

Creating a Student-led Agricultural Mechanics Project Show

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Introduction

Agricultural mechanics courses are popular with over 90% of the agricultural education programs in Texas. Most programs offer at least one agricultural mechanics class (Hanagriff et al., 2011). One of the contributing factors in the popularity is linked to the opportunities for students to exhibit agricultural mechanics projects at numerous major, regional, county, and local shows (Doss et al., 2019). Students have an opportunity to build a wide range of projects including BBQ pits, Firewood Racks, Trailers, Grills and more. Doss et al. (2019) further reported that over 3,500 projects were entered across four of the most popular agricultural mechanics shows in one year. This provides a unique opportunity for universities to host a project show which will bring students to a university campus and recruit students interested in agricultural mechanics.

How it Works

Planning and hosting an agricultural mechanics show takes long term planning, organization, and clear communication to be successfully implemented. Table 1 outlines the step-by-step longitudinal planning of a student-run agricultural mechanics project show. Communication is critical to ensure a successful agricultural mechanics show is planned and executed.

Table 1.

Steps designed to implement a student-ran Agricultural Mechanics Project Show

| Step | Activity | Description |
|--------|--|---|
| Step 1 | Show development (1 year to 6 months out) | The project show organizers need to set a date, secure a location, and develop a naming, description, and classification sheet for the projects to be shown. Identify and complete all university required documentation needed to be completed (Risk Management, Minors on Campus, etc.). |
| Step 2 | Show awareness (4 months out) | The project show organizers need to develop save the date flyers, update show information and rules on JudgingCard and promote on social media outlets and at other project shows. |
| Step 3 | Judges' solicitation (3 months out) | The project show organizers develop a database of industry representatives and alumni that can serve as judges. Communication with the judges needs to be completed well in advance including when and where to arrive, what classes they will be assigned to, how long they have to judge each project, and other pertinent information. |
| Step 4 | Awards solicitation (1-3 months out) | The project show organizers develop a database of companies and businesses that would be willing to provide sponsorships, awards, and other support for the show. Class trophies can be cut out, welded, and painted well in advance of the show. Prizes as they come in can be highlighted on social media. |
| Step 5 | Participant communication (1 week out) | Make sure all participants are aware of where to go, what forms to fill out, and other critical information at least one week in advanced. |

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| Step 6 | Show time! (Day of) | Have a laptop and printer at a registration table set up, have a loudspeaker available to give instructions, have a show map and areas mapped out for class organization. Set up awards. |
| Step 7 | Follow Up | Once all awards are handed out, follow up with sponsors with thank you cards and include save the date flyers for the next year's event |

Results to Date

The student organization at Texas State University has hosted three agricultural mechanics shows with the number of projects entered increasing annually. The students who are responsible for planning and implementing the show have developed and refined project classifications, implemented an electronic scoring system, and developed a list of judges and sponsors. With the addition of projects each year, sponsorships have increased as well. During the first year, \$2,000 in prizes were awarded. In the most recent project show, over \$16,000 were awarded. During the shows our students and faculty were able to interact with participants, parents, and teachers developing personal connections and showcased our program, facilities, and university.

Future Plans/ Advice to Others

We recommend starting the planning process one year in advance by setting a date, securing a location, and advertising for your show. We also recommend offering project building workshops if your state does not offer any project-based shows. The workshops can be aimed towards teachers and/or students interested in building projects. We also recommend visiting the major agricultural mechanics show websites to collect classification information, judge's score sheets, and other information that would be beneficial for starting an agricultural mechanics show. It is recommended to identify the opinion leaders among the agricultural education teachers in your state who might be interested in leading the efforts to build projects at their respective schools to attend a major agricultural mechanics show. We also recommend bringing pre-service teachers to a major agricultural mechanics show to serve as judges assistants to build a base knowledge of what judges look for and how to develop a quality project, with proper documentations, and communication skills.

Costs

Hosting an agricultural mechanics show can be relatively inexpensive if sponsorships are secured and a registration fee is collected. Our costs included reserving a university parking lot and for parking services to monitor the parking lot (\$750). We did not have close access to a university building and needed to rent four porta-potties and a hand washing station (\$500). We purchased 200 red, white, and blue ribbons (\$200) for the judges to distribute to each of the projects and cut out class, reserve, and grand champion trophies on our plasma table (\$200). Breakfast and lunch were purchased for the university students and judges (\$500). A pallet of water was purchased and distributed to everyone attending the show (\$160). Approximately \$16,000 in prizes were distributed at the last show with the majority of prize packages coming from industry sponsorships. The student organization views the show as a recruitment opportunity and uses and remaining balance from the registration fees (\$30/project) to purchase more prizes. One of the sponsors donated 400 departmental hats to give out to all participants, parents, and teachers.

References

- Doss, W., Rayfield, J., Murphy, T., & Frost, K. (2019). Examining Agricultural Mechanics Projects and Their Use as Supervised Agricultural Experiences. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 60(3), 62–79. <https://doi.org/10.5032/jae.2019.03062>
- Hanagriff, R., Briers, G., Rayfield, J., Murphy, T., & Kingman, D. (2011). Economic impact of agricultural mechanics competition projects in Texas and factors that predict chapter investment value: State returns from 2009-2010. *Proceedings of the Southern Region American Association for Agricultural Educators Conference*, 483-493.