

**Recruitment Road Trip: Partnering with FFA Evergreen Tour for Teach Ag Workshops  
Introduction/ Need for Innovation**

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### Introduction

Nationally, the agriculture (ag) teacher shortage is a current problem because open positions outnumber individuals entering the profession (Lawver et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2022; Solomonson et al., 2019). Some solutions to the ag teacher shortage point towards effective recruitment and retention of ag teachers. Research has shown universities that target individuals can influence student choice when choosing a program of study (Bobbitt, 2006; Rocca, 2013; Alston et al., 2019). It has also been suggested that high school students make decisions based on their experiences and opportunities (Olamide & Olawaiye, 2013). A recent agricultural education recruitment study found low diversity of cultural and ethnic backgrounds of students being recruited (Alston et al., 2020). Recruitment efforts should intentionally focus on recruiting a diverse population of future ag teachers.

### How it Works

In the fall of 2023, two graduate and seven undergraduate students from Washington State University (WSU) presented a Teach Ag workshop at the Washington FFA Association Evergreen Tour. These students were chosen due to their experience in agriculture education, present enrollment in the agriculture education program, and originating from or experience in each of the FFA districts. The FFA Evergreen Tour is planned and delivered by the FFA state officers in early October. The tour addressed each of the nine FFA districts at seven stops in five days. Dany Payne, the Washington FFA Association’s Executive Director, described, “the focus of the Evergreen Tour is membership recruitment and kicking off the new year. A lot of chapters use this to introduce new members to FFA” (personal communication). The Evergreen Tour provided a foundation to show agriculture students the need for agriculture education and address the ag teacher shortage. Due to the FFA Evergreen Tour being conducted across Washington State, the recruitment team reached a larger demographic of students and introduced students to agricultural education experiences.

Various activities (see Table 1) encouraged students to consider the knowledge needed as an ag teacher and the different pathways to become an ag teacher. These activities were selected to provide experiences to agriculture students and to encourage high school students consider agricultural education when making career decisions.

Table 1  
*Evergreen Teach Ag Workshop Activities*

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Objective of Activity</b>
Snowball Icebreaker	Students wrote what they enjoyed about their ag teacher on a piece of paper. They crumpled up the paper and threw it across the room. Students picked up a new piece of paper and shared their thoughts with another student to reflect on their experiences in their ag classes and with their ag teachers.
Gameshow-style Contest	Five different trivia posters were made with content from the seven different AFNR pathways. The students were split into teams and were competing to answer the questions. This activity expressed various knowledge that ag teachers need to know.
How to Become and Ag Teacher	This worksheet had fill in the blank spots that displayed to students that they could receive a bachelor's degree in Agricultural Education, work in the industry then obtain a teaching certificate, or pursue a certification by obtaining a master's degree.

### Costs and Resources Needed

Costs directly associated with the recruitment event included motor pool vehicle, fuel, hotel rooms, Teach Ag swag, workshop supplies, and students' time for presenting. Table 2 shows the cost breakdown for the workshop. In a collaborative effort to conduct this workshop, funds from the Washington State Teach Ag Results (STAR) Grant, the WSU College of Agricultural Human and Natural Resources Academic Programs, and the WSU Agricultural Education Program funded the workshop.

Table 2

#### *Resources and Costs for Evergreen Teach Ag Workshop*

<b>Resources</b>	<b>Quantity / Unit</b>	<b>Unit Cost (US Dollars)</b>	<b>Total Cost (US Dollars)</b>
Motor Pool Car	6 days	30.00	180.00
Fuel	40 gallons	3.75	150.00
Hotels	3 nights	133.33	400.00
Teach Ag Swag	various		792.80
Workshop Supplies	various		140.00
Presenter Time	100 hours	15.74	1,574.00
<b>Total</b>			<b>2,444.00</b>

### Results to Date

The Evergreen Teach Ag workshop was presented to 1,293 students and advisors from 112 FFA chapters across the state. Student engagement was high at each stop due to their previous knowledge of agriculture and their experience with their own ag teachers. Their engagement was demonstrated by their participation in the workshop activities and later discussions of the workshop with their teachers. When asked as an exit activity, many students wanted to become welders or mechanics as well as variety of other agricultural careers, including becoming an ag teacher themselves.

To expand the impact beyond FFA members, multiple news articles across the state addressed the agricultural education shortage, the teach-ag workshop, and the Evergreen Tour. Two of the articles include WSU press, "Washington State University, FFA team up to address Washington ag teacher shortage" (Sams, 2022) and another from the Tri-Cities Herald "'Critical' ag teacher shortage looms in Tri-Cities, rural Eastern Washington" (Rosane, 2022). This recruitment strategy led to successful outreach to a wide variety of communities and engaged students to share their love for agriculture and the importance of the industry.

### Future Plans and Advice

In the future, this activity should be repeated at the Washington State FFA Evergreen tour as well as at other events where high school agriculture students gather. Increasing exposure of high school students to the agriculture education profession could provide a positive way to recruit students into the agricultural education profession. Literature and studies suggest that presenting at these events could also lead to cultural and personal diversity in the agriculture industry (Olamide & Olawaiye, 2013). In the future, presenters should collect recruitment contact information from students to allow for follow-up and to track the success of this program. Scheduling all stops during school hours and at the schools rather than on fairgrounds or during after school hours may increase student participation in the tour.

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