

Teach Ag Campaign through a National Signing Day & Agricultural Education Institute

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Introduction

It is well known that a nation-wide shortage of agriscience teachers exists in school-based agricultural education (SBAE) (Grooms, 2015). The need for qualified agriscience teacher graduates is vital to maintaining agricultural programs in the middle and high school public school system (Roberts & Dyer, 2004). A shortage of SBAE teachers has been a continual issue for nearly a century (Camp, 2000), and studies have indicated no one steadfast strategy is effective in recruiting current students in SBAE to become the next generation of SBAE teachers (Lawver & Torres, 2012). The literature base supports three aspects of recruiting students to decide to become teachers: encouragement from a teacher to pursue the career (Hillison, Camp, & Burke, 1986); indication that the career choice is rewarding (Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000); and impact on their students during their career as a teacher (Lawver & Torres, 2011). Development of a program that takes into account these three factors is worthy of experimentation on SBAE student development for teaching agriscience education at the middle and high school level. This thought process led to the development of the Agricultural Education Institute hosted by [university] in partnership with [state] Team Ag Ed.

How it works/Program Phases

The Agricultural Education Institute is a year-long recruitment program that develops and sustains interest in becoming an agriscience teacher. This year-long special recruitment program is [state's] response to the national call for more agriscience teachers through the National Teach Ag Campaign. The [university] worked in partnership with current [state] agriscience teachers and leaders in education and industry to host students interested in becoming an agriscience teacher. Students were nominated to participate by their SBAE teacher. Once nominated, the students were participants of an introductory session at the state FFA convention. Participants who attended rotated through ten teacher zones to learn more about the [university], department, and how other key stakeholder groups assist an agriscience teacher (FFA Alumni, boards of education, professional organizations, advisory board members). After completion of the ten teacher zones, where students learned and interacted in small groups with a stakeholder leader, they were invited to sign a letter of intent, formally declaring their desire to become an agriscience teacher. Each signee was escorted to the convention media room for a special photo with their agriscience teacher, parents (if on-site), and an assigned teacher education faculty mentor. The students were then presented on stage at the state convention as a newly committed prospective teacher.

Faculty mentors provide these prospective agriscience teachers with a direct link to [university] and [department] as they finish high school and/or their college transfer degree. They remain in direct contact with their protégé during their undergraduate program at [university] and into their first years as a teacher. The faculty also serve as mentors as these students teach a take-home lesson in their local community.

In the fall, participants attend a special session at the university, where they learn more about teaching and learning strategies and effective teaching in an agriscience program. The event culminates with the participants preparing a lesson to take home and teach to students at a local elementary school. During the spring, Ag Ed Institute participants return to campus, learn more about the application process for entry into [university], hear from undergraduate students who

are completing their student teaching internship, and reflect on the take-home lessons they taught at their local elementary schools.

There are five factors addressed by the Ag Ed Institute: 1) encouragement and buy-in from the local agriscience instructor, 2) highlighting the rewarding portions of the career in a setting that exemplifies a rewarding atmosphere, 3) showcasing the impact of effective instruction and allowing participants to put effective instruction into practice, 4) mentorship from teacher educators while indicating the special interest of becoming a professional teacher, and 5) developing a professional cohort and community to build self-efficacy for teaching agriculture in the public schools.

Results to Date/Implications

There have been over 150 students participate in a portion of the program. This current year marks the first year of the year-long program where 50 participants have elected to maintain a focus throughout the year. The teacher education program currently has four members of the first Agriculture Education Institute in the teacher education program. It is too early to assess impact, however, continual faculty contact with future students as they progress through their transfer program has proven to be effective.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

Plans are to increase participation in the Ag Ed Institute in the coming years and involve past Institute participants as guest speakers in future programs. This exciting and unique new program has the potential to significantly reduce the shortage of agriscience teachers in [state's] middle and high schools and may serve as a model for addressing the nationwide shortage of agriscience teachers.

Resources Needed

Teacher buy-in through the nomination process is a critical resource and leads to research-supported encouragement of teachers and supporting future teachers pointed out by Hillison, Camp, and Burke (1986). Funding to support workshops and meals for participants at the state FFA convention, spring, and fall institute sessions. Cooperation from the state FFA Association for time on stage at the state convention, pictures and excitement of a national signing day, a faculty group willing to support participants through the mentorship program, and time additional effort from faculty in recruiting and maintaining relationships with high school students.

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