WHAT’S RIGHT ABOUT AMERICA?
by Jim Cravey

What’s right about America? If you have ever attended a National FFA Convention, you can recall the events of that convention and readily answer this question. For those of you who haven’t, try to think of the most positive, exciting event you have ever attended and multiply the excitement factor by ten, and you will begin to approach the thrill of a National FFA Convention.

I just recently returned from the 61st National FFA Convention, and I wish every young person in Alabama could attend. It is the most exciting, positive event with which I have ever been associated. There is an electricity in the air that is generated by each of the 20,000 plus young people from all across America. It is a contagious sort of enthusiasm and excitement that infects all who come in contact with FFA’ers in their “blue and gold” jackets. They come representing small cities and communities to receive awards; compete in contests; serve as delegates; and participate in the largest, most outstanding youth convention in America.

As I sat through the second general session, my mind drifted back to how I became involved in FFA. Prior to entering high school, I chose not to take Vocational Agriculture and FFA. After all, I knew about all I needed to know about farming anyway! Well, the local Vo-Ag teacher, Mr. Wallace Rasberry, noticed I had not signed up and came out to the farm to inquire as to why. He talked with me about Vo-Ag and FFA. I realized I didn’t have a good excuse not to participate, and besides, I was so impressed that a teacher I didn’t know cared enough to drive all the way out to our farm just to ask me to be in his class. How could I say NO? (Vo-Ag teachers are a special group of people.) Getting involved in FFA was the second most important decision that I made as a young person. It would shape my future and affect the decisions I would make for the rest of my life.

Through four years of agriculture and FFA, I learned firsthand the importance of hard work and commitment to excellence. The way our FFA was set up we could all be winners at something, if we put forth the effort. I remember vividly one of my earlier questions, “Are there any free trips available?” I’ll never forget Mr. Rasberry’s answer, “No, we teach you how to earn money so you can pay your own way.” My first lesson, there is no free lunch! To be successful, you have to earn your own way. FFA is the best organization I know which gives you that opportunity.

This year’s convention exemplified this. The programs stressed the important part FFA has and is playing in the development of the agricultural industry in America. You could witness firsthand this process of leadership development in the young people at the convention.

As the meetings begin, many of the FFA’ers are timid and reluctant to speak—much less introduce themselves and shake hands with strangers from some “foreign state”. However, as the convention progresses, they find it is really fun to meet, shake hands and discuss family, farm, and even school topics, with their newfound friends. Names and hometowns are exchanged, followed by friendly handshakes and hellos each time their paths cross throughout the convention.

For many of these young people, their paths will cross again as they become agricultural leaders from their respective communities. Some will become prominent farmers, business leaders, state representatives, Congressmen, Commissioners of Agriculture, Governor or maybe President of the United States. I know several former FFA’ers who do serve admirably in such positions.

As I viewed the excitement, talent and enthusiasm evident in the FFA’ers, it made me see all the right things about America. The free enterprise system—where hard work and diligence pay off through awards and recognition, FFA’ers compete in various contests and proficiency programs for awards, trophies, plaques and monetary rewards. Young people open meetings and banquets with prayers from the heart to a real God. A young fourteen year old, who had never sung in a chorus, is asked

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to sing a solo to an audience of 20,000. The response—a standing ovation for her effort and excellence. This same group of young people say “Thank You” by giving a standing ovation to adult leaders and corporations who are introduced for their financial support of FFA.

All in all, I just shake my head in wonder at this outstanding group of young people. What a better place America could become if we could just show these FFA’ers occasionally on the six o’clock news. Again my thoughts return to the wish that every young person in Alabama could attend a national convention. Those young FFA men and women, with their infectious excitement and enthusiasm, are truly “America’s finest”.

FOREST MANAGEMENT — Al Griffin, member of the Lineville FFA Chapter, representing the Southern Region, was declared the 1988 National Winner in the Forest Management Proficiency Award program. Griffin is shown accepting his award during the 61st National FFA Convention. Shown with Griffin is (left) his FFA advisor at Lineville, Lamar Dewberry, and (right) Kevin Oschner, National FFA Secretary.

REGIONAL WINNERS . . .

HORSE PROFICIENCY — Steve Beam, member of the Arab FFA Chapter, was one of four regional winners competing for the Horse Proficiency Award during the recent National FFA Convention. Steve is pictured with Dr. Larry Case, National FFA Advisor. Sponsor of the National FFA Horse Proficiency Award program is the American Quarter Horse Association, Amarillo, Texas. Steve’s advisors at Arab are Randy Brinell and Randy Wilkins.

FLORICULTURE — Rusty Hays, member of the Opelika FFA Chapter, was one of four regional winners competing for the title of the 1988 National Floriculture Winner. Hays is pictured here with Dr. Larry Case, National FFA Advisor. Rusty’s FFA advisor at Opelika is Jerry Williamson.
AGRICULTURE'S LEADING EDGE . . . FFA

FIRST PLACE WINNERS — The Alabama FFA State Forestry Team, Lineville FFA Chapter, placed first in the National FFA Forestry Contest. The team proudly displays the first-place trophy. Shown during the presentation (l-r) are: Dave Rapp, Homelite Division of Textron, Inc.; Robert Lee, Champion International Corporation, sponsors; team members Brannon McDonald, Eddie Duke, David Price, and their FFA Advisor Lamar Dewberry.

THE J. B. PENNINGTON AGRICULTURAL MECHANICS TEAM was Alabama's entry in the National FFA Ag Mechanics Contest. Representing the sponsor, the Firestone Tire & Rubber Company, is (left) Robert Smith. Team members are (l-r) Mitchell Dunn, Bryan Aaron, Allen Murphy, Greg Jones, and FFA Advisor Don Jones.

