

**Impact of Affiliation on National FFA Recognition:  
A Secondary Analysis of Existing Data**

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### Introduction

The purpose of this study, conducted as part of a larger series of studies on FFA membership and the affiliation program, was to examine secondary data made available from the National FFA Organization to explore the relationship between the FFA affiliation membership program and national recognition and awards programs.

The FFA Affiliation membership program was developed in California as a part of the California Agricultural Incentive Grant of 1983 (California Department of Education, 2016). The program first became a national option in 2009 after a yearlong trial of over 200 chapters, in an effort to eliminate student membership dues and engage all students in the three-component model of School-Based Agricultural Education (Case, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c). The program has since grown rapidly in participation, yet little is known about its benefits and advantage over dues.

The following objective was explored in this study: determine relative advantages of the FFA affiliation membership program by examining participation and recognition in award programs at the national level for affiliated chapters as compared to dues-based programs.

### Theoretical Framework

Diffusion is defined by Rogers as “the process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system” (2010, p. 5). Once a critical mass of users has adopted an innovation, it tends to “take-off” and become self-sustaining, typically around 10-20% adoption, but can vary (Rogers, 2010). Attributes of adoption include: “relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability and observability” (Rogers, 2010, p. 15).

Rogers adds that “individual perceptions of the innovation can be shaped, for instance, by implying that adoption of it is inevitable, that it is very desirable, or that the critical mass has already occurred or will occur soon” (2010, p. 361). As information about the innovation (FFA affiliation) is not well known, and its desirability and perceived advantages compared to the alternative practice (dues) is not publicly researched and reported, the rate of adoption is slowed.

### Methodology

A secondary analysis of FFA chapter membership roster records and award program reports was completed following the steps of Knowledge Discovery in Databases (KDD) as described by Fayyad, Piatetsky-Shapiro, and Smyth (1996). Data included membership numbers and chapter type for chapters participating in the affiliation program during the previous four complete academic years beginning in 2013-2014, as well as chapters who were recognized in five award programs during that time period.

The target data set of original membership and participation information were organized into a spreadsheet and cleaned, preprocessed and linked to chapter identification numbers, and reduced and coded by variable. National FFA awards reports were used by researchers to determine the number of chapters of each type who were recognized in each award program.

**Results and Findings**

Table 1 shows the number of FFA chapters by membership type who were nationally recognized or awarded with at least one participant for the two most recent years of the four years of available data. Data reported were not a count of total number of participants in a given category, it is a count of chapters. A chapter with more than one American degree recipient was only reported once. Data from 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 reflected similar results to those in Table 1.

Affiliated chapters represent 25-30% of FFA chapters (in 2015-2016, affiliated  $N = 2,110$ , dues  $N = 5,996$ ). The number of dues-based chapters who participated in each award program was greater than the number of affiliated chapters. However, the proportion of possible affiliated to be recognized is consistently greater than the proportion of possible dues-based chapters across all four years of data. In 2015-2016, 5.80% ( $n = 348$ ) of the 5,996 dues-based chapters were recognized in the National FFA Organization’s National Chapter Award program, while 12.94% ( $n = 273$ ) of the 2,110 affiliated chapters were awarded. On average, affiliated chapters were recognized twice as often as dues-based chapters when examining possible chapters.

Table 1.

*Nationally Recognized FFA Chapters During the 2015-2016 and 2016-17 School Years*

	2015-2016				2016-2017			
	Dues $N = 5996$		Affiliated $N = 2110$		Dues $N = 6001$		Affiliated $N = 2503$	
	$n$	% of $N$	$n$	% of $N$	$n$	% of $N$	$n$	% of $N$
National Chapter	348	5.80%	273	12.94%	352	5.87%	251	10.03%
American Degree	1019	16.99%	690	32.70%	1076	17.93%	749	29.92%
Proficiency Finalist	88	1.47%	66	3.13%	76	1.27%	71	2.84%
SAE Grant	355	5.92%	255	12.09%	396	6.60%	266	10.63%
Service Grant	163	2.72%	92	4.36%	104	1.73%	60	2.40%

**Conclusions, Recommendations and Implications**

This study was exploratory in nature. Cause and effect cannot be proven; affiliated chapters may be more successful at national level award programs or successful chapters may be more likely to adopt the affiliation membership option. Based on the findings of this study, there may be a relative advantage in national award programs for affiliated chapters compared to dues-based programs. The percent of affiliated chapters that are recognized, of the total possible chapters, is on average twice that of dues chapters in all five award programs areas. Possible relative advantages coupled with the fact that affiliated programs now represent 30% of all chapters, which is greater than the 10-20% Rogers proposed is necessary to achieve critical mass of an innovation, suggests adoption may soon “take off” as teachers perceive adoption to be inevitable.

Additional research should be conducted to qualitatively examine teacher and state staff perceived advantages and opinions on the complexity and compatibility of the program. The National FFA Organization and state FFA associations should conduct strategic planning to explore and prepare for potential long-term opportunities and challenges of complete adoption.

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