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The Times Journal

OPINION

February 26, 2026



Rooted in the Land: Why FFA Still Matters in Kentucky



By Jeff Jobe
Community Publisher

best of that word. Students who raise livestock before school, practice public speaking after class and serve their communities are not just learning agriculture — they are learning citizenship. They learn to lead meetings, manage finances, work as a team and win or lose with character.

There are certain symbols that tell the story of Kentucky without saying a word: a weathered tobacco barn, a Friday night football field, a county fair ribbon — and a blue corduroy jacket bearing three simple letters: FFA.

In the counties we serve across South-Central Kentucky, agriculture is not just an industry — it is identity. FFA ensures that identity continues, blending tradition with science, technology and modern business skills.

For generations, the National FFA Organization has been more than an extracurricular activity. It has been a classroom for leadership, a proving ground for responsibility and a foundation for the work ethic that defines rural America.

What moves us most is the consistency. Many of today's business owners, farmers, educators and public officials once wore that blue jacket. And many of the same sponsors and families who supported our first FFA recognition pages in 1998 still stand with us today. That loyalty speaks volumes.

In 1998, when our family owned a single community newspaper, we made a commitment to recognize our local FFA chapters every year. We have never missed — not through downturns, ownership changes or the digital shift in our industry. And we never will.

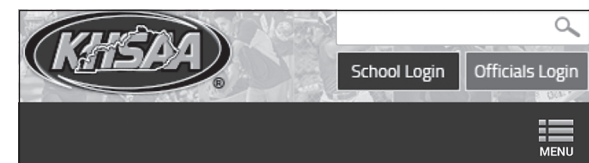
Supporting FFA is not a marketing decision. It is a statement about who we are — a family-owned Kentucky company that believes in hard work, local control and community pride.

Today we publish nine community newspapers, each with more than a century of local coverage. As we've grown, so has our responsibility. Growth is something to be proud of, but it should never cause us to forget the foundation on which success is built. For us, that foundation is local.

As we continue to grow and expand the JOBNews Network, we remain committed to honoring the traditions that shaped us. Because success without roots does not last.

Supporting FFA is not just about agriculture. It is about supporting the foundations of who we are.

FFA represents the very



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SEN. RICK GIRDLER'S LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Week seven of the 2026 Regular Session

As we reach the half-way point of the 2026 Legislative Session, I want to give you a quick update on where things stand and what to expect in the weeks ahead.

With more than 30 of the 60 legislative days complete, the Senate has stayed focused on steady, responsible progress. So far, nine of the Senate Majority's 10 top-priority bills have been filed and passed the Senate. This work reflects months of preparation during the interim and careful discussion in committee and on the floor.

I've also heard from many of you about the early budget proposal filed in the House. I appreciate everyone who has reached out. These issues affect real families, and your input matters.

It's important to understand that the budget process is still in the early stages. The budget traditionally begins in the House, and the current proposal has not yet passed that chamber. It will likely go through several changes before it reaches the Senate. To be clear, no final decisions have been made.

When the House sends its version to the Senate, we will review it closely and make any necessary changes. Our priorities remain the

same: maintaining a balanced budget, using one-time funds wisely, and making transparent decisions that protect both taxpayers and public employees. I will continue to keep you informed as this process moves forward.

This week, we also welcomed military families from across the commonwealth for our annual Military Kids Day at the Capitol. This event recognizes the children and grandchildren of those who serve our country. Military kids often face frequent moves, new schools, and long stretches without a parent at home. Their strength and resilience are inspiring. Despite limited space this year due to construction, the event reached full capacity. It was an honor to thank these families for the sacrifices they make every day.

Several important bills also passed the Senate this week:

SB 9 supports housing development by streamlining regulations and expanding financing tools to help local communities grow and increase access to affordable homes.

SB 47 expands state death benefits and tuition waivers to include search and rescue personnel who lose their lives in the line of duty.

SB 69 creates the Autism Spectrum Disorder Trust Fund and allows voluntary tax refund contributions to support autism research and services.

SJR 74 directs the creation of a statewide fiscal map of substance use disorder programs to improve coordination and accountability.

SB 85 allows public pension benefits to be placed in a Special Needs Trust to help families protect long-term care while maintaining eligibility for support programs.

SB 104 establishes a safety zone around first responders and strengthens penalties for those who interfere or threaten them, while protecting constitutional rights.

SB 141 modernizes public notice laws to improve transparency, expand digital access, and help control costs.

SB 152 strengthens school leadership by affirming principals' authority while maintaining input from teachers and parents.

SB 159 improves coordination in missing persons cases to help locate individuals more quickly and support families.

Each of these measures now moves to the House for

consideration.

As we enter the second half of the session, deadlines are approaching and work will continue at a fast pace. My focus remains on responsible, commonsense solutions that serve our communities. Thank you for staying engaged and sharing your thoughts. Your feedback helps guide the work we do in Frankfort.

It's an honor to represent you in Frankfort. If you have questions or ideas, feel free to contact my office at 502-564-8100 or email me at Rick.Girdler@kylegislature.gov. You can learn more about bills, committees, and other updates from the Kentucky General Assembly at www.legislature.ky.gov.

Sen. Rick Girdler, R-Somerset, represents the 15th Senate District, including Clinton, Cumberland, Pulaski, Russell, and Wayne Counties. Girdler serves as vice chair of the Senate Banking and Insurance Committee. He is also a member of the Senate Committees on Economic Development, Tourism, and Labor; Families and Children; and Natural Resources and Energy. Additionally, Girdler serves on the Capital Projects and Bond Oversight Committee.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Send your Letter to the Editor to
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