

25 Years Later FFA Still Tapping State Legislative Experience

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Special Sections Editor

HARRISBURG, Pa. — It started with a passing conversation 25 years ago between former FFA adviser William Erikson and Sam Hayes, who was a state representative at the time — “what can we do to expand the FFA experience?”

Out of that conversation, an idea took root. Why not bring FFA members to Harrisburg to learn the citizen role in the legislative process?

Conversations continued with Larry Redding at the state Department of Education and then agriculture teacher Russell Redding, and ultimately with state FFA leadership. And from those ideas, the State Legislative Leadership Conference (SLLC) was born.

Now, 25 years later, FFA members still travel to Harrisburg to learn about the legislative process and meet their elected officials.

On Tuesday morning, the Pennsylvania FFA Association took time to look back at the history and celebrate the evolution of the conference to its format today.

Hayes, who was state secretary of agriculture in the Tom Ridge/Mark Schweiker administrations, talked about the importance of FFA members remaining involved in the legislative process. He quoted William Penn.

“Governments, like clocks, go from the motion men give them,” he said.

“We have to become involved,” Hayes said.

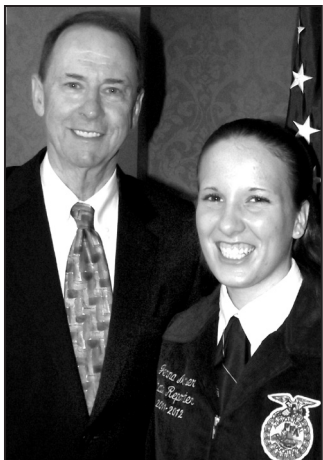
Since the start of the program, thousands of students have come to Harrisburg as part of the SLLC. During Hayes’ remarks to the group, he challenged them to take the opportunity to make a difference in the legislative process.

Matt Dodson, state FFA chaplain, said that during this past weekend FFA members re-created the legislative process. Conference participants were sorted into their own version of the General Assembly, debating several agriculture issues that now stand before the state legislature.

Dodson said the experience brings parliamentary procedure to life. For members who enjoy the formalized decision-making process, it is a popular part of the conference. The issues tackled by the students included agricultural education, property rights and farmland preservation.

Mark Anderson, Elizabethtown FFA chapter adviser, was a member of the state officer team when the SLLC concept was crafted. Looking around, he said that day’s event is a far cry from the event he participated in. The schedule has additional educational components and promotes community service as well.

Hayes summarized the conference as taking the FFA motto — “Learning to do, doing to learn, earning to live, and living to serve” — and bringing it to life in the legislative process.



Sam Hayes poses with FFA state reporter Jenna Moser. Hayes was one of the legislative leaders who helped to develop the State Legislative Leadership Conference concept.



Photos by Charlene Shupp Espenshade

More than 400 FFA members descended on the state capitol this week to learn about the legislative process.

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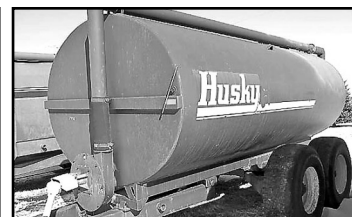
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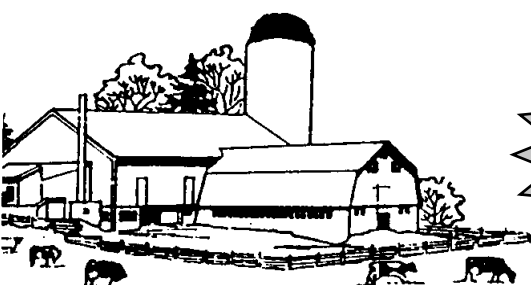
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