

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE GOALS ACHIEVED BY ADULT ORGANIZATIONS IN AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to describe perceptions of secondary agricultural education teachers in the United States toward the adult agricultural education organizations affiliated with their programs. A random sample of 367 teachers, stratified proportionally by state, was generated. Data were collected from March through May 1994 using a mail questionnaire. Usable responses were obtained from 244 teachers. Two (n=96) or one (n=82) adult organization(s) were commonly affiliated with secondary agricultural education programs. Advisory committees were affiliated with 199 programs, often advising on course content, assessing equipment and facility needs, and evaluating programs. Adult organizational goals that were being met by over 50% of all types of organizations included assisting the secondary agricultural education program with public relations, promotion, and identifying community resources; supporting FFA youth activities; and assisting young agriculturists to remain in agriculture. Although the teachers had positive attitudes toward a model of three adult organizations (i.e., advisory committee, FFA Alumni affiliate, and NYFEA chapter) affiliated with their programs, only 20 reported having all three. Agricultural education students remaining in the community after high school graduation commonly received continuing education in agriculture through local postsecondary institutions, the Extension Service, commodity organizations, and Farm Bureau.

Adult organizations like advisory committees, FFA Alumni affiliates, National Young Farmer Education Association (NYFEA) chapters, and booster clubs are often associated with, and considered by many to be integral to, secondary agricultural education programs. Each organization has specific goals developed to enhance and support agricultural education. "Advisory committees are essential linkages between the community and the agricultural education teacher, providing nonbinding recommendations to support the operation of agricultural education programs" (Whaley & Sutphin, 1988, p. 18). The FFA Alumni Association is an organized extension of the FFA program. The association's primary purpose is to assist the agricultural education teacher/FFA advisor in increasing his/her efforts and contacts (National FFA Foundation, 1993). The NYFEA, chartered in 22 states, is an educational program aimed primarily

at young men and women engaged in agriculture and/or agribusiness (NYFEA, Inc., 1992). Historically, secondary agricultural education teachers have had administrative, advising, and other responsibilities with the adult organizations affiliated with their programs. Demonstrated commitment to adult organizations can vary from a full-time adult educator to the absence of any adult programming affiliated with the agricultural education program (NCR-158 Committee on Adult Education in Agriculture, 1990). While agricultural education professionals possessing practical experience with adult agricultural education organizations have some knowledge about what these organizations are doing, research is needed to more completely profile their activities.

A perception exists in the profession promoting an ideal of secondary agricultural education programs being affiliated with an advisory committee, FFA Alumni affiliate, and NYFEA chapter. The assumption is that each of these adult organizations has unique goals that, if achieved together, should provide exhaustive and well-balanced community support, continuing education, and literacy education through the agricultural education framework. However, given the demands on secondary agricultural education teachers, what are their attitudes toward and rate of adoption of the three-organization model?

Demand still exists for local adult agricultural education programming (Nur, Birkenholz, & Stewart, 1989; Birkenholz & Maricle, 1991; Chizari & Taylor, 1991). However, there is disagreement in the profession about how adult agricultural education should be delivered. In a national study, Birkenholz and Maricle (1991) found agreement

among head agricultural teacher educators that adult instruction should be provided through the agricultural education framework. McCracken (1992, p.11) disagrees. "The public school system has failed to provide adult education in an effective way to adults outside of production agriculture. Adult education in the public schools is a broken, torn, and worn-out wineskin." To help resolve this issue, research is needed to determine how agricultural education is being delivered to adults.

The principal theoretical framework for this study is a comprehensive list of 21 primary goals for advisory committees (National Center for Research in Vocational Education, 1982), the FFA Alumni Association (National FFA Foundation, 1993), and the NYFEA, Inc. (1992). They form the base from which conclusions will be drawn and comparisons made about the goals adult organizations affiliated with secondary agricultural education programs are achieving.

Goals of advisory committees (National Center for Research in Vocational Education, 1982):

1. To advise teachers in the agricultural education program on course content.
2. To assist the agricultural education program with student job placement.
3. To assist with public relations for the agricultural education program.
4. To assess equipment and facility needs of the agricultural education program.
5. To assist with staffing concerns for the agricultural education program.
6. To evaluate the agricultural education program.
7. To identify community resources for the agricultural education program.

