a lot of things to do between now and then for sure, but next June, when the new officers are elected and we retire, I think that's going to be—the state FFA convention is kind of the big highlight of the year, kind of the final hurrah, as you would say, for us. And I'm looking forward to that in a bittersweet kind of way. It'll be the end of our term, but also looking back, and I'm curious to see how our year's going to go, and looking back, hopefully we made a positive influence in agriculture and in our members' lives. And so I think when all is said and done, I think that'll probably be the best experience or the one I'm looking most forward to.
- Ashby: Well, as Ben said, I'm definitely looking forward to all the chapter visits and getting to meet the kids from a lot of different schools in the state of Illinois as well as getting to see all the other schools in the state to kind of compare how they're different from the school I went to, and it would be kind of really neat to see that and get to meet a lot of members. But I'm also looking forward to the National FFA Convention. I get to meet people from a lot of different states there. I think it's always cool to meet somebody from—you know, kids from all over the nation as well as from Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. And you're kind of leaders at National Convention as well. We're National Convention delegates as officers, so we vote on some of the issues at the national FFA level, which is very exciting for us, and I get to meet a lot of people from all over the country.
- Larson: Well, I'm going to say National Convention is what I'm looking forward to. Definitely meeting—there's a half a million members in the United States, and obviously there's 50,000 at National Convention. And going around and talking to people and seeing how agriculture in

Washington State is different from agriculture in Illinois is awesome, I mean, and urban agriculture versus rural. And just talking to people and having conversations is something that I really like to do. But also, I'm looking forward to the conferences in the spring, like Farm Bureau Youth Conference and Made for Excellence Conference, which is for beginning members. And just going there and seeing the excitement that the members hold, just to be at the conference and be with other members is really exiting for me. And I know we were on Heritage, and we were tired, and we had just started, and they had thrown a lot of stuff at us, and as soon as you got on those buses to drive, I don't know, it was like sixteen hours to Washington, D.C—once you got on the bus, their enthusiasm automatically sparked yours, and I know that's a big thing for me. So I definitely like meeting members, I guess.

Maniscalco: Now, you know, you guys are kind of at the top tier of what's going on in the FFA, but I want you to think back to when you started, okay, to those first couple months. What were your thoughts? You know, and here you're picking projects—what project do you pick (inaudible speech). Try and pull me back.

Arteman: Well, my supervised agriculture experience project was pretty easy for me to pick. You know, I loved working on the farm with my dad and grandpa, and so naturally I just started up my own operation. Also, I did have a couple of choices of some other things I could do. We have chickens, so I could have done the poultry production book, or I also was going to start up a tree farm and do a nursery operations book. But ultimately, I just stuck with the classic diversified crop production. It was a pretty easy decision for me. But as I started into it, it's a pretty hard book to handle, and all the marketing and everything that goes with it. But that was my decision.

Heavner: I would have to say that my project was kind of chosen for me. At my high school, we have a pretty big aquaculture area, and my dad kind of said, "Since you've been doing this for years before you were in high school, you're going to do it as a project in high school, and you're going to be competitive with it." And I was pretty competitive with it. Besides the aquaculture, I got involved in the ag sales, where I would work in the back of a grocery store, unloading trucks, moving meat and vegetables and produce all around the store to where they need to go, and those were basically my projects, not really a production-based project like everybody else, but I loved them, so.

Zwilling: My projects were also pretty logical, I thought, when I joined as a freshman. I did beef production, swine production, and diversified livestock production, but then I also did one that I think a lot more people could get more involved in, and it's an area that I think is very important, and it's agriculture communications. I had an agriculture communications book, and basically that was my supervised ag experience. And I kept records on any speech I gave. Any time I'd do an interview or I'd do a radio spot, I kept records about that. Every time I'd give a speech about agriculture, it went in my ag communications book.

