

Teach AG Day: Impacting the Future of Agricultural Education

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The Clemson University Agricultural Education program proudly served as a host site in September of 2016 for the National Teach Agriculture Day Celebration. The event's purpose was to raise awareness of the need to recruit and retain qualified and diverse individuals to teach the future generations of agriculturalists. The all-day event provided participants with a variety of opportunities to expand their current knowledge and learn more about Agricultural Education as well as the agriscience, food, and natural resources sectors. Ultimately, the event raised awareness about the concern for the national teacher shortage in Agricultural Education and sought to reach the National Association of Agricultural Educators' (NAAE) goal to ensure an abundant supply of qualified and diverse agricultural educators who will inspire the next generation of critical thinkers, problem solvers, leaders, entrepreneurs, and agriculturalists. Clemson University was chosen, through a proposal process, by NAAE to participate in a live broadcast that was nationally recognized to showcase our Agricultural Education program, teachers, and students. Our live broadcast consisted of a Teach AG Panel themed, "Why Teach AG: The Past, Present, and Future Generations of Agricultural Educators." Students who were selected by the South Carolina (SC) Association of Agricultural Educators and "tagged" to Teach AG attended the event and participated in workshops titled, "Why We Need You" and "The Many Hats of an AG Teacher". SC FFA state CDE winners attended 90-minute workshops, taught by faculty experts from the university to assist in preparing them to compete at the 2016 National FFA Convention. A walking campus tour and presentation on the College of Agriculture, Forestry, and Life Science programs and admissions process were offered. Teachers discussed and shared innovative ideas they used in their Agricultural Education curricula focused on highlighting agriscience and STEM. The event drew an impressive crowd of over 150 live event attendees, consisting of 18 agricultural education teachers and their students, 16 of whom are university alumni. Over 50 current undergraduate and graduate students attended the event. Those who were unable to be on campus for the event participated through a live online feed provided by the university's video production team.

Nationally last year, there were over 1,000 agriculture teaching positions available and a shortage of agriculture teachers. Over 200 of those positions were filled with non-licensed teachers and 80 positions went unfilled. Unfortunately over 40 school-based agricultural education programs throughout the nation closed due to low enrollment, budgets, lack of teachers or a combination of those factors (Foster, Lawver, Smith & Thompson, 2016). Through the National Teach AG Day event, awareness was raised about the concern for the national teacher shortage in AGED while also empowering and exciting the next generation about their bright future as agricultural educators. "An average of 35,400 new U.S. graduates with expertise in food, agriculture, renewable natural resources, or the environment are expected to fill 61% of the expected 57,900 average annual openings" (Goecker, Smith, Fernandez, Ali & Theller, 2015).

Program Phases

An important first task was to reserve a location with adequate meeting space and technological capabilities. Once a location was set, guest speakers, student volunteers, and CDE breakout session leaders were contacted. CDE breakout sessions were taught in the following categories:

Agriscience Fair, Ag Mechanics, Public Speaking, Evaluation, ENR/Wildlife, Farm Business Management, Floriculture and Nursery Landscape, and Milk Quality. Clemson's Block and Bridle Club hosted the event participant's lunch. Written and electronic invitations were sent to all SC agriscience teachers, CDE winners and "tagged" students to inform them of the event. An email account was established specifically for communication with event attendees. A panel of speakers was also identified. Social media spread the word about the event, using the department's webpage, Facebook, and Twitter. Another integral part involved in the planning of the event included designing and ordering various promotional products, including t-shirts, hats, and giveaway items. Each participant received a Teach Ag drawstring backpack filled with: the event schedule, cup, lanyard, pencil, stickers, pin, stress owl, and various promotional, recruitment, and educational materials. Since Clemson University was selected as one of the national satellite locations to participate in the live broadcast, the live broadcast panel was planned and practiced in advance. A visual jigsaw style image using Clemson University's Teach Ag logo was created and projected at the conclusion of the live broadcast. The visual display was signed by event participants to serve as an artifact to commemorate the event. To gauge the overall event, a survey was distributed to teacher and student event participants, focusing on the importance and quality of break out sessions as well as opinion on event cost, preliminary information, transportation, session location, and lunch.

Results to Date, Future Plans, & Advice

Survey responses were ranked on a 1-4 scale with one being poor, and four being excellent. Students ranked the overall importance and quality of the event at 3.9 and the teachers ranked the overall importance at 3.9 and the overall quality at 3.7. Of the teachers and students who responded (n=60), 100 % would attend a similar activity, if offered again. An infographic and wrap-up video were created to summarize and further promote the impacts of the event. Clemson University has plans to utilize their first year efforts to host another Teach Ag Day next fall to continue to promote the profession and recruit agricultural educators. Some words of advice to others interested in hosting a Teach Ag Day celebration: work with your university's video and production crew to ensure you have adequate technological capabilities and utilize the crew to video the event. Event footage can be developed into a promotional video, which will show the impact of the event and assist in promoting your program. Ensure the location of the event is easily accessible with appropriate parking available. To maximize pre-event preparation, online pre-registration is recommended. To keep accurate records and avoid confusion, assign one individual to record registration and financial transactions. Administer a program evaluation to analyze the impact of the event and make changes for future events. Our event was best summarized by a student comment: "This day solidified my decision to teach agriculture!"

Cost/Resources Needed

A proposal and budget were presented to the dean of the college for support. The NAAE provided a \$250 stipend for participating as a host satellite location. Participants were charged a \$10 fee. The event costs totaled nearly \$5,500 for over 150 participants. Organizations should consider cost and resources before planning a Teach Ag Day event. Without the college funding support and the faculty resources available to us, our event would not have been as successful.

References

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