Goals of the FFA Alumni Association (National FFA Foundation, 1993):

1. To support FFA youth activities.
2. To assist the agricultural education program to involve former FFA members in worthy activities.
3. To promote an appreciation of the American free enterprise system.
4. To promote the personal development aspect of the FFA.
5. To cooperate with national-level FFA support groups.
6. To promote the agricultural education program.
7. To provide a tie between former and present FFA members.

Goals of the NYFEA (1992):

1. To assist young agriculturalists through educational programs to remain in farming, ranching, or agribusiness.
2. To assist young agriculturalists to use resources to develop family relationships.
3. To cooperate with other organizations to improve the economic conditions of rural life.
4. To assist young farmers, ranchers, or agribusiness people to develop leadership skills.
5. To provide group identity to the adult organization.
6. To promote the adult organization as an integral part of the agricultural education program.
7. To improve urban consumers' understanding of agricultural issues.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to describe perceptions and attitudes of secondary agricultural education teachers in the United States toward adult agricultural education organizations affiliated with their programs. Specific objectives were:

1. to describe the teachers by gender, age, years of teaching agriculture completed and to describe their programs by the number of teachers in the program;
2. to determine which adult organizations are affiliated with the secondary programs;
3. to determine which goals of advisory committees, the FFA Alumni Association, and the NYFEA, are being achieved by the adult organization(s) affiliated with the secondary programs;
4. to determine the teachers' attitudes toward a model of three adult organizations affiliated with their programs; and,
5. to determine how agricultural education program graduates who remain in the community after high school graduation are receiving continuing education in agriculture.

Procedures

Population and Sample

The population of the study was 7961 secondary agricultural education teachers listed in the National Agricultural Educators Directory (Henry, 1993). At a 95% confidence level, a sample size of 367 was needed to represent the population (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). A random sample of teachers, stratified proportionally by state to ensure representation, was generated.

Instrumentation

The design of the study was descriptive. A mail questionnaire containing six sections, five of which apply to this paper, was developed by the authors. Section one asked the teachers to identify from a checklist all adult organizations affiliated with their agricultural education program. Section two listed the 21 primary goals (listed in the introduction) of advisory committees, the FFA Alumni Association, and the NYFEA. Teachers were asked to check the goals that were being addressed in whole or part by each of the adult organizations and any "other" adult organization like a booster club, affiliated with their agricultural education program.

Section three assessed the teachers' attitudes toward a three-adult organization model (i.e.,

advisory committee, FFA Alumni affiliate, and NYFEA chapter) by asking them to indicate their level of agreement to a statement about the model on a Likert-type sub-scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. In section four, respondents indicated on a checklist which adult organizations or institutions were utilized by students remaining in the community after high school graduation to obtain continuing education in agriculture. Gender, age, number of years teaching agriculture completed, and number of teachers in the agricultural education program were sought in section five.

All parts of the questionnaire were assessed for content and face validity by a state supervisor, teacher educator, and secondary teacher in agricultural education; a faculty member in adult education; and two faculty members in research methods and statistics. Reliability was assessed using a two-week test-retest procedure and determining percentage of agreement for each section and the overall questionnaire. Forty secondary agricultural education teachers from New Mexico who were not part of the sample were randomly selected for the reliability assessment. Eleven returned two fully completed questionnaires in the two-week time frame. The total questionnaire had a percentage of agreement of 86%. The section relating to the 21 adult organization goals and by which organization(s) they were being met had a percentage of agreement of 87%.

Data Collection

Data were collected from March through May 1994, following the Dillman (1978) procedure for mail questionnaire administration. Incentives were included in the mailings to increase response rate. To check for nonresponse bias, 16 teachers were randomly selected from among the nonrespondents, contacted by telephone, and asked to respond to the questionnaire. Their answers were pooled with

those of 21 others who responded after the data collection deadline. These pooled nonrespondents (n=37) were compared statistically to respondents (n=207) on adult organizations affiliated with their programs; attitude toward the three-adult organization model; teacher gender, age, and number of years teaching agriculture completed; and the number of teachers in the agricultural education program. The two groups differed only in that nonrespondents were more likely to have a booster club or other adult organization, limiting generalizations to the respondents for this variable. Respondent and nonrespondent data were pooled, yielding a usable response rate of 66.5% (n=244). Data were analyzed with descriptive statistics (i.e., means, medians, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages).

