

**Recruitment Reimagined: Integrating an Agricultural Educator Academy into FFA
Leadership Camp**

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Introduction

Agricultural Education has expanded as a profession due to the growing realization of the importance of agriculture. However, despite the growth of programs, students, and interests, the profession still has a shortage of teachers. According to Eck and Edwards, without a sufficient supply of qualified agricultural educators, our nation's populace is likely to become more disconnected from agriculture and the supply of future generations of agriculturists negatively impacted (Eck & Edwards, 2019). If the agricultural education profession is going to grow and prosper in the 21st century, it will need to maintain an adequate supply of qualified teachers (Boone & Boone, 2007). Today, school-based agricultural education (SBAE) teachers must have numerous skills including classroom instruction, classroom and program management, student relationship management, personal characteristics, and conflict management (Traini et al. 2021). Efforts to recruit and retain quality teachers are critical to solving the SBAE teacher shortage and ensuring the success of the profession (Hur et al.). Therefore, having programs to recruit and retain SBAE teachers can play a significant role in preventing teacher shortages. The Agricultural Educator Academy (AEA) is a multiday program hosted by the [State] Teach Ag Campaign in partnership with the Louisiana FFA Association. The goal was to promote teaching agricultural education as a viable college major and career choice. This program gives students the opportunity to learn from in-service agricultural educators in Louisiana, learn the roles and responsibilities of agricultural educators, and the requirements needed for admission into [State] university SBAE teacher preparation programs.

How It Works

Unlike similar programs that operate as stand-alone programs, AEA was designed to be cost-effective by coinciding with Area FFA Leadership Camp which provided housing, meals, and facilities. This partnership allowed the Louisiana Teach Ag Campaign to offer a high-quality learning experience without additional expenses for students or the committee. The AEA was established this summer in Louisiana to highlight and create excitement for agricultural education as a college major and career. AEA was intended for FFA members who are seniors or juniors in high school and have the desire to pursue a career as a secondary agricultural educator. Students who have an interest in developing knowledge, skills, and dispositions expected of an SBAE teacher in order to meet the needs of local communities were ideal participants. FFA members completed an application process and were selected to participate in a special program during their assigned camp week. The application included short answer questions, GPA, and a recommendation letter from their FFA advisor. Up to ten participants from each area were selected to attend the AEA. Participants were separated and completed five sessions over a three-day period that included learning about Louisiana Agriscience Teachers Association, classroom instruction, SAE supervision, FFA advisement, and a future planning and college enrollment

session. These sessions included attending professional teacher meetings, demonstrations from in-service teachers, interaction with current preservice teachers, and guided reflection with university faculty. Students were also encouraged to network with agricultural education teachers throughout the camp to widen their professional network.

Results to Date

In the first year of Agricultural Educator Academy, there were 11 participants. They indicated that this program increased their desire to attend college and pursue a career in agricultural education. Participants completed a post program survey where they answered questions about why they want to teach agriculture, what they are most excited about, and what agricultural educator academy taught them. Students who participated in the AEA shared that the experience taught them the importance of adaptability, organization, and passion in teaching. They discovered that being an agricultural educator goes beyond classroom instruction and FFA and is more about building relationships, mentoring students, and creating meaningful learning experiences. Overall, participants gained a deeper appreciation for the impact SBAE teachers make and the supportive community that surrounds agricultural education. Participants communicated an increase in their excitement to teach and a better understanding of their next steps in attaining their teaching aspirations. SBAE teachers who participated in helping with the AEA also said that they were able to reflect on their own passion for teaching and appreciated the opportunity to interact with students outside of their own programs to advance the agricultural education profession.

Future Plans

This academy will continue in the summer of 2026, with juniors and seniors attending Area FFA Leadership Camp eligible to apply. The Louisiana Teach Ag Campaign plans to expand statewide recruitment, enhance hands-on teaching experiences, and incorporate participant feedback to improve program quality. Program improvements will include enhanced hands-on teaching experiences, added mentorship from current agriculture educators, and the use of participant feedback to refine academy sessions. Additional funding will be sought to increase resources, provide scholarships, and strengthen participant incentives. Students will be recognized at the next state FFA convention on stage, in the Teach Ag booth, and at the annual Teach Ag Dinner.

Resources Needed

This program was held alongside an existing state FFA leadership camp to reduce costs. Participant and presenter lodging and meals were covered through regular camp fees, allowing the program to operate on a very low budget. Louisiana FFA supplied basic workshop materials, teachers contributed classroom supplies, and the Teach Ag Campaign provided t-shirts and a program booklet for participants.

References

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