

 **OUTSTANDING  
EDUCATOR**

**Jenny  
Herman**

When asked what inspired her to become a teacher, Jenny Herman doesn't hesitate: "A great mentor once told me to become the person I needed growing up." As a student, Jenny struggled with her mental health. The teachers who offered her a safe space to simply be herself became her lifeline and inspired her to do the same for others.

As an agricultural education teacher for grades 9–12, Jenny has built that kind of space: kind, patient, and welcoming. "Agriculture is for everyone," she says. "It feeds, clothes, and unites us all. It's a place where any kid can land safely."

Jenny's path to teaching wasn't linear. Raised by parents who valued the outdoors, gardening, hunting, and learning from nature, she was immersed in agriculture without realizing it. In high school, she joined an ag class on a whim and competed nationally in floriculture. After switching majors multiple times in college, she found her home in agricultural education.

Seven years into her career, Jenny teaches a variety of agriculture classes, including greenhouse production and veterinary science. Her students gain hands-on experience—from germinating seeds to performing sutures—reflecting her belief that "kids learn best by doing." Her classroom may look "a little chaotic," but it's a space of organized growth. "If you want kids to be leaders, you have to give them the chance to lead," she says. "If you trust them, especially those not used to being trusted, they'll rise to the occasion."

Her teaching philosophy is simple but powerful: kids before curriculum. She meets students where they are, creating human connections and embracing laughter as vital to learning. "High schoolers are authentically themselves," she says. "They're awkward, funny, and figuring out who they are. When we live within the joy, learning blossoms."

That joy radiates through the thriving agriculture and FFA program she built from scratch. Jenny has watched students who once knew nothing about agriculture discover passion and purpose—from a city student now studying cattle production at South Dakota State University, to a former student overcoming addiction and mentoring others, to a greenhouse enthusiast now leading a crew at Bayer Crop Science. "My goal is for students to leave with every door open to them," she says. "Whether they pursue agriculture or not, I want them to know they are capable, loved, and that their dreams matter."

Jenny's growth as an educator is fueled by her colleagues. She regularly presents workshops, attends state and national conferences, and continues learning from fellow educators. When she learned she'd been named an Outstanding Educator, she was stunned (especially mid-"scat lab" filled with fake animal droppings). "I am an average teacher, just like anyone in this field," she laughs. "We all work hard, love our kiddos, and give the best parts of ourselves."

For Jenny, true success isn't about trophies. It's the spark in her students' eyes, the laughter in her classroom, and knowing she has become the person she once needed—and that her students now need too.