

**Historical Analysis of the National FFA Organization's Program of Activities: Milestones during Its Formative Years**

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## Introduction/Need for Research

Critics have noted that the impact FFA has on members' development as leaders is not easily measured (A Caring Critic, 1999). However, it was suggested by the National FFA Organization (2021) that this development of students occurs through activities and events implemented by local FFA chapters. "When FFA members participate in planning, implementing, and evaluating the POA, they are participating in program planning: a process they will use often in future organizational work" (Torres & Dormody, 1997, p. 11). The Program of Activities (POA) has been called the *road map* for local FFA chapter success (Phipps, 1972). FFA chapters use a POA to plan and implement events throughout the year to address the interests of all students (National FFA Organization, 2021). Today, the National FFA Organization (2021) recommends that the POA should align with the three divisions of Growing Leaders, Building Communities, and Strengthening Agriculture. These divisions are supported by 15 National Chapter Quality Standards (NCQS) that outline what should be offered by local FFA chapters (National FFA Organization, 2021).

Requirements for the POA are outlined in the *Official FFA Manual*. This provides a guide for agricultural education teachers (advisors) and students (members) to address the needs of their schools and communities. They may be better able to develop, organize, and achieve their goals because of this guidance. Although many resources exist to outline the purpose of the POA and related National Chapter Award requirements, it is important to understand from where this process originated in the FFA organization, how it evolved over FFA's history, and as changes are made to the organization's aims, approaches, and activities.

## Purpose and Research Questions

The National FFA Organization's standards, guidelines, and recognition program for its Program of Work (now Program of Activities), including that of state associations and local chapters, has been revised over time. This study sought to identify and document these changes. Three research questions guided this study: a) What is the origin of POA in the FFA? b) How did POA change over time? c) How was a FFA chapter's Program of Work (now POA) evaluated during the organization's first decade?

## Methodology

Historical research methods were used to gather data to answer the study's questions. Primary and secondary sources such as National FFA Convention Proceedings, *Official FFA Manuals*, the National FFA Organization's website, and *The Agricultural Education Magazine* were compiled using reliable online databases (McDowell, 2002). Search terms included FFA, Future Farmers of America, national chapter contest, program of activities, POA, and program of work. Findings were organized chronologically by source and overall.

## Findings

Prior to the establishment of the Future Farmers of America (FFA), the Future Farmers of Virginia held their first state meeting in April of 1927 (FFA, 1928). This organization created a Program of Work that prioritized supervised practice enterprises, father-son banquets, community service projects, and the investment of chapter funds in travel for livestock judging teams and in farming (FFA, 1928). The First Annual Congress of FFA was held in Kansas City, Missouri at the Baltimore Hotel on November 20, 1928 (FFA, 1928). The agenda for this first

convention included the presentation of three committee reports: Nominating Committee, Auditing Committee, and Committee on Program of Work. A Program of Work for the local, state, and national levels was presented by a committee of the same name and accepted by the voting delegates (FFA, 1928). Activities in the Program of Work included consulting community members regarding activities and events, and developing students' leadership skills (FFA, 1928).

In 1929, H. O. Sampson, New Jersey State Supervisor, addressed the National Convention and spoke about how to succeed in Future Farmer work and the importance of a Program of Work (FFA, 1929; State of New Jersey, 2008). During the first 10 years of the National FFA Organization's existence, the number of Program of Work standards varied by level, including nine for local chapters, four for state associations, and four at the national level to the eventual implementation of 26 standards with certain standards specified for specific levels (FFA, 1928, 1939). The first award for chapter activities was presented in 1929 (FFA, 1929).

The Program of Work was incentivized with inauguration of the National FFA Chapter Contest. The contest was started in 1929 as local FFA chapters were recognized by their respective states' reports for outstanding achievements (FFA, 1929). In 1930, 41 chapters participated in the Chapter Contest while this number grew to 699 chapters in 1939 (FFA, 1930, 1939). Prize money was awarded to those local affiliates identified as the regional and national winners of the Chapter Contest in the amount of \$1,000 overall with first place receiving \$400 in 1931 (FFA, 1931). It was referred to as the National Chapter Contest in the 1935 National FFA Convention Proceedings by W. A. Ross in his Annual Report of the Executive Secretary of the National FFA Organization. The first Chapter Contest scorecard was noted in convention proceedings from the 8th National FFA Convention in 1935. A scrapbook as an artifact for the Chapter Contest was first mentioned in the 1938 National FFA Convention proceedings (FFA, 1938). By 1939 the amount given to the contest winner was \$150 (FFA, 1939). In the award process, "[e]mphasis was given to activities organized and carried through by the chapter as a group" (FFA, 1939, p. 103).

### **Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations**

The Program of Work was the original iteration of what is now known as the Program of Activities or POA within the FFA organization from a local chapter to the national level. Many changes were made to the number and type of standards required throughout the formative years of the organization which may reflect its growth and focus during that time. In addition, the number of entries in the Chapter Contest increased more than 17-fold from 41 to 699 showcasing the organization's growth as well as the activities and accomplishments of local chapters. This growth occurred even though the monetary incentive had decreased, suggesting other benefits were recognized by FFA members and advisors from participating in the award program. It is recommended that further research be conducted to explore revisions over time to discover when changing of the name occurred from Program of Work to Program of Activities. This may provide insight into how the program's criteria evolved over time to meet the changing needs of FFA members and advisors as well as their local communities. This historical research may also reveal changes and related rationale for such regarding the standards, evaluation processes, and award structure underlying today's POA and National Chapter Award program.

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