

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2019

CONNECTION

BROADBAND:
EDUCATION EDITION

JOHN DEERE

THE FUTURE OF FFA

Female students find
opportunity in agriculture

READY FOR PRIME TIME

Students learn about
livestreaming events

SHAPING A GENERATION

Broadband educates
tomorrow's workforce



BY SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Program helps small telcos with cybersecurity

Our lives are impacted in countless ways by broadband internet access. With such connectivity, however, comes threats that must be guarded against, including cyber-attacks targeting network operators. Local, community-based providers such as your telco do a great job protecting against cyberattacks, despite not having the resources of the big, nationwide companies.

But there is more we can do, and NTCA is excited to work with our members and the Department of Homeland Security on the Cyber-Threat Information Sharing Forum for Small Network Operators. While there are other programs for sharing cyberthreat information, these generally do not meet the unique needs of small telcos. Our pilot program provides a trusted environment for small network operators to share information about cyberthreats, vulnerabilities, best practices and mitigation activities. Further, it is bolstered by connections to network defenders across the globe, including federal resources.

During this summer's pilot phase, participants exchanged information via a variety of online platforms, participated in weekly virtual meetings to share cyber intelligence and heard from guest speakers. They also collaborated with their peers and received daily open-source and weekly technical reports created by NTCA's pilot support team.

This is yet another example of how local telcos like yours all across America are working together to ensure you have the best broadband experience possible in today's connected world. [📞](#)

Home prices boosted by faster internet

BY NOBLE SPRAYBERRY

Access to speedy internet service increases the market value of homes, according to a first-of-its-kind study reported online by the Daily Yonder.com.

The study evaluated 887 "remote rural" counties, which are those not adjacent to a metropolitan area. And it evaluated data such as median housing value, housing characteristics, income growth, employment and more.

Speeds of 25 Mbps or less can make a dramatic difference in overall home values. A 10% increase in the percentage of residents with access to at least 200 Kbps — far slower than the speeds now offered by many rural telcos — would raise the average housing value by \$661.

"These may not seem like massive numbers, but when applied to the average number of households in each county, they add up to significant increases in property values, which would likely have meaningful impacts on county property tax collections," wrote the study's authors, Brian Whitacre, of Oklahoma State University; and Steven Deller, of the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The authors pointed out additional benefits of increased broadband adoption, including residents who become more civically engaged, reduction of social isolation and even income generation. [📞](#)

BY THE NUMBERS: BROADBAND IN RURAL REMOTE COUNTIES

94%

of the houses had access to down-load speeds of 200 Kbps.

63%

had access to 25 Mbps, the FCC's definition of broadband.

38%

had access to 100 Mbps.

9%

had access to 1,000 Mbps.

6%

on average, of houses had no fixed internet availability beyond dial-up.



Source: "Broadband's Relationship to Rural Housing Values," a study by Steven Deller and Brian Whitacre



Be aware

A dose of skepticism
and care will foil
phone and online
scammers

Helpful pop-up messages frequently appear on computer screens, including weather notifications, news alerts or reminders to update software. Not all pop-ups, however, are benevolent. In fact, some consumers have learned tough lessons about trust in the digital age.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) describes one form of gift as “tech support scammers.” A pop-up window appears on a computer screen, complete with well-known technology company logos and a phone

number for help solving a problem with a balky operating system, computer virus or similar woe.

The end goal for these scams is to have someone wire money or to provide gift cards to the scammers. And the pitches and patter from the scammers are polished — people are fooled. There are many variations, including offers to help someone recover a refund.

Fraud is certainly not limited to computers. Telephone scammers target the elderly with phone calls in which the scammer pretends to be the

grandchild or another relative. The scammer may even claim to be a lawyer or police officer, increasing the urgency, according to the FTC.

The scammer paints the picture of an urgent situation, asking for money to be sent immediately through a service such as UPS, whose terms and conditions for use state that it does not agree to ship cash. As a result, UPS, which does work with law enforcement on such cases, is not liable for the loss, says Matt O’Conner, senior manager of public relations for the company. 📞

TIPS FOR AVOIDING TECH SUPPORT SCAMMERS

PHONE CALLS: If you get a phone call you didn’t expect from someone who says there’s a problem with your computer, hang up.

POP-UPS: Do not act on pop-ups appearing on your computer that request you to call a number. Real security warnings and messages will never ask you to call.

WEB-BASED ADS: If you’re looking for tech support, go to a company you know and trust. Scammers will try to trick legitimate websites into posting ads for bogus companies.

