



Spencer Hartman does chapter proud as he travels Nebraska **By Jan Schultz**

The Imperial Republican

After Spencer Hartman gave his retiring address as state president of the Nebraska FFA earlier this month, he played the song “Do Something” by Matthew West.

The song encourages us to take action on issues such as poverty and hunger, instead of waiting for others, including God, to “do something.”

In response, God said, “I did (do something), I created you,” the lyrics continue. “If not us, then who?”

Hartman took those lyrics to heart as he and his officer team spent the past year visiting 143 of the state’s 150 FFA chapters, conducting leadership seminars and representing one of the country’s most vibrant youth organizations.

Along the way, 20 new FFA chapters were formed in Nebraska and membership broke 7,200, a new record.

Hartman himself visited 21 FFA chapters during the year in the northwest part of the state. And, most of that was done in a five-week span.

In those chapter visits, ag education teachers could ask Hartman to give workshops during their classes that day.

Each state officer wrote one of seven workshops offered, and each officer became adept in presenting them on their chapter visits.

Hartman said his two favorite workshops proved to be “Communicating the Ag Message” and “Being an Informed Consumer.”

Despite being a very active member of the Imperial FFA and a year as state officer, Hartman said his perspective changed the past 12 months.

“I came in seeing us as advocates for FFA. I’m going out seeing myself an advocate for FFA education,” he said.

He said his many visits and interactions with FFA members and ag teachers made the three facets of the organization—the classroom, FFA and the Supervised Ag Experience (SAE)—become equally important in his mind.

“I see us now as advocates of all three, not just FFA alone,” he said.

Hartman said he has not come across another organization that prepares a student for the life skills they need than FFA does.

“It’s not just the marketing, speaking or business skills, but another key component of FFA is its emphasis on being engaged in community and service,” he said.

Hartman said it “really hit him” that it was over Saturday morning after convention, following a breakfast with his fellow outgoing officers and the newly-elected ones, one of which is his sister, Blair, a 2014-15 FFA state vice president.

“When I went back to my room and took off my jacket I knew it was for real then,” he said.

He was asked multiple times during the April 9-11 convention if he was ready to be finished. He really wasn't sure.

"I loved the work we did and will miss it," he said.

One of the best experiences he'll miss will be the traveling to chapter visits and getting to know the host families who housed him overnight.

In seeing the workings of so many other FFA chapters the past year, how does Imperial's stack up?

"I'll always have a bias, but Imperial has been among the top 15 state chapters the past several years," he noted.

And, not surprisingly, as a state officer, Imperial was on Hartman's list of "powerhouse chapters."

That doesn't come without strong community support and good teamwork among its two ag teachers/FFA advisors, he said.

But it's not just Hartman who has a bias toward Imperial.

"As I travel in the FFA circles, everyone knows where Imperial is," he said.

Despite his hectic schedule as state president, Hartman was still able to complete 12 credit hours each of the two semesters this school year to remain in full-time student status.

His first semester classes were all on campus, but just one was on campus second semester. The rest were taken online due to the intense travel schedule this spring.

"The professors really worked well with us officers," he said.

And, it also helped that he entered the University of Nebraska-Lincoln last fall already with 17 college credit hours under his belt from taking dual credit courses through Chase County Schools/Mid-Plains Community College's partnership.

He also found time the past year to be a member of UNL's Engler Club for students interested in entrepreneurship.

And, he was elected in mid-March to UNL's Association of the Students as one of 29 students senators. He represents the College of Ag Sciences and Natural Resources and attended his first meeting last week.

He will complete his freshman year in a couple of weeks, majoring in ag economics with a public policy option and minor in entrepreneurship.

So what's ahead for this 19-year-old?

It's not surprising FFA remains in his blood. He plans to seek a national FFA office this fall at convention.

This summer, he'll be working as a sales intern with Syngenta, a seed and chemical company. He said he'll be relying again on his family to keep his tomato greenhouse business going. His parents are Rob and Carma Hartman of Champion.

After his college career, Hartman said he'd like to pursue venture capitalism and, eventually, election to public office.