



School-Based Agricultural Educators' Perceptions of Sustainable Agriculture

Sofia Martinez & Robert Williams
Sustainable Agriculture & Food Systems
College of Agricultural Sciences & Natural Resources

Introduction

Sustainable agriculture (SA) as a topic of study in school-based agricultural education (SBAE) has been promoted since the close of the 20th century (Williams & Dolliso, 1998) and continued into the early 21st century (Bosari, 2001; Bosari & Vidrine, 2005). A word/subject search in major journals for agricultural education found little or no mention of SA during the past decade. As a result, we assessed how SBAE teachers in our FFA service/ outreach region, Texas FFA areas V and VI, perceived SA in context of their programs.

Methodology

Questionnaire:

- adapted from Sameipour (2017)
- distributed via Qualtrics to secondary SBAE teachers in Texas FFA Areas V and VI (N=500)
- following Dillman et al (2014)
- 49 responses (9.8%)

The questionnaire items consisted of Likert-type scale with 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree regarding their perceptions of whether or not a practice contributed to SA.

We were pleased that 49 SBAE teachers had chosen to respond to a questionnaire on a relatively novel topic within context of the secondary SBAE curriculum and FFA resources and activities.

Results

Description of sample/participants (n=49)

- 53% taught in rural areas
- 47% taught in urban or suburban schools

Education level attained:

- Bachelor's—51% Master's—39%,
- Doctorate—4% Other—6%.

They self-identified as:

- Female--53% Male--47%
- African American/Black—8.16%
- Hispanic/Latino—6.12%
- White--85.71%

Agreed or strongly agreed that SA:

- Boosts local processing—61.02%
- Integrates livestock and diverse crops—57.63%
- Uses local knowledge/technologies—56.67%
- Promotes local markets—56.67%

Agreed or strongly agreed that SA includes:

- Conservation tillage
- Cover crops
- Crop rotation
- Developing healthy soils
- Integrated pest management
- Recycling renewable resources
- Reduced herbicide rates
- Rotational grazing
- Use of animal and green manures

100% interested in PD about SA

97.96% support a Sustainable Agriculture CDE

Conclusions

Even with a low response rate, this study provided evidence that interest in SA exists among secondary SBAE teachers in Texas. There was agreement that some topics and practices presently included in the secondary SBAE curriculum contributed to SA. Interest in more professional development about SA was confirmed along with interest in a Sustainable Agriculture CDE.

Recommendations

- Expand study to assess interest in SA at state and national level.
- Provide more opportunities for PD in SA.
- Collaborate with SBAE teachers to develop a state-level CDE in SA.

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