

Utilizing STAR Funds to Support Agricultural Education Summer Internships as a Means of Recruitment to Teach Agricultural Education

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Introduction/Need for Idea

School-Based Agricultural Education (SBAE) has long experienced a need for potential teachers to enter the teaching profession, with shortages of qualified teachers recorded for nearly the past 100 years (Camp, Broyles, & Skelton, 2002). This shortfall continues today, resulting in unfilled positions and programs closures (Foster, Lawver, & Smith, 2019). In an effort to recruit new teachers to SBAE, the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE) began the National Teach Ag Campaign in 2009. Beginning in 2014, the National Teach Ag Campaign implemented the State Teach Ag Results (STAR) program as a means of supporting statewide recruitment and retention efforts in SBAE. This program provides a variety of support services and funds to participating states, including STAR Teach Ag Grants. While funding can vary, each participating state receives at least \$8,000.00 in grant support annually. Indiana was one of the first states to join the STAR program and has used approximately \$6,000 of these grant dollars to support Summer Internships for Agricultural Education majors to intern with Indiana Agriculture Teachers. Students and teachers participating in this program have reported very positive experiences and have demonstrated engagement across the profession.

How it Works/Methodology/Program Phases

The purpose of the Summer Agricultural Education Internship is to spark an interest in current undergraduate students to consider entering the teaching profession, and to provide Agricultural Education students hands-on experience. These experiences consist of classroom instruction, FFA, and experiential learning. Interns attend the summer Indiana Association of Agricultural Educators (IAAE) summer conference and a portion of the annual Indiana State FFA Convention in addition to working no more than 40 hours/week, up to 300 hours total. The internship program also covers the summer conference registration and lodging, and the host FFA Chapter covers travel to the State FFA Convention. Minimum qualifications of interns include: (1) Have completed their sophomore year of college but not yet have graduated or completed student teaching; (2) Be a Purdue Ag Ed major; (3) Intend to teach Ag Ed in Indiana; (4) Be self-motivated, a strong communicator, ambitious, and possess a strong desire to learn; (5) Work well with youth and adults; (6) Have a valid driver's license and reliable transportation, and (7) Have a valid, current background check on file. Host teachers submit applications to the Purdue University Agricultural Education Program to serve as Internship Host Sites. Requirements to host an intern include confirmation that the teacher is an IAAE member, they are an effective or highly effective teacher, have a summer SAE or extended summer contract, and plan to attend the IAAE summer conference and Indiana FFA State Convention. A Purdue Agricultural Education staff member matches interns with Host teachers. Host FFA chapters receive \$500 in funding for use in the local program as compensation for hosting a Summer Agricultural Education Intern.

Results to Date/Implications

Since 2016, Purdue University has employed 36 interns, and 22 different schools have served as host sites. Surveys of internship participants show that interns felt as though the internship helped them understand what an agricultural educator does in the summer months and why an extended contract is necessary. After completing their internship, many of the interns plan to do their student teaching experience at the school in which they interned. Establishing this relationship at an earlier stage allows interns to develop their skills further, and provides schools an opportunity to meet a potential teacher candidate prior to the student teaching internship. Classroom teachers and Agricultural Education students were surveyed after the summer 2020 internships during COVID.

According to one host teacher, *“Oh, this was SO important...this is an excellent opportunity for a student to learn how we are trying our best to virtually serve our students through this semester and summer. [Student name] is now way more prepared than I ever was!”*

Interns had valuable learning experiences in all three components of the SBAE model. One intern stated, *“My internship experience has made me appreciate access to internet, social value of FFA, direct student interactions in the classroom and mostly flexibility. I learned so much about technology, student engagement and how the lesson plans all have to be changed to meet the situation and needs of the students. I now have no doubts about my passion to meets students where they are and teach agriculture as my career choice. Thank You!”*

Overall, it appears that many of the participating interns go on to work or desire to work as an agriculture teacher upon graduation (see Table 1).

Table 1. Agricultural Education Summer Internship Participation and Subsequent Employment

Year	Number of Interns	First Job: Teaching Ag	First Job: Non-Teaching Ag	Switched Majors Before Graduation	Not Yet Graduated
2016	6	5	0	1	0
2017	8	7	1	0	0
2018	10	3	3*	3	1
2019	6	2	N/A	1	3
2020	6	N/A	1*	0	5

Note: * = An alum from this year is currently seeking an Ag Ed Teaching Position.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

We aim to generate enough donated gift funding for a larger percentage of Agricultural Education students to be a summer intern. We would also like to have enough funding and host sites for students to be able to do the summer internship multiple years. We have learned a few lessons. First, the program cannot work without dedicated funding. The STAR funding is critical, but without additional annual donor support, we can only support two or fewer interns each summer. Second, early planning and collecting student/host site applications are essential. Students need to be selected and paired with host sites in late fall or early spring; otherwise, students choose to accept other internships. Finally, communicate with student interns and host sites more than you think is necessary. Both student interns and host teachers need clear expectations, guidance, support, and feedback on a regular basis throughout the internship experience. It takes time and persistence to collect the feedback and data to assess the outcomes and benefit of this program.

Costs/Resources Needed

We invest \$3,500 in each summer intern with \$3,000 to the intern and \$500 to the host site FFA chapter. Interns must receive close to a commensurate pay as they would from an industry internship or they will not select the Summer Agricultural Education experience. Host sites and host teachers need some level of compensation as a token of appreciation for their time and efforts. One Purdue University Agricultural Education staff member coordinates the program. This effort is part of their regular salary, but does take time and effort that could be devoted to other programs and efforts. The assistance of university Departmental business office and clerical personnel is essential as this program involves adherence to work and pay regulations.

References

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