

**An Inaugural Career Development Event in Sustainable Agriculture**

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### **Introduction**

Career Development Events (CDEs) provide members of the National FFA Organization with experience related to potential career opportunities and assessing their knowledge and skills sought by employers (Lundry et al., 2015). The inaugural CDE in Sustainable Agriculture served as a pilot study and was open to all FFA chapters in Texas. The Sustainable Agriculture CDE served as an educational innovation and reflected the characteristics of an innovation, as described by Rogers (1995) including *trialability* for FFA members competing, *observability* for agricultural educators, and *compatibility* with common components of other CDE. The pilot helped FFA members and teachers recognize the *relative advantage* of this new CDE in context of current trends toward a more sustainable food system (Williams, 2000).

### **Steps/Phases**

This contest format was similar to other CDEs at the Texas FFA level. Nursery/Landscape and Farm Business Management CDEs provided models for the contest components. Rules sent to all FFA advisors in Texas followed the format and structure of state-adopted rules for other CDEs. References and resources were provided with hyperlinks following the rules to provide agricultural educators and members easy access to relevant training materials. The Sustainable Agriculture CDE included three components, a 50 question multiple choice exam, 20 identification items, and 10 problem solving questions. Student volunteers assisted with coordinating the CDE.

A promotional flyer, rules, and resource list were posted to Ag Teacher Buddies, a private Facebook group for agriculture educators, and through a direct email to all FFA advisors in the state. Teams entered the CDE using through the same process used to enter other CDEs. Additional phases included obtaining feedback from those agricultural educators with teams competing in the CDE, as well as industry experts who also have familiarity with FFA and CDEs.

### **Results to Date and Implications**

The inaugural CDE was held May 3, 2022 at Texas A&M University- Commerce. Participants included 14 teams with 49 individual team members. The CDE was administered by dividing the contestants into groups, which then rotated through the three contest components. A hospitality room was provided and contest materials were distributed to the agricultural educators with teams participating during the event. Following the CDE and a break for lunch, an awards ceremony was held. The top three teams and the three individual with the highest scores were recognized and presented with awards. Additionally, each of the 49 team members competing and their advisors received a promotional tee shirt. Based on observation and feedback from advisors, the CDE was well-received

**Future Plans**

Contest providers for the Sustainable Agriculture CDE will use input from teachers and industry experts to make minor revisions in contest format and the number items in each component. A goal is the eventual development of an exam item test bank consisting of 200 or more multiple choice questions. We plan to do this through professional development workshops for agricultural educators. We also plan to increase the number of items in the identification category. This CDE will be hosted for the second time during the Spring of 2023 as an invitational event open to all FFA chapters in the state. After the second year of hosting the CDE we anticipate having enough interest and support from FFA members and agricultural educators for the Texas FFA leadership to include it in the official list of CDEs for state competition.

**Costs and Resources Needed**

The cost of hosting CDEs is a purposeful investment because it provides agricultural education students with opportunities to develop knowledge and skills relevant to future career choices. Participation in CDEs also allows FFA members opportunities to visit college and university campuses, thus becoming more familiar with institutions of higher education. Entry fees generated \$515 in revenue. Itemized expenses for this inaugural Sustainable Agriculture CDE are categorized below.

Awards	\$1,178.85
Promotional T-Shirts	1,286.21
Hospitality	201.88
Answer scan sheets	<u>86.00</u>
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b>\$2,752.94</b>

### References

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