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## NEWS RELEASE

**November 5, 2008**  
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### **The 81st National FFA Convention Boasts Record Attendance**

**INDIANAPOLIS** – The 81st National FFA Convention came to a successful close Saturday, Oct. 25, after four days of powerful speakers, a jam-packed FFA National Agricultural Career Show, captivating retiring addresses, award presentations and the installation of six newly elected national officers. These are but a few highlights from this historic annual event.

Themed “Step Up. Stand Out,” the national FFA convention welcomed a record-breaking 54,731 members to Indianapolis, Ind. The convention started on Wednesday, Oct. 22 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony to officially open the 42nd Annual FFA National Agricultural Career Show in the Indiana Convention Center. The career show hosted more than 400 booths from a variety of colleges, agricultural-related companies, fundraising organizations, U.S. Armed Services and auto and truck manufacturers. Neon tie-dyed tee-shirts and sweatshirts were among the most popular items sold in this year’s FFA Shopping Mall, also a part of the career show.

More than 1,600 FFA members took part in a three-day community service project for the National FFA Days of Service. Projects were completed at 12 sites in the Indianapolis-metro area, including Gleaners Food Bank, Strides for Success and Indy Parks. City civic leaders, the National FFA and a local organizing committee developed this community component to promote civic engagement through agricultural education, service learning and FFA member participation.

Even adults got in on the act; an impressive 5, 500 volunteers from across the country and Indianapolis community joined together to make the FFA convention a success.

The FFA Mission: FFA makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for **premier leadership, personal growth and career success** through agricultural education.

Dana Hee, an Olympic Gold Medalist and award-winning Hollywood stuntwoman, addressed the convention's three opening sessions and was just one of several speakers to take the stage during convention. Other keynote speakers included Tom Zupancic, vice president of marketing for the Indianapolis Colts, country musical artist Michael Peterson, and former national FFA president Fred McClure. U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Ed Schafer also made a special guest appearance. Motivational speaker Mark Scharenbroich was a big hit during the Fourth Convention Session, encouraging FFA members to develop positive connections with their peers. He also talked about the amount of personal change and growth that occurs during the high school.

“For the very first time in your life, FFA, you get to choose the path,” he said.

Eighteen-year-old award-winning country singer and proud former FFA member Taylor Swift rocked Lucas Oil Stadium Wednesday night to an FFA-only crowd of more than 22,000. Illusionists Ridgeway and Johnson performed their death-defying Grand Illusion & Escape show at Conseco Fieldhouse during the Third Convention Session Thursday evening.

The 2008 National FFA Alumni Benefits Auction raised more than \$198,000 for student scholarships during its silent, live and online auctions. Nearly 750 items were available for bids and counterbids, including a 2009 Ford F-150 SuperCrew XLT and a New Holland T6050 Elite Tractor.

The American FFA Degree, the organization's highest honor, was awarded to a record 3,341 recipients. FFA members received their degrees Saturday morning at Lucas Oil Stadium. Of those, four individuals were named the organization's top Stars Over America. Those award winners include American Star Farmer Travis Schnaithman from Oklahoma, American Star in Agribusiness Jason Handstedt from Wisconsin, American Star in Agricultural Placement Derek Lowrey from Missouri and American Star in Agriscience Laura Bruner from Ohio.

During the ninth and final general session, the 2008-2009 national officers were elected and installed into office. The new officer team includes President Paul Moya from New Mexico, Secretary Nessie Early from California, Eastern Region Vice President Hannah Crossen from Ohio, Central Region Vice President Laila Hajji from Oklahoma, Southern Region Vice President Regina Holliday from Georgia and Western Region Vice President Riley Branch from Texas. These six officers were elected from a slate of 38

candidates and will serve as student representatives of the organization, traveling more than 100,000 miles throughout the United States and Japan as part of their year of service to the FFA.

To learn more about the national FFA convention, visit [www.ffa.org/convention/2008/index.cfm](http://www.ffa.org/convention/2008/index.cfm).

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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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