



NATIONAL FFA CONVENTION  
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## FFA Members Visit Frisky Felines on Career Success Tour

By Dustin Petty

Fifty FFA members, advisors and chaperones attending the 81<sup>st</sup> National FFA Convention took time to take a walk on the wild side Thursday morning, traveling to the Exotic Feline Rescue Center (EFRC) in Center Point, Ind.

Don't think that this center houses your average kitty. Founded in 1991 by owner Joe Taft, the hub is home to 191 cats from 20 different states. Tigers, lions, bobcats, ocelots, servals, tigers and cougars all call the domain home.

With these feline pedigrees, one might think that the EFRC is a zoo with a strict family requirement. Not so.

All cats housed by the EFRC have been rescued from former owners that did not care for their well-being. Many have been abused, starved or just plain neglected. The EFRC does not buy, sell or breed any cats.

"If we didn't exist, I know that many of our cats would end up dead," said assistant director Jean Herrberg. "We recently rescued five felines that were on the verge of starving to death. They're almost back to good health and we're working on building a new home for them."

Rescued animals brought to EFRC will find 108 sprawling acres and plenty of food to fill their stomachs.

The cats eat over 3,000 pounds of meat each day. Donated by local farmers that need to dispose of dead livestock, the carcasses are broken down on-site; visiting FFA members had a chance to observe this aspect of the EFRC on the convention tour.

“I could have done without seeing the horse carcass,” said senior Courtany Amborn of the Clayton FFA Chapter in Wisconsin. “But it’s really nice to know that places like this exist to help take care of animals that would otherwise be abused.”

The tour of the Exotic Feline Rescue Center was one of many offered as part of the Career Development Tour program offered by the National FFA Organization to the 55,000 convention attendees.

“This tour looked interesting and I thought my students would not only enjoy the tour but also learn something,” said Allie Ellis, advisor of the Station Camp FFA Chapter in Tennessee.

She was right.

“I couldn’t believe how much goes into taking care of animals like these,” said sophomore Courtney Dawes of Station Camp.

For the people at the Exotic Feline Rescue Center, the care they give isn’t extraordinary to them. It’s just a part of the job and just one instance of their continuing passion for the work they do.

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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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