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Press Release

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Nebraska Student Achieves Career Success

National FFA Organization names American Star in Agribusiness



INDIANAPOLIS – Neal Ely was confused. He couldn't understand why local Nebraskans ate asparagus shipped in from California that was a week old when he could grow it in rural Nebraska and sell it fresh. Now, that innovative thinking has won him top honors.

The National FFA Organization named Ely 2006 Star in Agribusiness, one of the organization's highest honors. He competed with three other finalists at the 79th National FFA Convention, Oct. 25-28, in Indianapolis.

During the convention, each finalist participates in interviews by a panel of judges, who ultimately name the top candidate in each area. Those areas are American Star Farmer, American Star in Agribusiness, American Star in Agricultural Placement, and American Star in Agriscience. Ely was given his award during an onstage convention ceremony and received a plaque and an award of \$4,000. The runners-up also receive plaques and \$2,000 each.

The 22-year-old Grafton, Neb. native owns Ely Farms Pickled Asparagus Spears. The product is developed through a family recipe and is marketed to gourmet, specialty and gift, grocery and liquor stores in Nebraska and surrounding states. Ely worked with the University of Nebraska Food Processing Facility to develop the pickled asparagus, which is approved by the Food and Drug Administration.

The FFA Mission: FFA makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education.

In order to sell his pickled asparagus, Ely needed an FDA approved space to process it. He used an old building that existed on his family farm and converted it into a

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commercial kitchen. The product is one that needs a lot of his attention. In the spring, Ely spends hours in the asparagus patch, caring for the plants and later harvesting them to be sold. When he decided to add the pickling process to his endeavor, he spent much of his time producing, marketing, selling and delivering the product.

Aside from his obligations as the owner of his business, he has also excelled as an FFA member. Ely joined FFA in eighth grade and soon found he had a passion for public speaking. He participated in the state Creed Speaking Career Development Event, as well as National Public Speaking and Persuasive Speaking. He has held many leadership positions, including chapter president. In 2006, Ely had the opportunity to travel to Costa Rica as a National Proficiency Finalist.

He is the son of Michael and Tami Ely. He is a member of the Sutton FFA Chapter where his advisor is Tom Hofmann. Currently, Ely attends the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and is pursuing a degree in Agribusiness.

Ely's supervised agricultural experience (SAE) program led him to apply and earn the American FFA Degree, in which a student must earn and invest \$7,500 or have earned and productively invested at least \$1,500 and worked 2,250 hours in excess of scheduled class time.

An SAE program is one of three components that make up the agricultural education program. By combining the SAE career entrepreneurship or job placement component with classroom instruction from agricultural education instructors and leadership development from the FFA, students like Ely are able to make a positive impact on their own and others' lives

Awards and recognition for Stars Over America finalists are made possible by the generous support of individual contributors to the National FFA Foundation.

FFA is a national youth organization of 495,046 student members preparing for leadership careers in the science, business and technology of agriculture with 7,242 local chapters in all 50 states, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. FFA strives to make a

positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education. Visit www.ffa.org for more information. ###

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