

**Using a Point System to Motivate Students and Enhance the Delivery of Secondary
Agricultural Education Programs**

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Introduction

Point systems to incentivize secondary agricultural education students have emerged in recent years, in various forms, as a way to help inspire students while also enhancing the delivery of secondary agricultural education programs throughout the U.S (Tiextra & Robinson, 2018). The primary purpose of such is to enhance program factors such as attendance, participation, volunteerism, and to promote greater expectations of rigor. Essential to point systems are rubrics, which can clarify learning goals, communicate the goals to students, guide feedback, and help assign a numeric value to students' effort (Andrade, 2005). Therefore, the use of rubrics can help facilitate a comprehensive points system to communicate what is important to a program, and how students will be credited for their effort. For example, a point system could be customized for individual agricultural education programs depending on whether they place more value on community service, Career Development Event (CDE) participation, or fundraising efforts.

How it Works

This innovative idea poster is the result of the development of a rubric to guide the point system for a large, diverse urban program in Texas. The rubric was created from thorough research of existing award points systems and FFA Award opportunities. In particular, the rubric was organized by three categories: (1) student development, (2) chapter development, and (3) community development. Within each category, a variety of line items were created to allow students to earn points, such as attending chapter meetings, completing an SAE project, representing the chapter on a competitive team, or volunteering for a community service event. Point values were customized by associated importance, or need, ranging from one-point such as selling an item in a fundraiser, to fifty points for being a National FFA Band or Chorus member.

Points awarded for the various occasions through the year were tracked using sign-in sheets and submitted experience reflections, which were then compiled into a formulated Microsoft Excel™ spreadsheet. Then, we calculated a summary of point totals for the advisors to review and publish as desired. These summaries and totals allowed both the advisors and students to keep track of their eligibility for specific achievements, such as earning a letterman jacket or a graduation stole. The totals were also compiled at the end of the year to determine who would earn specific awards, such as an outstanding member award and their ability to attend events or trips such as the State FFA Convention. This point system was adapted and transformed into an updated version that directly related to each of the quality standards, as advanced by the National Chapter Award program. The system, which was developed in 2017 and shared publicly in 2018 at the Texas Teachers Conference, led to a collaborative effort to provide a management feature under the *Participation Value* function on the Agricultural Experience Tracker (AET). As a result, this function allowed other programs across the U.S. to create and implement their own point systems. Today, this feature has also been integrated into the event calendar on AET to assist agricultural education teachers and students with customizing their own unique points system rubrics.

Implications

The effect of points systems on program success appears to vary, and are highly dependent on the type of system utilized, moreover, most programs who have used the new AET function have reported that it has increased participation and eased point system management. As a consequence, a points system could serve as a roadmap, or objective rubric, with clear guidance on how students could reach specific achievements. After implementing this point system, one program reported they witnessed an increase in FFA membership from 22 to 76 members because students were able to see that their agricultural education experiences could lead to FFA recognition and award opportunities. Although membership had increased in this program, the area of community development saw the least amount of growth. Therefore, the program decided to increase the point values for community development. By the end of second year of implementation, a general increase in all areas was observed, especially in community development. Another program that implemented a points system reported they used it as a punitive function to motivate students to participate and complete their project requirements to earn points to remain eligible to use the program's livestock facilities and stay on the show team. If enough points were not earned during the respective year, students were not allowed to return to the facilities or show an animal under that programs name the following year.

Future Plans

As calls to improve transparency for agricultural education programs increases, it is important to emphasize quality program improvement. We conclude that point systems may be one way to fulfill such calls while also improving performance in regard to specific measures of quality (National FFA Organization, 1998). Over the past few years, the desire to implement points systems has increased dramatically, but due to the extreme diversity and the types of programs across the nation, a standardized point system for all may not be attainable. However, the rubrics described in this abstract provide an adaptable point system function for programs throughout the U.S., especially for those who already use chapter management features on AET.

Therefore, we recommend that agricultural education programs not only utilize this management tool as a way of incentivize students, but also as a resource for evaluating program needs or deficiencies, which could be addressed through the adjustment and execution of a points system. To remain effective as a tool to promote program needs, the ability to customize point values should not be undervalued. The importance and utility of this feature has been captured by literature on point management tools such as Google Sheets™ (Teixeira & Robinson, 2018), and the new *Participation Value* feature incorporated into the AET.

Costs & Resources

The costs and resources associated with this innovative idea are minimal. Overall, a program ultimately decides what types of incentives, or disciplinary features, they wish to implement. As for managing this program tool, Google Sheets™ remains a free service, and while AET does have a cost associated having an account, many programs are already covering this as they utilize the AET for other program services.

References

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