

**Growing Tomorrow's Ag Leaders Through Participation in Greenhand and Chapter Leadership Conference**

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## **Introduction and Need for Idea**

Studies show that career opportunities in the agricultural industry for new college graduates will continue to grow through 2025 (Goecker et al., 2015), but Suutari (2002) reported a shortage of global leaders in the corporate world. Agriculture is no exception; therefore, leadership events need to be implemented to develop the global competencies and perspectives of students. According to Moore et al. (2009), knowledge and understanding of global perspective is lacking in current students. However, for students to develop leadership skills and hands-on knowledge and skills in their chosen field of study, educational events that combine technical knowledge and skills with leadership skills need to be organized for these students.

The Greenhand and Chapter Leadership Conference (GCLC) at Auburn University is vital to support the growing FFA membership, increase involvement in Alabama FFA events, and promote leadership development among high school students. GCLC is directly related to classroom and job market instructions and demand, this approach enables students to apply learning through meaningful experiences in diverse social environments complementing and enhancing the traditional classroom model.

## **How it Works/Methodology/Program Phases/Steps**

GCLC is a leadership conference held at Auburn University for first year and senior FFA members in Alabama and is hosted annually in the fall by Auburn University's Agriscience Education department. It is usually held in September, so invitations to every high school agricultural program across the state are sent at the beginning of summer, around the beginning of June. But the Student Activities Center that was used for the facilities needed to be rented in January. Qualtrics was used for registration (which was designed by the graduate assistant in charge of the event), and FFA chapter advisors are communicated with through email. Lunch and shirts were provided to students, which needed to be organized a month in advance. The week of shirts were ordered into bags for each school participating. The day of coffee was provided for advisors in a break room and the workshops were set up.

The 2024 GCLC began with opening ceremonies and then included four 45-minute workshops, (1) National FFA Organization, (2) Supervised Agricultural Experience, (3) Agricultural Career Pathways, and (4) Alabama Agriculture Industry. Workshops included leadership activities designed to develop the leadership and career potential of first-year FFA members while providing a comprehensive introduction to agricultural education and career opportunities in the agricultural industry in Alabama. In its seventh-year, GCLC expanded to include a track for senior FFA members. The Chapter track offered students the opportunity to visit and tour campus while learning more about agriculturally related degrees at Auburn University during an academic browse and see how their involvement in FFA can connect to their future careers.

## **Results to Date**

At the end of GCLC, Greenhand participants shared their perspectives related to the event. The data indicates that most participants (92.0%) found the experience in the Greenhand track to be highly positive, suggesting they had a positive experience but with minor reservations. Also, 77.0% of Greenhand participants agreed that the program positively impacted their leadership and career development, while only 18.0% somewhat agreed, and

5.0% were neutral about the event. This indicates a strong support for the program's role in fostering individual leadership skills and guiding students toward future career paths. Lastly, most Greenhand participants (63.0%) agreed that they had prior knowledge about the workshop, while 23.0% somewhat agreed, indicating that teachers were informing their students of this event prior to its happening. A smaller percentage (7.4%) were neutral, and only 7.5% disagreed, suggesting minimal lack of understanding regarding the event. The 2023 program had 67 participants in the Greenhand track and no Chapter track. This year's (2024) had 159 in the Greenhand track and 57 in the Chapter track, which is 3.22 times more students on-campus than 2023.

### **Future Plans and Advice to Others**

Educational activities designed to develop a student's leadership capability to bridge the gaps between students and those in the industry who intend to hire agricultural students with leadership competencies are vital to moving the agricultural industry forward. We recommend educational institutions and teacher educators organize practical events for students to encourage and develop further leadership opportunities for undergraduate students interested in pursuing a career in agriculture. We also encourage increasing awareness of educational events for high school students by bringing them on-campus to university organizations so that these students can learn through interaction with these events. This can all be done by sending flyers of events via email to the instructors, through recruitment events and through social media platforms such as Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok.

In the future, GCLC can improve by moving the event from the smaller Student Activities Center to the Student Center where students can see a more central part of campus and the facilities will be large enough to accommodate the four workshops more easily. We would also have workers lined up on the concourse to welcome schools and show them where to go for registration after they are dropped off by their buses at a better drop-off location that is easier to find for the drivers and again allows students to walk through the main parts of campus to enjoy what Auburn University has to offer.

### **Cost and Resources Needed**

The three largest expenses for the event were the cost of the venue, providing a conference shirt to each participant, and lunch. The venue's fixed cost was \$1,675.00 for one day. The costs of the shirts were \$12.57 per student and a boxed lunch from Chick-fil-a cost \$10.57 per student. To help cover the costs of the event, business sponsors were secured and students were charged \$25.00. In addition to the financial cost, we had twenty-four volunteers that helped make the event possible—a speaker for opening ceremony that also was the graduate assistant that coordinated this event, workshop leaders, graduate assistants that helped lead groups from workshop to workshop, and those who distributed food to students. Much time was needed to coordinate this event, including the time that it took for FFA state officers who served as workshop leaders to plan their lesson, senior Agriscience Education undergraduate students who served as workshop leaders to plan their lessons, practice for these workshop lessons, graduate assistants' time to complete paperwork, organization, and shirt orders and filing, and the time of the event and setup which lasted from 6 a.m. to 3 p.m.

### References

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