

**Expanding the Reach of AEE Club:
Rebranding the Departmental Student Organization as FFA Alumni and Supporters**

Mary Kate Morgan Lanier
Department of Agricultural and Human Sciences
North Carolina State University
252 Ricks Hall
Campus Box 7607
Raleigh, NC 27695
(919) 515-2144
mkmorga2@ncsu.edu

Jillian C. Ford
Department of Agricultural and Human Sciences
North Carolina State University
jrcasey2@ncsu.edu

Joy Morgan
Department of Agricultural and Human Sciences
NC State University
(919) 515-6077
jemorga2@ncsu.edu

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Introduction/Need for Innovation

Student organizations have tremendous value to the teaching mission of colleges and universities (Aide et al., 1991; Hoover et al., 2004). Involvement in student organizations promotes the educational outcomes of institutions of higher education (Floerchinger, 1988, as cited by Hoover et al., 2004) while also providing students a connection. As it relates to agricultural education specifically, a study from Roberts et al. (2007) found that there is value in and need for a student organization for pre-service agriculture teachers for both professional development and creation of a social network for students.

When participation in the Agricultural and Extension Education Club at NC State University began to dwindle for a variety of reasons including a change of department name and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the current AEE Club officer team and advisors brainstormed how the mission of advancing agricultural education could be promoted to the broader student body. Thus, FFA Alumni and Supporters at NC State was born. FFA Alumni and Supporters chapters work to rally support of agricultural education and FFA chapters in local communities and support the work of FFA advisors (National FFA Organization, n.d.).

How it Works

Discussions of the potential rebrand began in the semester before the establishment of FFA Alumni & Supporters at NC State University. When the idea was initially presented, students and advisors were in agreement with the idea, but wanted to gather more information. Informal meetings were held with current AEE Club officers and faculty in the department to gather thoughts and more information about the implications of a club rebrand. A meeting was also held with North Carolina FFA State Staff, to inquire about the possibility of establishing such a chapter and how this chapter could support the work of North Carolina FFA. With largely positive response from both students and faculty, as well as FFA State Staff, the current AEE Club Officers presented a motion to the general body two weeks before the last scheduled business meeting of the semester to change the name of the organization from AEE Club at NC State to FFA Alumni and Supporters at NC State. All dues paying members were notified of the proposed bylaw amendment and notified of the meeting time and date where they could discuss and vote on the amendment. The amendment unanimously passed, and a motion was also made and passed to defer the election of officers until the club had been announced to the greater student body.

Additionally, a leadership team was formed of those present at the meeting that would guide the rebranding. Meeting over the summer to reevaluate the bylaws, plan the fall semester meetings, and plan for advertising the organization to the student body, this team also worked to file necessary paperwork with the Student Involvement Office at NC State to properly change the name within the university. Minor changes were made to the bylaws since the mission of the organization was still the same, only with a larger scope beyond just the department. The North Carolina FFA Advisor and North Carolina FFA Alumni Council President were invited to speak at the first and second meetings to share opportunities and ideas for this reformed organization. At the second meeting, officer nominations occurred and at the third meeting, officers were

elected. The leadership team worked to promote FFA Alumni and Supporters by rebranding and sharing the social media handles, sending an all-campus email, promoting meetings on the NC State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences website, and setting up a booth at multiple campus involvement fairs.

Meeting on the first and third Wednesdays of every month, FFA Alumni and Supporters at NC State elected a full eight-person officer team, hosted numerous guest speakers and team-building activities, and has plans to complete service events for the North Carolina FFA Association and local FFA chapters across North Carolina. Ideas that have been discussed include volunteering at State FFA conventions, leadership conferences, and CDEs/LDEs, hosting an official dress drive, and creating a networking event with other FFA Alumni and Supporters corporate and school-based chapters.

Results to Date

The FFA Alumni and Supporters Chapter was established after a vote of the membership body of the former AEE Club in the Spring of 2023. The first meetings were held and officers were elected in the Fall of 2023. Membership has increased from an average of ten students per meeting to fifty students per meeting, an increase of 500%, and includes students from every department in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at NC State University, undergraduate students, graduate students, and students from two other colleges at NC State. Additionally, there was enough interest in leadership positions to field a full, eight-person officer team. Plans are in place for club members to volunteer at upcoming state-level CDEs and LDEs. Additionally, more recognition and visibility has come to the agricultural education degree program at NC State University.

Advice to Others

For other departments that would like to replicate the transition of your departmental club to an FFA Alumni and Supporters chapter, it is recommended to have conversations with your FFA State Staff and FFA Alumni Council early. Through establishing an early partnership, our Alumni and Supporters dues were waived, and a mutually beneficial relationship began. It is also recommended to work with your university's student organization governance office to be sure all proper procedures are in-place before the official name-change vote occurs.

Cost/Resources Needed

A team of supportive students and faculty is essential to getting a newly rebranded organization off the ground. Additionally, low-cost/high-traffic advertising mechanisms such as involvement fairs, mass student emails, social media, flyers, and word of mouth are essential to spreading the word about your organization. A \$25 fee was required to change the organization on the club bank account.

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