

**Preparing Young Adult Leaders in Agriculture: An Evaluation of the Texas Agricultural
Lifetime Leadership Program**

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Introduction

Within the United States, the agricultural industry provides 10% of total employment, which equates to over 20 million jobs (United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, 2022). As the agricultural industry becomes more complex, there is a need for effective leadership to be implemented within the industry (Texas Agricultural Lifetime Leadership Program [TALL], 2022). Numerous agricultural leadership programs have prepared leaders capable of addressing issues affecting their industry and becoming active participants in public affairs (Kaufman & Carter, 2005; Lamm et al., 2016). It is critical to evaluate the outcomes of leadership development programs, such as the Texas Agricultural Lifetime Leadership (TALL) program to continue to receive financial and administrative support (Lamm et al., 2013; Lamm et al., 2016). Further, specific program evaluations contribute to understanding success and shortcomings to adapt for future programming (Slavin, 2008). TALL is a two-year program where participants receive a minimum of 455 hours of leadership training to enhance their ability to develop the agricultural industry at the local, state, national, and international level (TALL, 2022). Since established in 1988, over 1,000 young men and women between the ages of 25-40 involved in Texas agriculture have participated and graduated from TALL. An evaluation took place in 2015 to measure the value and success of this program. This study seeks to examine the most recent four classes to determine the impact of the outlined goals of the TALL program and illuminate long-term outcomes. Specifically evaluating the participants' understanding of seven constructs of the TALL program including key issues affecting the agricultural industry, personal development, leadership skills, agricultural public policy, non-agricultural public policy, relationship building, and overall management techniques (TALL, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

Evaluation is a continuous event with a systematic purpose and process to demonstrate the effectiveness of programs, identifying areas for improvement, and judging the worth of the program (Harris, 1968; Steele, 1970; Wall, 2014). To conduct an evaluation of the TALL program the Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model guided this study (Kirkpatrick, 1996). The model includes four levels that build off one another: reaction, learning, behavior, and results. The first level, reaction, evaluates the satisfaction and engagement among participants. The learning level evaluates the knowledge, values, and skills gained. The behavior level evaluates and measures the application of the knowledge acquired. The final level, results, evaluates and measures how the program has sustained over time (Kirkpatrick, 1996).

Methodology

A cross-sectional survey distributed via Qualtrics collected quantitative data. The target population included 100 graduates of TALL Classes of XIV to XVII, including years 2018-2021. Dillman et al.'s (2014) Tailored Design method allowed researchers to reach the target population quickly and efficiently. To evaluate the data, the appropriate statistical analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. A panel of experts at Texas A&M University established validity. Cronbach's Alpha established reliability for five of the seven constructs, falling between 0.83 and 0.96 (Fraenkel et al., 2019). The final two constructs included yes/no questions and sliding scale questions; therefore, Cronbach's Alpha

was unable to be conducted due to the multidimensional cumulative of the questions. Overall, the instrument was deemed valid and reliable.

Results

The analysis and results include each construct: (a) key issues affecting the agricultural industry, (b) personal development, (c) leadership skills, (d) agricultural public policy, (e) non-agricultural public policy, (f) relationship building, and (g) overall management techniques. The results from descriptive statistics, one-way ANOVA, Scheffe post-hoc comparison, and a Levene's Test for Equality of Variance, found Construct A suggested Class XVI (2020) had significantly higher attitudes towards the issue of "family roles and responsibilities" than their 2021 peers. Additionally, participants ages 30-34 had a statistically significant higher attitude toward understanding the issue of "immigration" compared to participant ages 35-39. Further, participants who identified as male had a significantly more favorable attitude than their female counterparts on the issue of "understanding political systems." Objective (c) determined male attitudes had higher statistical significance than their female counterparts pertaining to "communicating more effectively" and the lesson "networking with others." Alternately, females had a significantly higher attitude score in "leading groups and organizations." Constructs (b), (d), (e), and (f) found no statistical significance within their analysis.

Conclusions

This study highlights the importance of Kirkpatrick's Evaluation Model (1996) by acknowledging the differences in learning, implementation, and strength of different TALL program lessons. Further, we conclude the age of participants, the year participants participated in the program (prior to COVID-19 and after), and gender identification impacted participants' attitudes and knowledge obtained from the program. This demonstrates the need for continued adaptation to leadership programs for young adults in agriculture to be prepared and active participants in public affairs.

Recommendations

It is recommended further research should be conducted on the effects of COVID-19 on participants. Following the results of objective (c), further research should be conducted regarding the differences of female and male leadership within the agricultural industry. Programmatic recommendations include implementing an adult learning model (andragogy) to ensure all ages of participants are learning the material equally. It is critical for the growth of organizational leadership that strategic leaders be created to build organizational success (Tadesse, 2019). Further, the TALL program should develop resources that specifically target the behavior level of the Kirkpatrick Model for Evaluation (1996) to address how knowledge is gained from the TALL program and used by participants.

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