

**Integrating NFA History into School-Based Agricultural Education**

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### **Introduction/Need for Innovation or Idea**

From 1935-1965, the New Farmers of America (NFA) evolved into one of the most prominent Black youth farm movements in American history with a membership of over 50,000 Black farm boys participating in high school vocational agriculture classes in 18 states across the South and along the East Coast. Yet, on October 13th, 1965, the organization vanished without a trace (Smith, 2022). Since that time, there has been limited research on the NFA. A monograph by E. M. Norris (1993) entitled *Forty Long Years*, detailed the “swallow up” of the NFA by the FFA. Strickland (1995) documented much of the NFA history and also details of the consolidation of the two organizations. Dissertation research has been conducted on the impact of the NFA and the merger on both teachers and members (Gilman, 2013; Wakefield, 2001) and additional inquiries have been made as to the traditions and influential leaders (Callaghan & Hock, 2019; Connors, 2021; Jones et al., 2021). In school-based agricultural education classes, it appears that instruction on the NFA remains minimal. In order to introduce the NFA, allow students to explore the organization, and to promote the inclusion of historical research and archival analysis in the classroom, two assignments were developed and implemented, NFA Artifact Analysis and NFA History Choice Board.

### **How it Works/Methodology/Program Phases/Steps**

For the NFA Artifact Analysis, students were provided with five documents. These included a NFA camp brochure, an Activities of the NFA brochure, a NFA Supply Service Brochure, the NFA Emblem, and a North Carolina NFA Convention brochure. Students were expected to select one document to analyze and complete a Google form asking them to define the type of document, describe their selected artifact, and answer a few additional questions. When completing the NFA History Choice Board, students could illustrate a timeline, compare and contrast the history of the two organizations, create a social media profile for an individual who was vital to the success of the NFA, or provide a two-paragraph discussion on possible causes of the limited diversity in the present-day FFA organization. Other possibilities included creating a detailed plan to incorporate some of the NFA traditions in the FFA, pretending to attend a week of NFA camp and writing a journal entry narrative, or conducting individualized research on the location of any remaining NFA members.

### **Results to Date/Implications**

The NFA Artifact Analysis assignment has been implemented throughout the duration of six semesters, reaching over 250 students. As a result, many students inquired more about the organization and specifically about characteristics described within the artifacts. The NFA History Choice Board was introduced during one semester and received positive feedback due to the autonomy students had in which activity they picked. These assignments have led to chapter officers seeking opportunities to highlight NFA leaders and minority agricultural leaders on the morning announcements. Additionally, there have been collaborative opportunities presented between minority organizations at the high school where the activities were implemented. The

timeline of assignment integration has varied. During spring semesters, incorporating these activities during February, and Black History Month, challenges students to consider the achievements of African American leaders in agriculture. These activities provide an opportunity for all students to identify the foundation the NFA set for the diversity that exists today in the National FFA Organization.

### **Future Plans/Advice to Others**

Before introduction, modifications should be made to each assignment to meet the needs of all learners. Both could be modified by reducing the number of options and/or adjusting the number and level of analysis questions students must answer. Also, activities could be built upon by encouraging students to create awareness about the NFA outside of their classroom. The activities could work in conjunction by first analyzing artifacts but then utilizing those artifacts such as creating an educational display about NFA for the school or library. Other activities that vary in difficulty could be added. These might include reviewing NFA articles published through *The Friday Footnote* (Moore, 2019-2021), inviting students to form a NFA committee within their chapter, or designing an NFA mural or art installation. Additional ideas could have students write a letter to their State Association requesting for a lost tradition of the NFA to be implemented back into the organization, plan a NFA Day for the region, or complete a book review of the recently published, *The Legacy of the New Farmers of America* (Alston et al., 2022). The intention of these assignments is to encourage the remembrance and appreciation of the NFA and its unique characteristics that impacted thousands of African American youth. Involving students in the education of the organization beyond the classroom walls is one step in accomplishing this goal.

### **Costs/Resources Needed**

Additional resources are needed to establish a database of remembered NFA members and those still living across the southern states and nation. This resource would allow students to identify potential members of their communities who were impacted by the NFA. A database of NFA contacts would allow additional opportunities for students to understand the reach of the organization. Those willing, could serve as a contact for interviews, guest presentations, collaborations, and more. Creating this database would require an investment of time, financial resources and communication between Land-Grant Universities who once held close partnerships with the NFA in their states. This would also require networking between local community members within each state. Several sites could serve as field trip locations or be featured on FFA websites or social media, which would incur costs related to travel. These might include the F. D. Bluford Library at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical University, which holds one of the largest collections of NFA artifacts, or several other historical landmarks highlighting the NFA and its history.

## References

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