

**FFA Members' Perceived Benefits and Barriers
to a Secondary Agricultural Education
Teaching Career**

Ethan Igo

230 Linfield Hall
Bozeman, MT 59718
(406) 994-2132
ethan.igo@msu.montana.edu

Dustin K. Perry

230 Linfield Hall
Bozeman, MT 59718
(406) 994-5773
dustin.perry@montana.edu

Carl G. Igo

230 Linfield Hall
Bozeman, MT 59718
(406) 994-3693
cigo@montana.edu

FFA Members' Perceived Benefits and Barriers to a Secondary Agricultural Education Teaching Career

Introduction

The need for agricultural education teachers is a well-documented issue across the United States (Foster, Lawver, & Smith, 2015; Kantrovich, 2010; Myers, Dyer, & Washburn, 2010). School districts continue to struggle to fill positions, and university agricultural education teacher preparation programs deal with a perceived lack of interest in the teaching profession. To that point, one area of concern is the recruitment of high school students into agricultural education teacher preparation programs (Kantrovich, 2010). While emerging research examining post-secondary agriculture students' intent to pursue teaching exists (Lawver & Torres, 2012; Park & Rudd, 2005; Reis & Kahler, 1997), little is evident when examining high school students' perceived barriers and benefits to pursuing a secondary agricultural education career. Therefore, there is an apparent need for the examination of those perceived barriers and benefits to address the issue of student recruitment into agricultural education teacher preparation programs.

How it Works/Steps

In 2015 fall, the Montana FFA Association held eight District Leadership Conferences (DLCs). Facilitated by Montana FFA State Officers, DLCs provided opportunities for Montana FFA members to develop leadership and relationship skills. Historically, the Montana State University (MSU) Division of Agricultural Education faculty have not visited secondary programs for recruitment purposes. However, a recent recruitment push from MSU resulted in its faculty requesting time during DLCs to facilitate a workshop for high school juniors and seniors with three distinct goals: 1) Introduce themselves and the MSU Agricultural Education program to students; 2) Collect contact cards from students interested in becoming high school agriculture teachers; and 3) Record student-perceived barriers and benefits to becoming high school agriculture teachers.

After brief introductions of themselves and the MSU Agricultural Education program, faculty members utilized the remaining 45 allotted minutes to conduct a recruitment workshop modified from National Teach Ag campaign material (National Association of Agricultural Educators [NAAE], 2015). Participants were divided such that one-half were encouraged to record barriers to becoming an agricultural education teacher on a large section of craft paper affixed to a wall. The remaining participants individually discussed and recorded benefits on index cards. Upon completion of these tasks, participants were instructed to regroup as one entity. The group tasked with recording benefits on index cards was then prompted to roll up their index cards and tape them over the barriers written on the craft paper. The end result was a large sheet of craft paper covered in index cards describing high school juniors' and seniors' perceived benefits and barriers to becoming secondary agriculture teachers in Montana.

Results to Date/Implications

This process was repeated six times at different DLC locations, reaching approximately 350 students. Faculty members collected 330 perceived benefits to becoming an agriculture teacher and 107 perceived barriers. The responses were then coded, using methods outlined in

Leedy and Ormrod (2015) and Bogdan and Biklen (2011). Results indicated the most frequently reported perceived benefits were teaching others ($n=110$; 33.3%) and being involved in the agriculture industry ($n=62$; 18.8%). Perceived barriers were mostly economic issues ($n=32$; 30.0%) and the image of teaching as a profession ($n=32$; 30.0%). Based on these responses, recommendations and decisions can be made to increase recruitment efforts and address issues affecting a high school student's decision to pursue agricultural education teaching as a career.

Table 1
Coded Perceived Benefits and Barriers

Responses	<i>n</i>	%
Benefits*	330	-
Teaching	110	33.3
Agriculture Connection	62	18.8
Travel	51	15.5
Barriers*	107	-
Economic	32	30.0
Image	32	30.0
Time	20	18.7

*due to space constraints, only most commonly coded items were included

Future Plans/Advice

Future program plans include maintaining contact with workshop participants, particularly those who indicated their interest in declaring a major in agricultural education upon admission to MSU. To date, this effort, combined with other intentional recruitment efforts, has produced a 200% increase in newly-enrolled agricultural education freshmen. Faculty will continue to utilize the participant contact cards to track students through registrar data. Additionally, students who projected their interest in agricultural education should be referred to their own secondary agriculture education teacher for continuous follow-up once the workshop has concluded. Advice for use or adaptation of this workshop is for faculty members to split up to cover more territory within the region or state. Follow-up with incoming students is essential to measure the impact of the program.

Costs/Resources

The cost for the innovative idea workshop was minimal, although it could increase depending on a variety of factors. Mileage, materials, and promotional items were the primary costs. Faculty drove a combined 1,800 miles to complete the workshops. Using the Montana mileage rate of \$0.575 cents per mile, the mileage cost was \$1,035. Material costs were negligible, as they consisted only of markers, craft paper, tape, and index cards. Promotional items, which were not a necessity for the workshop, were a major contributing cost factor. Approximately \$500 was spent to obtain various promotional items, such as pens, Frisbees, flash drives, bookmarks, and other university marketing material. The total cost for the workshops was over \$1,500. Further, human capital was invested into ensuring a successful process. However, that cost is difficult to quantify.

References

- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson A & B.
- Foster, D. D., Lawver, R. G., & Smith, A. R. (2015). National agricultural education supply & demand study. American Association for Agricultural Education.
- Kantrovich, A. J. (2007). A national study of the supply and demand for teachers of agricultural education from 2004 – 2006. Morehead, KY: Morehead State University.
- Lawver, R. G. & Torres, R. M. (2012). An analysis of post-secondary agricultural education students' choice to teach. *Journal of Agricultural Education* 53(2), 28-42. DOI: 10.5032/jae.2012.02028
- Leedy, P. D., & Ormrod, J. E. (2015). *Practical research: Planning and design* (11th ed.). Pearson.
- Myers, B. E., Dyer, J. E., & Washburn, S. G. (2010). Problems facing beginning agriculture teachers. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 46(3), 47-55. doi:10.5032/jae.2005.03047
- National Association of Agricultural Educators (2015). National teach ag campaign - Teach ag lesson plans, games and activities. Retrieved from http://www.naae.org/teachag/teachag_lessons.cfm
- Reis, R. & Kahler, A. A. (1997). Factors influencing enrollment in agricultural education programs as expressed by Iowa secondary agricultural education students. *Journal of Agricultural Education* 38(2), 38-48. DOI: 10.5032/jae.1997.02038
- Park, T. D. & Rudd, R. (2005). A description of the characteristics attributed to students' decisions to teach agriscience. *Journal of Agricultural Education* 46(3), 82-94. DOI: 10.5032/jae.2005.03082