But also, when I was a freshman, I didn't really think about all the other opportunities involved with the career development events. I was set on doing livestock judging, and that's the way it was going to be. But I'd have to say my biggest motivation to do other things was actually a girl in my class—we were competing for the Star Green Hand place, so I did about every contest I could do as a freshman, trying to beat her—kind of some friendly competition there. So I ended up doing land-use crops, all sorts of other contests to broaden my horizons and open up opportunities, and I think that really helped—just getting out there and trying new things.

- Ashby: Well, honestly, I had no idea when I started as a freshman that I would be nearly as active or involved as I was or as I am. And it was kind of also simple for me to pick my project—big beef operation, so of course, I had beef production, and a lot of crops as well. So I had a lot of books that went in relation to the crops that we raised and things like that. But as far as getting involved, my ag advisor is kind of an intimidating guy. He was an all-state wrestler when he was in high school, and he's a pretty big guy and kind of intimidating, so he kind of pushed me to get involved and kind of threw a few threats at me, but you know, nothing serious. But I had no idea I would be this involved, and he really is a significant impact on my life as far as getting me involved when I was a young member and making me realize that, you know, there's a lot of different opportunities out there that come with the organization, and making me realize that this was definitely the organization to be involved in in high school, and it was going to take me places, so here I sit.
- Larson: You asked what we were thinking when we get involved that first couple months, and honestly, I don't know if I knew what I was thinking. I really got involved—the ag teacher that I had my freshman year is now not teaching ag, and probably wasn't the most influential person on me. But after that year, I guess my first couple months really in FFA would have been my sophomore year when we got our new ag teacher. And she really pushed me. I had started a book my freshman year, and she pushed me to close it out and really continue on. And I had a sheep production SAE and then diversified crop production, but I had placement, unlike Ben, so really for mine, all I did was ran the tractors on my family farm and helped work them and work the ground, and that was my SAEs.
- Maniscalco: Great. Now, this is kind of the obvious question, but what does FFA mean to you, since you've gotten to this point in your careers.
- Arteman: The common misconception about the FFA is that it teaches you to be a farmer, it teaches you to grow crops, it teaches to you to raise livestock, but that's not the case. The three components of our mission statement are premier leadership, personal growth, and career success. And the FFA teaches you to be a better leader; it teaches you to communicate better. It's just the best way for someone to break out of their shell, to step outside their comfort zone, to open up, and to meet new people. I guess I probably covered it all for you guys, but here, I'll send it down.
- Maniscalco: You don't have to say anything if you don't want to say anything.
- Zwilling?: Well, Ben pretty much summed it up, what it means to me, but I guess if there's one thing, one visual or one experience that would sum up FFA for me, it'd be standing at National Convention, watching the opening ceremonies and having the lights come on in the convention center and seeing 50,000 blue jackets stand up and say our—during our opening ceremonies part—our motto. And it's just really great, and that's probably—just seeing all those jackets and having that experience is just a tremendous experience, and that's what would sum up my FFA career, is just seeing that and seeing that one organization can be so powerful and influence so many lives. I think that's really what FFA is all about.
- Ashby: I think probably what FFA means to me the most is opportunities. It's the opportunity to get out there and meet somebody new; it's the opportunity to better yourself as a person. I mean, the opportunity to better someone else's life or make an impact on their life. I think a lot of times, you know, Ben said that the common misconception is it's all about production agriculture, it's all about farming, and it's not; it's so much more. It's about developing

yourself as a leader and preparing yourself for the future and giving you those opportunities that not a lot of kids get to have.

Larson: If I had to sum up FFA in one word, I would definitely say that it would be “growth.” I’ve seen so many members just open up from their freshman to senior year—and I believe that I was one of them—go from maybe a more shy and reserved person to an outgoing person who now can really talk to anybody about maybe what they believe in. And not only was it just growth, but having the opportunity to grow, as Austin said. And it’s unlike any organization in that no matter what you want to do, what level of involvement you want to get into, there’s opportunities for all of the members. And I know that I grew little by little, just taking that next step to be a chapter officer, a section officer, a section president, and now a state officer. And even now, in this position, there’s still opportunities to grow. And that’s what I really see the FFA as.