For additional tips, or if you feel you’ve been scammed, visit consumer.ftc.gov and search for tech support scam.

TIPS FOR AVOIDING FAKE EMERGENCY SCAMMERS



If you receive a call you suspect is a fake emergency scam, follow a few simple steps toward safety.

Check out the claim by looking up the phone number of the friend or family member the scammer claims is in need. Call that person, even if the scammer requested that you do not.

Do not pay. Anyone who requests you to wire money, send a check, overnight a money

order, or pay with a gift card or cash reload card is always, always, always a scammer. These payment methods are nearly untraceable.

If you sent money to a family-emergency scammer, contact the company you used to send the money and tell them it was a fraudulent transaction. Ask to have the transaction reversed, if possible.

Please report such calls or messages to [FTC.gov/complaint](https://ftc.gov/complaint).

Our cooperative mission gives us purpose

Business gurus often urge executives to ensure the company they've been entrusted to lead is "mission-oriented" or "mission-focused," and that the organization's mission should drive progress and establish values.



KEVIN BEYER
Chief Executive Officer

"A mission statement is not something you write overnight," said famed organizational thinker Stephen Covey. "But fundamentally, your mission statement becomes your constitution, the solid expression of your vision and values. It becomes the criterion by which you measure everything."

If experts like Covey turned their attention to communications cooperatives like Farmers and Federated, I believe they would be pleased to see that the original founding mission of our cooperative remains such a focus of what we do daily.

With October being National Cooperative Month, it's an important time to celebrate that founding mission and our unique legacy as a cooperative.

Farmers and Federated were founded by local people who wanted to bring a modern communications network to our area. These bold, forward-thinking people were not telecommunications experts or even the sort of business gurus I mentioned earlier. They were, however, people dedicated to our community. People determined to open opportunities for their friends, families and neighbors. People committed to building the foundation our region needed to thrive.

The convictions they held when they formed our cooperative live on today as the foundation of our mission. And taking a page from the business experts, we use that mission to drive our progress and establish our values.

DRIVE PROGRESS

Another favorite idea among the business gurus is that businesses must continually move forward to avoid falling behind. I think there's a lot of truth to this, but I also think it's important to let the cooperative's mission drive that progress.

Delivering the best possible communications service to residents in our region is what drives us to work hard every day.

It's also important for that mission to provide perspective for our progress. If we overextend our resources, we put our future in jeopardy. And if our future is put into question, so are the communications services on which many in our community rely.

Rest assured that as we move forward, we do so with our mission in mind.

ESTABLISH VALUES

A cooperative telco has a different set of values than a publicly traded company like the big corporate providers that dominate our industry. Those providers exist to enrich their stockholders and are driven by Wall Street's quarterly performance measurements. This is why, in most cases, those big, corporate providers only build and upgrade service in profitable metropolitan markets. That profit-driven mission defines their values as a company.

Farmers and Federated are different. Since our cooperatives were founded to improve the quality of life in the areas we serve, we are focused on bettering our community. This means taking care of our customers and employees. This means we value the relationships our cooperatives have with other organizations. And above all, it means we value the opportunity to continue meeting your communications needs today and in the future. 📞

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Farmers Mutual Telephone Company
301 2nd St. South
Bellingham, MN 56212
farmers@farmerstel.net
320-568-2105

Federated Telephone Cooperative
201 State Hwy. 9 S. • P.O. Box 107
Morris, MN 56267
emailftc@fedtel.net
320-324-7111 or 320-585-4875

FARMERS MUTUAL TELEPHONE COMPANY BOARD

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WORDSOUTH

A CONTENT MARKETING COMPANY

On the Cover:



Kyerra Carter, Morgan Johnson, Karmen Sperr and Izabella Stender thrive as part of FFA. See story Page 12.

BEWARE, BEFORE YOU SHARE

October is National Cyber Security Awareness Month. Please be cautious whenever using personal information. The frequency of fraudulent scams and phishing is on the rise, with many scams targeting vulnerable adults.

Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone took part in a NTCA webcast on the topic of protecting yourself against financial fraud. The National Adult Protective Services Association is a recommended resource on the topic:
www.napsa-now.org.

HERE ARE A FEW TIPS TO PROTECT YOURSELF:

Updating passwords

Use a password of more than a dozen characters, and don't reuse the same password or security questions for different accounts.

Backup your network

Be sure to back up your data regularly. In a case of a ransomware attack, this may be the only way to recover vital data.

Keep it safe

Never list your personal information in unsecured files on your device. Try a password management program with encryption, or encrypt your hard drive.

