

Growing Future Educators

Investigating the Impacts of the University of Florida's Ag Ed Institute

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The Ag Ed Institute

- The Ag Ed Institute (AEI) is a recruitment program for preservice teachers that was established in 2013 within the Agricultural Education and Communication department at the University of Florida.
- The AEI was developed to mentor students interested in teaching agriculture and to help meet the growing demand for agricultural educators in Florida.

Introduction

- Challenges in School-Based Agricultural Education (SBAE) continue to affect recruitment and retention efforts of educators.
- Teacher educators are faced with difficulties recruiting high school students to preservice agricultural education programs.
- National Teach Ag Program was established in 2009 to bring awareness to the growing demand for agricultural educators.
- This study was rooted in Social Cognitive Theory as the framework to investigate the impacts of the AEI Program.

Methodology

- Explanatory mixed-methods were used throughout this study beginning with a survey then followed by interviews.
- The survey included questions regarding demographics, participation in AEI, participation in specific aspects of the program, and perceptions and impacts of the program.
- Semi-structured interviews included questions about participations' background, their entry into the program, motivation, career exploration, experiences within the program and perceived impacts, career intentions, factors influencing their participation, and recommendations for program improvement.

Findings

- The target population for this study included AEI participants from 2021-2024. 136 participants were contacted, and 23 individuals agreed to participate in the study. Of those 23 respondents, 13 met the minimum age threshold of 18.
- 83% of respondents reported an interest in teaching agriculture.
- 82% of the respondents said the program reinforced their desire to teach ag.
- Here is what some of the interviewed participants had to say:
 - "I felt equipped before I came to UF that I know what my major was... I think AEI played a big role in that"
 - "I met a few professors at AEI... it was encouraging for them to be supportive from the start."

Conclusions & Recommendations

- This study indicated that AEI had a positive impact on shaping students' decision to pursue a career teaching agriculture.
- Researchers recognize the low response rate and limitations on the generalizability of these findings.
- To increase the response rate in the future, program leaders should ensure that a non-school issued email is collected.
- It is recommended that program coordinators share their intentions to follow up with participants in the future.