Maniscalco: You know, you guys are—Andrew, I’m sorry, did you want to say—?

Heavner: No, they all hit it basically pretty good.

Maniscalco: You know, there’s so many different (inaudible speech) for where you can go with agriculture and where you could go with (inaudible speech). . What do you personally think you’re going to do after college?

Arteman: Well, after college—I know I said that I would like to get a degree in animal science—I want to be a veterinarian, large animal veterinarian, and open up my own practice. But also, I’d like to possibly maybe double-major or just get a minor or something in communications—in ag communications—to spread the word about agriculture. You know, agriculture employs 25 percent of the jobs in Illinois. It’s such a diverse organization, and nobody understands. You know, I’d just like to use my speaking abilities, the skills I’ve used from the FFA, and share that with everyone. So primarily, veterinarian, but on the side, a communicator.

Heavner: I would probably have to say if I do end up going for ag education, probably go to school, get a job, raise a family, and just live life, take it easy.

Zwilling: That’s a typical Andrew response. I’d have to say—I kind of hit on this earlier—but ultimately, I want to be a high school ag teacher because, as we all said, at some point, our ag teachers had a significant impact on our lives, and not just on ours, but other students’ as well, and I kind of want to give that back to—I want to be what my ag teacher was for me, and that’s someone who influences lives. But I also want to have a small livestock operation on the side as a hobby—keep me out of trouble when I have down time from being an ag teacher.

And as I said, possibly when I get older, I’m highly considering maybe trying to run for political office, because I think we need people with strong agricultural backgrounds that can be involved in politics so that there’s a better concept and a better grasp of what agriculture is, because it’s such an important industry not only to Illinois, and not only to America itself—to the entire world. I mean, a nation that can feed its people is a powerful nation, and that’s why America is—the reason we are today. So I think that’s something that’s important to have, someone that comes from an agricultural background in leadership positions.

Ashby: Well, I’m sure the other four can attest to this, but I’m kind of a calm and collected kind of guy—roll with the punches, go with the flow. So you know, I’m not real sure what I’m going to do after this is all over, after college is over. I kind of just live life one day at a time—that’s

- kind of always been my motto—so I'm just kind of leaving the doors open and hoping something good comes along.
- Larson: Well, after college, I'll get an ag communications degree for public relations and work for some sort of ag firm, hopefully like Monsanto or Grillmark, and just handle all their public affairs, because I don't know if you've picked it up during the interview, but I really like getting out there and talking to people about agriculture. Ultimately, I'd like to get a minor in curriculum planning so that maybe I could go into Farm Bureau or Extension Services and work with developing ag literacy curriculum and things that ag teachers could use in their classrooms to better inform their students, so that those students can go out and really push agriculture awareness.
- Ashby: Andrew ( speech).
- Heavner: This week, I've been kind of messing around with the hogs, too, and I think after I get done and I get a little more acquainted with the livestock industry, I'd kind of perhaps like to get a few hogs and raise my family around some livestock, too. So I forgot to throw that in there earlier.
- Zwilling: So maybe if I have livestock, I can sell some to Andrew and make a lot of money off him.
- Maniscalco: Now, a little earlier, I had an interview with , and this is something I was thinking about, and ( speech) discussed it a little bit, but that in the FFA, women really taking a very high role, especially, you know, ( speech), more so than in real life. You know, I was wondering if maybe you could kind of talk about that, especially Annie, I guess, (inaudible speech).
- Ashby: We'll let Annie start.
- Larson: Well, I guess since 1969, women were allowed into the FFA, and there are many different roles that women can play. And I don't think I see much discrimination at all in the FFA organization towards women. And I really think it is a place for everyone. You can find your niche. I think it's a little, actually, less discriminatory than other organizations, just because women don't have a role that they have to play. As you can see, I did diversified crop production just as Ben did diversified crop production. And really, you can do what you want to do. They're just as competitive. And I don't know, I think it gives it a little bit of an edge.
- Ashby: Well, it's amazing, I think, that in just, you know, forty years in the organization how they've grown to such a strong influence on the organization and have a strong impact on in and really take a lot of leadership positions. You know, I think the percentages are very close in the guy-to-girl ratio in the organization now. If not, there's more girls in the organization than there is guys, you know. It could be that way now. So it's very, very interesting to look at some of the statistics and see how they've really grown.
- Zwilling: Well, I think Annie covered everything pretty well. The only thing I'd add is that I think the reason our organization is so diverse is because the fact is, no matter where we come from, no matter what background, no matter what gender we are, no matter what race, religion, whatever, we're all FFA members, and I think that's what this organization really, really strives for. And that's why people want to join. I think that's why our organization is 500,000 members strong is because that when you're wearing a blue jacket, you're no different than any other person wearing a blue jacket. We're all just FFA members, and it doesn't matter where you come from or what you think, we're all FFA members, and we all support agriculture.

