

Weatherford FFA Member Wins State FFA Speak-Off

With a speech about her passion for reining horses and how stem cell therapy research is helping to keep horses working.

BY MADISON STEPHENS, WEATHERFORD FFA REPORTER



Oklahoma FFA member, Reagan Stephens started the journey to the state FFA Speak-Off Finals with an agri-science speech that talks about the importance of equine health research, specifically stem cell research. “It is the first time, to my knowledge, that the State Champion in FFA prepared public speaking highlights reining horses and stem cell therapy,” said Phillip

Major, Weatherford Vocational Agriculture instructor. The journey began last year as Reagan competed in animal science with a speech about sustainable anthelmintics in the equine industry and one in the agri-science category about explaining stem cell therapy in the equine industry and how it has helped one of her favorite reining horses. After winning the local contest and area contest with both speeches, she competed at the State Prepared Public Speaking contest with both speeches and won both the agri-science and animal science state titles. In FFA, the winners from the six categories compete against each other in a Speak-Off at the State FFA Convention. Reagan had to pick which of her two winning speeches she would use, as they only allowed her to compete with one of the speeches. Her love for reining and interest in stem cell therapy was a clear choice for her. In fact, Reagan’s

interest in the topic came from her experiences related to NRHA. She begins her speech with, “It was the first day of the National Reining Horse Association Derby (NRHA) at the Oklahoma State Fairgrounds, and I was beyond excited. Although the horses and riders came from as far away as Europe and South America, the horse

Stephens accepting the state prepared public speaking championship award and an expense paid trip to the national FFA convention and \$1,000 scholarship.



Reagan Stephens, Weatherford FFA sophomore accepting the agri-science and animal science state prepared speaking awards.

I wanted to see actually lived less than two miles away from my house. The owner and breeder of the horse, Sherm Lauder, is a retired agricultural education instructor who started breeding sound minded, quality reining horses as his second career. Getting to see Huggy Bear at the show solidified my passion for horses and planted the dream of owning a reiner someday.”

She goes on to say, that “about a month after the NRHA Derby, I learned Huggy Bear had bowed a tendon, and possibly would never compete again. However, there was one way Huggy Bear could return to excelling at reining. Interestingly enough, the solution to Huggy Bear’s injury already existed in his body: the stem cell.” Then Reagan dives into the intricacies of stem cell therapy including interviews she did with some of the premier equine researchers in the country. There was a happy ending for the speech as well as the competition. While stem cell therapy doesn’t help all horses, it helped the Lauder’s horse and Huggy Bear will compete in November in the North American Non Pro Championship.

Few FFA members know much about the equine industry and think of only the sport of rodeo. “It has been nice to share with this large audience my favorite equine sport of reining as well as share part of the story of how our industry works hard to keep our equine partners healthy and active.”

She reworked the speech to win the NRHyA prepared public speaking contest this summer. Stephens will compete at the National FFA Prepared Public Speaking Contest at the National FFA Convention the week of October 24. Based on our research, we cannot find any FFA speeches on the national level about the equine industry and reining. ♦

