

# Local Link    Normal Students Launch FFA 10 Gallon Challenge



See for yourself! Search for  
**#FFA10GallonChallenge**  
on Facebook to see  
photos & videos!

**N**ormal Community High School FFA Chapter's 10 Gallon Challenge shows how a little gesture can sometimes go a long way.

On Sept. 3, 2018, the students purchased 10 gallons of milk to donate to a local homeless shelter and posted a video on Facebook challenging FFA chapters across the country to do the same.

FFA is a nationwide agricultural youth organization that promotes leadership and community involvement with more than 8,500 chapters at schools across the country.

"Buying 10 gallons of milk to donate isn't a big impact, but by challenging others to participate it will multiply and make a bigger difference," says sophomore Madelyn Hubble, who serves as community service chair.

Initially started by Ohio farm broadcaster, Ty Higgins, the 10 gallon challenge has a two-fold purpose.

"We wanted to show our support for dairy farmers who are experiencing tough times and give back to our community," says junior Jose Serna, who is co-chair of the leadership committee.

Normal Community FFA donated their 10 gallons of milk to Salvation Army Safe Harbor, a local homeless shelter.

"Our ag teacher saw the original video on social media and brought the idea to us," Hubble says. "We thought it would be a great way to encourage FFA members across the country to get involved."

Dairy products like milk are among the top three requested items at food pantries nationwide, but also among the least donated, according to Feeding America, a nationwide nonprofit network of food banks.

Each FFA chapter that participates tags or names other chapters in their social media post to keep the challenge going.

Normal Community FFA's video has been viewed more than 410,000 times and FFA chapters as far away as Florida and California have accepted the challenge.

The project also provided a learning experience for the students in handling opposing viewpoints on social media.

"We did see some negative feedback from a few people and animal welfare organizations," Serna says. "We've just tried to focus on the positive message of helping our community and not giving attention to the negative."

To see photos and videos of the project in action, search for "#FFA10GallonChallenge" on Facebook.

**GALLONS FOR GOOD**  
Normal Community High School students (from left) Mollie Brothers, Jose Serna, Kenzie Kraft, Georgia Merkle and Maddie Kraft issued a challenge to FFA chapters across the country to donate 10 gallons of milk to a local food pantry.

## Take the Challenge!

1. Contact a local food pantry to confirm needs & ability to accept a milk donation.
2. Purchase & donate.
3. Spread the word! Share a post on social media with #10GallonChallenge.

# Local Link Barn Quilt Trail Weaves Through McLean County



**FAMILY FARM FLAIR**  
Left - A red, white and blue barn quilt adds a patriot pop of color to the old white barn at Jacob and Kellie Rustemeyer's farm. The four diamond design represents their four children (from left) Hannah (10), Morgan (13), Reece (8) and Nash (2).

Across McLean County, a colorful patchwork of barn quilts weave folk art into the landscape and tie the agricultural past together with the present.

"I spent hours looking at barn quilt designs," says Kellie Rustemeyer. "I just kept coming back to this one."

The four-diamond pattern she selected represents four generations of farm families that have each raised four children at the rural Heyworth farmstead she and her husband purchased in 2014.

Often inspired by traditional quilt square patterns, barn quilts feature designs as diverse as the interests of the owners and the structures they adorn.

McLean County now has more than 50 barn quilts decorating rustic barns and corn cribs as well as modern machine sheds and other buildings.

"The McLean County Barn Quilt Heritage Trail offers a way to celebrate the beauty



Illinois State University Mascot Reggie Redbird keeps a watchful eye from a corn crib at the Sutter farm east of Normal.



A stars and stripes design decorates a modern machine shed at Kelley Grain Farm along Towanda Barnes Road.

of agriculture and our rural communities," says University of Illinois Extension Program Coordinator, Sherry Thomas.

The barn quilt trail serves as an open invitation to take a drive through the countryside to admire the artwork and explore the rural landscape.

For the Rustemeyers, adding a barn quilt offered a way to honor their farm's legacy and share the unique history of their barn.

Originally constructed in 1867, the barn began its life as a church in what was once a town called Sparta about two miles north of the farm.

"In 1916, the Martin family purchased it for \$200, moved it by mule to the farm and converted it into a horse barn," Rustemeyer says.

Today the barn houses pigs instead of church pews. Rustemeyer's children show pigs at the local county fair and at livestock shows across the country.

o participate in the trail, barn quilt owners agree to place the artwork in a spot visible or accessible to the public and agree to have the barn quilt up for a minimum of five years," Thomas says.

The project started in 2012, spearheaded by local volunteers Karen Gottlieb and Kay Henrichs. It became a University of Illinois Extension program in 2014.

The first barn quilt installed as part of the project hangs on the carriage barn at the historic David Davis Mansion in Bloomington.

