

By CHRISTY WHEELAND Anyone who has been around the FFA program knows the countless hours and dedication it takes to achieve excellence with livestock projects, speaking opportunities, competitions and more while completing academic studies in the classroom. This week Mandy Lawson, representing the Coweta FFA Chapter, and Sarina Keele and Hallie Barnes, representing the Porter FFA Chapter, will be honored at the 91st National FFA Convention and Expo with the American FFA Degree FFA's highest honor. The presentation will be held Oct. 27 in Indianapolis, Ind. The American FFA Degree is bestowed upon a select group of students in recognition of their years of academic and professional excellence. To be selected, consideration is given to the members' desire to develop their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education. There are 653,359 FFA members in 8,568 chapters across the U.S., Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Less than one percent of FFA membership earns the American FFA Degree. Lawson, Keele and Barnes will be given a gold American FFA Degree key and certificate in recognition of their achievement. Let's learn a little bit more about Wagoner County's high-achieving FFA members: Mandy Lawson Mandy Lawson is the daughter of Steven and Shari Lawson of Coweta. She was involved in Coweta FFA for four years. Her competitive FFA events included Parliamentary Procedures, Prepared Public Speaking, Cattle Grading, Poultry Evaluation and Livestock Show. She served Coweta FFA as chapter vice-president for two years and as reporter for one. Lawson's primary Supervised Agricultural Experience was swine production. She showed numerous breeds through her FFA career including Crossbred, Yorkshire and Hampshire hogs. She added a second SAE her senior year and conducted an Ag in the Class Presentation for second grade students at Southside Elementary. Through that program she taught children about urban agriculture and incorporated a hands-on project where they made herb gardens to take home. Lawson competed in State Poultry Evaluation, State Speech, State Cattle Grading and State Reporter's events, earning both individual and team honors. She was also a state qualifier in Oklahoma FFA Parliamentary Procedures. She served on various committees, was a State Convention voting delegate and made

the Oklahoma Youth Expo Night of Stars Gilt Sale. She is also a Career Passport recipient and a State FFA Degree recipient for academic excellence. Lawson has received a host of academic and leadership scholarships to help her further her education at Oklahoma State University where she is a sophomore pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Animal Science with a Pre-Veterinary Option. She is a member of the Delta Delta Delta sorority and is serving as a New Member Educator for the Fall 2018 Pledge Class. She is also serving as a Homecoming Director and works with other projects as well. Lawson is involved in Collegiate American Farmers and Ranchers and OSU Meat Science. She volunteers with the Special Needs Community and Stillwater Humane Society and is an Oklahoma FFA volunteer. Sarina Keele Sarina Keele is the daughter of Donnie and Donnetta Keele of Porter. She has been a Porter FFA member for five years. Throughout her FFA years, Keele competed in Land Judging and Commercial Cattle Grading along with numerous community service activities. She developed her cattle Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) more than doubling her herd size. She was very successful showing many of the cattle that she raised out of her own herd. Highlighting Keele's FFA career in successive years was receiving the Porter Chapter Star Discovery award, the Star Greenhand award, the Star Chapter Farmer award and now the American FFA Degree. Since graduating from Porter High School, Keele attends Indian Capitol Technology Center (ICTC) where she is completing her welding certification to become a licensed welder. She is a student in the ICTC Graphic Communications department, is employed as a licensed welder and continues to run her cattle ranch with her family. In addition, she has become a valued community asset as she enjoys being a member of the Wagoner County Cattlemen's Association. She serves as an officer in various community organizations and her church. Hallie Barnes Hallie is the daughter of Kent and Diana Barnes of Hulbert. She was a member of the Porter FFA Chapter for seven years. Her competitive FFA events included Meats Evaluation and Technology, Public Speaking and Agriscience, among others. She earned the State

Agriscience Star, State Agriscience Proficiencies and was a member of the State winning Meat Judging Team. Barnes served her chapter as an officer for four years and also served the State FFA Association as 2015-2016 State FFA Reporter. Nationally, she earned the high Individual in Meats Evaluation, third in the Agriscience Fair-Animal Systems and was one of four finalists for the National Agriscience Proficiency award. Her FFA SAE of cattle grew to include forage production in addition to a registered Hereford cow herd from which she raised many successful show heifers. Barnes is a senior at Oklahoma State University majoring in Animal Science with a minor in Agribusiness. She is a member of the Omega Sigma chapter of the Alpha Omicron Pi sorority, as well as the Collegiate AFR, Farm Bureau, Cattlewomen, Aggie-X and Block and Bridle. She was a member of the OSU delegation touring New Zealand Agriculture as well as competing on the 2017 OSU Meats Judging Team. Be the first to know Get local news delivered to your inbox! Sign up! * I understand and agree that registration on or use of this site constitutes agreement to its user agreement and privacy policy.