

**Kansas Agriculture Teacher Perceptions of the FFA Affiliation Fee Program**

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## **Introduction/Need for Research**

In 2009, the National FFA Organization unveiled a new membership program termed the “Affiliation Fee Program.” The main variance between the Affiliate membership and the traditional membership is that the FFA chapter pays students’ dues rather than the students themselves (National FFA Organization, 2016).

A sliding scale system with cost calculated by the number of students in the agriculture program determines the Affiliate Fee for each chapter (Kansas FFA Executive Committee, 2012). The Affiliate Program aims to offer equal access for all students in agricultural education by making them FFA members (National FFA Organization, 2016). Currently, participation in the Affiliation Program within Kansas is voluntary and 23 of its 186 FFA chapters are utilizing the program. In recent years, the Kansas FFA Association has been considering required participation in the Affiliate Program, translating to a direct effect on every FFA chapter in Kansas. There has been little, if any, research completed to see how teachers perceive this program and whether it is a tool they want to use in their program or not.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Rogers (1995) innovation-decision making process served as the theoretical framework for this study. His stages include knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation. This study aimed to investigate teachers’ perceptions in various stages of decision-making process in regards to the FFA Affiliation Fee program.

## **Methodology**

Three research questions guided this study: RQ1. What are the perceptions toward the FFA Affiliate Fee Program held by teachers currently using the program? RQ2. What are the perceptions toward the FFA Affiliate Fee Program held by teachers contemplating using the program? RQ3. What are the perceptions of teachers toward a statewide FFA Affiliate Fee Program?

Qualitative methodology was used for this research study. Input from Kansas Department of Education and Kansas FFA Association staff helped identify programs that represented a variety of factors including; varying years of teaching experience, high school size, and FFA chapter size. Additionally, three of those teachers operated FFA chapters whom have had the Affiliate Program longer than two years, three were starting their second year as an Affiliate chapter, three were in their first year, and three of the teachers advised an FFA chapter that did not use the Affiliate Program. These qualities ensured that the study examined the perceptions of teachers from diverse backgrounds and with different experiences.

Twelve teachers were identified and invited via email to participate in the study. Six of the twelve teachers agreed to participate. Five of those teachers were currently using the Affiliate Program and one was not. During the 10-20 minute interview, teachers were asked 11-12 open-ended questions over the phone. The interviews were audiotaped, transcribed verbatim, and evaluated. During the evaluation process, interview responses were analyzed for commonalities and were grouped together into common themes.

## **Findings**

Common themes identified from RQ1 include: *Financial limitations, More inclusive system, Motivation/Participation stayed the same*. Most teachers mentioned that students who could not afford to be an FFA member could now participate, regardless of socioeconomic status. Additionally, students who are in an agriculture class, not with the anticipation of being in FFA, now have an easier avenue to join FFA if they decide to participate later in the school year. Teachers also mentioned that they may have seen a slight increase in FFA participation but, overall, it remained about the same.

Two common themes emerged in relation to RQ2: *Involve younger students, No change in motivation/participation anticipated*. Younger FFA members, particularly middle school/junior high students, who are generally more hesitant to join, will now have an easier way to participate in FFA. The perception that student motivation/participation will stay about the same is also held by teachers not currently using the Affiliate Program.

The three common themes established from RQ3 consisted of: *Size of chapter would impact acceptance, Possible increase in state participation, Identify funding sources*. The most common concern raised by teachers was the negative effects this program could potentially have on larger agricultural education programs due to large costs and the management of more students. Teachers also believed that participation in state-level events, such as conventions and contests, could increase. Lastly, many teachers identified that finding funding sources could be a potential concern for some chapters.

## **Conclusions**

The FFA Affiliate Program presents several benefits as well as hindrances to FFA chapters. The program's aim is to encourage more students to participate in FFA activities as well as provide easier access for students who may not have considered joining FFA. By removing some of the financial burden, the intent is for all students, regardless of socio-economic status, to be a member of the FFA. Teachers in this study believe that participation in FFA events may see a slight increase with this program, but overall it will remain about the same as before. While most of the teachers stated this would be a good program to implement across the state, they also discussed the disadvantages it causes among certain FFA chapters. Larger schools will receive a large influx of FFA members, which will make managing the chapter harder for teachers and will negatively affect the chapter financially. With this information, teachers can now make more well-informed decisions on the membership program they utilize within their chapter. It also helps the state consider the decision making process (Rogers, 1995) of teachers as they work to require this program throughout the state.

## **Implications/Recommendations/Impact on Profession**

The results from this study will be shared with agriculture teachers to assist them as the state association considers a transition to full implementation of the program. Future research is warranted to further evaluate how this program will affect teachers in Kansas, specifically those in larger schools. Research on student participation and outcomes after implementation is also an area of interest. The FFA Affiliation Fee program may help to increase the diversity of members and lead to a more diverse group of leaders for our agriculture industry.

## References

Kansas FFA Executive Committee. (2012, August 11). *Kansas Affiliate Chart* [PDF]. Manhattan, KS: Kansas FFA Association.

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