



**Inclusion
Council**
GROW. SUSTAIN. BELONG

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

ONE STUDENT'S STORY IN STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

HOW PARTICIPATING IN FFA & FBLA INFLUENCED
KATIE'S FUTURE IN THE FOREST SECTOR

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National FFA Organization

FFA is a nationwide student organization that helps young people grow as leaders while exploring careers in agriculture and beyond. It gives members hands-on experiences that build confidence and skills they can use in real life. Students in FFA often go on to careers as farmers, scientists, business leaders, teachers, and many other professions. While it started as “Future Farmers of America,” today FFA represents a much broader community of students interested in agriculture, leadership, and personal growth. At its core, FFA is about helping members reach their full potential while making a positive impact in their schools and communities.



Future Business Leaders of America

FBLA is a career-focused student organization that prepares high school and college students for success in the business world. With an emphasis on leadership, entrepreneurship, and professional development, FBLA offers competitions, conferences, and networking opportunities that mimic real-world business challenges. Students engage in areas such as public speaking, accounting, marketing, finance, and emerging technologies, while also building soft skills like teamwork and problem-solving. The organization’s strength lies in bridging classroom learning with career readiness, helping students connect with mentors, internships, and potential employers.

Meet Katie Norris!



Katie Norris graduated from the University of Tennessee with a degree in Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications. Originally from Athens, Georgia, she now lives in Greenville, South Carolina, where she works as Program Coordinator at the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities. In this role, she supports project coordination, grants management, and partner engagement, all with a focus on advancing the health of working forests and the communities that rely on them. With a background in communications, community engagement, and conservation, Katie is passionate about building connections and making a positive impact through her work.

Katie's journey with student organizations started back in middle school when she jumped into both FBLA and FFA. At first, it was all about curiosity—curiosity about agriculture through FFA, and curiosity about leadership and business through FBLA. She also wanted to push herself out of her comfort zone, and both groups gave her plenty of opportunities to do just that.

FBLA became a big part of her high school years. She moved into leadership roles, took part in competitions, and got a taste of what professionalism looked like in real life. One of her favorite memories is when all the Georgia FBLA chapters came together for a huge Monopoly tournament. It might sound like just a game, but it taught strategy, quick thinking, and teamwork in a way that felt like leadership training disguised as fun. Mix in public speaking, teamwork challenges, and event planning, and Katie walked away with skills she still leans on today—organization, communication, and a clear sense of professionalism. More than that, FBLA showed her that leadership isn't about titles, it's about serving and inspiring others.

FFA added another layer of experience. Katie joined because she was curious about agriculture and excited for the leadership opportunities it offered. She loved FFA camp in Georgia, where she got to learn about the many different parts of agriculture and how important they all are. For her, being part of FFA meant learning teamwork, responsibility, and service while also feeling like she was part of something bigger than herself. Those lessons eventually shaped her path to study Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications at the University of Tennessee.

Looking back, Katie can see how much these organizations influenced who she is today. Both taught her confidence, communication, and teamwork—the kind of life skills that stick with you long after high school. She also thinks the forestry sector could play a bigger role in groups like FBLA and FFA. Forestry wasn't emphasized much during her time, but she sees how competitions, mentorship, and field opportunities could highlight the importance of forestry while also sparking interest in sustainability careers.

For Katie, the biggest takeaway is simple: growth comes when you put yourself out there. Whether it was competing in Monopoly, speaking in front of a crowd, or working alongside her peers at FFA camp, she learned that leadership is about responsibility, teamwork, and inspiring others—and those are lessons she'll carry for life.

Continue Reading to hear personal testimonies from Katie Norris about her experiences in both FFA & FBLA

FBLA Testimony, Katie Norris

“FBLA was the first organization that really helped me come out of my shell and grow into a leader. I first got involved in middle school, and from the very beginning, it pushed me to try new things, whether it was competing, speaking in front of a crowd, or working with a team on a project. By the time I reached high school, I was serving in leadership positions, which gave me the chance to guide others through the same opportunities that had shaped me. Those experiences taught me what it meant to be responsible, dependable, and confident, but they also taught me that real leadership isn’t about titles, it’s about serving and inspiring others. FBLA gave me practical skills that continue to shape my life every single day. It taught me how to present myself with professionalism, how to stay organized while planning events, and how to prepare with confidence for our annual competitions. Through those experiences, I learned the power of clear communication and genuine connection with others. Looking back, I can see that FBLA was one of the biggest reasons I chose to pursue Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications at the University of Tennessee. The lessons I picked up in my middle and high school years didn’t stay in the classroom, they grew with me. Now, in my role at the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, I rely on those same skills constantly. Whether I’m coordinating projects, leading discussions, or collaborating with partners, the influence of FBLA is right there with me. It wasn’t just an extracurricular activity, it was the foundation that gave me confidence, direction, and a clear vision for the career I’m building today.”

FFA Testimony, Katie Norris

“FFA was where my journey and love for agriculture really began. I was most involved during middle school, and it was the first organization that opened my eyes to the importance of agriculture and leadership. Even at that young age, FFA gave me the chance to step into leadership roles, try out competitions, and experience the pride of being part of something bigger than myself. Those early years gave me confidence, taught me responsibility, and showed me the value of teamwork and service. Even though I wasn’t as active later in high school, the lessons I learned in middle school FFA stayed with me and shaped how I approached new opportunities. What I also loved about FFA was the way it highlighted how many different paths exist within agriculture. It helped me see that agriculture isn’t just about farming, it’s about leadership, communication, stewardship, and connecting people and communities. That perspective influenced me when I chose to study Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications at the University of Tennessee. And now, in my work with the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, I can clearly see how those first experiences in FFA planted the seeds for the career I’ve built. FFA gave me an early start that I’ll always be grateful for, it introduced me to agriculture, taught me the basics of leadership, and set me on a path that I continue to walk today.”