



# **American FFA Degree**

## **&**

# **American Star Award**

## **Handbook**

## Table of Contents

### Part One: Introduction

The American FFA Degree:	
What is it?	3
Why earn the Degree	3
Qualifications	3
FFA membership qualifications	4
Special Circumstances for Membership Eligibility Extension	4
SAE programs	5
How American FFA Degree recipients are selected	5
Chapter Verification	5
State Verification	5
National Approval	6

### Part Two: Completing the Application

The American FFA Degree application	7
General Instructions and Icons	7
Application Screens/Pages	8
Cover Page	8
Membership Check	10
Basic Setup	10
SAE – Research	11
SAE - Placement & Foundational	12
SAE - Entrepreneurship	13
Income and Expense Summary	14
Ending Current Inventory	14
Ending Non-Current Inventory	15
Financial Balance Sheet Assets & Liabilities	16
Financial Balance Sheet Statement – Net Worth	16
Financial Balance Sheet Statement - Earnings & Productively Invested	17
Community Service	17
Application Checklist	17
Electronic Signatures	18
Save/Print Application	20
Application Submission	20

### Part Three: American Star Candidates

What are the American Star Awards?	22
Who can apply?	22
Star Categories	22
Star Application Screens/Pages	23
Star Setup	23
Primary Pathway	23
Performance Review	24
Learning Outcomes & Efficiency Factors	26
Skills Competencies and Knowledge	28
Resume	28
Photo Pages	30
Attachments / Uploads	31
Application Submission	32
Application Judging	32
Scoring Rubrics	33
Additional Information	34

# Part One: Introduction

## The American FFA Degree: The ultimate challenge

The American FFA Degree is the highest degree an FFA member can achieve. It is the final step in an FFA degree system that encourages personal growth and achievement. The degree is a high and rare honor, less than one percent of FFA members earn it.

It requires commitment and hard work to attain but you don't have to be a gifted student or live on a farm or ranch to reach this goal. The FFA degree system is organized so that all FFA members have an equal chance at the American FFA Degree, no matter where they come from.

The American FFA Degree requires at least three years to meet the requirements. Plan and set goals early to earn the degree.

## Why earn the Degree?

- Recognition: Many members have said that there is no greater satisfaction than walking across the stage at the national FFA convention to receive their American FFA Degree key and certificate. In addition, recipients' names are listed in the American FFA Degree convention booklet and the official proceedings of the convention.
- Career preparation: An SAE that leads to an American FFA Degree provides training and experience, that enable member to enjoy a useful, interesting, and challenging career later in life. Listing the receipt of the American FFA Degree on a job resume stands out to employers in agricultural career areas.
- Perseverance and preparation: Everyone must compete to secure a job or a position to start a career and make a difference in the world. Meeting the degree requirements teaches members to reach career goals and provides learning experiences that complement classroom education.

## Qualifications

Qualifying to earn the American FFA Degree is not a judgment call. Candidates don't "compete" to "win" the degree. The degree is earned by meeting a specific set of qualifications or criteria. All those who meet the following requirements may receive the American FFA Degree:

- Must have received the State FFA Degree prior to receiving the American FFA Degree.
- Must be an active FFA member at the time of application and have been an active member for the previous three years (36 months consecutively) at the time of application.
- Must have satisfactorily completed the equivalent of at least three years (540 hours) of systematic secondary school instruction in an agricultural education program or have completed at least the equivalent of 360 hours of systematic secondary school instruction in agricultural education and one full year of enrollment in a postsecondary agricultural program or have completed the program of agricultural education offered in the secondary school last attended. **Note:** the hours of instruction are not required to be from three different calendar years.
- Must have graduated from high school at least 12 months prior to the national FFA convention at which the degree is to be granted.

- Must have **in operation** (and have maintained records to substantiate) an outstanding SAE, which demonstrates comprehensive planning, managerial and financial expertise.
- After entering agricultural education and becoming an FFA member must have
  - earned \$10,000 and productively invested at least \$7,500, through an eligible SAE project(s) or
  - earned and productively invested at least \$2,000 and worked 2,250 hours in excess of scheduled class time in an eligible SAE project(s).
  - Any combination of hours times a factor of 3.56 plus any dollar amount of student earnings and investments must be equal to or greater than \$10,000.
- Must have a record of outstanding leadership and have achieved a high school scholastic record of “C” or better.
- Must have completed at least three different community service activities totaling at least 50 hours. All activities must meet National FFA Organization “[Community Service Guidelines for FFA Degrees](#)” to be counted. These hours are cumulative from all years of FFA membership.
- Must complete the official application provided by the National FFA Organization for the current year and submit the signed and completed form by the approved deadline.

## FFA membership qualifications

For each year a student wishes to be an FFA member a student must:

- be enrolled in at least one secondary agricultural education course during the school year
- and/or must follow a planned course of study the objective of which is preparation for an agricultural career.
- Either course must include a supervised agricultural experience (SAE) program.

Members may retain active membership until November 30, following the fourth National FFA Convention after graduation from high school or until their 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday, whichever comes first.

### Example:

Juanita is an FFA member in good standing. She graduates from high school in 2022 so is eligible to receive the American FFA Degree at the 2023, 2024 or 2025 National FFA Convention. Her FFA membership eligibility expires Nov 30, 2025. She cannot apply to receive the degree in 2026 or beyond unless she falls into two special circumstances.

## Special Circumstances for Membership Eligibility Extension

A member in good standing at the time of induction into the armed forces or into the FFA international program will retain their good standing during the period of active service without further payment of dues or attendance at meetings. Time spent in the armed forces or in the FFA international program will not be considered as “elapsed time” in determining the maximum period of four conventions following graduation from high school or leaving high school. Members participating in at least a six-month armed services program or in the FFA international program for at least six months are eligible for a full year of extended membership.

No individual may retain active membership beyond their 23rd birthday regardless of these special circumstances.

**Examples:**

Sherry is 19 years old and two national FFA conventions have been held since her high school graduation in 2020 (2020 & 2021 conventions). Sherry joins the U.S. Air Force and serves two years active duty. Although she missed two National FFA Conventions while serving (2022 & 2023) Sherry may resume her pursuit of the American FFA Degree, provided she resumes active FFA participation (pays dues and attends meetings) and re-establishes an SAE project within six months of the end of active service. The two conventions missed while on active duty do not count against the four national conventions after graduation so she has two more conventions at which she may receive the American FFA Degree unless she turns 23 before the fourth convention.

Tyrone graduated in 2020 when he was 18 years old. He had hoped to receive his American FFA Degree at the 2023 National FFA Convention (his last year of eligibility), when he would be 21 years old. In 2023 Tyrone waits until late September prior to the 2023 National FFA Convention to ask his chapter FFA advisor about applying for the American FFA Degree. Tyrone's advisor sadly informs him that the deadline to turn in the completed application was 8 months ago in February and he has missed it. Tyrone is no longer eligible to apply for the American FFA Degree since his eligibility will expire Nov 30 of 2023.

## SAE programs

A good SAE program is the foundation for the American FFA Degree. Only members with strong and successful SAE programs will meet the minimum qualifications. It usually takes at least four years of growth in an SAE program before the degree can be obtained and very often it takes 5-7 years.

Developing an SAE into a successful program takes time and planning. Learn more about Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAE) on the [SAE for All](#) website.