Revised Authentication

Consider using a two-factor or multi-factor authentication to confirm your identity and to protect your accounts.

Learn to suspect "Phishing"

Downloading unknown attachments or links can be risky. Check the URL by positioning your mouse cursor above the link to make sure it's correct.

Protect all devices

Handheld devices are just as vulnerable as a desktop. Install the latest security updates, or enable automatic updates of your operating system.

Lock it down

If you suspect your personal information has been compromised, immediately call your credit card companies to freeze those accounts and hopefully stop any further damage.

Be careful with social media

While posting vacation photos and daily activities can be fun, they can also be a window for a criminal if your privacy settings aren't reserved to friends and family.



Amazing opportunity!

Farmers Mutual Telephone Company awarded Rachel Lund with a trip to the 2019 FRS Youth Tour in Washington, D.C. "I met lots of new people from many different places around the U.S.," Lund says. "It was really cool to see the sights that other people have only seen in books and movies. Not only did I learn a lot about our nation's history, but I also learned a lot about the telecommunications industry. It was an amazing experience, and I am so grateful that I got the opportunity to see our nation's capital. Thank you so much to everyone who made this trip possible."



HELP US WELCOME A NEW MEMBER

We are proud to announce that Teague Picht has joined our team as an IT Technician. A native of Morris, he recently graduated from Alexandria Technical & Community College with an associate of science degree in cybersecurity, virtualization and networking. He is excited to be a member of the Acira team. Picht likes spending time outdoors or volunteering in the community.



Taking 'City Farmhouse'

on the road

BY JOHN CLAYTON

Before an alphabet soup of cable television channels like HGTV and DIY began delivering tips and advice for home decor and remodeling, Kim and David Leggett were finding dusty treasures and building their City Farmhouse brand.

That part of the business — the hunt for the rusty and the rustic — has remained the same for the Leggetts since they started the business 25 years ago in Franklin, Tennessee. But City Farmhouse evolved as trends changed, venturing into “pop-up fairs” and “pop-up shops,” terms now part of the lexicon as antiques and decor items move beyond the four walls of the traditional retail space.

“The pop-up fairs and pop-up shops are becoming a popular way all across the U.S. for people to sell all kinds of things,” Kim Leggett says. “It’s not just relating to antiques. They’re extremely popular in New York and California, where people are selling everything from jewelry to fashion.”

The Leggetts began their City Farmhouse Pop-Up Fairs in 2012 in Franklin. Shoppers and vendors from across the country have attended. In 2017, the couple licensed City Farmhouse fairs in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and Medina, Tennessee.

While Kim Leggett has been putting her touch on her own City Farmhouse brand for more than two decades, her fingerprints are now all over a series of Country Living Fairs.

As program director for the 2019 fairs, sponsored by the popular Country Living Magazine, Leggett is coordinating presenters for the main and kitchen stages. “The goal is to bring Country Living Magazine to life,” Leggett says.

“Visitors will learn from top-notch influencers in the industry, while enjoying vendors with antiques, home decor, food, crafts, clothing — everything you might see in an issue of Country Living Magazine.” 📺



Kim and David Leggett have curated the City Farmhouse style for over two decades.

A family business by the book

Kim Leggett says the pieces she discovers, buys and sells can come together to create a home that makes memories. “We don’t always know the whole story behind a piece, but when it goes to another home, it becomes part of another story, and we have that going forward,” she says.

To Leggett, connections between past and present are at the essence of what has become the “city farmhouse” style of decor, which she promotes with shows and her Franklin, Tennessee-based business.

She authored “City Farmhouse Style,” a 2017 book about a design movement that features urban homes decorated in farmhouse style. The work includes photography by Alissa Saylor. “Farmhouse style is time-tested. It has staying power. You can bet the farm on it,” writes Country Living Editor-in-Chief Rachel Hardage Barrett in the book’s foreword.

A love for antiquing and decorating is part of Kim Leggett’s family heritage. “My grandmother, who raised me, and my aunt — she was at our house all the time — went to auctions and local flea markets like the ones in every little small town,” she says. “So you could say I was raised in the business. My grandmother wasn’t actually a seller, but she would buy things, and when she got tired of something, she would sell it to a neighbor.”

Leggett was hooked, going to the auctions and first buying “blind boxes” filled with surprises. “There would just be all kinds of interesting little things in the box,” she says. Soon enough, she began buying with purpose, teaming with her husband to create City Farmhouse and applying knowledge gained through the years to bring a country style into households across the country.



