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Sumner FFA members are, from left, back row: Kevin Warren, Timothy Hurd, Tristan Hanon, Kassandra Ognoskie, Natasha Moffitt, Jordan Swarthout and Eric Larson; front row: Alexis Brendible, Kelsey Oliver, Becca Humphries and Sarah Josten.



Photo by Daniel Nash

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Students win honors, scholarship cash at national FFA convention

By DANIEL NASH
The Courier-Herald

Sumner High students brought home \$5,800 in scholarship money from the national FFA convention this year.

Students competed in contests of skill and a science fair, covering specialized categories like meat evaluation or dairy foods, and broader categories like environmental science.

The national convention took place Oct. 21-24 in Indianapolis. Formerly known as Future Farmers of America, the organization goes exclusively by its abbreviation to shift slightly away from its historic emphasis on farming to encompass all agriculture.

"I hate to say we're straying from science, because that's not necessarily the case," livestock examiner team member Eric Larsen said. "Science is brought in in areas such as genetic engineering, which is used to create more productive food, better livestock, more efficient crops. It's still Future Farmers of America, but it's just based more on science."

Tim Hurd, Becca Humphries and Kelsey Oliver won gold medals and cash prizes in the science fair for their experiments.

Hurd entered his project into the individual-entry Environmental Science category, a category he described as a broad umbrella for projects like his, which could belong in different categories depending on one's perspective. His project examined the relationship between tick activity and the percent of Anaplasma Ovis infection in sheep communities, where tick activity was measured by the length of time the outdoor temperature was conducive to their activity. Hurd found a strong

linear relationship, meaning he could predict the effect climate change may have on A. Ovis.

The same principle could be applied to do research on the spread of other pathogens, such as malaria, Hurd said.

"With that example of malaria, Tim's project shows how agricultural science can be applied to many types of fields," Sumner FFA President Tristan Hanon added. "It shows that a high school student's project can apply to problems posed in the world today."

Humphries' and Oliver's project centered around a topic close to home. In 2008, 19 cattle shown at the Puyallup Fair died from malignant catarrhal fever, spread by the sheep with which they were housed. The disease was spread under conditions typical of the Puyallup Fair's livestock show and other livestock shows around the country.

Humphries and Oliver set out to determine whether the spread was a freak occurrence or a logical outcome. Sheep in normal flock conditions are frequent carriers of MCF, but aren't affected by its symptoms. At a certain age, sheep will experience intense asymptomatic episodes in which the disease is shed from their body.

The two Sumner girls hypothesized that the enhanced stress of a livestock show would induce viral shedding. They tested the hypothesis by collecting nasal secretions from an experimental group in a livestock show environment and from a control group in their home environment.

Humphries and Oliver concluded that the stress of the show environment did catalyze intense shedding, but after the shedding period viral activity in the secretions matched the

control group.

The findings could directly affect how state and county fairs store livestock, adviser Gregory Pile said.

Students tested their agricultural mettle in standardized competitions as well.

The meats evaluation team of Erin Frazier, Lindsey Montgomery, Kassandra Ognoskie and Katie Scholz won the distinction of being the national champions of the 2009 convention. Each student brought home \$1,000.

Evaluators had to be able to identify 40 different samples of meat by species (pork, beef or lamb) and cut, then rank them from best to worst. Other activities included written and multiple choice examinations, meat quality grading and assembling combinations of meats at the highest quality for the lowest price.

The dairy foods team, which took second place and was comprised of Alexis Brendible, Annie Elias, Hanon and Kevin Warren, required a similar combination of knowledge and product savvy. In addition to written examinations, students had to be able to identify and distinguish dairy and nondairy products by taste.

The categories of competition were not limited to the science of agriculture. An agricultural communications category challenged students to put across agricultural information to the community in plain-spoken language. The team took second place. Team members were evaluated individually through news writing tests and together through a public relations project they put together. Drawing from the theme of community, the team put together a two-day "Tour de Farms"

See FFA, page A2

FFA

from page A1

event encouraging community members to buy locally grown produce.

A promotional packet was submitted alongside an evaluative report, including a cost-benefit analysis of the

campaign.

The agricultural communications team was comprised entirely of members of the class of 2009, who qualified for nationals prior to graduating.

Members took a break from post-high school activities for the convention. Team graphic designer Sarah

Josten currently attends Pierce College. Web designer Hurd attends Pacific Lutheran University, where he plans to pursue a degree in a branch of engineering.

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