## How American FFA Degree recipients are selected

All candidates who meet the constitutional requirements are eligible to receive the degree.

### Chapter Verification

The procedure for selecting American FFA Degree recipients starts with the chapter advisor. The chapter advisor must check the accuracy of the completed application and sign the application to verify all requirements for receipt of the American FFA Degree are met. Always check with the chapter advisor for due dates and chapter verification procedures.

### State verification

The next step in the procedure for selecting American FFA Degree recipients is the signed application being submitted to the state association by the state deadline. A representative of the state staff must check the application to verify all requirements are met. Only a state staff member may submit the application to the national level for review.

**Note:** State FFA associations may have higher requirements for their members to achieve degrees including the American FFA Degree. Always consult state constitutions and policies for differences in American FFA Degree qualification requirements.

### National approval

Once state staff have submitted the application, staff at the National FFA Organization review the application to ensure all constitutional requirements have been met. National FFA staff, may require corrections or updates for vague or incorrect information. The candidate may correct errors and return an updated application to National FFA staff if it can be done before the June 15 deadline. National FFA staff will reject any applications that do not clearly meet the requirements. Be certain applications are clear and descriptive so that a reviewer entirely unfamiliar with the candidate and SAE project(s) can understand the information.

After this review process is complete, the national staff make a recommendation to the National FFA Board of Directors when they meet each year in July/August. State FFA advisors are notified of their candidates' status at least 30 days prior to the next national FFA convention. As soon as possible after the approval from the National FFA Board of Directors, a listing of successful candidates is sent to each state staff and is then placed on the [American FFA Degree webpage](#) of FFA.org.

# Part Two: Completing the Application

## The American FFA Degree application

This section of the handbook will serve as a map to navigating through the American FFA Degree application. It includes definitions, examples, and helpful hints to common questions.

The American FFA Degree application is a series of questions and information requests designed to collect the information necessary to determine if a member has reached, or exceeded, the minimum requirements to receive the degree. Receiving the American FFA Degree is not a competition all members who meet the minimum requirements may receive the degree.

In order to approve an application reviewers need detailed information about candidates and their SAE program. Members who have completed the agricultural education program, actively participated in FFA experiences and established and maintained detailed and accurate records of their SAE experience should be easily able to complete the application.

Candidates who wish to compete, add additional pages to the American FFA Degree application to compete for the American Star Farmer, American Star in Agribusiness, American Star in Agricultural Placement or American Star in Agriscience awards. Each FFA association in good standing may submit 1 candidate in each of the four award areas to compete. Part Three of this handbook provided detailed information about and applying for American Star awards.

## General Instructions and Icons in Application

- Carefully reading the “Instructions” screen/page of the electronic application before beginning the application will help avoid technical issues and save much frustration while filling out the application
- Watch for and click on the  icon as you complete the application for help and tips.
- Read the instructions and “Special Notes” at the top of each screen/page in the electronic application carefully. This will save a great deal of time and effort.
- Complete the application as of Dec 31 of the year prior to receiving the degree. No achievements accomplished or inventory acquired after this date may be included. (i.e., applying in 2023, conclude your application as of December 31, 2022).
- Check with your state association staff to learn the deadline for submitting the completed application to your state for review and potential approval.
- Plan ahead to get all of the required application signatures.
- If applying for an American Star award click Yes to the questions on the application cover page to add the Star application pages.

# Application Screens/Pages

The following information will cover each screen/page of the electronic application from first to last.

## Cover Page

- Name:** Enter your name or confirm that your name is spelled correctly if already entered. Be certain your name is typed exactly as you want it to appear on awards, websites and press releases. National FFA staff download this information directly from the application, so your name will appear exactly as it shows in the application.
  - If the box is grey and will not allow you to type in it, change the information in your record book where the information is downloading from.
- Name on FFA roster (if different):** If the name you entered on the application is different than your name is shown on the FFA roster type your name here exactly as it appears on the FFA roster. This helps staff confirm FFA membership eligibility.
- Chapter ID:** This information will load automatically into the application based on the login credentials used to start the application.
- FFA Member ID #:** This information will load automatically into the application based on the login credentials used to start the application.
- Name Pronunciation:** Provide an easy-to-read pronunciation example of your name so award announcers have the best chance possible to say it properly.
- Personal Telephone Number:** Provide the best phone number you can be reached at. This number will be kept private. It is used only by FFA staff to provide assistance and correct errors.
- Home Mailing Address:** All mail will be sent to this address potentially including checks to be certain this address is complete and correct. DO NOT USE the school address.
- Email Address:** This is the main means of communication FFA staff will use to provide information on competitions and awards. Provide an email address that will remain active even after high school graduation. Your email address will not be sold or provided to anyone outside of FFA without your permission.
- Physical Address:** If your mailing address and physical address are different complete this section. This ensures any packages can be delivered as some mail cannot be delivered to P.O. boxes.
- Names of Parents/Guardians:** This information is used for press releases and award announcements. Please ensure the spellings are correct and the name is the one they wish used.
- Email addresses of parents/guardians:** This information is used to provide information about the degree and national convention activities. Additionally these addresses serve as a backup method to contact candidates with information.
- Year received the State FFA Degree:** The year the State FFA Degree was received must be entered here to show the degree has been received.

13. **FFA Chapter Name:** Provide the official name of the FFA chapter (Example: Western FFA).
14. **Name of High School:** Give the complete official name of the school as it is often different from the chapter name. This will be used on websites and press releases.
15. **School Address:** FFA advisor(s) and/or other school officials will be sent mail at this address.
16. **School Telephone Number:** Include the area code and number where your FFA Advisor and/or school officials can be reached.
17. **Chapter Advisor(s):** – Click the (Refresh) link to load this information automatically from the FFA.org Chapter Profile. If the information is not up to date, ask your advisor to update the information in the chapter profile on FFA.org. Click the box next to the name of the advisor(s) who National FFA should copy information to.
18. **Year of High School Graduation:** Enter the calendar year you graduated from high school. This date is part of determining eligibility so must be accurate. You must have graduated from high school at least 12 months prior to the national FFA convention at which the degree is to be granted.
19. **If not Graduating give date you left school:** Enter a date only if you did not graduate from high school.
20. **Years of Ag Education Offered (grades 7-12) in High School Attended:** This number provides important data to National FFA to determine your eligibility.
21. **Years of Ag Education Completed in High School:** This number provides important data to determine your eligibility.
22. **Is your grade average a C or better?:** Click Yes or No based on your graduation grade average. A school official must verify this by signature on the Signature page.
23. **Postsecondary (2-year college, technical/trade course) Completed:** Enter the number of semesters or quarters completed at any training other than a four year college or university. This can be any type of agriculturally related certificate or course. Leave blank if none. Postsecondary training is not required if at least three years (540 hrs) of agricultural education were completed in high school.
24. **Postsecondary (4-year university) Completed:** Enter semesters or quarters of college/university completed towards an agricultural program. Leave blank if none. Postsecondary training is not required if at least three years (540 hrs) of agricultural education were completed in high school.
25. **Name(s) of Postsecondary institution (university, college, technical/trade program):** Enter the name of the institution you indicated receiving semester or quarters of training at.
26. **Area of Study/Major/Technical Certificate:** If you have declared a major field of study while in college, such as agronomy or agricultural education, indicate that field here. If you are studying agriculture, but have not declared a major, you may want to declare something broad, like “general agriculture.”
27. **Military duty - dates of full-time Active Military Duty:** If you served on active duty this can extend membership eligibility to the maximum allowable membership age of 23 years. Be sure, therefore, to give enlistment and separation dates. (See Article V, Section B of the National FFA Constitution.) Leave blank if you did not serve.

