

**Tagged to Teach Ag: Developing an Agricultural Education Career Development Event for a State FFA Association**

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### **Introduction**

The National FFA Organization offers Career Development Events (CDEs), which enable students to learn critical life skills in a competitive setting (National FFA Organization, 2022). Over time, proposals have been made to enhance current CDEs and develop new events relating to different agricultural occupations and industry requirements (Robertson, 2014; Schwalbe, 2016). Previous research has shown that student engagement in CDEs affects agricultural education students' career choices and their likelihood of pursuing agriculture-related occupations (Lundry et al., 2015). Agricultural educators are also urged to promote student development opportunities, such as CDEs, to strengthen career-specific skills taught in the classroom (Goodwin & McKim, 2020).

The National FFA Organization has been exploring the possibility of an Agricultural Education CDE unique to the agricultural education profession for some years (Adams, 2017; Elliott, 2019; Kelly, 2021; Robertson, 2014). However, no such event currently exists at the national level (National FFA Organization, 2022). Smith et al. (2022) discovered a demand for trained educators to teach agricultural education and determined further measures for teacher retention via research from the National Association for Agricultural Educators (NAAE). As a result, developing an Agricultural Education CDE might help solve the demand for qualified agricultural educators while also introducing the next generation of educators to the field, addressing the industry's recruitment and retention issues (Elliott, 2019). It has been advised that each state FFA association create a similar event at the state level to support the idea of an Agricultural Education CDE being developed and implemented at the national level (Kelly, 2021).

### **How it Works**

An Agricultural Education CDE was created for the New Mexico FFA Association in two phases for implementation. In Phase 1, students were tasked with developing a 50-minute lesson plan from a list of established lesson topics generated from a specific Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resource (AFNR) system. The AFNR subject is chosen from a rotating list of subjects published on the New Mexico FFA website before the event. Participants were also asked to use subject standards from the National Council for Agricultural Education's (2018) AFNR Career Cluster Content Standards as part of their lesson plan.

During the event, students took a 25-question test based on four chapters of *Foundations of Agricultural Education* (Talbert et al., 2014). This book was chosen because it was previously required for post-secondary agricultural education courses in New Mexico. Several teachers in the state have an easily accessible copy of the text from previous enrollment in these courses. The specific chapters from the text used in the test rotate every year, with four chapters being assessed. Following the tabulation of these scores from the exam and the lesson development, the top ten participants will be identified and named as finalists for Phase 2. Eliminating competitors alleviates the time restraints of having all competitors compete in Phase 2.

In Phase 2, the top ten individuals are directed to deliver 10-minutes of their pre-planned lesson plans to a live audience of ten agricultural education students. The participants will provide all lesson materials and presentation tools needed to replicate a teaching lesson. In addition, participants were requested to submit an assessment strategy for the lesson they developed as part of Phase 2 before the event's start. Before the event, all assessment strategies

were scored. However, only the top ten's scores would count toward their final scores. Following Phase 2, the top ten competitors' scores from both stages are tabulated. Judges individually evaluate each contestant in numerical order based on their final scores; the rankings are then totaled, and the winner is the person with the lowest total or rank. Other placements will be selected similarly to determine the top five finalists.

### **Results to Date**

This event was first offered in 2022, with the inaugural event conducted at the New Mexico FFA Convention. Seven students competed, and the top five received honors from the New Mexico FFA Association. Due to the small number of competitors, all participants automatically advanced to the event's presentation component. More students are expected to participate in the event in future years.

A panel of three judges who scored all pre-submitted materials and the live presentations included a New Mexico State University post-secondary instructor, a recent New Mexico State University graduate who completed student teaching, and an active agricultural educator. Before the event, the judges evaluated all pre-submitted materials and scored the lesson plan's live presentation during the event. Ten Hagerman High School students served as live audience members throughout the lesson presentation. They reported enjoyment of the lessons and satisfaction with the event's structure and development.

### **Advice to Others**

Following the event and feedback from multiple parties, the New Mexico FFA Association staff advised including a technology component into the lesson plan template to accommodate the possibility of hybrid and virtual learning. The event judges suggested reducing sections of the scoring rubrics and merging elements of the assessment strategy scoring rubric into the lesson development and presentation rubrics. Consolidating the numerous scoring rubrics will make scoring more accessible and less confusing.

If any other state decides to launch its own Agricultural Education CDE, adopting the rules, scoring rubrics, and curriculum developed by current competitions will assist in building uniformity in similar events in other states. Consistency in current competitive events' rules and curriculum will allow for a seamless transition between state-level contests and a hypothetical national event. It is also suggested that sponsorship be sought with post-secondary agricultural education institutions to showcase the value of teacher preparation programs and maybe sponsor a scholarship award to the state winner.

### **Resources Needed**

Developing and implementing an Agricultural Education CDE is inexpensive since postsecondary agricultural education students organized the event and created the materials with the assistance of professors and state FFA officials. All event components, including lesson plan development, lesson presentation, and assessment strategy, will need scoring rubrics. Additionally, a 25-question multiple-choice test should be developed annually using available resources (Talbert et al., 2014). Before the event, judges and live participants for the lesson presentation practicum must be finalized. All relevant materials, including scoring rubrics, and competitor materials, must be printed and distributed to the judges before the event. All tangible awards (i.e., plaques, banners, etc.) were financed and provided by the New Mexico FFA Association at the cost of \$125.

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