

Telling the Ag Story

With her winning essay, Katlin Wiest proves that agriculture is bigger than you think.

BY CLAIRE VATH

The tiny township of Lykens, Penn., was blanketed with a thick layer of snow the day the phone rang at the Wiest home.

Since school was canceled, 14-year-old Katlin Wiest answered the call.

“They told me I was the essay contest winner,” says Katlin. “After, I had to get them to explain it again,” she laughs. “So I won an essay contest and it was a snow day!”

Several months earlier, Katlin’s mother perused the weekly “Lancaster Farming,” when an ad for an essay contest caught her eye.

The topic of the Agriculture Council of America-sponsored 2008 Ag Day essay contest was “Agriculture—Bigger Than You Think.”

After a bit of encouragement from her mom, and the promise of \$1,000 prize money for the winner, Katlin got busy.

“I wrote the whole essay in a weekend and revised it,” she says. After taking the essay to school for her English teacher to look over, “I turned it in on the last day,” she adds with a laugh.

Last minute or not, 14-year-old Katlin was well-equipped to write about a subject so close to home.

She lives on a beef farm where her father raises beef cattle, grows corn, beans, wheat and hay. And aside from being a budding writer and aspiring large-animal veterinarian, “I have what my parents call ‘a small enterprise,’” says Katlin. “For 4-H I raise sheep, goats and dairy steer to show.”

“Katlin’s essay looked at all of ag,” says Gerald Tumbleson, president of the Agriculture Council of America. “Some people wrote about just one topic. Hers is so wide-range. A farmer is just a small fraction of agriculture. She understood ag as a bigger picture.”



Katlin Wiest won a trip to Washington, D.C., to read her essay in front of Congress.

PHOTO: USDA/ALICE WELCH

“When our alarm clocks ring in the morning, they are most likely made of plastic derived from corn or soybeans. . . . As the day ends, we crawl under our wool blankets and go to sleep not thinking that the many things we did today involved agriculture,” Katlin wrote in her essay.

“In the future, agriculture will be more important as our country grows. Agriculture is certainly bigger than you think.”

Writing about that bigger picture also won Katlin a trip to Washington, D.C., where she read her essay to members of Congress, industry representatives and the media.

“Everyone was so nice and full of congratulations,” says Katlin, who insists she was only “a little” nervous.

And that \$1,000 prize money? “I plan to save most of it for college and put the rest toward my animals,” she says. ●



on the web

To read Katlin’s entire essay, visit our web site at about.dtnprogressivefarmer.com/essay.