## Membership Check

This information will load automatically into the application based on the login credentials used to start the application.

- Click the “Refresh Membership Data” button if the information is not complete.
- Read the “Special Notes for this page:” at the top of the screen if you have issues.

## Basic Setup

This page interacts with and impacts all the following screens/pages in the application. It should be completed before trying to enter data into following screens/pages.

### 1. Dates for this Application

- a) **Beginning Date** – Enter the date the Candidates began their first agriculture education course of the year they first became an FFA member.
  - i) Example: Candidates first Agricultural Education course began Aug 15, 2020. Candidate was added to the FFA membership roster in Sept 2020. Enter Aug 15, 2020.
  - ii) Example: Candidates first agricultural education course began Aug 20, 2019 but candidates chose not to become an FFA member until starting their second agricultural education course on Aug 17, 2020. Enter Aug 17, 2020. No records or information from before Aug 17, 2020 can be included in the application.
- b) **Ending Date** – Enter the year prior to the National FFA Convention year in which the application will be submitted for competition.
  - i) Example: The ending date for an application that will be submitted in in 2022 must have an ending date of 2021.
  - ii) Only records and activities that occurred prior to the ending date of the application are eligible to be entered into the application. Any mention of records, skills, events, or activities which occur after this date will cause the application to be penalized
  - iii) Wanting to add years to an application already started in a prior year? Changing the Ending Date will allow additional years of records to be entered into the application.
- c) **SAE Types** – Click each SAE type for which records will be included in the application. The appropriate pages of the application for each SAE type will appear when the type is selected.
  - i) Foundational - Job shadowing and other career exploration done outside of class time. Such hours should be very limited, typically less than 40 hours in total.
  - ii) Research – this application type is for Research SAE projects.
  - iii) Placement – this application type is for all Placement/Internship SAE projects and some Service-Learning SAE projects.
  - iv) Entrepreneurship - the application type is for Ownership/Entrepreneurship SAE projects, School-based Enterprise SAE projects and some Service-Learning SAE projects.
- d) **Assets** - Assets are items of value that you own and used in developing your SAE program.

- i) **Value at Beginning Date** – the dollar value of items owned by the candidate on the Beginning Date specified above in the application. Enter a value in the appropriate box for any such items.
  - (1) Example: The candidate had \$690 in their checking account on the beginning date entered in the application. This should be entered into box 1a. The candidate also owned a three-year-old pure bred angus cow. The value of this animal should be entered on line 2b.
  - (2) Read the  icons in the application for more information.
  - (3) Only include assets owned personally by the candidate. Do not include family owned assets.
- ii) **Value at Ending Date** – the dollar values of cash and items owned by the candidate on Dec 31 of the application ending date.
- e) **Liabilities** - Money the candidate owes to others (debts) that is related to their SAE program. Beginning and ending values are entered.
- f) **Personal Cash Income and Expense** - This section represents personal items that were used as resources to support the development of the SAE program. These are values from beginning to all years in the application. Only enter dollars and items that are directly related to the SAE project(s) included in the application.

## SAE - Research

Enter information about research and experimentation SAE projects completed here. After filling in each required box click “Add” to enter the information into the application for each individual project. As many different qualifying research projects or experiments as were conducted during the time span entered on the Basic Setup page/screen of the application may be separately entered.

1. **Pathway** – Select the Agricultural Food and Natural Resources (AFNR) pathway the research falls under. If the research does not fit under any of these pathways it is not eligible to be counted as SAE and cannot be used or entered. To learn more about the [Agricultural Food and Natural Resources](#) pathways click the link.
2. **Research Title** – Enter a descriptive title that will allow a reviewer to understand what the research or experimentation were about.
  - a) Example: “Corn vs Wheat Based Rations for Working Horses, Which Provides More Energy?”. This title tells the reviewer what the research was about and that it was an agricultural topic.
  - b) Example: “Research”, “People Watching”, “Work in lab” or “Chester” are all bad examples. None of these allow an application reviewer to determine if the project is eligible or even a project at all. The application would be sent back for corrections or rejected.
3. **Start year** – Select the year the research or experiment began from the years available in the dropdown menu. Only years within the Basic Setup dates entered on the Basic Setup page/screen of the application will appear for selection.
4. **End year** - Select the year the research or experiment finished from the years available in the dropdown menu. Only years within the Basic Setup dates entered on the Basic Setup page/screen of the application will appear for selection.

- a) Experiments could have lasted less than one calendar year or stretched over several years.
- 5. **Hours** – Enter the number of hours spent planning, conducting and reporting the research or experiment. This information should come directly from a careful log of hours in the candidates SAE records.
- 6. **Income/Funding** – Enter any income or funding received from the project or to do the project. It is not at all unusual for there to be no income/funding. If so leave this box empty.
  - a) Example: A local pet shop owner paid the candidate to research the best temperature to keep each fish tank at for the specific type of fish being kept.
  - b) Example: The American Association for Beekeepers provided the candidate a \$400 grant to conduct an experiment on the best type of insulation for over wintering beehives in northern states.
- 7. **Expenses** – Enter the total amount of expense to conduct the experiment or research.
  - a) Example: Purchase of digital thermometers to measure water temperature in fish tanks.
  - b) Example: Purchase of different materials to insulate beehives.

## SAE - Placement & Foundational

This screen/page of the application only appears in the application menu if you have selected Placement as and SAE type.

If you have multiple placement SAE projects you can make multiple entries in each year. For example, if you work for two different agricultural employers in the same year you can enter information for both in the year(s) you worked for them.

Year 2017 ▼	Pathway Agribusiness Systems (ABS) ▼	Job Title and Responsibilities / Project Description ? [Empty Text Box]	
	Employer or Project Name ? [Empty Text Box]	Unpaid Hours [Empty Box]      Paid Hours [Empty Box]      Gross Earnings [Empty Box]      Expenses [Empty Box]	<a href="#">Add</a>

1. **Year** - This dropdown menu will include only the years which you designated on the Basic Setup screen/page of the application. The earliest year available will be the year of the “Beginning Date” you entered. The latest year will be the year of the “Ending Date” you entered. Change these dates to make additional years available if appropriate.
  - a) Select the year from the dropdown menu that you wish to enter records for.
2. **Pathway** – there is no right or wrong answer for this selection choose the pathway the best fits the project.
  - a) Select your desired Pathway from the dropdown menu.

3. **Employer or Project Name** – Enter the name of the business or person you worked for. Even if your project is unpaid, to be a placement project, you have someone to whom you report and who makes management decisions. Enter that person’s name.
4. **Job Title and Responsibilities / Project Description** – This portion is very important to allow the reviewer to determine eligibility. Provide a short but clear and specific description of your duties and responsibilities showing that they were agriculturally related.
5. **Unpaid Hours** – enter the number of hours worked in an unpaid position for experience or as a volunteer on the project(s) included in the application.
6. **Paid Hours** – enter the number of hours worked for payment or wages on the specific project(s) included in the application.

