

**Andragogical Lessons Learned from the Stockyards Beef Learning Series**

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## Introduction

According to the American Farm Bureau, Americans are at least three generations removed from the farm, with less than 2% of the population actively involved in farming (American Farm Bureau Federation, n.d.). Agricultural literacy for the US population is essential to maintaining the validity of our industry amidst false accusations, food security concerns, and a disconnect from the production process. In addition, we need not forget the 2% of the population still actively involved in food production, who must stay on top of current trends, topics, and new research as they attempt to keep up with our ever-changing technological society. Our industry has historically placed value on educating citizens of all ages on agricultural topics, with the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 establishing the cooperative extension service for disseminating information to farmers and communities (USDA NIFA, n.d.) and the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 creating School-Based Agricultural Education (SBAE) programs for high school students (FFA, n.d.).

Due to the nature of the Agricultural Education degree, it is likely for a graduate of a collegiate program in the area to find themselves capable of working either in the extension service or the SBAE setting. Therefore, it is crucial for teacher preparation programs in our unique subfield of education provide our pre-service teachers with the skills to educate in both pedagogical and andragogical settings. One teacher preparation program in Kentucky partnered with their local Beef Council to provide pre-service educators with the opportunity to teach lessons about the beef industry to the general public, agricultural organizations, and local beef producers in an educational series at the local stockyards. Specifically, this facility has a unique learning space called the YARDS (Youth, Advocacy, Research, Demonstration, and Sustainability), which is a classroom within the facility designed to maximize public exposure and education of the beef industry (Kentucky Regional Marketplace, 2017). Pre-service educators were expected to design a lesson tailored to this particular audience based on their needs, such as updates on beef industry trends and technologies. This Beef Learning Series provided pre-service teachers the opportunity to hone methods of andragogy, while creating partnership and professional networking opportunities within the local beef industry. This innovative idea aligns with Research Priority 5 of the 2016-2020 American Association for Agricultural Education Research Agenda: Efficient and Effective Agricultural Education Programs.

## How it Works

The YARDS facility was established in 2017 by a University of Kentucky Agricultural Education graduate with a passion for the beef industry, with support from the Kentucky Cattlemen's Association and Beef Council. Since its inception, a professor within the Agricultural Education program has included an assignment within the senior-level Methods of Teaching course that requires pre-service educators to: design and present a lesson on a topic within the beef industry, to an unknown audience of community members and local producers, using andragogical techniques. Students are given the assignment on the first day of the course, and are presented with a lecture and training about andragogy one month prior to the Beef Learning Series. Tasked with designing a lesson, pre-service educators must meet the challenge of preparing for an unknown audience; predicting topics that the audience may find useful; and using methods for teaching adults that are different than their previous knowledge of methods for teaching youth.

As students are preparing their lessons, the event is being promoted across professional networks and social media platforms. A Facebook invitation group is created, while flyers are printed and

distributed at the stockyards. The event is effectively promoted by the “word of mouth” communication systems of the community as well. On the day of the event, students come prepared to teach to the participants, who range from industry professionals, stockyards employees, beef producers and the general public. Participants are given feedback forms on which they “grade” the educator, giving them constructive criticism and praise for successes. After the lesson, participants and educators are able to discuss the lesson as a group, give feedback on what they liked and on what they would have rather seen, as well as any other pertinent feedback. The educator has time to network with the audience as well, building social capital and gaining insight into the industry.

### **Results to Date**

The Beef Learning Series has just finished a successful second year this fall. The use of social media and communication outreach through industry networking led to an increase in participation from producers and industry professionals. Awareness of the program has grown via word of mouth and success stories from the previous year; with this awareness came more diverse, larger audiences. Perhaps the most important result, however, is the impact on pre-service educators in the University of Kentucky Agricultural Education program. One senior in the program had this to say of the experience: “This assignment gives me an opportunity to practice teaching to different groups. This setting allows me to speak directly to the public, which is important to me as an agriculture advocate, along with learning skills for teaching to other age groups outside the formal classroom.” The agricultural education program has received positive feedback from recent graduates who cite the experience as beneficial in their new roles as agriculture educators.

### **Future Plans**

Seeing the Beef Learning Series has thus far been a success, the teacher preparation program will continue to schedule this as an assignment within the senior-level Methods of Teaching course. Through professional networking and the advertisement of successful presentations (via social media and conversations amongst the professionals), the program plans to see increased participation as the learning series progresses in subsequent years. The agricultural education program would like to promote applicable learning opportunities like this one within the profession to aid other teacher training programs in facilitating learning series relevant to their own communities. This particular series focused specifically on the beef industry, therefore it is advised that the program reach out to other commodity groups to offer a more versatile experience.

### **Costs/Resources Needed**

This teacher preparation program had an advantage in creating this Beef Learning Series in that the Kentucky Beef Council’s education outreach coordinator is highly supportive of the program, assisting the professor in scheduling, recruiting participants, and counseling students on their lesson topics. The YARDS facility itself is free for educational use by institutions like the University, and is located within the same city, allowing for convenient accessibility to pre-service teachers and participants. Small tokens of appreciation bearing the University’s Ag Ed logo were presented to the participants, at a price of \$100 for the promotional gifts. This gift fosters professional relationships and encourages future participation.

## References

American Farm Bureau Federation (n.d.). Our Food Link. Retrieved 2018, from <https://www.fb.org/programs/womens-leadership-program/our-food-link/>

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