

**Creating a FFA Agricultural Education Career Development Event as a Tool to Recruit  
More Teachers**

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## **Creating a FFA Agricultural Education Career Development Event as a Tool to Recruit More Teachers**

### **Introduction**

There has been an ongoing shortage of agricultural education teachers (Smith et al., 2017). Programs sometimes hire less qualified individuals to fill vacant teaching positions. Meanwhile, programs throughout Florida and the country are pushing to increase the number of students enrolled in agricultural education. This has created a chronic shortage of teachers in Florida that has existed for decades. In an effort to seek a creative solution to this problem, in 2013 the Agricultural Education and Communication Department at the University of Florida, in collaboration with the Florida Association of Agricultural Educators and the Florida FFA Association, worked together to create the Agricultural Education Career Development Event (Ag Ed CDE) to expose high school students to the idea of agricultural education as a career option. A faculty member within the department of AEC at the University of Florida serves as the superintendent of the event.

### **How it Works**

The Ag Ed CDE has two preliminary rounds followed by a finals round. In the preliminary round, participants submit a lesson plan and take a written content exam. If needed, scores on the content exam reduce the total number of participants to a manageable number which varies according to the state and available judges. The second preliminary round occurs on campus and participants teach a portion of their lesson plan to a set of judges and a few peers, role-playing as students followed by questions from the judges. The top 5 participants then move onto the Final Round. In this round, participants are given a prepared lesson plan and have 1 hour to adapt their materials. They then go before the judges and teach the newly adapted lesson. The content area for each year is established ahead of time, based on a rotation of major units in the introductory high school agricultural education course.

### **Results to Date**

The Ag Ed CDE has been held for eight years, with a total of 142 participants total. Several challenges presented themselves in the beginning years, such as getting judges, location, and the size of the event. Initially, the event was held on two separate days, with the preliminary round happening on campus, then several months later, the state finals were held at the Florida State FFA Convention. Judges are typically faculty and graduate students in the Agricultural Education and Communication Department. The FFA chapters for each participant are also asked to bring a few extra FFA members to participate in the event as role-playing students. The original timing of the preliminary round and the finals round competed with other FFA events for judges and other resources. In 2017, the entire event consolidated into a single day on campus to reduce competition with other events, which has proven to work very well. This event started with 21 participants and has now grown to a level where the written exam is used as an initial screening to qualify applicants for the event. To date, 18 participants have enrolled in the Agricultural Education and Communication Department at the University of Florida. Of these, 12 in the Agricultural Education major and 6 in the Communication and Leadership major.

### **Advice to Others**

Over time, we have certainly learned several things that others should consider if offering a similar program. First, when planning for this event, you should consider the number of participants which can be reasonably handled. As mentioned earlier, a screening process became necessary because of the number of students that participated. Simply put, there were too many students compared to judges and rooms available for the event to function all in one day. Second, it is important that ALL participants have a good experience, as the purpose of the event is to recruit future agricultural teachers. This requires communication with the judges and other students in the rooms. It is critical that participants walk away from this event happy with the experience.

### **Costs**

The single largest resource needed for this event is the time required by judges and students. The other costs are food for the judges, students, and participants. Typically, there are nine judges and 30 participants. There is also a small cost for paper and copies of materials provided to participants. These costs are normally paid by the Agricultural Education and Communication Department. Each participant may incur expenses if they choose to use special or consumable materials during their teaching demonstrations.

### **References**

Smith, A. R., Lawver, R. G., & Foster, D. D. (2017). *National agricultural education supply and demand study, 2016 executive summary*. <http://aaaeonline.org/Resources/Documents/NSD2016Summary.pdf>