“People in farmhouses were very eclectic, especially people who didn’t have a lot of money,” Leggett says. “They used whatever they could find, and maybe there was a craftsman in their backyard who was a cousin or a neighbor and they could make some wonderful things inexpensively.”

Leggett has introduced these relics — and their stories — to cabins, cottages, mansions, homes of celebrities and even restaurants across the country. From national design awards to features in national magazines, Leggett is recognized for her passion and efforts in sharing a decorating style that connects people with the past while writing a new story for their future.

CITY FARMHOUSE AT THE COUNTRY LIVING FAIRS

Sponsored by Country Living Magazine

The first fair this year was in Rhinebeck, New York. The final two 2019 events are set for Columbus, Ohio, Sept. 13-14 and Atlanta, Georgia, Oct. 25-27.

In addition to hundreds of vendors from more than 25 states, this year’s fairs will feature a City Farmhouse Pop-up SHOP. This special section of the Country Living Fairs will include unique finds from the Leggetts, along with curated sellers and popular vendors from other City Farmhouse events.

Other antique events

THE OLMSTEAD COUNTY GOLD RUSH ANTIQUE SHOW AND FLEA MARKET

This event covers the entire 52-acre Olmstead County Fairgrounds in Rochester, Minnesota. Events occur annually in May and August. It is billed as one of the largest such shows in the Midwest.



HI! I'M JADE GEHRKE!

In this column, in each issue, you'll learn about technology and read simple tips to get the most out of your electronics. For more tips or help with your devices, be sure to read this column in future publications. I'm always happy to help!

CONNECT YOUR TECH



Your devices for back-to-school learning are more powerful when they are connected to a reliable Wi-Fi network.

Contact Acira and ask about options for extending broadband internet service throughout your home with Wi-Fi.

Back-to-school tech

Find the right tools for you

Technology can't answer those age-old questions that come up this time of year — "Is it back-to-school time already?" and "What happened to summer?" — but it can make the transition from carefree idling to hitting the books a little easier.

Here are three software and portable hardware combinations students can use in their classwork and beyond.

ELEMENTARY OR MIDDLE SCHOOL



While younger students can benefit from a laptop, most of them are so familiar with mobile devices that a tablet with a little more power

can offer the perfect choice. It's hard to rival the Apple iPad for ease of use and a polished user experience. There are several models, ranging in size from the iPad mini's 7.9-inch display to the iPad Pro's impressive 12.9-inch screen. A traditional iPad, starting at \$329, is a good choice for this age range.

With tablet in hand, kids can use a variety of age- and grade-appropriate apps, such as Libby. Available free from the App Store and on Google Play, Libby is a neat mix of old and new that allows kids to borrow any of the thousands of e-books and audiobooks available at their local library. Students with a library card can sample any available books, download them for offline use and keep track of their reading history.

HIGH SCHOOL


Much like in the tablet department, it's hard to beat the ease of use offered by an Apple device. The new MacBook Air model provides good computing power at a reasonable price, starting at \$1,199 with a 13-inch Retina display and 128 GB of storage. Chromebooks,

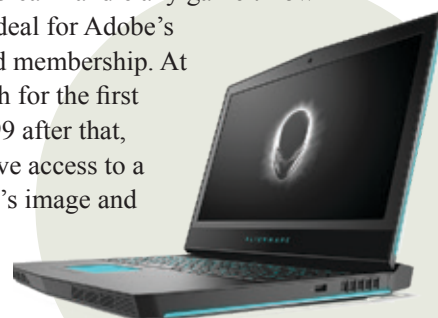
available at a range of prices and specifications, can also offer affordable options.

As for software, a must-have is Microsoft Office. Yes, Google offers a similar program suite on the cloud, but you can't beat the style and functionality offered by the bundle of productivity applications. Office has you covered whether you're writing an essay in Word, making advanced spreadsheets in Excel or preparing history presentations in PowerPoint. A subscription to Office 365 for use by one account across a variety of devices — including Macs, PCs, tablets and phones — is \$69.99 a year. Students are eligible for a fully functional free version. All they have to do is visit www.office.com and provide a school email address.

COLLEGE

As students go away to college, they may not want to lug along the family PC. But if they miss the computing power of a desktop, and their game consoles, they can substitute both with a gaming laptop from Alienware. Fully loaded at \$2,199, the R5 model comes with a 17-inch display, an Intel Core i9 processor, a GTX 1080 graphics card, 32 GB of RAM, a 256 GB solid-state drive and a 1 TB hard drive.