Results and Conclusions

Objective 1

The sample had 95% male teachers and 5% female teachers. Most came from one-teacher (76%) or two-teacher (20%) departments. The teachers had a median age of 40 and averaged 40.2 years in age (sd=9.5). They had taught a median of 13 years and an average of 14.1 years (sd=8.6). Using the formula $(\text{mean}-\text{median})/\text{sd} \times 100$, these last two distributions were nearly normal with 2.1% and 12.8% of possible skewness, respectively.

Objective 2

Of the 218 who responded to sections one and two of the questionnaire, it was most common for two (n=96) or one (n=82) adult organizations to be affiliated with their secondary agricultural education programs (Table 1). The most common arrangement was to have only an advisory committee (n=69 or 31.7% of the programs). Programs with two adult organizations usually had both an advisory committee and FFA Alumni affiliate (n=43) or an advisory committee and

Table 1. Adult Organizations Affiliated With Secondary Agricultural Education Programs (n=218)

Organizational Category	Subtotals		Totals	
	f	%	f	%
No Adult Organizations			1	0.5
One Adult Organization			82	37.6
AC* Only	69	31.7		
Another Only	7	3.2		
FFAA* Only	6	2.8		
NYFEA Only	0	0.0		
Two Adult Organizations			96	44.0
AC and FFAA	43	19.7		
AC and Another	37	17.0		
AC and NYFEA	11	5.0		
FFAA and NYFEA	2	0.9		
FFAA and Another	2	0.9		
NYFEA and Another	1	0.5		
Three Adult Organizations			34	15.6
AC, FFAA, and NYFEA	15	6.9		
AC, FFAA, and Another	13	6.0		
AC, NYFEA, and Another	6	2.8		
FFAA, NYFEA, and Another	0	0.0		
Four Adult Organizations			5	2.3
Totals			218	100.0
Total With an Advisory Committee			199	91.3
Total With a FFA Alumni Affiliate			86	39.4
Total With Another Organization			71	32.6
Total With a NYFEA Chapter			40	18.3

*Note. AC stands for advisory committee. FFAA stands for FFA Alumni affiliate.

another organization (n=37). Twenty programs had an advisory committee, FFA Alumni affiliate, and NYFEA chapter (Table 1).

Objective 3

According to the teachers, at least 60% of the advisory committees were meeting each advisory committee goal (Table 2). At least 50% of the FFA Alumni affiliates were meeting advisory committee goals 2, 3, and 7; at least 50% of the NYFEA chapters were meeting goals 1, 2, 3, and 7; and at least 50% of the other adult organizations were meeting goals 3 and 7. Advisory committee goal 3, "to assist with public relations for the agricultural education program," and goal 7, "to identify

community resources for the agricultural education program," were being met by over 50% of all four adult organizations. Goal 1, "to advise teachers in the agricultural education program on course content," goal 4, "to assess equipment and facility needs of the agricultural education program, and goal 6, "to evaluate the agricultural education program," were met by nearly 90% of the advisory committees, while receiving relatively low attention from the other adult organizations.

Eighty percent or more of the FFA Alumni affiliates were meeting six of the FFA Alumni Association goals (Table 3). Goal 3, "to promote

Table 2. Advisory Committee Goals that Are Addressed By the Adult Organizations Affiliated With Secondary Agricultural Education Programs

Short Titles of Advisory Committee Goals*	AC(n=199)		FFAA(n=86)		YF(n=40)		Other(n=71)	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Goal 1, Advise on course content	177	88.9	35	40.7	20	50.0	24	33.8
Goal 2, Assist w/ student placement	121	60.8	54	62.8	25	62.5	27	38.0
Goal 3, Assist w/ public relations	132	66.3	72	83.7	28	70.0	49	69.0
Goal 4, Assess equip./facil. needs	174	87.4	38	44.2	15	37.5	33	46.5
Goal 5, Assist w/ staffing concerns	126	63.3	27	31.4	11	27.5	14	19.7
Goal 6, Conduct program evaluation	179	89.9	23	26.7	8	20.0	15	21.1
Goal 7, Identify commun. resources	148	74.4	55	64.0	26	65.0	40	56.3

*Note. The goals are listed fully in the introduction section.

