



THE DATE DIGEST



THE NEWSLETTER OF AGRICULTURAL & TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION

NO. 3

SEPTEMBER 2026

VIRTUAL



Focus on Key Topics

- Welcome Message
- Student Spotlight
- Staff Highlight
- Engagement Initiatives
- Teaching Insights
- Faculty Highlight
- Research In Action
- Social Media & Scholarships

A Message from Dr. Perry

As we begin the fall semester, I am excited by the energy our students, faculty, and staff bring to DATE. This edition highlights that energy, from welcoming Katie Garland and Andrew Thomson to celebrating students who will receive their American FFA Degrees. These stories reflect the people and experiences that make our department special.

Our work extends well beyond classrooms. Dr. Mike Walach is being recognized for excellence in authorship, while his work with the NASA BOREALIS lab took MSU students to Spain for research during the total solar eclipse. Closer to home, students are putting learning into practice through experiences like the AGED 482 TEACH Trailer workshops.

I hope you enjoy this edition and see students, faculty, and staff learning, leading, and representing DATE. Thank you for being part of our community and for your continued support.

~ Dr. Perry, Department Head



STUDENT & SPOTLIGHT



KATIE GARLAND

The Department of Agricultural and Technology Education (DATE) is proud to introduce Katie Garland as the Fall 2026 Communications Intern. Originally from Enumclaw, Washington, Katie is a senior at Montana State University majoring in Agricultural Communications with a Pre-Law track. In her role, Katie will manage DATE's social media, assist with newsletter development, and work with faculty to highlight the people, programs, and accomplishments within the department.



STAFF HIGHLIGHT

ANDREW THOMSON



We are excited to welcome Andrew Thomson to DATE! Andrew joined us at the beginning of the semester as our new Administrative Associate, supporting our students, faculty, and the day-to-day work of the department. He enjoys helping others, building connections, and being a dependable resource for our department.

Outside of work, Andrew enjoys gardening, cooking, traveling with his wife, and spending time with their dogs. Before joining higher education, he worked as a railroad conductor, developing skills in teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability.

ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES

What Is An American Degree?

The American FFA Degree is the highest degree an FFA member can earn and is awarded to fewer than 1% of members. It represents years of dedication to agricultural education, FFA involvement, leadership, service, and a successful Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE).

Recipients must demonstrate achievement well beyond participation, including strong academics, leadership, community involvement, and continued growth through their agricultural experiences. Receiving the American FFA Degree is the culmination of an FFA member's journey and represents National FFA's gold standard of achievement.



Congrats to Our American Degree Recipients!



American Degree Recipients

- Jordan Leach
- Cole Waldusky
- Kaylee Reid
- Kaycee Corbin
- Johanna Demars
- Mary Kate Nagel
- Tess Van Loo
- Isabella Myers
- Baileigh Phebus
- Abigail Berger

TEACHING INSIGHTS

The eDucATE Effect!

The 2026 eDucATE Academy welcomed 10 students from across Montana: Cerenity Hjorth and Bethany Lane of Augusta, Kadee McKinney of Belgrade, William Barcomb of Dillon, Travis Tasker of Huntley Project, Payton Hersel of Lewistown, Andrew Holmland and Cheyanne Worley of Roundup, and Adelaide Meyer and Kealie Hixson of Stevensville. Evan Heupel served as student director and Undergraduate Scholars Program Research Scholar, while Kaylee Reid served as a peer mentor.

Building on the Academy's work, Dr. Sewell received a Faculty Excellence Grant to support eDucATE research conducted through the Undergraduate Scholars Program. The grant will help expand the program's research efforts, examine the impact of the eDucATE experience, and share both the programming and research findings with agricultural education professionals at the National Association of Agricultural Educators Convention.



AGED 482 Teach Trailer Workshops



Students in Non-Formal Teaching Methods (AGED 482) put their teaching skills into practice by creating lesson plans and facilitating workshops in the TEACH Trailer. Each student had 15–20 minutes to teach a topic of their choice while incorporating hands-on activities designed to involve their peers. The experience challenged students to think about how they communicate and adapt instruction for different audiences. It also provided an opportunity to experiment with new teaching strategies and build confidence in facilitating experiential learning. Through the activity, students practiced engaging learners, leading activities, and applying non-formal teaching methods in a real-world setting.



FACULTY HIGHLIGHT

The International Technology and Engineering Educators Association (ITEEA) is recognizing Dr. Walach's article, "Jour de Vol (Flying Day)," with a Gerald Day Excellence in Authorship Award for the 2025–2026 publishing year. The award recognizes outstanding contributions to ITEEA publications and honors the legacy of Gerald Day, who served for many years as editor of ITEEA's flagship journal. His dedication to high-quality scholarship and professional excellence helped shape the field and inspired generations of authors and educators.

Dr. Walach's article was selected by Technology and Engineering Education readers and editors for its quality, relevance, and contribution to the field. The recognition reflects his continued commitment to connecting technology and engineering concepts with meaningful, applied learning experiences. Through his teaching and scholarship, Dr. Walach works to make technical concepts accessible and relevant while providing students with opportunities to learn through hands-on problem-solving, design, and application.

As an award recipient, Dr. Walach will be recognized at the ITEEA Annual Conference in Louisville, Kentucky, March 31–April 3, 2027, bringing national recognition to his work and the Department of Agricultural and Technology Education.



DR. MICHAEL WALACH

RESEARCH IN ACTION

MSU Students Chase the Eclipse in Spain

Montana State University students traveled to Spain in August 2026 to participate in NASA's Nationwide Eclipse Ballooning Project (NEBP) during the total solar eclipse. The eight-student team was co-led by Dr. Walach of MSU's NASA BOREALIS lab and Dr. Angela Des Jardins of the Department of Physics and Director of the Montana Space Grant Consortium. Dr. Walach also serves as Flight Director for BOREALIS.



The team stayed in Villalibado and launched two high-altitude balloons into the path of totality, carrying scientific equipment to collect data and capture near-space footage during the eclipse. The experience provided students with hands-on opportunities in ballooning, engineering, data collection, and scientific research. The team was also joined by the YouTube science channel Veritasium, which featured footage from cameras flown aboard the MSU balloons. The project received additional media attention from Spanish outlets, CNN, and a Polish science news program.

Opportunities for students to participate in NASA-related research will continue to expand through ASCEND (Aerial Science, Collaboration, and Education Network for Discovery), a new NASA-funded project beginning in January. Using balloons and drones, ASCEND will measure air quality across the United States, with a particular focus on wildfire smoke. Students interested in gaining hands-on experience with these projects and other research opportunities are encouraged to connect with the BOREALIS lab.





STAY CONNECTED

PEOPLE
PROGRAMS
OPPORTUNITIES
A BRIGHTER
TOMORROW



Thank you for being part of DATE.

From classrooms and laboratories to communities across Montana and beyond, our students, faculty, staff, and alumni continue to learn, lead, and put agricultural and technology education into action.



FOLLOW DATE

Stay connected with department news, student experiences, events, and opportunities.



SCHOLARSHIPS & OPPORTUNITIES

Explore current scholarships and other opportunities available to DATE students.



SHARE YOUR STORY

Have something we should feature?

We want to celebrate the people and experiences that make DATE special. Send us student accomplishments, alum updates, awards, research, classroom experiences, events, or other news for a future edition.

✉ DATE@montana.edu