While the R5 can handle any game thrown at it, it's also ideal for Adobe's Creative Cloud membership. At \$19.99 a month for the first year and \$29.99 after that, subscribers have access to a suite of Adobe's image and video editing tools, including Photoshop. 



Full stream ahead

Local schools, districts connecting online

BY JOHN CLAYTON

This isn't your dad's AV club. With access to high-speed internet and wireless technology, students at Morris Area and Lac qui Parle Valley high schools are streaming athletic and other events online. They join AV teams at other high schools and school districts nationwide that are keeping fans, alumni and families involved via the internet.

Austen Miller, technology integration-ist at Morris Area High School, graduated from high school around 20 years ago — a time when putting together a campus broadcast was a monumental task. “We had a live TV broadcast station for our small little school, and I mean it took an army of people to put it together,” Miller says. “We literally had a trailer with just the equipment that had to be pushed around. I can't even imagine what kind of money was invested into that, just to get it to go live for band concerts and football games and whatnot. So, to be able to grab a \$200 iPad and a tripod and set it up and go live is pretty insane when you think about it.”

Morris streams its live events on YouTube Live using a free application called Open Broadcaster Software that links to the streaming service. “Our first goal was to keep it as basic as possible with a one-camera setup,” Miller says. “We didn't want to go all out and break the budget.”

NEWS TO SPORTS

Lac qui Parle Valley High School also streams live from sporting events, concerts, school board meetings and even prom, but via the Livestream platform. Viewers can watch streamed Lac qui Parle Valley events live at livestream.com/lqpv. Both schools use high-speed internet services from Farmers Mutual or Federated Telephone.

Regardless of the technical differences, the content is much the same for both schools. “We do sports, the arts and everything,” Miller says. “We try to do as much as we can. Our biggest hurdle is having people available to run the stream.”

Miller says the most popular streaming events so far have been football games, some of which can be long hauls for fans who follow the team in person. Streaming gives them another option, and Miller says a basketball game this past season had over 300 viewers. The school publicizes the games via simulcast alongside the local radio broadcast, so viewers can see the game while listening to the radio play-by-play calls.

► Eean Allpress renders some footage with video editing software as Brett Baldwin and Trevor Gearman watch and give suggestions.

▼ Harrison Patzer, left, and Brett Baldwin check the camera settings before filming a segment.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

“The feedback has been all very positive,” Miller says. “It's for your grandparents or family that are in Arizona and can't make it to a game or performance. Or maybe they're local, but they're in a nursing home or can't make it out. With poor weather and bad road conditions this year, people could watch the stream, and they could still show their support for the teams.”

Streaming of events from area schools is not only important to local communities, but also to students who spend their time on the 21st-century AV teams. “I think there's so many teachable and valuable skills in this,” Miller says. “The industry is so huge.”





ONLINE opportunities

Broadband internet takes education to another level

Tomorrow's workforce may appear very different from today's due to an expected increase in the number of science, technology, engineering and math jobs. And the market for jobs requiring more education than a high school diploma but less than a college degree is also expected to grow.

But with the opportunities a changing workforce represents, challenges also appear. Fast broadband internet services, however, can help by providing rural communities access to the educational tools to make those career paths a reality.

A report by NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association found that improved access to broadband internet allows communities to better provide critical training. Many small, rural communications providers offer fiber-based broadband services that can support distance education, and many also work closely with educators and industry to develop opportunities for students to acquire STEM — science, technology, engineering and math — and middle-skills jobs.

Students like Nathaniel Treadaway develop skills that increase economic opportunities in rural areas through work-training programs, apprenticeships and classroom instruction. Treadaway grew up in Kuttawa, Kentucky, with aspirations to teach music. But after studying music education at the University of Kentucky for a short time, he quit. "I decided the teaching field wasn't for me," he says. So he started working at a bank.

He soon realized the need to combine technology and his job, and he decided to go back to college. He enrolled at West Kentucky Community and Technical College in Paducah to pursue an internet technology degree. He got an internship at a major Paducah corporation that provides customer network support, and now he works there full time while continuing his education online. He expects to graduate this year.

At 29, Treadaway is part of a growing number of students attending college while continuing to work. "This is a rural area, and I'm thankful we have these opportunities," he says. "It's vital for those of us who want to stay here."