- Heavner: I guess the only thing that really would stand out in my mind is that it seems like everywhere, women are, you know, being more involved in almost everything, in the FFA and any other club in schools and ever—you know. So I think that's really good, and we try to give these young ladies every opportunity that they can to become leaders so that they can grow and they can be successful in their future careers.
- Arteman: You know, as Annie said, she was in diversified crop production (inaudible speech) area, just as I was. When I was a junior, I was competing for Star Farmer for my district. I was up against four girls for the Star Farmer position. You know, it's not any different being a girl as opposed to a guy. I think the ratio, I think it is 55 percent boys and 45 percent girls, so we're almost even. And there really is no difference, as Clay said. They're still wearing a jacket. I mean, it doesn't matter—we're wearing slacks and they're wearing skirts, but we're still wearing a jacket, so.
- Maniscalco: That's really a pretty cool thing (inaudible speech) Now, you have quite the year ahead of you. What's the one thing you (inaudible speech) walk away and say I made that change in the FFA or I (inaudible speech) platform (inaudible speech)?
- Arteman: Wow. Well, a lot of what we're trying to do this year is work on our website. I know that's more of a minor thing, but we're trying to make it more member-friendly. It looks really professional, and it's more like a business website. I'd like to make it more member-friendly. But also, there's a couple different processes that we go through, leading up to becoming a state officer, and I like to do a little work on some of those, refine them a little bit more. But you know, we all have that push to influence members, and that's the main thing—influence as many as I can.
- Heavner: In June, when we were elected, Mr. Craft asked us a pretty similar question: when we are done, what do we want to be able to walk away and say, We made that happen? And I think one thing that personally I would like to go away and say, you know, I did that, is I would like to see—us, as an officer team, we set goals—I'd like to see us accomplish all those goals, you know, whether it's membership or an application. We talk about how we want to increase membership all the time, but also something that we've talked about, not so much in this interview, but at the office or in a hotel room, is how we want to get more FFA members active in applications and scholarships. I want to be able to say at the end of the year that more students filled out those applications than in past years, and so they have more opportunities for the future, they have more scholarship money, they have more chances for success on the national level. And that's something that I'd like to walk away and see happen in June.
- Zwilling: One thing that I know really personal to me, but as a team we've kind of set aside and said, This is something we want to do is project our image to the public as more than just production and farming—and not just FFA, but agriculture as a whole. And I think that's critical. I realize that in our one year, we're not going to hit every person out there, we're not going to change a whole bunch of lives, we're not going to change a whole bunch of mindsets about agriculture. But if we take one step, two steps, maybe just three steps, in the right direction, trying to get people to understand what agriculture and our organization is about, I would walk away saying that we were a successful team, just trying to inform the people about what FFA and agriculture is.
- The other thing that I would say is if one member comes up to me and says, “You made a significant impact on my life,” I know that as an FFA member and as a leader in our

organization that we did something right as a team and that I did something right and that we have influenced lives throughout our organization, and we have made better people that will be out in the—not only in the agriculture industry but in the world, representing a great organization and representing this industry.

