

Attracting the Next Generation of School Based Agricultural Education Instructors: An Approach to Recruitment

Jon W. Ramsey
466 AGH Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, OK 74078
405-744-4260
jon.ramsey@okstate.edu

Cassie Graham
458 AGH Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, OK 74078
405-744-2972
cassie.graham@okstate.edu

Hanna Holsapple
459 AGH Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, OK 74078
405-744-2972
hanna.holsapple@okstate.edu

Marshall Baker
456 AGH Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, OK 74078
405-744-8251
bakerma@okstate.edu

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Introduction

The lack of supply and filling the demand for Agricultural Education teachers is not a new concept (Kantrovich, 2010, p 6). For nearly 100 years, the teacher shortage in agricultural education has been lingering in the minds of those in the profession (Camp, 2000). The shortage has led to the ultimate question “how does the agricultural education profession recruit enough qualified people into teaching to fill the need of the profession for replacement teachers” (Kantrovich, 2010, p 7)?

Recruitment strategies in the Department of Agricultural Education, Communications and Leadership at Oklahoma State University (OSU) rely on two approaches (passive and active) for promoting agricultural education as a college major and career choice. The active strategies consist of highly visible programs that include faculty and graduate students working with teachers, parents and students to highlight the positive attributes of the profession. Reis and Kahler (1997) reported, “parents and agriculture teachers play the biggest role in determining whether or not students enroll in agriculture programs at college” (p.44). Regarding the passive approach to recruitment, Calvin and Pense (2013) advise the implementation of “better designed, interactive web pages used by potential recruits and their parents to make decisions regarding fit with the program” (p. 54). To that end, attention to webpages, consistent, timely correspondence and static displays in the department compose the passive strategies that represent the more subtle recruitment activities.

How it Works

The Department of Agricultural Education, Communications and Leadership at Oklahoma State University uses an array of programs developed to recruit potential agricultural education students. Recruitment strategies are designed to attract students at both the secondary and post-secondary level, and highlight agricultural education as a viable college major and career choice. Recruiting students within the college can be problematic due to perceived “departmental turf” or the attachment students have to their current departments. This abstract focuses on strategies employed at the college level, specifically the College of Agricultural Science and Natural Resources (CASNR) Career Fair, and the secondary level, the Future Agricultural Education Teaching Academy (Ag-Ed Academy). The CASNR Career Fair offers a professional atmosphere for students to seek out potential agricultural career opportunities. This year, a faculty member and graduate student reserved booth space and created a static display representing the National Association of Agricultural Education (NAAE) Region II. The booth hosted Oklahoma school-based agricultural education teachers, state staff, and Ag-Ed faculty and graduate students. CASNR Career Fair attendees had access to experts on Oklahoma agricultural education and received the most recent information concerning job responsibilities, demand for teachers and opportunities across the state. The Ag-Ed Academy focuses on secondary students with an interest in agricultural education as a college major and career choice. Participants are given the opportunity to teach selected agricultural literacy lessons and interact with current agricultural education stakeholders. This recruitment activity is a result of a cooperative effort

between the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education, Agriculture Division, Oklahoma Agricultural Education Teachers Association and the agricultural education faculty at OSU. Teachers nominate their students and assist with the application process and staff members assist with the selection process, while faculty design and deliver the weeklong program on the campus of OSU. Passive recruiting strategies are also implemented and include e-mail listservs, newsletters, and targeted mailings to prospective students. Additionally, social media sites are utilized to recruit students into the agricultural education program.

Results to Date/Implications

These strategies have been effective in bringing students to the agricultural education major and ultimately the profession of teaching. The CASNR Career Fair resulted in fifty contacts with students that represented all nine majors within CASNR. These contacts will be added to the database and passive recruitment strategies will be used to further inform them about the available opportunities in the profession. The Ag-Ed Academy has been in place since 2007 and, consequently, 135 students have been introduced to agricultural education via the Ag-Ed Academy. Of those students, 27 are currently teaching agricultural education. Currently the database for prospective students receives a bi-annual mailing to correspond with admission and orientation/enrollment deadlines that are set by the university.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

The Ag-Ed Academy has been successful in recruiting students in to the agricultural education program to fill the shoes of those in the school-based agricultural education setting. The department will continue to provide this opportunity to those students who meet the requirements. Additionally, in order to receive grant funds and assistance in developing a sustainable plan for school-based agricultural educator recruitment and retention, OSU intends to work with other teacher education institutions in a state-wide effort to join the National Teach Ag State Teach Ag Results (STAR) Campaign.

Cost

The cost for participating in the CASNR Career Fair is approximately \$250.00. This reflects the cost of the booth rental and printing and duplicating. The Ag-Ed Academy requires a budget of \$10,000.00 to conduct the weeklong event. The budget includes on-campus housing, transportation, meals and consumable supplies. The Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education provides funds for teacher mentors and Ag-Ed Interns, additional sponsors provided resources for scholarships awarded to students that complete the Ag-Ed Academy, enroll at OSU and select agricultural education as their college major.

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