

## 10.28.2020 COVID-19 Updates

### Agricultural Educators

The events that are affecting every corner of the world are most certainly being felt here at home. It is times like these that we cannot underestimate the collective power of working together and supporting each other. To that point, we want to thank all of our teachers for their courage and strength as agricultural educators around the state tirelessly work to develop ways to engage our students in new learning environments and manage our personal lives during these extraordinary times. Our goal is to ensure that you — our agricultural education community — remains informed and abreast of all decisions regarding future programming for you and your students.

As we continue to navigate these uncertain times, the following decisions were made by the COVID Task Force and affirmed by the board of directors and will directly impact our teachers, students and families.

**As of 10/28/2020, New York Agricultural Education and FFA have made difficult decisions to change the delivery format of several upcoming events, including the 96<sup>th</sup> New York State FFA Convention.**

We have based these decisions on the following critical factors:

- Our prioritized concern for our teachers, students, and community health and safety;
  - Limited ability for schools to approve travel or fiscal expenditures;
  - Closures of New York's K-12 public schools and Universities in our state's hot spots; and
  - New York State's current ban on all events over 50 people in place for the foreseeable future
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- All District, Sub-State, and State Leadership Development Events (LDE) and Career Leadership Develop Events (CDE) scheduled for January, February March, and May of 2021 will be transitioned to a virtual format. This decision has been made to ensure that 100% of New York FFA chapters have the ability to safely participate and advance through each level of the local, area, and state level competitions while adhering to fiscal, health, and travel restrictions across the state.
  - The 96<sup>th</sup> New York State FFA Convention will be held virtually in May of 2021. While the event will look different in 2021, rest assured that we will continue to celebrate agriculture's future leaders and conducting the organization's official business. By making this challenging decision now, we can plan for this experience with a renewed focused on enhanced virtual engagement for our students and supporters. New York FFA looks forward to returning to an in-person convention in 2022.

We know there will be many questions about the schedule and format of the aforementioned updates. The NY FFA staff, board leadership, and committees, continue to meet regularly and work to finalize the details of upcoming events and distribute that information to all FFA advisors. Regardless of the change in format to these activities, we look forward to providing high-quality developmental experiences this winter and spring that will help FFA members to obtain and develop transferable 21<sup>st</sup> century leadership skills.

We will use our experience from the virtual NYS FFA Convention in 2020 and additional experience from the virtual National FFA Convention to ensure that NYS FFA continues to deliver a premier event for our students, advisors and supporters.

All New York Agricultural Education Outreach Staff continue to work each day fielding calls, supporting teachers and students, and planning events and programming important to our mission. Travel remains limited to only essential business. Please know we are available should you have any questions or concerns.

While we understand that these programmatic format changes are disappointing, it is essential that we prioritize the health and safety of everyone involved within our organization – including students, advisors, chaperones, stakeholders and staff – and we take that role seriously.

You have our commitment that we are doing all we can in this unprecedented situation. We want to thank you for your continued support and understanding as we work through this together over the coming months. We are deeply committed to keeping you informed and involved as we reimagine future virtual and hybrid events.

We want to end by expressing our sincere gratitude for your ongoing efforts to guide and provide leadership to your students, now when they need it most. During this unprecedented time, we appreciate the goodwill and resilience each of you has shown. Thank you for your amazing support as we work through this together. Be strong, be brave, and be steadfast!

We wish all of you good health and good spirits as we face these once in a lifetime scenarios together. Should you have any immediate concerns, please contact us. We will get through this together.

Shari Lighthall, Director, NYS Agricultural Education Outreach

Derek Hill, NY FFA Director

Karen LaBombard, NYS FFA/NYAAE Governing Board Chair

Paul Perry, State Convention Committee Chair

Betsy Foote, NYS FFA/NYAAE Governing Board President Elect

Gleason Walley, Past NYS FFA/NYAAE Governing Board President