Ashby: One thing I think I'd like to see out of the year is—probably kill two birds with one stone here is—you know, I look out there, and I see a lot of kids who aren't involved in the FFA but are still heavily involved in agriculture, that have great potential to be involved in the organization. And I think the—you know, one thing, I speak for all of us when I say that we'd like to get them involved and help them become members. This past year, we had a twenty-eight-year membership high. We edged over 17,000 members. You know, I think this year, you know, it'd be really cool to make it twenty-nine year membership high and, you know, keep increasing membership throughout the state and giving more and more kids the opportunities that we had.

And I mean, I know there's kids in ag classes out there that aren't FFA members, so I'd like to see as many kids as possible become those members, and as well as what Clay said, if I have—you know, people don't understand how it feels when someone comes up to you and tells you that you made an influence and made a difference in their life. And if someone comes up to me—you know, if I get one member to come up to me and say that this year, then we know we did something right as a team and as individuals. And so that's, you know, something big that I'm looking for out of my year.

Larson: Well, I guess I just have a couple things. Actually, on the national level, I won't get into too many details, but we have a chance to change the whole national FFA. Our state team has kind of taken it upon ourselves, along with a couple other states, to give smaller states the opportunity to be heard on the national level, and I'm really looking forward to National Convention and trying to get that passed so that other people have the same opportunities that we, the bigger states, have, as far as voting and getting heard.

Also, just here on the state level, we get a lot of opportunities to talk to schools that don't have FFA chapters and administrations that don't have FFA in their schools, and I would really like to see us, especially—well, me personally, but the whole team in an entirety—really go out there and try to start new chapters, because you can only get so many new members from a community, but it's tapping those communities that don't have an FFA program and a chance for members to get involved.

Maniscalco: Okay, so now, what makes FFA in Illinois special?

Arteman: Well, in Illinois, we're the eighth-largest state in membership, but I believe that you can really—it really shows at the national level. When we go to the National Convention as delegates, we're the most prepared—and I'm not just trying to brag here. But we have such a great state staff that prepare us with all the amendments and all the national issues that it's just amazing. When you get there and you see some of the states—I'm not trying to bash on any other states—but when you see some of the other states that don't really know what the amendment is being proposed, or they don't have all that information, and we are prepared with all that. And I think the level at which we are involved as state officers with the workings of our state is absolutely amazing. You know, I know some of the officers from other states don't even have the roles of some of our section officers. So I think it's pretty awesome being in the position we are in in this state. So.

- Heavner: Like Ben said, nationally, we are one of the more prepared states as far as issues and things at National Convention. But something else—we do a lot of work with the state legislature. We are very involved with the state capitol, and we try to push for funding for different CTSOs and our own ag education line item, and I think that's one thing that's unique about Illinois agriculture and the job we're supposed to do. We do a lot of PR work, but also, we try to push for our funding from the state government, which is something that not a lot of state associations do. So I think that's something that's unique with our state.
- Zwilling: Well, this year's state fair theme is "A Family Tradition." I think if I could sum up Illinois FFA in one thing, that's a tradition, and that's a tradition of excellence. Because Illinois FFA, I mean, ever since we were chartered, has been very well respected. A lot of really great things have come from the Illinois FFA. And like I said, it's a tradition, and it's a longstanding tradition, and it's a tradition that's going to keep continuing to grow and drive. And it's just that fact that Illinois—I mean, Illinois is an agricultural state, whether some people believe it or not—but it's a huge agriculture state. And the thing is, I mean, we have a longstanding tradition of pride in Illinois, and we have such great people, and I think that's what really drives the Illinois FFA is that the people and the passion that we have in Illinois, and I think that's what really make Illinois stand out from the FFA standpoint.
- Ashby: One thing that I've always said that has to make Illinois FFA stand out a little bit is the ties we have with the communities—the ties our organization has with the communities. You know, I go to conferences and convention and things like that and meet people from other states, and they talk about how they don't get any support from people in their community and they don't get any help from people in their community, and it shocks me. It really does, because you think about coming back to Illinois, and you know, all the community members are very supportive of the organization. They're always willing to donate money or lend a helping hand on a Saturday or do anything like that. And I think that goes from, you know, all over the state, clear from the Northwest corner, where I'm from, all the way down to the southeast corner. I mean, it's everywhere in Illinois. The community involvement is just unreal, from what I've seen, and they're always willing to help you out and do whatever it takes to help you become a success.
- Larson: I think we can break it all the way down to just the chapter member level, and those students in those chapters are so active, comparatively. There's a lot of other larger state organizations that the chapter will just pay the dues across the board, and they're a member, but how active are they? And you can see it in the competitiveness of all of our record book competitions and everything. We have nine national finalists. So I mean, our national level, that's huge. And it really is an honor to see all of these kids just do so well at any competition, contest, record books, everything. You can just see it in the way they are driven to compete against each other. And also, at the end of the day, after they've competed and done the record books, they're talking in the lobby of whatever they're competing at, and you can just see it, the camaraderie and the competition here in Illinois is, I think, almost unmatched.
- Maniscalco: Okay, now you guys are (inaudible speech). What's the one thing that you want to leave in this interview for the new guy?
- Arteman: For the person that's taking our position?
- Maniscalco: Just somebody who's just entered it.