West Kentucky Community and Technical College continues to address the problem of young people across rural America leaving for the bigger cities. "In the past, some of the younger generation felt like they had to leave the area to make a good living and raise their families, but they're itching to come back," says David Heflin, vice president of academic affairs at the college. "We want to find employment that can provide that opportunity for them. We can't allow the 'brain drain' to continue taking our kids from this area. We have to provide opportunities so they have a reason to stay."




DISTANCE LEARNING

Broadband internet leads the way in the industrial revolution, and it's a driving force in education and jobs. Not only does broadband impact technology in jobs, but also manufacturing plants often rely on high-tech tools such as robots and cobots, which are computer-guided devices that assist a person. Partnerships among industry and educators are a growing trend to ensure that schools are offering courses that meet the requirements for these and other jobs.

Using technology to partner with other high schools and postsecondary institutions, high school administrators can create programs that help students prepare for guided postsecondary education, according to the report. Partnerships with other area institutions can help students prepare for regional job markets.

For rural community colleges, distance education plays a big role. Often, there's not enough enrollment to support a local classroom, and online classes can fill a gap. It's a growing trend. At Collin College in Texas — with locations in



Frisco, McKinney and Plano — online classes now account for about 40% of the enrollment.

When Glenn Grimes, a Collin College professor of computer science, first started teaching 17 years ago, all the classes were face to face. “Back then, people didn’t have the bandwidth necessary to drive the audio and video needed to do online classes,” he says. Students now have the ability to pick and choose topics they wish to study from campuses all over the world. “It’s a huge benefit for students,” Grimes says. “It gives them so many more options.”

Rural broadband providers are playing vital roles, leveraging their networks and working closely with local educational institutions, the NTCA report states. Rainbow Communications of Hiawatha, Kansas, provides fiber connectivity to Highland Community College, the oldest college in the state.

The network allows the school to offer numerous courses at various sites. Career and technical education courses at HCC include building trades and medical coding. The college also supports the agricultural industry through such courses as precision agriculture and diesel mechanics, areas of study which are necessary as farms increasingly rely on precision agriculture that blends traditional mechanical equipment with analytical tech and GPS-guided systems.

In Brainerd, Minnesota, Consolidated Telecommunications Co. works with Bridges Career Academies & Workplace Connection, which brings together high schools, local colleges and businesses to provide career guidance and training. The effort focuses on building local career opportunities.

Nex-Tech in Lenora, Kansas, works with local charitable foundations and public utilities to support high school and college internships. Students earn at least \$10 per hour and are offered technical and nontechnical career experiences in areas like agriculture, economic development, automobile restoration, medical services, computer technology, art, banking, legal and others. ☞



Broadband and its impact on education

- Youth who live in areas with broadband are found to have earned higher scores on college entrance exams such as the SAT or ACT.
- More than 70% of NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association members can provide 25 Mbps and higher broadband to their customers.
- A 2005 study found no significant difference between the writing skills of on-campus and off-campus students utilizing distance learning.
- Distance education can help address the lack of specialization possible in small, rural schools that can't provide as broad a range of courses as larger schools because of affordability or demand.
- Distance education can also assist in early college attendance for high schoolers, particularly in rural areas that lack resources to support the increased expenses of college.
- Broadband-enabled distance education allows all eligible students who have access to broadband to participate.
- Distance education can also provide flexibility for working students and accommodate ongoing family obligations.

Source: Rural Broadband and the Next Generation of American Jobs, a report of NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association.





From left, Morgan Johnson, Izabella Stender, Karmen Sperr and Kyerra Carter have all made their marks in FFA.

women celebrate 50 YEARS IN FFA

LOCAL FEMALE STUDENTS HAVE BECOME AG LEADERS

BY JOHN CLAYTON

A half-century ago, Future Farmers of America was a boys club — no girls allowed. But that changed when women finally got the opportunity to join the national organization in 1969.

The very next year, two young women from New York and New Jersey became the first female delegates at the FFA's national convention, paving the way for women to take on leadership roles in the organization.

They also opened doors for Minnesotans like Kyerra Carter, Morgan Johnson, Karmen Sperr and Izabella Stender to join, lead and thrive as part of FFA. We asked those four young women about their experiences in FFA. Here are some of their answers:

KYERRA CARTER, 18

- Lac qui Parle Valley Class of 2019
- Freshman at South Dakota State University

Q: What got you started in FFA?

A: My family has always been very active in FFA and agriculture in general. I would say what truly got me started in FFA was my passion for agriculture and the encouragement that I received from my brothers and parents.

Q: How do you hope to use what you've learned in FFA in the future?

