

Meet our Scholarship Winners...

by Cheryl Carmichael

As the Chair of the Scholarship Committee, I am proud to present to the membership the six winners of the \$1500 award. These students are either seniors in high school this year or college students from this county. They are all fine examples of advocates for the Agricultural community, exemplify personal drive, are effective leaders and grateful for the help in funding their continuing education. Thank you to all of our members for the fundraising support that has allowed this Club to make a real difference in the lives of our community.

Enrique Lopez: Enrique is a senior at Oakdale HS. He will attend Cal Poly in the fall. His counselor described him as a go-getter and a natural leader. He serves as the President of the local chapter of FFA and has held many responsible positions in the organization. He also works as an Ag mechanic.

His story of achievement has included challenges that most of us can barely imagine. As a young boy his family immigrated to the US from Mexico after a devastating downturn in the family's once successful cattle business. His parents' focus was on insuring educational opportunities for their children. Enrique started school here with no understanding of English but a drive to learn. With the support of parents who also had to build a new life, he and his brother overcame the obstacles to become a force to be reckoned with.

Isabella Crutcher: Isabella is a senior at Central Catholic HS. She will attend Cal State Monterey Bay in the fall. She has participated in Ag-related activities since she was very young starting with 4-H and the breadth of activities available to this extraordinary Club. She immediately joined the Central Catholic chapter of FFA and has focused her high school education on Ag related sciences: Ag biology, Ag chemistry, Biology and Sustainable Agriculture to name a few. She holds leadership roles in 4-H and FFA. Her career passion is sustainable and safe Ag production for the future.

Isabella's interests are a natural by-product of growing up on a working farm. However, her passions have deeper roots. As a four year old she contracted E.Coli from something she ate. The secondary effect of the severe E.Coli infection was kidney failure necessitating a kidney transplant as a five year old. Despite her health challenges (and maybe because of them) she has a relentless drive to positively influence safe and sustainable agriculture.

Lillian Agueda: Lillian is a senior at Hughson HS. She will attend MJC in the fall with the career goal of becoming an Ag Teacher. Lillian's drive is to provide students with broad information and direct experiences to fully educate those who will follow in the footsteps of generations of farmers and ranchers but to also touch the lives of students who have never had exposure to the richness of the plant and soil world.

Lillian formed lasting relationships with the multi-faceted nature of agriculture through FFA. Her focus in FFA was their garden club: growing flowers, food and plants for County Fair exhibits. It opened up a world of joy and learning that will benefit her further education. This well-rounded student was awarded the impressive Scholar Athlete award during every semester of high school. Any school will be lucky to hire her.

Melanie Wolf: Melanie finished her sophomore year at Fresno State studying Ag Education. Her goal is to teach Ag Sciences in high school or college. She was an FFA member in high school and continues to propagate plants for their fundraising plant sale.

She has learned a lot by “doing”. Understanding the science and practice of plant propagation has taken her knowledge from theoretical to pragmatic. It has informed her understanding of crop production versus home gardening, soil health and sustainability in ways that books alone couldn’t. She has the excitement and personality to communicate effectively with future students. Another future teacher who will be an immediate asset to any school that hires her.

Lauren Clark: Lauren is a senior at Hughson HS. She will attend MJC in the fall. Lauren dreams of a career in the horticultural industry emphasizing the sustainable agriculture processes to support agricultural needs of farmers and home landscapers.

Lauren has been an active FFA member in hands on work and leadership roles. She has been raised as a beekeeper to support her family’s business. This essential and unique enterprise has opened up worlds of knowledge about these fragile beings and their intricate involvement in so many aspects of agriculture. She brings a well-developed sensitivity to the interaction of all of nature to the health of the earth and our needs. Lauren was also a four-year Scholar Athlete.

Sofia Johnson: Sofia is finishing her junior year at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. Her academic and work has focused on Environmental Earth and Soil Science. This is the fourth time that Sophia has been awarded our Club scholarship and rightly so! Her ongoing effort to understand the Earth as a living and changing planet is important work for all of us, whether we live and farm in the country or inhabit cities and suburbs. This fall Sofia will experience a semester abroad in Copenhagen, Denmark studying glaciers, climate changes and soil science. She will get to spend a week living on a glacier in Iceland and participating in ongoing experiments.

While the focus of her college studies is “global” in nature, the everyday experience of growing her own food has been essential to cultivating her strength as a person. As a young woman who has been plagued by OCD in the form of “picky eating” for all of her life gardening has proven to be the most effective intervention: calming her anxious thoughts, increasing the flexibility of her thinking and improving her overall health. She is definitely on the right track to master the constrictions in her life through gardening. Her ability to challenge her anxious thoughts and behaviors allows her to jump on experiences like foreign studies.

Again, we all congratulate the scholarship winners. I know they will make a tangible difference in their own lives and the lives of others.