

Student Recipients Comment On Syngenta's Support For FFA

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At the Syngenta Media Summit in San Antonio, Texas, both benefactors and student recipients gave their views on the partnership Syngenta has with the National FFA organization.

Laila, Hajji, a student at Texas Tech University from Guthrie, Okla., and former National FFA Central Region vice president from the state of Oklahoma, has benefitted greatly from the contributions of Syngenta. She said they make a genuine investment in the future of agriculture through FFA and its members.

"Syngenta invests in a number of programs one of which is the Agri Science Fair which is a high science program for students," she said. "Another is the blue jacket program in which retailers at the local level get involved with students. We often say the heartbeat of the National FFA organization is on the local level and Syngenta recognizes that and developed the blue jacket program so their retailers have a one on one experience with students."

They sponsor The American FFA Degree and also Chapter Leadership continuum, which is where leaders are developed.

"Syngenta believes in not only having students who know about the industry and know about agriculture, but can lead the industry so they partner with that program as well," she continued.

"Another program that they're very proud of is their Collegiate Agriculture Ambassadors. That is a group of 20 students throughout the country whose main objective is to spread the message of agriculture. Since its conception in 2006 there have been 1,300 presentations and 62,000 people who have heard the message of agriculture. Syngenta is very passionate about spreading agriculture's message.

"There is also a Collegiate Career Expo and the National FFA Convention Career Show and those are just a lot of foot traffic where students can interact one on one with Syngenta's employees. They do a lot. They often say they're bringing plant potential to life and I would say they're bringing students' potential to life.

"I'm very honored to speak on behalf of Syngenta. They truly care about students and young people in our industry and I'm very glad to be here," Hajji summed.

Also speaking about the partnership Syngenta has with the National FFA was Jarrod Hardke from Louisiana State University.

Hardke is originally from Carlisle, Ark., in the Grand Prairie area or rice capital of the world. He grew up on a rice and soybean farm, and spent seven years working for the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service in the summer while an undergrad. He now is working on his PhD at LSU with Dr. Roger Leonard, Department of Entomology, Field Crops Research and Extension. Hardke was a runner up in the graduate portion of the competition in the Southern Agriculture Scholarship program

"My primary research is on Bt cotton and fall armyworms as well as additional research on field corn, soybeans and rice," he explained.

The Southern Agriculture Scholarship program is an essay contest sponsored by Syngenta. This is the third year for the essay contest.

"I think there were 150 entrants and they expanded the range to include all of the universities in every state in the south now," he continued. "With that number of applicants going up it shows what this means and that it is actually important to students."

"I was the runner up in the graduate category of the competition," Hardke added. "As I said, the fact that Syngenta actually tailored the graduate and undergraduate programs is actually very appropriate because of the level of education and knowledge and background people have acquired on those different levels. I think it would be an unfair advantage to pool everyone in and have all the graduates competing against undergrads which I'm sure – don't get me wrong – an undergrad can step up and beat the graduates from time to time, I have no doubt. But the program as it's designed is very fair and gives everyone opportunity for recognition for their ideas. Certainly since the programs are differentiated, and undergrads do still have a dif-

ferent perspective than grad students, I think there's also an opportunity there for some further new ideas. There's obviously a wide variety of tactics people take in their essays and I think it brings to light different perspectives and gives people an opportunity in agriculture to read and learn. Hopefully it will spur thoughts and the interest of other people.

"I thanked them earlier for affording me this opportunity to speak to everyone and, of course, being in San Antonio which is always a nice place to go in my off time.

This year's essay topic was "The sustainability of water use on farms."

"That's becoming a major topic as aquifers become depleted and we keep drilling deeper and deeper wells," he continued. "My essay centered on what our water use will be in the future and how we are going to make water use more sus-



Visiting at the Syngenta Media Summit in San Antonio, Texas, are from left to right: Laila, Hajji, a student at Texas Tech University from Guthrie, Okla., Vern Hawkins, Syngenta Representative and Jarrod Hardke, Graduate Assistant at LSU AgCenter.

Photo by John LaRose, Jr.

tainable and more efficient going forward. My focus was more on an interdisciplinary approach with regulatory agencies, research and extension, biotech companies like Syngenta coming together to improve those situations. It will take a collaborative effort of all of those different players in order to actually see an improvement in the sustainability of water use going forward.

They do choose broad topics that allow for different people to participate.

"Last year the topic was food production as we progress from 6 billion people to 9 to 10 billion people by 2050. I didn't win last year but the essays that I was able to read showed that people are passionate about these things and came from various backgrounds to write their essays. They have valuable input and it certainly gives us a positive outlook on the future to see what some of these students have to say and their knowledge and that they seem to be this interested in the future of agriculture. Through efforts like this we can see they are supporting a positive future. I am sure my work will continue to be in agriculture going forward and so certainly from my standpoint I believe my winning was a fortunate investment on Syngenta's part and it will continue to be as long as they continue to fund this program."

One good thing about essays is that they spur some critical thinking that could possibly lead to solutions.

"I think that did take a lot of critical thinking to write the essays. It's actually a significant undertaking to sit down and write. And once you read the essay you realize they just couldn't sit down and write that out in an hour and then submit it. It takes some time and some effort, and that level of critical thinking is bound to force out new ideas. And maybe the ideas aren't innovative, but by doing a little research and thinking about it, just the way that they put the different pieces together may be innovative."

Syngenta representative Vern Hawkins added further comment on the programs supported by Syngenta.

"The FFA investment that we make really is very well connected to the belief we have that you have to be a long term committed player in agriculture. If you look at the demographics of our industry, not just our own company, we do need to start planning now for the future talent. If you've ever seen an FFA student speak and seen the experience of learning they get exposed to, you know you can't start in a better place. Certainly, 4H is a contributor for the younger group, and there are a lot of great organizations that work in consortium with the FFA for training and development, but in terms of the core values, experiential learning, leadership development, the FFA is hard to beat." Δ

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