- Arteman: Oh, just entered the FFA. Take advantage of every opportunity you're presented with. I guess that's everybody's answer here. (laughter) But there's so many opportunities in the FFA, and if you don't do that initial contest or that initial conference when you're a freshman, that's not going to help you to break out of your shell any sooner. But I know—I guess I speak for everybody when I say, "Take advantage of every opportunity," because they're endless. I mean, you don't want to miss the things that you can get out of it. So.
- Heavner: I guess the piece of advice I'd like to give, and I say it all the time, is, Whatever you do, have fun with it, and work hard on it.
- Zwilling: Well, outside of taking every opportunity—this kind of coincides with that—it's, Go out and meet people, because, I mean, you can go to a conference with 300 people, but if you're hanging out with two people from your chapter, that's—I mean, that's fine, but you're not going to get to meet new people. And that's something I'm really passionate about; I love communicating and talking with other people. If there's one thing that I loved about this organization, it was making new friendships, meeting new people—which goes into just taking opportunity as it comes. It's just like life. This organization is just like life: take every opportunity that is there and live it to the fullest.
- Ashby: One of my big things that I think I'd like to—piece of advice I'd like to leave—is probably just, Be yourself and let it come natural. I mean, there are so many different things you can do in the organization, and it's so diverse. Don't think that you have to be somebody that you're not just to fit in with the crowd. I mean, there's something for everybody in the organization, and if you're not a good public speaker, that's okay. You know, there's different contests you can compete in. There's something for everybody; there really is. You know, my piece of advice is, Just let it come natural. Whatever it is you're good at, just let it come to you and just be yourself.
- Larson: Well, along with taking all of the opportunities, when you do take the opportunity, dive into it headfirst; give it 100 percent. I know that, looking back, there's probably some things that I could have worked harder out, and I probably now wish I did—a couple of contests that I wish I would have really given that extra effort and see what happened. Because unless you do it, you're never going to know how you did, and unless you gave 100 percent, you're not showing your full potential. So whatever you do, dive into it, and really take it on as your own.
- Zwilling: There's one thing I'd also like to say, is that there are a lot of different activities and competitions that you can have in the FFA, and even when success doesn't come to you in the form of a plaque or a trophy, don't get discouraged, and keep trying, because eventually, good things will come your way.
- Maniscalco: Thank you very much.
- All: Thank you.
- Maniscalco: I have one more form for you guys to fill out. Thank you for spending so much time with us.
- Larson: Yeah, no problem.
- Ashby: Well, thank you.
- Ashby: Thanks a lot.
- Maniscalco: This just releases the interview to the museum (inaudible speech). I'll take the microphone.

FFA  
(end of interview)

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