As barn quilts started cropping up across the county, word spread and more owners expressed interest.

For McLean County farmer, Gary Shankel, putting up a barn quilt was something on his "bucket list."

"I've seen the barn quilts around and always thought they were kind of neat," says Shankel. He chose a green and yellow design with the emblem of his preferred brand of farm equipment.

"My blood's about as green as it gets. I've been using John Deere equipment my whole life," says Shankel, a third generation farmer who grows corn and soybeans near Heyworth.

Most of the barn quilts are 8 by 8 foot, although a few are smaller. Owners pay for the materials and then the artwork and painting is done by volunteers.



A Baltimore Album pattern barn quilt hangs on the carriage barn at the historic David Davis Mansion.

"The average barn quilt probably takes 20 to 30 hours of work between design and painting," says Mary Jane Zook, one of the current volunteer artists.

Hanging the barn quilts usually requires a bucket truck to hoist the artwork into place, but sometimes the architecture of the building presents a few challenges.

"We had one barn with very little clearance for the bucket truck," Zook says. "Fortunately, the barn still had its old hay rope and pulley system. We ended up using it to hang the quilt."

The barn quilt trail also stitches together other elements of artistry.

"One thing that makes our barn quilt trail unique is the poetry," says Zook, who also serves as a member of the barn quilt committee.

Each barn quilt is paired with a poem written by a local poet inspired by the artwork and the history of the building or property.

Details about each barn quilt along with locations and suggested driving routes can be found online at the University of Illinois Extension Livingston, McLean and Woodford unit website.



**BUCKET LIST  
BARN QUILT**

Adding a barn quilt was a "bucket list" item for McLean County farmer Gary Shankel. TNT Tree Services of Bloomington installed the 8 by 8 foot artwork on his machine shed near Heyworth as the most recent addition to the McLean County Barn Quilt Trail.

## Take a Drive Through the Countryside

McLean County's Barn Quilt Heritage Trail serves as an open invitation to take a drive through the countryside to admire the artwork and see snippets of local agriculture past and present.

The trail is organized into four routes that can each be completed in about two hours or you can pick and

choose to see a few that interest you. To see maps and locations plus the stories and poems associated with each barn quilt, visit: <https://go.illinois.edu/McLeanBarnQuilts>

Print copies of the barn quilt booklet are available at the McLean County Extension office for a suggested donation of \$10.

# *Local Link*

## Centennial Barn Signs Honor Farm History



Once a prominent part of the rural landscape, barns offer a visible and tangible link to agriculture and farm family history.

Today, the classic symbol of farm life is becoming a rarer commodity as many old barns have succumb to age, weather and changes in agriculture that rendered them less practical.

"Barns are the thing that made agriculture possible – they were the centerpiece of life on the farm and also the bank as they held everything of value," says Ron Ropp, McLean County native and barn enthusiast.

In 1955, McLean County was home to more than 4,800 barns, but by 2002 only about 1,200 remained, according to data compiled by the McLean County Barn Keepers, a local preservation organization.

The Centennial Barn Project, launched by the Barn Keepers in 2017, aims to celebrate farm history by recognizing 100-year-old barns that are still standing.

Ropp and his wife, Jo, live in a barn originally built in 1874 by his great-grandfather repurposed into a house.

A second barn on the property proudly displays a Centennial Barn Sign. Built in 1912, that barn was originally used for horses and later converted to a chicken barn that at one time housed 1,500 laying hens.

"Barn Keepers works to preserve the building if possible, but even more so the stories of these unique structures," Ropp says.

The information about each barn's history is archived at the McLean County Museum of History.

"Farm owners fill out an application with information about the history of the barn and provide documentation to verify its age," says Ropp, who serves on the Barn Keepers board.

For a \$50 application fee, owners receive a 24 x 24 inch red and white Illinois Centennial Barn sign personalized with the farm family name.

So far, thirty-six barns in McLean County have received the designation.

Dave Stephens and his wife Diane know exactly when the centennial barn on their farm was built thanks to Pantagraph newspaper clipping documenting its construction in 1878.

"The barn was a bit unique because it had a drive through center aisle with hay lofts on both sides," says Stephens, a fact they discovered as they started to work on restoring the barn and found a door that had been covered in a previous remodel.

Today the barn is used for storage and a woodworking shop, while a modern machine shed nearby houses the farm equipment.

"My wife grew up here and her dad grew up here, so there's a sentimental attachment to the barn," says Stephens, who also serves on the Barn Keepers board.

To learn more about the Centennial Barn Project, visit [www.barnkeepers.org](http://www.barnkeepers.org).

### HONORING OLD BARNS

Centennial Barn signs recognize barns documented to be at least one hundred years old. The barn on Ron Ropp's farm was built in 1910 (left) while the barn on Dave Stephens' farm dates back to 1878 (right).