



# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Oklahoma student named Star Farmer finalist Slade Don Nightengale receives top honor for his cattle operation**

INDIANAPOLIS – Agriculture has been a way of life for as long as Slade Don Nightengale can remember. In fact, at the age of 8, Nightengale was an entrepreneur, beginning his own stocker cattle operation with the money he earned from driving a tractor. That entrepreneurial spirit has now earned him top honors.

The National FFA Organization has named the Cordell, Okla. resident 2009 American Star Farmer, one of the organization's highest honors.

Each year at the national FFA convention, 16 national finalists vie for the organization's top awards: American Star Farmer, American Star in Agribusiness, American Star in Agricultural Placement and American Star in Agriscience. These awards honor students who have developed outstanding agricultural skills and competencies through their supervised agricultural experience (SAE); demonstrated outstanding management skills; earned the American FFA Degree – the organization's highest level of accomplishment; and met other agricultural education, scholastic and leadership requirements. Each finalist was interviewed by a panel of judges, who named the top candidate in each area. The winner was announced in an onstage convention ceremony and received a plaque and an award of \$4,000. The runners'-up will also receive plaques and \$2,000 each.

When Nightengale first enrolled in agricultural education classes, he had an operation with 22 head of cattle-- an inventory that he knew he wanted to grow. He was able to secure funding and soon purchased 128 head of cattle. He then rented 160 acres of land from a local landowner, with 45 acres of cropland and 115 acres of native grass pasture. Utilizing some of his father's equipment in exchange for labor, he was able to plant the cropland. Today, he has 450 acres of planted wheat, 478 head of cattle and a lease for 1,000 acres of grass.

“I didn’t know what to expect when I enrolled in agricultural education classes in 8<sup>th</sup> grade,” Nightengale said, “Completing five years of high school agricultural education, being involved in FFA and having a supervised agricultural experience program taught me many valuable lessons. Production agriculture requires record keeping, marketing and financial skills. My agricultural education classes and FFA have helped me develop these skills to prepare me for my career in production agriculture.”

Nightengale, son of Kevin and Sherry Nightengale, is working toward a degree in business finance at Southwestern Oklahoma State University. He is a member of the Cordell FFA chapter and his advisor is Brian Dowdle.

The American FFA Degree recognition programs are co-sponsored by Case IH of Racine, Wis.; Farm Credit Systems of Washington, D.C.; Pioneer Hi-Bred of Des Moines, Iowa; and Syngenta of Greensboro, N.C., as a special project of the National FFA Foundation.

The National FFA Organization, formerly known as the Future Farmers of America, is a national youth organization of 507,763 student members – all preparing for leadership and careers in the science, business and technology of agriculture – as part of 7,439 local FFA chapters in all 50 states, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. The National FFA Organization changed to its present name in 1988, in recognition of the growth and diversity of agriculture and agricultural education. 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. Visit [www.ffa.org](http://www.ffa.org) for more information.

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