

Dear Representative Doherty, Representative Hernandez, Representative Wilson, Representative Wilson, Representative Evans, Representative McLaine, Representative Parrish, Representative Sollman, Representative Sprenger, and Representative Vail in regard to HB2382,

My name is Alexis Cain. I live in Corvallis and work for grass straw export company on a farm. While I currently call Oregon home, it hasn't always been that way. My family relocated from Portland to the outskirts of San Diego when I was nearly two years old. Agriculture wasn't in my story then, but it is now: thanks to my five years in the National FFA Organization.

When entering high school in San Marcos, California, I had a few more adjustments than the typical high school freshmen did. I had my first shoulder surgery, leaving me unable to take PE, like every other 9th grade student. It was so last minute that I didn't get to change my schedule until the first week of school, when all of the electives were already taken by upperclassmen. My counselor gave me two options: art or introduction to agriculture. He asked if I liked art or animals, and I chose animals (trust me, I'm no artist).

My school, at the time, had a school farm (or "Land Lab" as termed here in Oregon), and that was where my day started my first week of high school. I was welcomed with open arms to my teacher. A student who was already involved in FFA gave me a tour of my FIRST farm and I was hooked. I didn't know what I wanted to do after high school yet, but I knew it wanted to involve this: agriculture.

Quickly after joining the class, I was roped (or as other students would refer to it as, "volun-told") into going to the first meeting of the term, where I witnessed Parliamentary Procedure (for the first time), watched students make decisions for the betterment of the program 5+ years ahead, budgets, planning, etc. The first meeting wasn't cows and plows, it was professional.

Next, my advisor (FFA teacher) volun-told me into joining the Vegetable Crop "Career Development Event" judging team, where I was to learn how to identify several vegetables, seeds, seedlings, pests, and diseases as well as judge the quality of several types of vegetables and give oral reasons upon my judgments. That was a lot for most freshman, but I continued with it. The thrill of competition was enough to keep me going, since I couldn't play sports anymore. I wasn't a winner my first competition, but I continued to compete for 4 years. Since I was hooked on competition, my advisor had me participate in the novice extemporaneous speech event as well, where you get 30 minutes to prepare a 3-5 minute speech on an agriculture or leadership topic. I placed second at our county level, and third in the regional level and continued to compete for four years as well.

Then, I got into the hands-on activities of raising my first "Supervised Agriculture Experience" project. This is where FFA members get the chance to take their skills they learn in the classroom to an actual agriculture project. It requires budgeting, loans (in some cases), record keeping, time management, money management, basic veterinary care or basic cultivating skills, and marketing to have a successful project. After getting my parent's approval, I got chose a lamb. I helped care for the lamb from its first day until its last day when I sold it at our county fair. I stayed on budget, managed my time between my lamb and classes, and marketed my lamb in one of the toughest economies that our fair saw.

If I haven't lost your attention yet, **just** in my first year of the program, I witnessed or participated in events that improved my public speaking, leadership, responsibility, money management, professionalism, marketing, etc. while learning and having fun!

Yes, I had a wonderful time in FFA. It helped me get through some of the toughest times in my personal life, but it also taught me so many lessons about myself. I learned how to handle stress in a way that helped me immensely through college, and I learned how to deal with diversity and challenges. Being the only female in courses such as Agriculture Mechanics didn't hurt me, but make me stronger. The lessons I learned weren't just about cows and plows: they were life lessons to apply in and outside of agriculture.

I continued my time in FFA by digging into every opportunity possible by participating in our chapter's leadership team, running community events, participating in community service, continuing to compete in speaking competitions and vegetable judging, raising market sheep, goats and beef, going to leadership conferences and

participating as a voting delegate at the state and national level, and even participating as a press member at the state level. I received several awards in the program, including regional awards in agriculture education, state-finalist in speaking, first place individual in vegetable judging, the “Service Above Self” award from my high school, and, the highest honor of all, my American Degree (given to less than 1% of all FFA members). Not all of my lessons came easy. I failed several times to learn many other times. It didn’t stop my will to pursue a future in the program and agriculture, despite the plans our district had.

Funding isn’t something that comes easy to the majority of FFA programs – especially in a debt ridden states like, California or Oregon. My FFA program relied on grant funding from the state. Sometimes, it gave us \$10,000 to use. Other years, we had \$2,500 to keep our program funded. Our school district wouldn’t provide any outstanding funding or help, especially after a 2010 special election to fund necessary repairs for the older schools in the district – including my high school. Their plans weren’t to fix a building here or there, but to demolish the entire school and work out the details later. Our school farm was also to be demolished, so it may become a parking lot. That left us no space on campus for a greenhouse or animal housing. Luckily, they found space for us for the livestock. Unfortunately, it was a 25-minute drive from the high school. While we were fortunate that we weren’t cut, it was a new challenge for our struggling program, as it cut the hands on learning that is essential for teaching agriculture. The students were the ones who really suffered, as courses such as animal science, agriculture mechanics, landscape design were either cut or severely difficult to teach and learn. Our district superintendent promised a rooftop greenhouse at the new school and temporary planter boxes during the construction period, but, when it came down to it, we were the first to be cut.

There isn’t a doubt in my mind that I wouldn’t have seen the success I have seen without FFA. The professionalism, networking, public speaking, time and stress management, and marketing skills I directly applied to my time in college and finding a post-college job. The program gave me the confidence and ability to be a new person, a new person in agriculture. I came into Oregon State University with a hand up opposed to my other friends who didn’t have this experience. I was able to get onto the Dean’s List my first term of college, despite my personal life trying to get in the way. This program propelled me to keep going through the good, bad, and the ugly in college, as I wanted the end goal: to be involved in agriculture.

Here I am, 4 years after my last time in the blue corduroy jacket. While the jacket sits in my closet, the memories and skills that I received with it are far from gone. If the program wasn’t at my school, if it wasn’t funded, my life would be extremely different. I don’t know if I would have ended up in college, or a career after college. It directed me where I needed to be. Everything happens for a reason, and I am happy for the way FFA played its part.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. Please consider my stories and the several stories similar to mine when considering funding plans for Measure 98. Remember that this reaches far more topics than just cows and plows. If you have absolutely any additional questions about FFA, CTE funding, or anything, feel free to contact me with my information below.

Sincerely,



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