**TIP:** You cannot enter both paid and unpaid hours in the same entry. If you work for an employer at which some hours are paid and some are unpaid you will enter the hours as two different positions and should explain in the descriptions why some hours are paid and some are unpaid.

**TIP:** Do not duplicate hours. Each hour worked is either paid or unpaid it is not both.

**TIP:** If you own the project (animal, business, etc.) you do not have a Placement project and need to change to Entrepreneurship records.

7. **Gross Earnings** – enter the entire wage or salary you earned during that specific calendar year for the SAE project(s) in the application before any payroll deductions were made for taxes or other benefits.
8. **Expenses** - Some employment opportunities require you to provide your own equipment or safety items as part of your job. Enter the total amount spent during the calendar year of your entry on required items such as gloves, special shoes, safety glasses, etc. If you do not have such expenses leave this box empty.

**TIP:** When good records are not maintained it is easy to over-estimate the number of hours invested in a project. Review [SAE/Directed Lab Hour Limits](#) for information on the number of hours in a typical work year. If you are legitimately listing more than 2,080 hours in any one year be sure to provide a good explanation for the judges in your description.

## SAE - Entrepreneurship

This screen/page of the application appears if Entrepreneurship was selected as an SAE type on the Basic Setup screen/page.

Multiple entries can be made in each year. For example, if you own multiple animal or crop projects or multiple business enterprise you can enter information for each in the year(s) owned.

Year 2017 ▼	Pathway Agribusiness Systems (ABS) ▼ Project Name ? <input type="text"/>	Size/Scope ? <input type="text"/> Description ? <input type="text"/>	<a href="#">Add</a>
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1. **Year** - This dropdown menu will include only the years designated on the Basic Setup screen/page of the application. The earliest year available will be the year of the “Beginning Date” you entered. The latest year will be the year of the “Ending Date” you entered. Change these dates to make additional years available if appropriate.
  - a) Select the year from the dropdown menu that you wish to enter records for.
2. **Pathway** - there is no right or wrong answer for this selection choose the pathway the best fits the project.
  - a) select the Pathway that best fits the SAE project you are entering records for from the dropdown menu.
3. **Project Name** – Enter the name of the project you own. For example: Feeder Steers, 7E Lawn Mowing or Juanita’s Pet Care.
4. **Size/Scope** – Enter the size or scope for each project. Examples could include: Three head, 7 Clients, \$4,290 Gross Revenue, 8 acres, 69 tons or 71 repairs. Provide the information that best helps judges understand your size and scope.
5. **Description** – Provide the reviewers a short but clear description of what the project is so that eligibility can be determined.

### **Income / Expense Summary** – (*ENTREPRENEURSHIP or RESEARCH applications only*)

The income and expense summary is a yearly summary of annual cash and non-cash income and expenses from the SAE project(s) entered into the application.

The dates entered in the application on the Basic Setup screen/page set your application years.

Your records should be organized by calendar year. If your SAE records have a short-year (*Ex: 4 months*) and then a complete year (*12 months*), you will need to separate the records into two calendar years.

Example:

Year 1: September 1 to December 31 - (4 months of records for the year)

Year 2: January 1 to December 31 - (12 months of records for the year)

For further information regarding the Income and Expense Summary please refer to the tips and examples within the application by putting your mouse on one of the



symbols in the application

### **Ending Current Inventory** – (*ENTREPRENEURSHIP or RESEARCH applications only*)

Enter the value of items that you own on Dec 31 of the year prior to the year applying and that you intend to use up or sell/trade over the next 12 months in this section of the application. Examples  
National FFA Organization

could include seed you intend to plant, fuel you will use; animals, plants, or equipment you will sell/trade before Dec 31 of the following year.

Do not include items in this section that you intend to keep for longer than the next 12 months and that you can depreciate. Examples could include fish tanks, a greenhouse, computer hardware or breeding stock.

Only include items in this section that are directly related to the SAE project(s) included in the application.

For each of the following sections fill in the Description, Quantity and Ending Total Value boxes. You can add as many lines as needed to each inventory section by simply completing one line and clicking "Add".

- **Description** – Enter a clear description of the item(s). For example "Ewe Lambs", Feeder Steers or "Purebred Labrador Retriever Pups". Entering a description that only you understand, such as an animal's name (Spot) or tag number (582) is a bad idea. Remember judges do not know your project, you must clearly describe it to them
  - **Quantity** – Could be number of animals, pounds, gallons, liters, or other specific measurable amount of each item on hand.
  - **Ending Total Value** - The total dollar value of listed inventory items entered on the line as of December 31. Value should be no more than fair market value on that date.
1. **Harvested and Growing Crops/Plants** - This includes plants/crops owned on the date shown. Examples could include such things as potted plants or trees being held for sale, crops growing in the field or greenhouse and harvested grain in storage.
  2. **Feed, Seed, Fertilizer, Chemicals, Supplies, Prepaid Expenses, other Current Assets** - This includes consumable items such as livestock feed and veterinary supplies, crop supplies such as fertilizer, potting soil, pesticides and supplies such as gas, oil, spare parts, etc.
  3. **Merchandise, Crops, and Animals Purchased for Resale** - This includes all items of inventory owned that have been purchased for the specific purpose of reselling within 12 months which are on hand as of December 31.
  4. **Raised Market Animals** - Includes all the home-raised animals born that year and on hand as of December 31.

### **Ending Non-Current Inventory** – (*ENTREPRENEURSHIP or COMBINED applications only*)

Enter the value of items that you own on Dec 31 of the year prior to the year applying and that you intend to keep longer than 12 months in this section of the application. Examples could include but are not limited to tools, fish tanks, tractors, tack, buildings, breeding animals, etc.

Do not include items in this section that you intend to use up or sell within the next 12 months. Examples could include animal feed, fuel, items purchased for resale, etc.

Only include items in this section that are directly related to the SAE project(s) included in the application.

For each of the following sections fill in the Description, Quantity and Depreciation Claimed boxes. You can add as many lines as needed to each inventory section by simply completing one line and clicking "Add".

- **Description** – Enter a clear description of the item(s). For example: "Mature Mare", "2011 Case IH Tractor" or " 5 gallon Fish Tank". Entering a description that only you understand, such as an animal's name (Spot) or tag number (582) is a bad idea. Remember judges do not know your project, you must clearly describe it to them
  - **Quantity** – Could be number of animals, pounds, gallons, acres, or other specific measurable amount of each item on hand.
  - **Acquisition Cost** - The actual cash dollar cost to obtain the inventoried item. Fair market value should be used to determine the acquisition cost.
  - **Depreciation Claimed** - Represents the total dollar value of the depreciation claimed since the property came into your possession.
1. **Non-Depreciable Draft, Pleasure, or Breeding Animals** - Includes all working, pleasure or breeding animals/livestock born and raised on your property and owned by you which are on hand as of December 31 of the year prior to the application being submitted. These are animals that have not reached their maturity (*the point in which they start to depreciate*).
  2. **Depreciable Draft, Pleasure, or Breeding Animals** - Includes animals that have reached their maturity value and are now declining in value. These animals/livestock are owned by you and on hand on December 31 of the year prior to the application being submitted.
  3. **Depreciable Machinery, Equipment, and Fixtures** - Includes all machinery and equipment personally owned as of December 31.
  4. **Depreciable Land Improvements, Buildings, and Fences** - Includes all the buildings and land improvements, including tiling, terracing and fences you own as of December 31 of the year prior to the application being submitted.
  5. **Land** – Includes any land owned as of December 31 of the year prior to the application being submitted. Land does not depreciate.