Table 3. FFA Alumni Association Goals that Are Addressed By the Adult Organizations Affiliated With Secondary Agricultural Education Programs

Short Titles of FFA Alumni Association Goals*	AC(n=199)		FFAA(n=86)		YF(n=40)		Other(n=71)	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Goal 1, Support FFA activities	146	73.4	83	96.5	36	90.0	55	77.5
Goal 2, Involve former FFA mem.	76	38.2	77	89.5	29	72.5	43	60.6
Goal 3, Promote Amer. free enterpr.	89	44.7	48	55.8	26	65.0	29	40.8
Goal 4, Promote personal develop.	103	51.8	76	88.4	18	45.0	44	62.0
Goal 5, Cooperate w/ ntl. FFA grps.	35	17.6	68	79.1	16	40.0	7	9.9
Goal 6, Promote the ag. ed. program	160	80.4	78	90.7	32	80.0	52	73.2
Goal 7, Tie w/ past/pres. FFA mem.	62	31.2	80	93.0	23	57.5	46	64.8

*Note. The goals are listed fully in the introduction section.

an appreciation of the American free enterprise system" was being met by only 55% of the affiliates. At least 50% of the advisory committees were meeting FFA Alumni Association goals 1, 4, and 6; at least 50% of the NYFEA chapters were meeting goals 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7; and at least 50% of the other adult organizations were meeting goals 1, 2, 4, 6, and 7. FFA Alumni Association goal 1, "to support FFA youth activities," and goal 6, "to promote the agricultural education program," were being met by over 50% of all four organizations. Goal 2, "to assist the agricultural education program to involve former FFA members in worthy activities," approached this criterion, having a frequency under 50% only for advisory committees. Goal 5, "to cooperate with national-level FFA support groups," appears to be the most unique to FFA Alumni affiliates. NYFEA chapters and other adult

organizations appear to address most of the same goals as FFA Alumni affiliates.

At least 60% of the NYFEA chapters were meeting each NYFEA goal (Table 4). At least 50% of the advisory committees and other adult organizations were meeting NYFEA goal 1. At least 50% of the FFA Alumni affiliates were meeting goals 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. NYFEA goal 1, "to assist young agriculturists through educational programs to remain in farming, ranching, or agribusiness," was being met by over 50% of all four organizations. The other six goals appear to be somewhat unique to the NYFEA although over 50% of FFA Alumni affiliates were meeting five of them. Urban agricultural literacy (NYFEA goal 7)

Table 4. NYFEA Goals that Are Addressed By the Adult Organizations Affiliated With Secondary Agricultural Education Programs

Short Titles of NYFEA Goals*	<u>AC</u> (n=199)		<u>FFAA</u> (n=86)		<u>YF</u> (n=40)		<u>Other</u> (n=71)	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Goal 1, Assist to remain in ag.	105	52.8	54	62.8	33	82.5	36	50.7
Goal 2, Assist w/ family relation.	53	26.6	39	45.3	24	60.0	28	39.4
Goal 3, Improve rural life economics	77	38.7	47	54.7	27	67.5	33	46.5
Goal 4, Assist w/ leadership skills	76	38.2	45	52.3	35	87.5	30	42.3
Goal 5, Provide group identity	55	27.6	49	57.0	31	77.5	33	46.5
Goal 6, Integral part of ag. ed. prog.	71	35.7	50	58.1	29	72.5	28	39.4
Goal 7, Promote urban ag. literacy	63	31.7	43	50.0	27	67.5	24	33.8

*Note. The goals are listed fully in the introduction section.

was not addressed by a high frequency of any of the adult organizations.

Objective 4

Even though only nine percent of the programs had an advisory committee, FFA Alumni affiliate, and NYFEA chapter (Table 1), the teachers had positive attitudes toward having all three organizations. Of the 236 who responded to the Likert-type question, "Ideally, agricultural education programs would have all three of the following: An advisory committee, FFA Alumni affiliate, and NYFEA chapter," 65 (27.5%) strongly agreed and 109 (46.2%) agreed. Forty-seven 47 (19.9%) neither agreed or disagreed, while only 13 (5.5%) and two (0.8%) disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively.

Objective 5

According to the agricultural education teachers, the most common means for secondary agricultural education students who stay in the community after graduation to receive continuing education in agriculture were through a local community college or other postsecondary institution (n=179), the Cooperative or Agricultural Extension Service (n=161), commodity organizations (n=98), and Farm Bureau (n=94) (Table 5). Adult organizations associated with

secondary agricultural education programs were much less frequently mentioned as a means for continuing education in agriculture.

