

Using a Photo Booth as a Means of Exposing Urban Youth to Careers in Agriculture

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Introduction

A recent report by the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture indicate that there will be an annual shortage of approximately 22,500 qualified candidates to fill the 57,900 open positions in the agricultural field between 2015 and 2020 (Goecker, Smith, Fernandez, Ali, & Goetz, n.d.). The report also specifies that 39% of those jobs will be filled by people with no agricultural background or experience. Due to the high demand for graduates with some fundamental agricultural knowledge, there has been a recent push to expand agricultural education and literacy efforts within our urban and suburban communities to help meet this ongoing workforce need. The National Center for Education Statistics (2013) informed us that in 2010, 43% of all schools in the United States were located within urban and suburban areas. The NCEES (2013) tell us that 75.53% ($n=37,137,596$) of the entire United States public school population come from these communities. Since many of these schools do not currently offer any instruction in agricultural education (Warner & Washburn, 2009), it is imperative to expose the youth in these areas to the vast career opportunities available to them within the food, fiber, and natural resources industry. As part of an initiative to educate urban youth about various careers in the agricultural industry, the University of Illinois Extension Service's Ag in the Classroom program in Rock Island County created an agricultural career photo booth to utilize at various summer camps, career days, back-to-school events, and educational workshops to expose these students and their parents to agricultural careers.

How it Works

The primary purpose of the photo booth was to educate both urban youth's and their parents about the ample career opportunities available within the agricultural industry. Esters and Bowen (2005) tell us parents have the most influence on an urban's youth career decision. The extension staff utilized this knowledge as they developed the implementation plan for this project. The idea initially began with the County Extension Teens as Teachers program, whose chief objective was to educate urban youth about various facets of agriculture during a five week summer experience. This group, made up of both urban and rural teens, wanted to devise an interactive activity that informed the youth in their summer program about the various career opportunities within the agricultural industry. This is where the concept of the agricultural "selfie" photo booth was born. The teens helped create the initial plans for the photo booth and the county Ag in the Classroom coordinator ordered the supplies and brought the concept to life.

According to the National FFA Organization, there are 235 unique agricultural career options available to students (Meyer, 2016). To choose the agricultural careers that would be available at the photo booth, the Teens as Teachers group referenced the Facilitating Coordination in Agricultural Education (FCAE) agricultural careers binder that is provided to each county Ag in the Classroom program in Illinois. The students chose thirty-six of the fifty-eight careers to highlight making sure to include some within each of the agricultural career pathways. From there, the Ag in the Classroom coordinator had all banners and signs printed, gathered costumes and props, and built a backdrop using PVC pipe.

At the various events the photo booth was utilized, the participants got to pick out the agricultural career of their choice (out of the list of thirty-six) and get their picture taken using the available costumes and props. The photos were developed using an instant camera and

distributed to the children within several minutes. They were then able to take them home to show their parents.

Besides just having the youth identify various agricultural occupations and get their picture taken at the photo booth, the extension staff wanted to also encourage the parents to get involved. This brought about the idea of adding an affixed QR Code to the photo frame. A parent could then use their smartphone or tablet to scan the code which would direct them to the National FFA Organization's AgExplorer (www.agexplorer.com) website. This would enable both the student and parent to explore specific details about any particular agricultural career that might interest them.

Results to Date/ Implications

To date, the photo booth has been utilized by over 2,000 urban students exposing them to a variety of agricultural careers. It was first used during three different youth summer camps in Rock Island County with the Teens as Teachers program on their agricultural careers day. Approximately ninety students participated during that activity. Additionally, the photo booth was used at a career day, back-to-school event, and at the John Deere Pavilion Learn and Play Day that first summer. These events yielded approximately 1,000 student participants. This past fall, the photo booth was utilized during the Rock Island County AgXPerience event where over 900 students took part in the photo booth activity.

The photo booth idea has also been shared with other Ag in the Classroom coordinators in Illinois and two additional counties have borrowed the photo booth to use at their events with their constituents.

Future Plans/ Advice to Others

Since it currently cannot be determined as to how many participants utilize the QR Code on the photo frame, a new website is being developed to help track that information. This new webpage would have a counter to determine the amount of hits the page receives. This could help determine the project's impact factor and if the QR Codes are being utilized. The new webpage would also provide the web links to the AgExplorer website as well as other agricultural career resources students and parents could use to investigate agricultural careers.

It was also recommended by several individuals to just post the pictures online instead of printing them off. This would help cut costs of the project immensely as well as allow the extension staff to better track how often people are visiting the website. However, as a majority of the participants are minors, caution must be taken to secure proper photo release forms prior to posting the photos online.

Costs/ Resources Needed

The initial photo booth costs approximately \$407. The photo booth included a PVC pipe (\$10) frame to hold the backdrop banner (\$84), thirty-six agricultural career signs (\$171), the photo frame with logos and a QR Code that links to the AgExplorer website (\$72), props for students to wear in the photos (items gathered from around the home, office, and shop), and camera (\$70) to print the pictures on-site. Once these items have been procured, the only ongoing expense would be the film used during the events (about \$.60 per exposure).

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