THE MARION AVC DAIRY JUDGING TEAM was Alabama's entry in the National Dairy Contest in Kansas City. Shown representing the sponsor is (left) Mel Kunstleben, Associated Milk Producers. Team members are (l-r) Reggi Smith, Jeffery Ford and Stacy Heard. Their FFA Advisor is Fairest Cureton.

THE OPELIGA FFA FLORICULTURE TEAM competed in the National Floriculture Contest during the National FFA Convention recently. Members of the team are (l-r) Derek Kellum, Tim Williams, Clay Henderson, and FFA Advisor Jerry Williamson.

THE ARAB FFA LIVESTOCK JUDGING TEAM represented Alabama in the National Livestock Contest. Representing the sponsor, Purina Mills, Inc., is Don R. Mauery. Team members are (l-r) Joe Wallace, Shannon Pyar, Trey Williams, Mickey Donahue, Lenny Franklin, and FFA Advisor Randy Wilkins.

THE VALLEY HEAD FFA NURSERY/LANDSCAPE TEAM represented the state in the National Contest during the National Convention in Kansas City. Shown congratulating the team is Doug Fencer, Kubota Tractor Corporation, sponsor. Team members (l-r) are Chris Jackson, Dempsey Millican, Paul Turner, Brevin Brown, and FFA Advisor L. A. Smith.

THE AMERICAN FARMER DEGREE RECIPIENTS attending the National Convention were (1st row) Alicia Edson, Opp; Noel Danner, Arifton; Tommy McKenzie, Fairhope; Allen Knight, Louisville; Scott Lewis, Ariton; (2nd row) Danny Miller, Collinsville; Denise Summerford, Arab; Eddy Outlaw, Ariton; David Ruf, Elkmont; Lee McDaniel, Ranburne; (3rd row) Scott Britnell, Russellville; Mark Blackwell, Collinsville; Peter James, Russellville; Kipp Plair, Atbeville, and Duane Wales, Elkmont.

1988 STATE AGRISCIENCE TEACHER OF THE YEAR AWARD — Lamar Dewberry (left), teacher of agribusiness education at Lineville High School, was recognized at the 61st National FFA Convention in Kansas City as the State Agriscience Teacher of the Year winner from Alabama. Dewberry was honored for his efforts in agriscience and emerging technology. The Agriscience Teacher of the Year Award is sponsored by the National FFA Foundation. Shown representing the sponsor is Jeff Brazo.
CHAPTERS, ADVISORS, AND SUPPORTERS RECEIVE RECOGNITION

NATIONAL CHAPTER AWARDS received (l-r, front row) Dondi James, Russellville; Rhonda Hood, Daleville; Scott Pace, Scottsboro; Melissa Merk, Marbury; Richard Schmitz, Jacksonville; Jeff Smith, Brantley; (back row) Jason Cross, Russellville; Brandi Powell, Daleville; Shawn Hubbard, Marbury; Brian Phillips, Jacksonville, and Robert Prescott, Brantley.

NATIONAL SAFETY AWARD WINNERS (l-r) Chris Etheredge, Daleville; David Griscom, Russellville; Blake Boozer, Jacksonville "Gold"; Leslie Plunkett, J. R. Pittard AVTC; Gary Collins, R. C. Hatch; Clabe McGuire, West Limestone; (2nd row) Cliff Dozier, Daleville; Patrick James, Russellville; Chris Young, Jacksonville "Gold", Regina Fulmer, J. R. Pittard AVTC, David Mines, R. C. Hatch, and Tim McAllister, West Limestone.

BOAC AWARD WINNERS (l-r) Joey Ray, Fairhope; Darrell Smith, Jacksonville "Gold"; Robert Simpkins, Opelika; Tammy Stevens, J. R. Pittard AVTC; Richard Scott, R. C. Hatch; (2nd row) Jeff Manarch, Fairhope; Chris Young, Jacksonville "Gold"; Dana Miracle, Opelika; Mindy Calfee, J. R. Pittard AVTC, and Gary Collins, R. C. Hatch.

TAKE PRIDE IN AMERICA — Southern Regional winner was the Opelika FFA Chapter. Accepting the award for the chapter is (right) Dana Miracle and his FFA Advisor Jerry Williamson. The T-shirt and cap were presented by the Moody Brothers Band.

HONORARY AMERICAN FARMER DEGREE RECIPIENTS — (left) J. L. Holmes, Educational Consultant, Killingsworth and Associates, Montgomery, and Jerome Campbell, District Specialist, Agribusiness Education, were honored during the 61st National FFA Convention in Kansas City.

AGRIBUSINESS TEACHERS HONORED — Teachers receiving the Honorary American Farmer Degree in Kansas City were (l-r) Jerry Williamson, Opelika; James Turner, Attalla; Randy Blackidge, Elkmont, and Bob Moorehead, G. W. Long.

ALABAMA'S OFFICIAL DELEGATES — Shown during one of the sessions at the National Convention are the official delegates (l-r) Kelvin Whitaker, Kate Duncan Smith DAR Chapter, State Treasurer; Mindy Stringer, Castleberry Chapter, Secretary, and Kim Sanders, Marbury Chapter, State President.

THE JACKSONVILLE "GOLD" FFA QUARTET participated in the talent program and entertained at various functions in Kansas City. Members of this quartet are Joel Wilder, Stephen Johnson, Darin Williams, and Bill Williams. Their advisor is John R. Whaley.