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A queen who walks among Putnam County as a rising sophomore from Q.I. Roberts Junior-Senior High School was crowned the 2020 National Teen Miss Agriculture USA in June.

The results shocked 15-year-old Samantha Harper, but she will take her role as queen seriously to “AGvocate” for the future of the agricultural industry, she said.

“When I won, I was very surprised and very happy about it,” Samantha said. “I started crying. ... I was very humbled and grateful for it.”

Samatha said she never participated in pageants before this experience in Ohio, but she was a dedicated cheerleader and felt comfortable on stage. She raised rabbits for four years, and while she continues to do that, she is a rabbit educational leader who mentors young children who want to show their animals at county fairs.

“I do call it my small farm. I will continue to raise rabbits for as long as I can,” she said. “Even if you don’t live on a big farm ... you can still have an impact on the agricultural industry.”

The competition had several parts, including speeches, surprise questions and formal wear, but Samantha’s Florida roots shined through in agricultural wear. She dressed as sugar cane and educated the Ohio crowd.

Samantha’s mother, Abby Houser, said she still felt numb days after the pageant, and it was “a dream come true” to see her daughter win the whole pageant.

“I cried. She was crying. I was crying. It was phenomenal,” Houser said.

Samantha won against 74 other girls and Houser said she was incredibly proud of her daughter.

Joe Theobold, the principal of Q.I. Roberts echoed the sentiment.

“Samantha’s a great student,” Theobold said. “She represents everything we strive for, our core values at the school.”

The agriculture queen said she fell in love with the Miss Agriculture USA program as soon as she heard about it, but her favorite part was meeting all the different girls from across the country.

“We all advocate on social media and we see each other’s posts. It was so fun to meet everyone in person,” Samantha said. “We all support each other. So it’s kind of like one big family.”

As queen, Samantha’s job is to teach others about the future of agriculture, and she said she is already thinking about how to share her experiences to people who may not know much about rural work.

“My main goal for my experience is to expand abroad as much as I can to advocate and teach others about agriculture,” Samantha said. “I’ve only been a national queen for a couple of days now and I’ve already been trying to start planning what I should be doing over the next year.”

Samantha said she wants to teach local youth about agricultural practices because she hasn’t met many younger people in Putnam County who farm or grew up on a farm.

“They’re going to be our future one day,” she said. “It’s really good to be able to help youth with my position, especially here in Putnam County.”

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