Passing the Passion
Ag science senior aims to teach & reach high schoolers

BY JO ANN LLOYD

Agricultural science senior and "Rogers Scholar" Frances "Nicole" Castle is passionate about agriculture.

"I knew at a very young age that I wanted to teach agriculture," she said.

IN 2002, SHE EARNED AN AMERICAN FFA DEGREE, THE HIGHEST DEGREE THE ORGANIZATION AWARDS.

Born and raised in the San Joaquin Valley – California’s top agricultural producing region – that’s not surprising.

Growing up, she was active in the FFA (Future Farmers of America). The organization both broadened her horizons and helped mold her character, she says.

“My FFA experiences shaped the person I am today,” Castle said. “My advisors were like family to me. They also changed the lives of many who might have been destined for failure. My advisors inspired me.”

The FFA is not the only organization that changed Castle’s life. The Mary Stuart Rogers Foundation, and the scholarships it provides, has made her teaching goal attainable.

A second-year Rogers Scholar, Castle was among 27 Cal Poly students who received a Mary Stuart Rogers scholarship this year. "The scholarship puts me that much closer to becoming a teacher," she says. "Without that help, I would not be able to attend a university like Cal Poly."

And Cal Poly is lucky to have her, according to Robert A. Flores, professor and department head of the Agricultural Education and Communication Department. "We are fortunate that Nicole chose Cal Poly," he says. "She’s delightful, and students recognize her as a leader. I have no doubt that she’ll become a sought-after teacher."

Castle remains active in the FFA, last year devoting countless hours as a committee chair at the State FFA Judging Finals held on campus. In 2002, she earned an American FFA degree, the highest degree the organization awards. To qualify, she completed three years of classroom instruction and worked on beef, sheep, swine, dairy cattle and horse projects.

Castle is on track to graduate in December and will then begin studies in Cal Poly’s teacher credential program.

The 22-year-old is looking forward to passing her passion for agriculture on to students. "I want to help them develop the skills that will benefit them throughout their lives, to help them build character and integrity. I can help them realize their potential."