## Financial Balance Sheet Statement Assets and Liabilities

These two pages summarize the assets and liabilities listed in your degree application. You will take note that the numbers reported are your "beginning" and "ending" values. Also, these pages are populated automatically within the application. The numbers from these pages come from the ending basic setup page, income/expense statement, and the current and non-current ending inventory. Values are hyperlinked to corresponding pages to aid applicant in locating where their financial figures are coming from.

## Financial Balance Sheet Statement-NET WORTH

The financial information for this page will automatically transfer from previous information provided by the candidate. To complete this page, the candidate will need to reference section E to make sure that the Accuracy Check for the balance sheet has "Met". This section compares your beginning and ending asset values in this application to your entered Liabilities + Equity (personal + SAE earned).

## Financial Balance Sheet Statement-Earnings and Productively Invested

The following sections are a summary of previously entered values

1. **SAE Earnings:** Summary of SAE-related earnings meet the award requirement
2. **Productively Invested:** Total change in productively invested using rules outlined by FFA.
- 3.
4. **Unpaid Hours:** Summary of unpaid hours from the SAE activities, which includes unpaid hours entered on:
  - a) SAE Details - Placement and Exploratory
  - b) SAE Details – Research
5. **Qualification Check:** Summary of SAE-related earnings meet the award requirement. One of the following options (*all areas for each option*) must be “MET” for the application to be successful.
  - a) **Option 1 Conditions:** A review of SAE earnings and productively invested value to achieve award value.
  - b) **Option 2 Conditions:** A review of award criteria using unpaid hours, earnings and productively invested.
  - c) **Option 3 Conditions:** An expanded combination of unpaid hours, earnings and productively invested.

## Community Service

Candidates must have participated in at least 50 hours of community service, within at least 3 different community service activities. These hours are in addition to and cannot be duplicated as paid or unpaid SAE hours. Activities can only be used once in the application. Activities planned by the local chapter can be included provided they are only listed in the community service section of the application and not duplicated in the FFA activities section of the application. Carefully review the [“Community Service Guideline for FFA Degrees”](#) to learn what activities are eligible to be counted as community service for FFA degrees.

Remember just because you worked for free doesn’t mean it was eligible community service, check the guidelines.

## Application Checklist

The application includes an automated checklist to help find errors or information missing from the application. It is intended to assist in finding errors. It will not find every possible error. A clean checklist does not guarantee the application is acceptable.

1. **NOT MET, MISSING or ERROR** - The application cannot be submitted for national level competition if there are any “Not Met”, “Missing” or “Error” items in red font on the checklist. This signifies there is incorrect or missing information that may prevent the application from qualifying.
2. **REVIEW** – A checklist items that says “Review” in red font is not an error and may be fine. The checklist is simply calling attention to information in the application that should be double

checked. Applicants are advised to ensure the information the item points to is clearly explained in the application.

3. **Pending Review** – A checklist item that says “Pending Review” in green font simply means that national staff need to manually review this application portion.
4. **MET** - Ideally all items on the checklist should say “Met” in green font. This does not mean the application is perfect and without error. It does mean everything the computer can automatically check for has been cleared.

**TIP:** Computers are not as smart as people. The computer can check whether or not a box contains text or numbers, it can't determine if the text or numbers are correct information. A clean checklist does not guarantee the application has no errors.

## Electronic Signatures

Carefully read the signature statements before electronically signing the application. Commitments are being made for all signatories, know what you are signing.

1. **Student Approval** – this is the signature of the applicant. Only when correctly signed into the applicant's electronic account can information be entered.
2. **Advisor Approval** – this is the signature of the supervising agricultural education teacher / FFA advisor. The advisor's signature is required to verify and certify the application. The advisor must be signed in to their electronic account to enter information here.
3. **Request for Parent/Guardian Approval** – this area is for the parent/guardian to certify the information in the application and give permission for information to be used.
  - a) Enter the email address of the parent/guardian who's signature is being requested and click the “Request Signature” button. The application will send an email to that address which says:

Dear *(Insert Parent/Guardian Names)*,

*(Name of Applicant)* has applied for an American FFA Degree and parent/guardian approval is required to complete the application process.

Please click this link to review the application and complete the approval:

*(A unique link to the specific application will be shown)*

If you have questions, please contact the *(Name)* FFA chapter advisor(s) listed below:

Advisor(s): *(The names of the FFA advisors in the application will be listed here.)*

Email: *(The email addresses of each listed advisor will appear here.)*

Phone: *(The school phone number will appear here.)*

- b) The parent/guardian must open the email message, click the link and following the simple instructions to electronically sign the application.
4. **Principal or Superintendent Approval** – This signature is for the school official to verify the scholastic information in the application is true and that the official is willing to recommend the candidate.
- a) Enter the email address of the “Employer” whose signature is being requested and click the “Request Signature” button. The application will send an email to that address which says:

Dear *(Insert School Official Name)*,

*(Name of Applicant)* has applied for an American FFA Degree and a school official's approval is required to complete the application process.

Please click this link to review the application and complete the approval:

*(A unique link to the specific application will be shown)*

If you have questions, please contact the *(Name)* FFA chapter advisor(s) listed below:

Advisor(s): *(The names of the FFA advisors in the application will be listed here.)*

Email: *(The email addresses of each listed advisor will appear here.)*

Phone: *(The school phone number will appear here.)*

- b) The school official must open the email message, click the link and following the simple instructions to electronically sign the application.

## Save/Print Your Application

It is important to understand that reviewers do not access the live, online application. The live application can be constantly accessed by applicants and is ever changing. The document reviewed is the specific, time stamped PDF version of the application which is generated and submitted. If no PDF of the application is "generated" by completing the following steps there is nothing to be submitted or be judged.

1. **Complete/Save Your App** – The button labeled "Complete/Save Your App" is how application PDF versions are generated (created). This generated PDF is what is actually submitted and judged. As versions are generated, they are listed in the table on the screen. The most recent version prior to the deadline is generally the one available to state leaders to select. Confirm with state leaders which version you want submitted.
2. **Get PDF** - To view the generated application click the "Get PDF" button next to each listed version. What you see when you open this file is what is being submitted for review.

## Application Submission

Each state FFA association has its own specific directions and deadlines for submitting applications for local/state review. Consult with the chapter FFA advisor and/or state FFA staff for these instructions.

Only state staff may certify and submit applications for national review. Instructions for state staff to submit applications online are provided yearly by national FFA staff and available in the State Staff Dashboard on FFA.org.

# Part Three: American Star Candidates

## What are the American Star Awards?

An American Star Award is the highest award given in the FFA. Only for members are able to receive this award each year. There are four American Star categories at the national level: American Star Farmer; American Star in Agribusiness; American Star in Agricultural Placement and American Star in Agriscience.

