

# Where Are They Now?

**LIFE AFTER FFA**



## “THANKS TO THE FFA...”

This month’s article features those who are in successful careers and have utilized the skills gained through the FFA.

“Where Are They Now?” highlights former New Jersey FFA members who once wore the blue jacket and are now in successful careers. Through the interpersonal skills and support it provides, the FFA leads its members toward successful careers.

### Theresa...

- Joined the Hunterdon Central FFA Chapter in 1989
- Served as a State FFA Officer from 1992-1994
- Attended Delaware Valley University
- Entered a career in Database Marketing & Communications.
- Coaches dairy teams, mentors members & serves on the South Hunterdon FFA Alumni Board.



### Theresa Cooper

#### How did Ag Education and FFA help prepare you for your career?

“FFA provided my first opportunity in the marketing world. A State President from Connecticut I met at SPC hired me for a job in a small ag marketing firm. The networking and public speaking skills I learned in FFA helped me thrive, and I still work in the same industry after 20 years.”

#### What was your favorite moment in FFA?

“Attending my first National Convention for Poultry Judging. Also, the opportunity to meet so many great members throughout the state. There are many that I am still friends with today.”

“Success is not counted in dollars. It is measured by the number of people you personally made a positive impact on. It is measured by your own happiness.”



#### What advice would you give to FFA members?

“Stay true to yourself. Nothing is impossible. Always go for the gold, even if you have to dredge through a swamp to get there.”

### Kathy...

- Joined the Northern Burlington FFA Chapter in 1980
- Served as a State FFA Officer from 1984-1986
- Attended Rutgers University for Agricultural Science
- Attained a Masters Degree in Science Education at Montana State
- Currently teaches Chemistry & Biology at Rancocas Valley Regional High School
- Serves as a judge for State FFA events



### Kathy Gangel

#### What is your favorite memory in the FFA?

“Some of my funniest times were had at leadership conferences around the state, but one of my proudest memories was watching my daughter Kelly be elected as State Secretary almost 30 years after holding the same position myself.”

#### How have you stayed involved in FFA?

“Beyond high school and college, I served on the NJ FFA Foundation and State Alumni Boards. I still come back to judge at state competitions.”

“FFA members, get involved and don’t be afraid to run for an office. The FFA provides valuable experiences you can only get by participating! Making lasting friendships is a great added benefit!”



#### How has FFA and Ag Ed prepared you for your career?

“Through my FFA experience, particularly serving as a state officer, I was able to hone my presentation skills and ability to think ‘on the fly’. These skills certainly come in handy in the classroom.”

### David...

- Joined the Northern Burlington FFA Chapter in 1973.
- Served as a State FFA Officer from 1979-1981
- Graduated from Rutgers University with a Bachelors & Masters Degree
- Serves as the Assistant Director of the Rutgers EcoComplex for Bioenergy & Controlled Environment Agriculture
- Conducts research to promote the development of sustainable bioenergy & greenhouse production technology
- Operates a U-Pick & vegetable farm with his family



## DAVID SPECCA

### How did the FFA and Ag Ed prepare you for your career?

“Without a doubt, the strong ag ed program at Northern Burlington has been the foundation for a viable agriculture industry in Burlington County. Almost every successful farmer and ag entrepreneur in the area has taken agriculture classes at Northern Burlington. The FFA was an integral part of the ag education program because it added leadership, entrepreneurship, and public service opportunities to my skill set. These experiences helped me to stand out among my coworkers and excel in my career path.”

“I would consider myself successful if I was half the person my parents and teachers were. They are the yardstick to measure yourself by. You want to make sure that you set a good example and have inspired others just like your parents and teachers did for you.”

### In what ways are you involved in agriculture?

“I am the Past President of the NJ Agricultural Education Advisory Council, the Agriculture Representative for the NJ Water Supply Advisory Council, Past President of the National Clean Energy Alliance, and am an FFA Honorary American Degree recipient.”

### What is your favorite FFA memory?

“I have too many great memories to count, but the one that stands out the most was the officer training retreats we conducted as state officers. They were a blast but I think it gave our state advisor, Mr. Grover, a lot of grey hair.”

### What advice would you give to FFA members?

“The FFA will help you develop skills that you will use and appreciate for the rest of your life. However, you need to push yourself, just like an athlete does in a race, to go beyond your comfort level. It doesn't have to be all at once; you can be the chapter sentinel, then chapter president, then a state officer and be more and more confident along the way. Don't sit in the audience and say 'I could never do that;' rather, take it one step at a time and before you know it, you will be that person on stage!”



**Everyone has a story to tell. We want to hear yours!**

**How has the FFA made a difference in your life?  
Share Your Story with us at**

**<https://form.jotform.com/NJFFA/WhereAreTheyNow>  
and be featured in a special issue!**