A: I hope to use the agricultural and leadership skills that I have learned to guide me as I pursue a degree in human chiropractic and eventually equine chiropractic. I believe that the business and communication skills that I have enhanced through FFA will help me as I own my own chiropractic business and raise my own livestock.

Q: How has FFA helped you as a student and outside of the classroom?

A: FFA has improved my communication skills and self-confidence infinitely. I have learned valuable skills involving agriculture and leadership that I have no doubt will serve me well in the future.



Kyerra Carter, Lac qui Parle Valley High School Class of 2019.

MORGAN JOHNSON, 19

- Dawson-Boyd High School Class of 2019
- Freshman at Minnesota West Community & Technical College
- Future plans: Major in agricultural communication at Southwest Minnesota State University

Q: What got you started in FFA?

A: I began my FFA career because of a close friend. I had been involved in 4-H all my life, but I had never thought about FFA. However, my junior year of high school, a friend encouraged my brother and me to do FFA! My family is big into horses, and my brother and I thought that would be a good way to start in FFA. That fall, my brother, Caleb; another friend of ours; and myself competed in horse judging.

Q: What's your favorite part(s) of the program?

A: What I love about this program is that there is an area of the program that fits every interest. For me, it was horse judging, but for others, it might be horticulture, forestry or meats evaluation. Everyone is able to have an area of interest which they can compete and excel in!

Q: How has FFA helped you as a student and outside of the classroom?

A: I believe that the largest way which FFA has helped me outside of the classroom is in my decision-making ability. In horse judging, you have to make a decision on four horses within five minutes.



Morgan Johnson, Dawson-Boyd High School Class of 2019.

This may seem easy, but there are many different factors you have to consider. This type of situation has prepared me to evaluate a situation and make a decision quickly.



Karmen Sperr, Morris Area High School Class of 2020.

KARMEN SPERR, 17

- Senior at Morris Area High School
- Future plans: Major in agribusiness at North Dakota State University

Q: What got you started in FFA?

A: What got me started in FFA was mainly the positive influence I saw that it had on my sisters' lives. They were both in FFA when they were in high school, and I got to see all the fun and interesting things they got to do. When I was able to join FFA, they both really pushed me to join because they knew that I would love every minute of it. What they didn't know is that I already knew I wanted to be in FFA and that I had known for a long time because I was able to see how they are using skills to accomplish many great things in their careers and their lives. I am very grateful that they pushed me to be a part of this great organization and that I was able to see the impact it had for them and for me.

Q: How has FFA helped you as a student and outside of the classroom?

A: FFA has helped me as a student by teaching me how to work well on group projects. Throughout different camps and by being an officer, I have really learned the importance of communication and how

to communicate effectively with others. These skills have really helped me work better with other people and have also taught me how to better understand other people's opinions on different topics. Outside of the classroom, FFA has helped me learn the importance of goal-setting.

IZABELLA STENDER, 17

- Senior at Lac qui Parle Valley High School
- Future plans: Attend and play golf at a four-year college or university

Q: What's your favorite part(s) of the program?

A: My favorite part of the program would be meeting new people. FFA allows you to stretch your group of friends. Some of my really close friends have come from FFA, and I am very thankful for that.

Q: How has FFA helped you as a student and outside of the classroom?

A: FFA has taught me how to be a leader. This has helped me in everything I do.

Q: How do you hope to use what you've learned in FFA in the future?

A: I hope to use the knowledge I have gained and the skills I have learned to help make myself marketable. Being marketable is something that Wes Anderson always talked about when I was in his class. This basically means that you are a well-rounded, intelligent individual that employers would like to hire. ☑



Izabella Stender, Lac qui Parle Valley High School Class of 2020.

Fall squash

Enjoy a versatile, beautiful taste of the season

Jennifer Thull goes out of her gourd each fall as she stands in her garden and gazes at her 300-plus varieties of autumn squashes.

“They are absolutely my favorite vegetable,” she says, recalling how comforting the squash was that her mother prepared fresh from the garden when Thull was a child. “It was rich — like mashed potatoes, only better. She always mashed it with butter and brown sugar.”

But Thull takes it a step further. As a professional chef trained at the famed Le Cordon Bleu culinary school, she loves experimenting with the different ways she can use autumn squash. Unlike many vegetables, squash — botanically classified as a fruit but considered a vegetable due to how it is prepared — can be part of sweet or savory recipes.

“I love playing with Asian and Spanish flavors and spices,” she notes. “I test out a lot of squash varieties on my husband and ways to make them. If I didn’t find different ways to make them, he would revolt! They are amazingly versatile, and I have actually made seven-course dinners out of just squash.”

Choosing her favorite type of squash is like asking her to pick a favorite child.

“I love heirloom varieties from all over. Marina di Chioggia from the Amalfi coast in Italy is hands down my favorite,” she says. “It’s a beautiful seafoam green color that’s turban-shaped and bumpy with dry yellow flesh inside — great for making gnocchi. But I love Japanese heirloom squash — Chiriman, Shishigatani and Kogigu — for how old the varieties are. Some date back to the 1600s.

“And then there are the Native American types, like Hopi Pale Grey, because they range in colors and shapes.

Trained at the Le Cordon Bleu culinary school, Jennifer Thull is passionate about squash and uses them in a range of recipes.



Australian Butter is a gorgeous, pink, cupcake-shaped squash with flesh that’s the sweetest, creme brulee-like texture. It needs no flavorings. Not even salt or sugar.”

Her love affair with squash extends well past her garden, into her kitchen, throughout her house and to the exterior. “It’s covered in squash and pumpkins,” she says. She also makes huge displays at her workplace, the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, which is where she met her husband, John. Together, they grow and manage 12 acres of grapes as research

professionals for the arboretum’s Cold Hardy Wine Grape Project. Squash was just a side project — one that exploded and now occupies an additional 4 acres, which the couple carefully tend after their 40-hour workweeks end.

Autumn is the time to harvest fall squash, but it has a tremendous shelf life as long as moisture levels and heat stay constant. Winter squash should be very hard. To tell if one is ripe, use your fingernail to try and pierce the skin. If it’s difficult to pierce, then it is ready.

Also, not all squashes are for cooking. Gourds, which are in the same family, have very hard shells and are typically for decoration only. But if you get some for cooking, try some of Thull’s tried-and-true favorite recipes. [👉](#)



FOOD EDITOR
ANNE P. BRALY
IS A NATIVE OF
CHATTANOOGA,
TENNESSEE.



Sweet and Spicy Asian Pork-Stuffed Squash

SWEET AND SPICY ASIAN PORK-STUFFED SQUASH

- 4 Shokichi Shiro or Green Squash
(You can use a small squash such as acorn or spaghetti squash.)
- 1 tablespoon peanut oil
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 shallot, thinly sliced (about 2 tablespoons)
- 1 tablespoon freshly grated ginger
- 1 pound ground pork
- 2 tablespoons hoisin sauce
- 2 tablespoons low-sodium soy sauce
- 1 1/2 teaspoons chili garlic sauce
- 1/2 teaspoon sesame oil, divided
- 1/2 cup shredded red cabbage
- 2-3 green onions, sliced

Heat oven to 400 F. Cut each squash in half horizontally and scoop out the seeds. Lay them cut-side down in a roasting pan or other baking dish and add about an inch of water. Place the pan in the oven and roast for 45-60 minutes or until tender when poked with a fork.

While the squash is roasting, heat oil in a large, nonstick skillet over moderate heat. Add garlic, shallots and ginger. Saute until fragrant and beginning to soften, about 2 minutes. Add pork and cook, breaking it up with a wooden spoon or spatula as you go, until it is browned all over. Add hoisin, soy sauce and chili garlic cause and continue cooking until the meat is cooked through. Remove from heat.

To serve, place each squash on a plate, cut-side up. Drizzle each with 1/8 teaspoon sesame oil. Place 1/4 of the pork mixture inside each squash. Sprinkle cabbage and green onions over top to garnish. Makes 4 servings.

GRILLED DELICATA SQUASH WITH CHIMICHURRI SAUCE

For the squash:

- 3 pounds acorn or delicata squash
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- Ground black pepper

For chimichurri:

- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 1/2 cup finely chopped cilantro

- 1/2 cup finely chopped parsley
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped oregano leaves
- 1 1/2 teaspoons chili flakes
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1/4 cup red wine vinegar
- 1/4 teaspoon salt


Prepare the squash by cutting it in 1-inch rings. Scoop out and discard the strings and seeds. (Save and roast the seeds, if you like.)

Toss the squash with the olive oil, salt and black pepper to taste. Place on the prepared baking sheet.

Grill the squash over medium heat for 5 minutes or until easily pierced with a fork.

While the squash is cooking, prepare the chimichurri. In a medium bowl, stir together the olive oil, cilantro, parsley, oregano leaves, chili flakes, garlic, red wine vinegar and salt. Taste and add more salt, if needed.

To serve: Transfer grilled squash to platter and dress with generous amounts of chimichurri.



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