## Who can Apply?

1. Each year Star candidates are selected only from the current year American FFA Degree Candidates.
2. Each state FFA association is entitled to recommend one candidate in each star category for competition.
3. A single applicant may apply in only one category.
4. Star applicants must complete the current year American FFA Degree Application with the Star pages and attachments included.
  - a) Applicants must answer “Yes” to the question on the application cover page which states, “*I would like to complete additional pages in this application to be considered for an American Star.*” The additional screens/pages and instructions will be added to the electronic application.

## Star Categories

**American Star Farmer** – Candidates must have an entrepreneurship type Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) in production agriculture.

**American Star in Agribusiness** - candidates must have an entrepreneurship type SAE in a non-production area. Examples include but are not limited to, lawn care services, crop consulting services and services marketing agricultural products.

**American Star in Agricultural Placement** - candidates must have a placement type SAE working for an agricultural producer or agribusiness. This placement does not have to be a paid position, although the applicant must have enough earnings and investment from their SAE to qualify to receive the American FFA Degree.

**American Star in Agriscience** - candidates must have an SAE program that involves planning and conducting a scientific experiment based on a hypothesis and the use of the scientific method of investigation on the hypothesis. This may include qualitative research, quantitative research, experimental research, descriptive research, or quasi experimental research. Members who work for agricultural laboratories but are not performing their own research should apply in the Agricultural Placement category.

**TIP:** Candidates who have SAE projects of multiple types must decide which their strongest type is and complete the Star application with ONLY that information. Information from all SAE types may be included in the American FFA Degree application. When filling out the Star only pages, candidate should only discuss the SAE project(s) that qualify in the star category they have chosen to applying in. Mixing SAE projects from other categories only confuse the judges and will the applications score.

## Star Application Screens/Pages

### Star Setup

Carefully review the star category descriptions. Selecting the wrong category will severely penalize the application.

1. Click the single star category applying for.

### Primary Pathway

These are the Agriculture Food and Natural Resources pathways created by the [National Council for Agricultural Education](#). To learn more about the pathways and see all of the possible standards in each pathway review the [AFNR Standards](#) on the [National Council for Agricultural Education](#) website.

Select the primary pathway your SAE fits into. Even if entering multiple SAE projects from different pathways one of the eight career pathways or Career Ready Practices or Cluster Skills must be selected.

The pathway selected will determine the Agricultural Food and Natural Resources (AFNR) Performance Indicators available to select in a later section of the application. This selection can be changed at any time but if the pathway is changed the “Skills, Competencies & Knowledge” portion of the application has been completed this section will need to be redone.

Pathways available to select are:

1. **Agribusiness Systems** - The application of business principles, including management, marketing and finance to agriculture, food and natural resources.
2. **Animal Systems** – Applying and managing animal life processes, health, nutrition, genetics and processing.
3. **Biotechnology Systems** - The use of data and techniques of applied science to solve problems concerning living organisms.
4. **Environmental Service Systems** – Using instruments and technology used in waste management and to influence the environment.
5. **Food Products and Processing Systems** – Developing and applying skills in product development, quality assurance, food safety, production, and regulation and compliance within the food science industry
6. **Natural Resource Systems** - The management of soil, water, wildlife, forests and air as natural resources.
7. **Plant Systems** – Applying and managing plant life cycles, classifications, functions and practices to crops, turf grass, trees and shrubs and/or ornamental plants.
8. **Power, Structure and Technical Systems** – Developing and applying skills creating, using or maintaining agricultural equipment, power systems, alternative fuel sources and precision

technology, as well as woodworking, metalworking, welding and project planning for agricultural structures.

**Tip:** Career Ready Practices and Cluster Skills are not actually AFNR Pathways but rather practices and skills that should be applied to all pathways. These selections should generally be selected as the Primary Pathway only for Agricultural Education and Agricultural Communications type projects.

**Tip:** If the project does not fit well into any pathway except Career Ready Practices or Cluster Skills it is very possible the project is not agriculturally related and will not be accepted.

9. **Career Ready Practices** - fundamental skills and practices to be career ready including responsibility, maintaining personal finances, communication, decision-making, creativity and innovation, critical -thinking problem solving, management, technology use and cultural/global competency.
10. **Cluster Skills** - Developing and demonstrating fundamental knowledge of the nature, scope and relationships of agricultural food and natural resource systems and the skills necessary for analysis of current and historical issues and trends; application of technologies; safety, health and environmental practices; stewardship of natural resources; and exploration of career opportunities.

### **Performance Review:**

The following instructions and suggestions cover *Performance Review A, B and C*.

SAE programs vary widely. To accurately compare your accomplishments with other applicants, judges need information about you and the SAE project(s) the application is based on. The performance review section must be supported by details provided in the remainder of the application.

1. **Performance Review A - Question 1:** Briefly explain your SAE and how it is related to this award area.
  - a) Suggested information to provide:
    - i) What is the project(s)? Providing a clear, concise overview of the project for the judges is the most important piece of information to provide here. This helps the judges understand the rest of the application better. Remember that judges have only the information provided in the application. Be clear and descriptive!
    - ii) Explain unusual project aspects such as labor exchanges, gifts, loans, etc. that helped start or sustain the project.
    - iii) What interested you in this career area and motivated you to begin this specific project?
2. **Performance Review A - Question 2:** Briefly explain how your roles, responsibilities and/or management decisions related to this award area changed.
  - a) Suggested information to include here:

National FFA Organization

- i) How have your roles and responsibilities changed over the life of this project(s)?
  - ii) How have your responsibilities related to this award area changed or increased?
  - iii) How have your knowledge and skills related to this area changed or increased?
3. **Performance Review A - Question 3:** Briefly explain the single greatest challenge you faced in this award area and how you overcame that challenge.
- a) Suggested information to include here:
    - i) Specifically describe the challenge and provide the judges insight into your management and performance skills when describing what you did to overcome the challenge.
    - ii) Be clear and detailed.
4. **Performance Review B – Question:** Briefly explain your three greatest accomplishments or findings in this award area.
- a) Suggested information to include here:
    - i) Training, certifications, or knowledge gained that impacted success and/or growth as an owner or employee.
    - ii) Expansion, adaptation or major changes to the enterprise or employment that had a significant impact.
    - iii) Successful implementation of new methods or technologies.
    - iv) Personal growth or skill increase gained through the project that can be applied to future life or career.
- TIP:** Avoid repetition. If you have already shared information on a skill, experience or challenge do not repeat it. Provide the judges new and additional information.
5. **Performance Review C - Question:** Identify three experiences from your SAE in this award area and explain how they will impact your future.
- a) Suggested information to include here:
    - i) What future career choices has your SAE helped you select from or against?
    - ii) What training, skills, certifications, or degrees has participation in this SAE project decided you to learn/earn?
    - iii) Personal or business connections gained through this project that will impact your future.

- iv) Life skills learned through this project and the future impact.

## Learning Outcomes & Efficiency Factors

**Learning Outcomes** are specific skills or abilities learned or developed through the SAE project.

**Efficiency Factors** measure how well an enterprise is managed compared to accepted industry standards. Efficiency factors are like grades on report cards. They help you know if your business is doing well and if you should continue your current practices or make changes to increase efficiency.

Click “+ Add New Outcome/Efficiency” in the upper left corner of the application table to make an entry.

1. **Learning Outcome or Efficiency Factor** – Enter clear, specific and measurable skills and abilities you have increased or efficiency factors you have achieved. See a examples below.

