

TASKed with Recruiting Agriculture Teachers

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Introduction/Need for Innovation

In 2014, the National Teach Ag Campaign established the State Teach Ag Results (STAR) Program. The intent of this program is to recruit and retain high school agriculture teachers at the state level (NAAE, 2018). The need for new teachers lies in the continuation of a nationwide shortage of agriculture teachers, as outlined by Smith, Lawver, and Foster (2018). Kansas was among the first cohort of 14 STAR States. The program has added additional states each year with 36 currently in the program. According to the campaign's website, "STAR states receive in-kind design and consultation services, access to Teach Ag grant funds, priority preference for Teach Ag Ambassador positions, promotion and assessment summaries" (NAAE, 2018, para 1).

Each STAR state can devise their own ways of disseminating grant dollars to recruit and retain agriculture teachers. The bulk of grant funding and resources from the STAR Program in Kansas go to the TASK Force. The TASK Force, which is an acronym for *Teach Ag Students of Kansas*, is a group that primarily focuses on recruiting high school and community college students to a career as an agricultural educator.

How it Works/Methods/Steps

TASK Force is comprised of eight undergraduate students majoring in Agricultural Education and advised by a Kansas State University agricultural education faculty member. Students apply to be a member of the group in April each year and complete an interview process in May. Applicants can be enrolled at one of the two agricultural education degree-granting institutions in the state or a community college, if they intend to transfer to one of these institutions.

The team is selected directly after the interview process and begin their year of service with a meeting at the end of the spring semester. At this meeting, the general itinerary and responsibilities for the upcoming year are discussed. Seven team members serve as liaisons to one of the seven FFA districts in Kansas, while one is usually a second-year member who serves in an at-large position. The team then meets again at the beginning of the fall semester to begin preparing for the four major events hosted each year. At each of these events, the group has three primary goals; recruit future high school agriculture teachers, persuade students to pursue a career in agriculture, and recruit students to the academic institutions the team members represent.

The first event is a workshop for each of the seven Greenhand FFA Conferences. This workshop is designed to expose younger students to careers in agriculture while emphasizing a career as an agriculture teacher. The second event is the Teach Ag VIP Day. This event is held each winter and invites all students interested in becoming an agricultural educator to the Kansas State University campus for an entire day's worth of activities and information on the agricultural education profession. The third activity is awarding a \$500 scholarship to one student, from each of the state's seven FFA districts, who intends to major in Agricultural Education at any institution they choose. The scholarship application is administered and evaluated through the National FFA Organization's scholarship program. The scholarships are presented every spring by a TASK Force member at each of the seven district banquets. Our final event of the year is a Tagged to Teach Ag event held during the state FFA CDEs in which students learn more about KSU, college, and the degree while socializing and enjoying ice cream and cookies.

TASK Force members are also engaged in a number of other activities throughout the year to promote the agricultural education profession. Members run booths at numerous conferences, facilitate workshops, and hold Teach Ag Day celebrations each September. Some of these events require the students to travel using their personal vehicle. The TASK Force has funding set aside to reimburse students for mileage at the rate established by the state.

Results to Date/Implications

Kansas has experienced success with the TASK Force model. This is evidenced by an increase of students majoring in Agricultural Education throughout the state and the number of high school agriculture programs that have been started since the model was put into place. In 2014, the year Kansas joined the STAR Program initiative, there were 68 students enrolled in the Agricultural Education major at Kansas State University. Each year it has increased with 72 in 2015, 76 in 2016, 81 in 2017 and 91 students enrolled for the Fall 2018 semester. This increase can, at least partially, be attributed to the efforts of the TASK Force. In addition, there were 163 high school agricultural education programs in the state a year before the STAR Program began, during the 2012-2013 school year (National FFA Organization, 2015). The state now has 205 active programs for the 2018-2019 school year.

The total number of students impacted by the TASK Force each year is hard to estimate, but it has increased each year. For example, during the 2017 Teach Ag event during the Kansas FFA State CDEs, we had approximately 150 students pass through the stations. In 2018 that number rose to 300 students. We have hosted three Teach Ag VIP Days. We started in the fall 2015 with 17 students/guests and have increased each year with 28 students and 12 guests in spring 2017 and 39 students and their parents and/or teachers in 2018.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

The TASK Force could improve in some areas. Something TASK Force does not focus on, outlined as a need from the STAR Program Campaign, is the retention of current teachers. If the TASK Force places more emphasis on teacher retention it may reduce the number of teachers leaving the classroom. Another challenge faced by the TASK Force is student scheduling. It was hard to find meeting times throughout the year and some struggled to travel to their respective districts. Having an at-large position helped to combat this challenge by that individual being able to step in and attend events. The TASK Force has been a successful model for Kansas. We are interested in comparing our results to those of other states to continue to improve our programs. We will eventually examine whether this program was effective at recruiting students who graduate in agricultural education and enter the teaching profession. The continuation of this program will ensure Kansas is helping to reduce the agriculture teacher shortage.

Costs/Resources Needed

The funding for the TASK Force events and activities is provided by the National Teach Ag Campaign. For the 2017-2018 school year, costs included the State Convention Booth (\$150), travel to district banquet (\$900) and Greenhand Conferences (\$770), shirts (\$250) and the seven scholarships (\$3,500). The Teach Ag VIP day cost \$2,232 for the winter 2018 event including lunch, promotional items, parking passes, and snacks. The 2018 Tagged to Teach Ag Event cost \$807 including snacks, promotional items, and other supplies. An additional \$675 is spent on promotional items to be used throughout the year. We spent just under \$9,300 on events throughout this past school year.

References

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