

An Inaugural Career Development Event in Sustainable Agriculture

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 state level. Nursery/Landscape and Farm Business Management CDEs provided models for compatible 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 shared with hyperlinks following the rules to provide agricultural educators and FFA 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. The team who developed the CDE presented an overview of the contest rules, resources, and information through a webinar hosted by the Agricultural Teachers Association of Texas.

Teams entered the CDE through the same process used to enter other CDEs. Observability was achieved by allowing advisors for each team to review all contest materials and components following the event. Trialability resulted from teams actually participating in the CDE. 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.

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. An exam-item test-bank, consisting of 250 multiple-choice questions, was developed by agricultural educators and other students in a graduate course about issues in Sustainable Agriculture. The test-bank will be used to support future contests. We also plan to increase the number of items in the identification category. We anticipate that the problem-solving component of the CDE will have an annual theme that focuses specifically on one or two training resources.

This CDE was hosted for the second time during the Spring of 2023 as an invitational event open to all FFA chapters in the state. Only five teams participated but four of those teams were from FFA chapters that had participated the first year. After the second year of hosting the CDE, we hoped to have enough interest and support from FFA members and agricultural educators for the Texas FFA leadership to consider including it in the official list of CDEs for state competition. However, due to the low participation in 2023, we are working on some new promotional strategies, professional development opportunities, and encouragement for FFA chapters that host invitational CDEs to include this contest. By increasing the number of opportunities to participate, we believe that we can achieve an interest level representative of critical mass for adoption at the state level.

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 resulting in experiential learning that cannot be measured in monetary units.

Entry fees generated \$515 in revenue. Itemized expenses for this inaugural Sustainable Agriculture CDE are categorized below.

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

References

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