**TIP:** Clear and realistically measurable outcomes/factors score better.

2. **Beginning Level**

- a) **Year** - Enter the year the specific outcome or efficiency started. This is generally the same year as the project started.
- b) **Level** – Enter the specific outcome or efficiency level you started at when the learning outcome or efficiency factor began

3. **Level Attained**

- a) **Year** - Enter the year the specific outcome or efficiency finished. This is generally the same year as the application closes.
- b) **Level** – Enter the specific outcome or efficiency level you have reached for the learning outcome or efficiency factor.

4. **Describe how this factor or outcome impacted the management decisions or performance objectives** – Provide a clear explanation of how the outcome/factor listed made a difference to the project the application is based on.

## Learning Outcome or Efficiency Factor EXAMPLES:

Learning Outcome or Efficiency Factor  	Beginning Level	Level Attained	Describe how this factor or outcome impacted the management decisions or performance objectives. 
Hourly Pay Rate	Year <b>2018</b> Level <b>\$8.00 per Hour</b>	Year <b>2021</b> Level <b>\$16.00 per Hour</b>	I started with no experience but committed to being reliable, teachable and hard working. I have called in sick only twice in 3 1/2 years and arrive to work on time every day. I have applied on the job training and my employer has recognize my value as an employee with multiple pay increases.
Job Safety, Accidents in Employment	Year <b>2018</b> Level <b>3 Accidents</b>	Year <b>2021</b> Level <b>0 Accidents</b>	Job safety is closely monitored by my employer to keep workers safe and avoid downtime. My first year I had three minor accidents. By applying training and experience I have decreased my accident rate so I have not had a reportable accident in two years.
Job Skills	Year <b>2018</b> Level <b>1 Skill Attained</b>	Year <b>2021</b> Level <b>11 Skills Attained</b>	When starting my employment my only skill was arriving on time. I have now learned to operate three different types of mowers as well as gas powered trimmers and edgers. I have learned six different basic maintenance operations.
Pumpkin Crop Yield	Year <b>2019</b> Level <b>1 ton per acre</b>	Year <b>2021</b> Level <b>1.6 tons per acre</b>	By adding additional organic matter to the soil and applying fertilizer strategically rather than broadcasting The water retention and nutrient levels of my soils has been increased resulting in improved yield.
Survival Rate	Year <b>2018</b> Level <b>18% Loss</b>	Year <b>2021</b> Level <b>6% Loss</b>	By purchasing and installing a new computerized thermostat and grow light switch I was able to improve the growing conditions of my poinsettia's. The reduced loss rate increased the number of healthy plants available to sell and increased profit.
Written Communication	Year <b>2018</b> Level <b>8-10 Edits per Article</b>	Year <b>2021</b> Level <b>1-2 Edits per Article</b>	When I first began writing agricultural news articles my editor regularly found spelling, grammar and content errors which necessitated corrections. Through improvements to my writing skills my editor now generally finds few errors in each article saving us both time and effort.

## Skills, Competencies and Knowledge

This section of the application is linked to the [Agricultural, Food and Natural Resources Standards](#) (AFNR Standards) established by the [National Council for Agricultural Education](#). This section of the application requires applicants to show how the included project(s) meets AFNR standards.

The application provides the opportunity to select ten standards. Five from the selected primary pathway and five from any pathway, cluster skill or career ready practice.

1. **A. Five Skills, Competencies, Knowledge within your Primary Pathway** - This table in the application requires selections from the primary pathway selected on the application's Basic Setup page. If you decide the offered standards do not match well consider returning to the Basic Setup page and selecting a more appropriate primary pathway.

If you find that no AFNR standards match well with your project you should consider whether or not your project is actually within an agricultural pathway at all. Projects that are determined to be non-agricultural are deeply penalized in the judging process.

- a) **AFNR Performance Indicator** - Select up to 5 indicators by selecting them from the dropdown menus.
- b) **Contributions to Success** – Concisely and clearly explain what you learned related to the selected standard and how applying it contributed to the success of the included project(s).

**TIP:** The description written needs to directly and closely, match the selected standard.

2. **B. Five Supporting Skills, Competencies, Knowledge from ANY Pathway** – This table allows selection from any of the AFNR Pathways, plus Cluster Skills and Career Ready Practices.
  - a) **AFNR Performance Indicator** - Select up to 5 AFNR Performance Indicators by selecting from the dropdown menus.
  - b) **Contributions to Success** – Concisely and clearly explain what you learned related to the selected standard and how applying it contributed to the success of the included project(s).

## Resume

A résumé is a written account of experiences and accomplishments that used to explain to potential employers why you are the most qualified person for a specific position.

Your involvement in agricultural education and FFA has provided you with numerous noteworthy employment and career-related opportunities.

1. **Objective (Career objective)** - Indicate specific short-term and long-term career goals.
2. **Agricultural Classes/Coursework** - List specific courses, seminars or other educational experiences that helped to prepare you for your stated career objective.
  - a) Examples:
    - i) Attended seminars on specific topics of interest
    - ii) Earned state-level certification for pesticide and herbicide applications
    - iii) Completed a plant science short course

- iv) Participated in a one-week ecology camp
- v) Attended a garden seed seminar

3. **Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAE)** - A summary of your SAE or related work experience (most recent to oldest).

- a) Examples:
  - i) Year - Year: Beef (Ownership) 18 projects
  - ii) Year - Year: Poultry (Ownership) 8 projects
  - iii) Year - Year: Grain Crops (Ownership) 2 projects
  - iv) Year - Year: Sales (Placement) 1 project
  - v) Year - Year: Natural Resource Systems (Research) 2 projects

4. **FFA Leadership** - Leadership opportunities come in many different forms.

- a) Examples:
  - i) Chapter/State Office
  - ii) Chapter/State/National Committee Chair or Member
  - iii) State/National Convention Delegate
  - iv) FFA Leadership Conferences

5. **FFA Activities** - List FFA activities in which you have participated at all levels; chapter, state and national.

- a) Examples:
  - i) Conferences
  - ii) Conventions
  - iii) Competitions
  - iv) Awards

6. **Community Service** – List activities and organizations you participate in or are part of for you community.

- a) Examples
  - i) Volunteer firefighter or EMT
  - ii) County Fair superintendent, board member or volunteer
  - iii) Scout projects
  - iv) Animal rescue
  - v) Food pantries

**Tip:** These hours may not be duplicated for SAE hours.

7. **School and Extracurricular Involvement** - List school-based organizations or activities participated in.

- a) Examples:
  - i) Class Officer
  - ii) Band
  - iii) Sports
  - iv) Chorus
  - v) Drama

8. **Awards and Honors** – List awards and honors from both FFA and non-FFA. Generally list a year and **short** description of the accomplishment (most recent to oldest).

- a) Examples:

- i) 2021 - Food Science & Technology CDE State Winning Team Member
- ii) 2021 – Beef Production – Placement National Finalist
- iii) 2019 – State FFA Degree
- iv) 2019 – High School Honor Roll
- v) 2018 – First Chair Trumpet in XYX School Band
- vi) 2018 – Junior Silhouette Rifle County Champion

9. **Certifications** (if none exist, enter “None” in this section)

- a) Example
  - i) Pesticide Applicators License
  - ii) Artificial Insemination Technician Certification
  - iii) CPR Certification
  - iv) NRA Range Safety Officer Certification

10. **Skills** – List specific and verified skills.