Implications and Recommendations

1. Over 90% of the local agricultural education programs had advisory committees. Nearly 90% of the time, these committees were advising agricultural education teachers on course content, assessing equipment and facility needs of the agricultural education program, and evaluating the agricultural education program. Because other adult organizations were not frequently meeting these three goals, they appear to be somewhat unique to advisory committees. Because they are extremely important goals for ensuring strength and development of secondary agricultural education programs, the researchers support the concept of secondary agricultural education program advisory committees with a focus on them. The researchers recommend that secondary agricultural education programs be held accountable for active advisory committees by state departments of education and encourage teacher education and state departments of education to cooperate in offering pre-service and in-service teacher education related to establishing and maintaining effective advisory committees.

Table 5. Means By Which Agricultural Education Students Who Stay In the Community After Graduation from High School Receive Continuing Education in Agriculture (n=244)

Organization	f	%
Local Community College or Other Postsecondary Institution	179	76.5
Cooperative or Agricultural Extension Service	161	68.8
Commodity Organizations	98	41.9
Farm Bureau	94	40.2
FFA Alumni Affiliate	44	18.8
Secondary Agricultural Education Program Advisory Committee	39	16.7
NYFEA Chapter	34	14.5
Other	34	14.5

2. Assuming that an adult organization goal that is being met by over 50% of all four organizations is a measure of its importance, the results suggest a framework for other goals an advisory committee or second adult organization might adopt.

From the advisory committee goals:

- To assist with public relations for the agricultural education program.
- To identify community resources for the agricultural education program.

From the FFA Alumni Association goals:

- To support FFA youth activities.
- To promote the agricultural education program.

From the NYFEA goals:

- To assist young agriculturists through educational programs to remain in farming, ranching, or agribusiness.

One other FFA Alumni Association goal comes close to meeting the 50% criterion:

- To assist the agricultural education program to involve former FFA members in worthy activities.

Combining similar goals, the researchers recommend the adoption of the following four goals to supplement the three advisory committee goals previously mentioned:

- To assist with public relations and promotional efforts for the agricultural education program.
- To identify community resources for the agricultural education program.
- To support FFA youth activities.
- To assist the agricultural education program in involving former students who remain in the community after graduation in worthy activities, including continuing education in agriculture.

All four goals provide assistance to the agricultural education teacher with their program while providing the adult organization with meaningful activities. If other adult education organizations in the community are harnessed to accomplish the fourth goal, these

goals could be accomplished by the adult organization(s) while actually reducing the responsibilities of the teacher. This is crucial for ensuring a high rate of adoption.

3. Any other goals adopted by adult organizations affiliated with secondary agricultural education programs should be based on local needs.
4. Agricultural education should not promote a model of three adult organizations (i.e., an advisory committee, FFA Alumni affiliate, and NYFEA chapter) associated with secondary agricultural education programs. While there is agreement among teachers about the merit of this model, in practice there is little adoption. Through these results, the teachers have suggested which adult organization goals are most central to the mission of secondary agricultural education programs. State supervisors, teacher educators, and teachers should collaborate to develop achievable routes for secondary agricultural education teachers to meet these goals through one or two adult organizations. For example, why couldn't a sub-committee of a FFA Alumni affiliate, NYFEA chapter, or booster club be the advisory committee for the agricultural education program, in effect limiting the number of adult organizations affiliated with the program to one? What we call the adult organization(s) is not as important as the goals they accomplish.
5. In most cases, there appears to be more effective ways for agricultural education students who remain in the community after graduation to obtain continuing education in agriculture than through the agricultural education framework and secondary agricultural education teachers, who have little time or funding to develop a quality program (McCracken, 1992). Teachers and the students appear to be knowledgeable about continuing education opportunities through postsecondary

institutions, Cooperative or Agricultural Extension, commodity organizations, and Farm Bureau. Therefore, secondary agricultural education teachers should not duplicate effort, but develop linkages through their adult organization(s) to these other programs that have the time, funding, and other resources to provide quality continuing education programs.

6. A second publication from this study will report qualitative opinions of secondary agricultural education teachers about the three-organization model and the utility of each adult organization. In the case of programs that have multiple adult organizations, it would be valuable to determine how many persons are members of more than one organization. Another follow-up study could measure which goals the members feel these adult organizations are achieving.

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