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Blake Bennett Profile – SBSC Videographer

A country music video posted on the web was Dr. Karen Ballard’s first introduction to Blake Bennett. She was “blown away” by his presence and his production of the video on soybean planting and harvesting. She immediately got her staff together and said, “You’ve got to see this. We’ve found our videographer for the Arkansas Soybean Science Challenge online course. Dr. Ballard, Director of Program & Staff Development at the UofA Cooperative Extension Services was right. We had found our videographer.

At that time Blake, 18, was a senior at Pocahontas High School and already an entrepreneur in music videos. He now attends Williams Baptist College in Walnut Ridge so he can be close to family and continue to farm while acquiring his general education requirements. He plans to attend another university and pursue a degree in agriculture.

Ballard and Drs. Julie Robinson and Lynda Wilson held an online meeting early in his first college semester, and within a week, Blake had agreed that it would be fun to work with Extension on the Arkansas Soybean Science Challenge, doing what he likes best – making videos about soybeans and farming. “Making a video for the Challenge,” said Blake, “would give me an opportunity to educate others not accustomed to the agricultural world, on how their food is grown. I want to inform and inspire others to choose a career in agriculture.”

Bennett Family Farms in Pocahontas, AR, was started by his great grandfather in the early 1900s. Soybeans are the primary crop, but the Bennett’s also incorporate a large number of corn and rice acres. Blake has actively farmed with his family since he was able to follow his father around. He started making music videos at the age of 14, and his videos have continued to improve each year.
Blake has his own video production studio, Blake Bennett AG Productions, at home. The Soybean Science Challenge grant provided Blake with the necessary equipment to produce the videos for the Arkansas Soybean Science Challenge online course. The video includes an introduction to Blake and his passion for farming and follows the soybean planting process from Blake’s perspective. Blake is currently working on another video which will cover the soybean growing season, spraying, irrigation and plowing which will be included in the 2014-15 Soybean Science Challenge online course.

“What interested me most about assisting the Extension team with the Soybean Science Challenge course was how they were able to use a young producer like me who grew up on a farm to connect with the students in my generation,” Blake said. “I was able to put my heart, emotions, time, and words into building these videos which say far more than I could teach this group of students in any other way. I’m very thankful that the Extension Program & Staff Development team stumbled across me, and I happened to be the right fit for their needs, doing what I’m passionate about.”

Blake said that producing the videos was an awesome experience, teaching him responsibilities and how to work as a team. “I have met so many great people through sharing my soybean farming story with them. Some of the connections I have made through doors opened up by this project could truly last a lifetime.”

The Extension PSD team and the Arkansas Soybean Promotion Board have benefited greatly from Blake’s involvement in the development of the Soybean Science Challenge course video content. Their partnership with Blake had a common goal – a passion for growing Arkansas soybeans and supporting student scientific scholarship.

The Soybean Science Challenge is a partnership between the Arkansas Soybean Promotion Board and the UofA Cooperative Extension Service. The program supports secondary student scholarship and research to ensure the sustainability of soybean production in Arkansas.

Students in grades 9-12 who successfully complete the Soybean Science Challenge online course and enter a science project in one of the Arkansas ISEF-affiliated regionals and Arkansas State Science Fair are eligible for consideration of cash awards. Regionals awards are $300 and the state fair award is $500.

Information on the 2014-15 Arkansas Soybean Science Challenge will be available in summer 2014. For more information, contact Dr. Karen Ballard or Dr. Julie Robinson at 501.671.2086 or jrobinson@uaex.edu.

The Cooperative Extension Service is part of the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture.