

FFA Membership Growth Measured as Market Share

Blaze Currie
Graduate Assistant in Agricultural Education
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
174 Bevier Hall
905 South Goodwin Avenue
Urbana, Illinois 61801
(217) 333-3165
bkcurri2@illinois.edu

Erica B. Thieman, Ph.D
Assistant Professor in Agricultural Education
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
139 Bevier Hall, MC-180
905 South Goodwin Avenue
Urbana, Illinois 61801
(217) 244-3863
thieman@illinois.edu

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Introduction/Literature Review

In this time of controversy over the use of federal funds to support vocational youth organizations, it is essential that vocational agriculture adapt to the needs of the changing times, and that FFA activities, methods, and strategies be modified as needed to provide the valuable support to the total vocational agriculture program that it has been in years past. (Cooper & Nelson, 1983)

As indicated in the previous quote, the American education system and more specifically those programs housed beneath the modern Career and Technical umbrella are not new to facing adversity and threats to funding. Agricultural education has proven itself to be highly resilient in facing these ever-cycling adversities. The National FFA Organization has recently announced an all-time membership high with 629,367 members (National FFA Organization, 2015). Membership started to decline in the mid-1970s, and it wasn't until 2010 that the National FFA Organization broke its membership record of 1977 by reporting 520,000 members (Kreul, 2010). FFA membership became a major concern in the late 80s and early 90s when enrollment was dropping 1 to 3 % annually (Hoover & Scanlon, 1991). This decline was attributed to three factors including antiquated curriculum, increased core curriculum requirements competing for scheduling, and a perception of vocational programs being for those not pursuing further education. Following that decline, the organization made changes in order to modernize and adapt its image (Hoover & Scanlon, 1991), and FFA membership has been increasing in total number of members ever since. Membership growth awards, discussions, and measurements used in many studies measure absolute increase in membership year-to-year to evaluate and reward membership growth. However, absolute growth is not the only way to measure membership growth. Another method to measure membership growth is by calculating FFA membership as a share of the total high school population enrolled in public school, hereinafter referred to as "market share." Looking at market share rather than absolute annual membership growth, one can account for increasing or decreasing school enrollment. States with booming school enrollment but modest FFA membership growth are actually shrinking as a percentage of the population. With increasing efforts to ensure accessibility of the FFA program, it is worth considering membership growth trends in comparison to student populations. Looking at data through this market share lens gives rise to new questions and perspectives about where FFA membership growth is increasing or decreasing and what is causing or limiting such growth.

Methods

School enrollment data for grades 9 – 12 by state was collected (US Department of Education, 2015) and measured against national FFA membership data. Data from both data sets were used for the years 1990 and 2014. 1990 was chosen because it was the lowest year for total FFA membership, and 2014 was chosen because it is the most recent year for school enrollment and FFA membership data. A simple calculation of "market share" was determined by dividing the number of FFA members for a given year by the number of total students enrolled in grades 9 – 12 in public education for that same year. This was computed for each state, comparing market share in 2014 to market share in 1990. Puerto Rico, Guam and Micronesia calculations were not included due to insufficient public school enrollment data. School enrollment data for Washington, D.C. was included with Maryland for consistency when measuring against

Maryland FFA membership numbers. Market share was calculated for all 50 states.

Findings

Market share comparisons for several states are presented in Figure 1. Seven states have increased in absolute membership from 1990 to 2014 but have decreased in market share. For example, both Florida and North Carolina have increased in membership by more than 6,000 members but have decreased in market share. Montana and Delaware have had the largest increases in market share since 1990, each gaining more than 7% market share. North Dakota has the largest market share with more than 15%. Overall, The National FFA Organization has increased in market share from 3.35% in 1990, the year with the lowest total membership, to 4.23% in 2014, the year with a record high in membership. In total, 34 states have increased market share, albeit by small margins. The median change for all states in market share from 1990 to 2014 is 0.63%, and the average is 1.01%.

State	Fall 1990 Enrollment 9-12	90-91 Members	% FFA market share - 1990	Fall 2014 Enrollment 9-12	14-15 Members	% FFA market share - 2014	Change in Market share 1990-2014
Alabama	194,709	22,469	11.54%	218,100	14,611	6.70%	-4.84%
Delaware	27,052	1,017	3.76%	37,700	4,262	11.31%	7.55%
*Florida	491,658	11,011	2.24%	809,700	17,454	2.16%	-0.08%
*Idaho	60,749	3,258	5.36%	84,900	4,372	5.15%	-0.21%
*Minnesota	210,818	8,741	4.15%	264,600	10,538	3.98%	-0.16%
Montana	41,805	1,889	4.52%	41,900	5,215	12.45%	7.93%
*New Mexico	93,794	3,265	3.48%	98,400	3,390	3.45%	-0.04%
*North Carolina	303,739	13,621	4.48%	452,100	20,106	4.45%	-0.04%
North Dakota	32,882	3,926	11.94%	30,500	4,741	15.54%	3.60%
Rhode Island	37,016	221	0.60%	42,100	95	0.23%	-0.37%
*Tennessee	226,484	11,672	5.15%	283,400	14,081	4.97%	-0.18%
*Washington	227,112	7,304	3.22%	327,500	8,024	2.45%	-0.77%

* States that increased in membership but decreased in market share.

Figure 1. Market share changes of FFA membership from 1990 to 2014 measured as membership per total high school enrollment by state.

Conclusions, Discussion and Recommendations for Future Research

Based on this study, even states with increasing absolute membership can decrease in market share or FFA members per high school student population. Even in some states with membership gains, the like likelihood of a high school student being an FFA member has decreased. Several states have increased market share, some by significant margins. States that have increased market share merit a closer evaluation. If California had the same market share today as North Dakota, there would be more than 300,000 FFA members in California. Recommendations for future research are to evaluate those states with higher market share to determine what situations, contexts, or practices led to such membership gains. This study did not include middle school enrollment and did not evaluate market share in terms of enrollment in agricultural education courses, both of which should be included in future studies. Future research may also evaluate the impacts of rural, urban and suburban growth on FFA membership market share. Finally, state and national leaders may consider reviewing awards and recognition programs for membership growth to including market share data.

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