Who Feels Prepared? Examining Florida Agricultural Teachers' Perceived Skills for Program Management and Planning

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Introduction

School-based agricultural education (SBAE) programs require teachers to plan and manage classroom instruction, FFA, and supervised agricultural experiences (SAE). These responsibilities create a demanding environment where teachers must balance expectations across multiple areas of their programs (Traini et al., 2021). These responsibilities place significant demands on teachers. For example, Best et al. (2025) identified more than 80 tasks associated with FFA advisement alone, highlighting the program-management demands placed on SBAE teachers. When teachers are expected to manage this range of responsibilities, their preparation and perceived ability to perform these tasks matter for program quality. Understanding how teachers perceive their program-management skills and the relevance of those skills to their work help clarify how well preparation and support align with the realities of SBAE practices. This study describes SBAE teacher demographics and examines teacher perceptions of program planning and management skills and relevance.

Conceptual Framework

Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961) provides the foundation for examining how SBAE teachers develop the program-management competencies required to lead comprehensive agricultural education programs. The theory explains that individuals enhance their effectiveness through investments in education, training, and experience. In SBAE, teacher preparation programs function as structured opportunities to build these competencies by developing skills such as budgeting, fundraising, supervising SAEs, coaching teams, managing FFA operations, and cultivating community partnerships. Because teachers enter the profession through varied certification pathways, the type and depth of preparation they receive prior to teaching can differ substantially.

Using this framework helps clarify why teachers' perceived skill and the perceived relevance of program-management competencies may vary across preparation backgrounds. Traditionally certified agricultural teachers often receive targeted coursework and field experiences aligned with the multifaceted demands of SBAE, while alternatively certified teachers may enter with strong general content skills but less specialized preparation in areas such as chapter operations, SAE supervision, or program planning. Interpreting the findings through this lens suggests that differences in perceived competence likely reflect differences in the training and preparation teachers received. This perspective helps evaluate how well various preparation pathways equip teachers for the real program-management demands of SBAE.

Purpose and Methodology

1. Describe demographics of Florida agricultural teachers.
2. Perceived skill level for teachers certified through an agricultural education teacher preparation program compared to all other Florida agricultural teachers.
3. Comparing perceived skill level for the University of Florida Agricultural Education and Communication Department graduates and graduates of other programs/universities.

The instrument was conducted via convenience sampling, with 299 respondents, with 271 usable responses. Florida agricultural teachers completed the Florida Agriscience Teachers Need Assessment (FLATNA) in the Fall 2025 at Florida FFA Conferences on paper and were hand-entered into excel. The FLATNA measured teacher perceptions for skill level and relevance in multiple skill areas. This study focused on the instrument section for program management and planning. The FLATNA had 25 competencies within the program management and planning construct, reporting a Cronbach's alpha (α) value was 0.929. One item was removed due to its lack of alignment with the other items listed. Examples of competencies were chapter budgeting,

fundraising, marketing, completing award applications, training officers, coaching career/leadership development (CDE/LDE) teams, developing and supervising SAEs, instructional and program planning, developing and maintaining relationships in and out of school, and communicating with school officials. Demographics were collected, including gender, certification type, university and degree program, years of teaching, and other professional experiences.

Results/Findings

Objective one aimed to describe Florida agricultural teacher demographics. Of those who completed the FLATNA, 74.2% (n = 201) of respondents were female, 22.9% (n = 62) were male, and 2.9% (n = 8) preferred not to answer. Looking at educator certification type, 35.1% (n = 95) were traditionally certified through a university agricultural teacher preparation program, 60.8% (n = 165) were not traditionally certified in a teacher preparation program, and 4.1% (n = 11) preferred not to answer. The pathways to teach agriculture in Florida were similar to those reported by Claflin et al. (2020) for Wisconsin agriculture teachers. Respondents reported whether they attended UF at any time throughout their education; 44.3% (n = 120) reported they attended UF and 55.7% (n = 151) did not. Objective two focused on perceived skills of those traditionally certified in an agricultural education teacher preparation program and all other pathways to certification. Other pathways/non-traditional refers to those certified in other areas or who are alternatively certified. Traditionally certified teachers reported significantly higher perceived skill than non-traditionally certified teachers in 13 of 24 competencies, aligning with previous studies (Claflin et al., 2020; Sullivan, 2021).

Objective three compared perceived levels of participants who were UF alumni. A statistically significant difference in self-reported skill level was observed between participants affiliated with UF and those who were not. Using an ANOVA test comparing perceived skill scores, the UF group reported higher overall perceived skill across five competency areas within the 13 competencies reported for certification type.

Conclusions/Implications/Recommendations

SBAE teachers in Florida entered the profession through diverse certification pathways, with most coming from non-traditional routes. Traditionally certified teachers who entered the profession through an agriculture teacher preparation program reported higher perceived skills in more than half of the program-management competencies, and teachers affiliated with [University] also reported stronger perceived competencies across more than half of the listed competencies for program-management. This finding is not surprising, as graduates of the [University/Department] program engage in program planning components across multiple courses in the program. These findings reinforce the importance of preparation experiences that directly address the specialized demands of SBAE program management. This is especially key for teachers who enter the profession from alternative pathways, Differences in perceived skill suggest that some pathways may not provide sufficient depth in competencies such as SAE supervision, chapter operations, and program planning. We recognize the limitations in this study and the lack of generalizability and see value in adding to the body of knowledge in this area of research (Johnson & Shoulders, 2017). We recommend that state leaders in agricultural education target preparation programs and professional development, especially for alternatively certified teachers, to help ensure all SBAE teachers are equipped to manage full scope of program responsibilities. Multiple tracks for professional development could be offered to help meet the specific needs of traditionally certified versus alternatively certified teachers and closing the gap on skill development in program management. We also recommend offering asynchronous and

virtual options for teachers, who may be less likely to attend in-person professional development opportunities, due to lack of funds or other potential barriers.
Viewed through a human-capital lens, these findings suggest specialized preparation better equips teachers for program-management demands, supporting the need for targeted development opportunities, particularly for alternatively certified teachers.

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