

(INNOVATIVE IDEA)

On the Road Again: Agriculture Teacher Industry Tours as Professional Development to Promote Career Pathway Preparation

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Introduction/Need for Innovation

Teachers have a right to professional development (PD). It is “something they deserve as dedicated and hardworking individuals” (Guskey, 2002, p. 1). To facilitate PD among California teachers of school-based agricultural education (SBAE), state leadership developed a continuum of PD events including a “Road Show.” Modeled after the circuit Chatauqua and demonstration trains (Scott, 1962; Tozier, 1943), the “Road Show” takes workshops on the road to teachers who meet in a centralized location based upon their geographical region. The focus of this innovation was the South Coast Region along the central and south coasts of California. At this particular “Road Show,” the current format provided little involvement from outside industry and most workshops focused on increasing pedagogical content knowledge and expertise in managing agriculture programs. Within the region, no current formalized opportunity existed to expose teachers to career opportunities available to their students.

If teachers of SBAE seek to produce college and career ready students who will enter the workforce in high-skill, high-wage jobs, they must have an understanding of the types of careers available within their local area. Teachers may vicariously experience these types of careers through being a member of the local community, but according to the National Dissemination Center for Career and Technical Education (NDCCTE) (2000) providing an opportunity to experience them via a tour allows teachers to “gain first-hand knowledge of the workplace in order to create authentic learning experiences for their students” (p. 4). Sorensen, Tarpley and Warnick (2010) discovered teachers of SBAE in Utah showed preference to tours as a method of inservice delivery. Further, visits and tours were identified as items of importance in regard to technical knowledge acquisition in aquaculture among teachers of SBAE in the Northeastern United States (Wingenbach, Gartin, & Lawrence, 1998).

In an effort to strengthen the annual PD activity, teachers suggested reformatting the annual “Road Show” activity in 2017 by taking the event on the road. The goal of the activity was to link teachers of SBAE with local industry leaders with potentiality to employ students from local programs. Emphasis was placed on exposing teachers to careers so they may use knowledge gained to influence their own instruction in preparing students for high-skill, high-wage jobs within the industry sector of Agricultural, Forestry, and Natural Resources (AFNR).

How it works

The purpose of the 2017 “Road Show” was to take teachers into local businesses which may potentially employ students graduating from their Career and Technical Education (CTE) pathway programs. Coordination of the event involved planning, management on the tour, and follow up after the event. Tour stops were reserved two months prior to the event. STEM fields, and those revolving around the food sciences and more technological fields are in higher demand for careers in the local geographical area (California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO), 2017), thus tour locations were selected which reflected career opportunities within these pathways. The tour included three locations: (1) Central Coast Creamery (CCC)-an artisan cheese facility where conversations focused on food sciences; (2) Firestone Walker (FW)-a craft brewery which concentrated on fermentation science careers and construction careers due to the

brewery's current expansion project; and (3) Trelleborg Sealing Solutions (TSS)-a medical silicone manufacturing facility which focused on careers in engineering and fabrication.

Participants met at a central location, on a week day in December, and were divided between two tour buses. Within each bus, teachers were further divided to facilitate ease of tours at each stop. The buses rotated between the first two stops (CCC and TSS) and then ended together at FW. The final stop also included lunch and a raffle. Buses departed back to the original tour pick-up location. Total time of the event was 6 hours and covered 21 miles. An electronic survey was distributed to all participants the day after the event and asked them to rate each of the three tour stops, the meal, and transportation on a five-point Likert-type scale (5 = very satisfactory, 0 = not satisfactory).

Results to Date

In attendance were 74 teachers of SBAE, 1 program director, and 1 state consultant for agricultural education. Forty-eight (64.9%) participated in the evaluation which revealed preference of the tour stops in the order of CCC ($M = 4.65$), FW ($M = 4.42$), and TSS ($M = 3.94$) on a 5-point Likert-type scale (5 = very satisfactory, 0=not satisfactory). Teachers ranked transportation the most favorable ($M = 4.87$), and meals the least favorable ($M = 3.28$). Teachers indicated they were enthusiastic about taking content learned back to their classrooms to discuss unique career opportunities and pathways with their students; particularly within the area of food science. Further, teachers were excited to have time to spend together in a relaxed, non-competitive environment as well as be "provided with something educational instead of having to be the provider."

Future Plans

It was recommended by the advisory committee of the South Coast Region to investigate the possibility of a second tour during December 2018. The advisory committee, which includes secondary and post-secondary agriculture teachers as well as industry partners, has suggested we focus the tour in a different county and follow the same format of three tours and a lunch activity. It was also suggested that one stop be a local community college creating a new agriculture program to further explore connections between students and career pathway opportunities post-secondary. One industry partner has already volunteered to host the meal and a bank of locations has been collected for reference. The South Coast Region supervisor is responsible for researching the feasibility of a 2018 tour. It is anticipated that numbers will increase slightly during 2018 due to the overall success of the initial event.

Costs

Costs to conduct the Road Show included transportation, meals, and tour charges at two venues (CCC and FW). In addition to lunch and tours, teachers received a pad folio, pen, tasting glass, and bottle opener. For this event, which included 74 teachers, 1 program director, and 1 state consultant for agricultural education, the total cost was \$5798.90 or approximately \$76.30 per participant. Individual teachers were charged \$20 per person, for a total income of \$1,520. The remaining \$4,278.90 was absorbed by the South Coast Region as a component of the state agriculture professional development contract.

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