

Decisions, Decisions!

Exploring School-Based Agricultural Education's Influence on Students' Choice of Major

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Introduction/Need for Study

- There will be more agriculturally related job openings nationwide than can be filled by graduates of agricultural programs (Goeker, Smith, Fernandez, Ali, & Theller, 2015).
- The most important function of school-based agricultural education (SBAE) is to prepare youth and adults for careers in agriculture (Phipps and Osborne, 1988).
- SBAE can be an important means for recruiting and training students for careers in today's agricultural workforce to satisfy the need for trained professionals.
- However, little is known about *how* SBAE influences career choice.

30 Second Summary

- School-based agricultural education can be an important means for recruiting and training students for careers in today's agricultural workforce.
- This study sought to explore how participation in SBAE influences students' motivations to major and pursue a career in an agricultural field.
- College students with SBAE experience participated in a focus group interview.
- Four themes emerged of how SBAE influences career choice: 1) develops self-concept, 2) outside of class experiences influence students' choices, 3) aligns with career values, and 4) socializers influence students' choices.

Theme 2: Outside of Class Experiences SAE & Experiential Learning, FFA Experiences

"It was at national FFA convention... he gave this speech. It was pretty inspirational. And it was there that I knew I was going to go into agriculture."

Theme 1: Self-Concept

"I always thought that gaining the knowledge and having to remember it all would always be something that was unattainable for me... The vet science career development event definitely helped open my eyes to see that you don't have to be 4.0 Harvard student to get it done. I can be a veterinarian."

Career Choice

Theme 4: Socializers

Friends, Family, Teachers, Other Individuals

"The impact that he's [agriculture teacher] had on so many lives and on my life as well, it's pretty rewarding for him...so, I want that same experience."

Purpose and Methods

- This study sought to explore how participation in SBAE influences college students' motivations to major and pursue a career in an agricultural field.
- Purposive sampling for maximum variation.
- Focus Group Interview.
- Open, axial, & selective coding.

Theme 3: Career Values

Time for Family & Hobbies, Job Benefits, Making a Difference

"I'll have the same schedule as my kids...I'll be out at the same time they will be...and I like the idea of having a real job and then doing different work on the side."

Conclusions

- Findings suggest SBAE influences career choice through development of self-concept, outside of class experiences, alignment with career values, and socializers.
- We recommend colleges of agriculture allocate their resources accordingly to target students from SBAE programs.
- As more students recognize the opportunities that exist in agriculture through the influences of SBAE, more will enter the agricultural workforce, providing agriculture with the number of qualified workers it so desperately seeks.
- Agriculture teachers should encourage students to pursue agriculture careers, provide students with outside of class experiences, as well as help students develop self-confidence in agriculture.

Theoretical Framework

- The Model of Career Choice (Dick & Rallis 1991).
- Based on three key concepts that influence an individual's career choice: socializers, past experiences, and self-concept.