- a) Examples
  - i) Project Planning
  - ii) Conflict management
  - iii) Detail-orientated
  - iv) Active listening
  - v) Goal-oriented
  - vi) Microsoft Office Suite
  - vii) Adobe Creative Suite
  - viii) Public speaking
  - ix) Business and technical writing

11. **References** - Provide contact info for three people who can provide information about your strengths and skills, but who are not related to you.

12. **Personal History** - This is an addition space to provide information about you and your eligible SAE project(s) to the judges. Give them a full and clear picture of your SAE project(s) that meet the category.

- a) Examples:
  - i) Add more detail about SAE project(s)
  - ii) Explain unusual circumstances or opportunities that impacted SAE project(s).
  - iii) Describe skills and abilities developed through the SAE project(s).
  - iv) More fully explain duties and responsibilities.

**TIP:** Do not repeat information already provided elsewhere in the application.

## Photo Pages

Photos are used as supporting evidence to help tell the SAE project’s story. They need to show activity, size, and your involvement in the selected star category. Good photos and informative captions help judges understand projects and provide additional information for them.

Carefully read these important rules and tips to ensure the photo section of the application makes a positive impact on the application score.

1. **Photo Rules** – breaking any of the following rules will result in penalties up to and including disqualification of the entire application.

- a) Each photo page may contain only a single original photo.
    - i) Photo pages on which multiple photos have been combined into a single file (*collage, before/after, etc.*) are scored zero.
  - b) Photos may only show equipment, scenes, activities, etc. that are of the applicant's own SAE project included in the application.
    - i) Using photos taken from magazines, the internet, photo banks, etc. and claiming they are of the applicant's own project will result in the application being disqualified.
  - c) Using photos that include a copyright mark, watermark or any other mark that shows the photo is the intellectual property of someone other than the applicant will result in the application being disqualified.
    - i) Professional photos which have been legally purchased or are used with permission of the photographer are allowed if the applicant clearly asserts permission to use the photo has been obtained and that the National FFA Organization has permission to use the photo as well. This statement may be included in the photo caption or may be included as part of the Supplemental Information uploaded to the application.
    - ii) Using professional photos in the application is not needed and is generally recommended against to avoid any issues.
2. **Photo Tips** – the following suggestions can greatly improve the score for the photo pages.
- a) Photos and captions need to be germane to the project. Pictures of a grand champion ram owned by the applicant in a Star in Agricultural Placement application will score zero an entrepreneurship project does not qualify in the placement category.
  - b) Don't use photo captions to tell judges something they can already see by looking at the picture. Use the caption to add more information.
  - c) An SAE project must cover at least three years, a national level application is more competitive if showing more years. Inserting only recent photos all taken on the same day does not tell the story of your SAE as well as photos taken over the course of multiple years that show the progress and growth of the project.
  - d) Only six photo pages, with one photo each, can be included in the photo pages. Make each picture count. Judges don't know your project so make sure the photos and captions emphasize your strong points, not your weaker ones.
  - e) Ask a person who is unfamiliar with your program to review your photos and captions to determine the type of message they convey.

## Attachments / Uploads

The following items must be uploaded into the electronic application. The files must be PDF format and cannot be larger than 5 megabytes each in size.

1. **SAE Agreement(s)** - Attach a copy of your most recent SAE agreement.
2. **Recommendations** – Request and upload three ONE PAGE letters of recommendation from:

- a) **Agriculture Instructor / FFA Advisor** – this letter of recommendation should include the instructor / advisors name, school, title and signature. This letter must be no more than a single page. Extra pages will be cut off and not seen by the judges. Check the PDF copy of your application to be certain it loaded properly.
- b) **Other recommendations** – Request and upload SINGLE PAGE recommendation letters from two other people not related to you and not your FFA advisors. The letter writers name, title and signature should be included on the page.
  - i) If applying in the **Star in Placement** category one recommendation letter must be from your employer.

## Application Submission

Each state FFA association has its own specific directions and deadlines for submitting applications for local/state judging. Consult with the chapter FFA advisor and/or state FFA staff for these instructions.

Only state staff may certify and submit applications for national judging. Instructions for state staff to submit applications online are provided yearly by national FFA staff and available in the State Staff Dashboard on FFA.org.

Each state association may submit a single application for national level competition in each star award category available at the national level each year.

## Application Judging

Each chapter and state FFA association uses their own processes to select winning applications. Consult with the chapter or state association for those specific rules. The national judging process starts in June.

National judging is conducted in two rounds, the Finalist Selection Round and the Finals Round.

### National Judging Application Version

Only the generated PDF version of the application, certified and submitted by state staff is received by national FFA. This does not include SAE record books or added information that may be used as part of verification and judging at the local/state level.

While all pages of the national application are important and used to administer judging and award presentations not all pages are scored or even seen by judges.

1. **Page 1 - Signature Page** – this page is required to certify the application but is not scored or provided to judges.
2. **Page 2 – Applicant Information Page** - this page provides essential information for administering the judging and award process but is not scored by or provided to judges. This page includes personally identifiable information including the applicant's name, state and contact information so is removed before applications are made available to judges. This protects

the privacy of the applicants and removes any potential for bias by judges based on who the applicant is or where they are from.

3. **Extra Pages** – some state associations and chapters have added additional pages to the application for local and/or state use. These pages are removed for national judging and are not seen by national judges. This ensures that for national judging all applications contain the same pages.

## Finalist Selection Judging Round

A team of judges from around the country is assigned to each star award category. These judges score each application independently using scoring rubrics designed for each specific category. Judges submit their scores to national FFA staff.

The application score of each application from each judge is added together and averaged. The average application score for each application is used to rank it against the other application scores.

The top four applications, by average score, are named National Finalists and compete in the Finals Round of judging. Their rank is not announced.

Scores and rankings from applications not selected as finalists are not released.

## Finals Judging Round

A second team of judges from around the country is assembled to interview the four national finalists in. The national judge application versions of the four finalists are provided to the judges prior to the interview so the judges can review and prepare questions specifically about each finalist's SAE project.

Each judge ranks the four finalists using a scoring rubric created especially for the interviews. The judges submit their rankings independently to national FFA staff. National FFA staff combine the rankings of all judges to determine the Finals Judging Round ranking of each finalist.

## Winner Selection & Announcement

The applicant ranks from the Finalists Selection Judging Round and Finals Judging Round are combined to determine the national winner.

National Finalists are expected to attend the national FFA convention to appear on stage to be recognized. The national winner is announced live on stage. All national finalists and the winner may be recognized with certificates, pins, plaques or cash awards.

## Scoring Rubrics

At the national level judges score applications using specialized scoring rubrics developed to ensure that applications are all scored using the same criteria. The rubrics used for national judging are available for anyone to download and use on the [American Star Awards webpage](#) of FFA.org. The online application provides links on multiple pages to the webpage or go directly to the scoring rubrics by clicking [HERE](#).

There is a specific scoring rubric for each of the four star categories.

## **Additional Information**

The [American Star Awards](#) webpage of FFA.org has additional resources like “Tips & Tricks” from past judges, application examples and help videos.