

Needed: Educational Objectives and Administrative Criteria for the National FFA Contests

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Every year since 1947, the National Future Farmers of America (FFA) Organization has been conducting contests as a part of their convention program in Kansas City, Missouri. The fact that these contests have been recognized as worthwhile and interesting educational activities is evidenced by the 1,392 national contestants representing over 87,000 state contest participants, the multiples of students involved at sub-state and local contests, and the large number of agricultural educators involved with contests from all levels within the profession. These state and local contests, as represented by the national contests, have a broad impact on the educational experiences of some 468,953 students enrolled in vocational agriculture and participating in the FFA organization. As such, it is imperative that the national contests be planned and administered as are other educational activities.

In order for the national contests to provide truly educational activities, these contests must be continuously evaluated and revised. Evaluation requires that criteria relating to administrative functions and educational objectives reflecting desired outcomes of the contests exist. Previous to this study, the problem was that no educational objectives have been attached to the national contests as a whole, and the administrative criteria (criteria for adding, changing or discontinuing a national FFA contest) developed were either inadequate or not used.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of a study (Smith, 1985) completed for that National FFA Organization was to establish overall educational objectives and administrative criteria for the national FFA contests. More specifically, the objectives of this study were: (a) establish educational objectives for the national FFA contests which encompassed the areas of vocations and careers, basic skills, personal development, sociological and cultural development, health and leisure, and subject matter; and (b) establish administrative criteria for the addition, change or discontinuing of a national FFA contest.

Methodology

The Delphi technique is a research method that seeks information from interested individuals involved with the question being studied (Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustafson, 1975). Helmer (1967) felt that the Delphi technique could be used as a method for educational innovation. Hostrop (1975) indicated that the Delphi technique provides a more objective means to determine the range of ideas about goals and objectives, provide priority ranking for goals and objectives, and establish the degree of consensus about the goals and objectives. Sutphin (1981) observed that the Delphi technique could assist an investigator in assessing the what is and what should be with regard to organizational

conditions, goals and objectives. McNeill (1985) indicated that the Delphi technique has been used by curriculum workers to determine and establish educational goals and objectives.

A modified Delphi technique was used to formulate the educational objectives and administrative criteria. Through a series of three questionnaires, input was received from a Delphi panel of thirty-three members that generated possible objectives and criteria and later identified those objectives and criteria felt to be most important.

The thirty-three member panel consisting of National FFA Board of Directors members, contest superintendents, special advisory committee for the national contest members, and industry representatives began by responding to the first questionnaire and formulating 112 objectives in six separate concern areas and 56 criteria in three separate concern areas. These objectives and criteria were combined and refined, according to comments received from the panel, and developed into a second questionnaire.

The second questionnaire had the panel rank the objectives and criteria in order of importance in each of the concern areas. The objectives and criteria consistently ranked more important by the panel were then further refined and merged, according to comments from respondents, and served as the basis for the third questionnaire.

The third questionnaire presented one list of 27 objectives and three lists of criteria and requested that respondents rate the importance of each objective or criteria. Importance was indicated, based on a five-point scale (1 = no importance and 5 = utmost importance), and those objectives rating 3.5 or above and criteria rating 3.4 or above were recommended to the National FFA Board of Directors.

Findings

The following are the educational objectives formulated and recommended from the analysis of the data collected during this study:

1. Demonstrate the ability to recognize and perform quality work.
2. Demonstrate the use of scientific, problem-solving, and decision-making skills and abilities through practical application within the contest area.
3. Demonstrate the ability to apply the needed agricultural technical knowledge in the contest area.
4. Demonstrate competencies learned in the vocational agriculture program.
5. Demonstrate competencies needed for employment in agricultural occupations related to the contest area (affective and cognitive as well as psychomotor).
6. Demonstrate knowledge and skills in completing tasks common to occupations in agricultural areas focused on by the contest.
7. Use correct basic skills in completing agricultural tasks in contests.
8. Demonstrate common organizational and manipulative skills and abilities required in contest area that are related to those necessary in agribusiness and industry.

9. Demonstrate safety procedures and recognize health hazards in occupations within a contest area.

10. Exhibit positive attitude toward being successful in agricultural occupations.

11. Demonstrate judgement through oral or written responses, completion of tasks, and recognition for work well done.

12. Describe current industry standards, procedures and technology.

13. Demonstrate ability to locate and properly use resource information and/or technical assistance required to complete tasks in pertinent areas of agriculture.

14. Demonstrate the ideals of honesty (in its broad aspect), respect, consideration, service, etc., to others.

15. Demonstrate team work (working with others toward a common goal) and good relationships with others whether at work or otherwise.

16. Demonstrate leadership potential and management ability.

17. Exhibit a positive attitude toward lifelong learning.

18. Recognize that competition is critical and essential to the competitive free enterprise system.

19. Demonstrate goal setting ability by meeting the challenge of participating in a contest.

The following are the administrative criteria formulated and recommended from the analysis of the data collection during this study.

1. Criteria for adding new contests:

a. The new national contest must complement the content and instruction of pertinent agricultural education areas taught in vocational agriculture classes nationally.

b. The content of the proposed new contest must be judged appropriate to existing conditions and trends in the agricultural business or industry it represents by a 5-10 member review panel consisting of representatives from the industries and businesses represented by the contest.

c. Adequate resources must be available to conduct the contest, i.e., financial (industry sponsorship), facilities, equipment, staffing, etc., in a way that provides a quality educational experience for participants.

d. Proposed national contests must be approved by the Special Advisory Committee for National Contests and the National FFA Student Delegate Contest Committee before being considered by the National FFA Board of Directors.

e. Thirty or more states should be providing instruction in the topic area in which the contest is proposed.

- f. Specific educational benefits (minimum of three) not otherwise provided through existing state and local programs shall be stated in support of the proposed contest.
- g. Twenty-five or more states must petition for a new national contest to the National FFA Board of Directors.

2. Criteria for discontinuing contests:

- a. Contest content is outdated or irrelevant as perceived by a panel of business/industry representatives, a polling of past contest participants, and evidence secured through studies of the contest.
- b. Contest deleted only after input from industry and/or agribusiness people, vocational agriculture teachers, contest committee and past contest participants has been received and these groups approve its deletion.
- c. Lack of resources and/or support to provide a quality educational experience for participants.
- d. Contest is not in agreement with the national and/or individual contest objectives.
- e. The cost of a contest financially and time wise outweighs the benefits derived by the number of students participating.
- f. Less than 25 states are conducting a state contest and/or entering their teams in the national contest.
- g. Less than 25 states are providing instruction in the area covered by the contest.

3. Criteria for changing contests:

- a. Evaluations by vocational agriculture educators (local, state and national), agribusiness and industry representatives, sponsors, past participants, and other interested parties every three years are made to update and/or redirect the contest.
- b. The contest is not focused on skills and competencies required by workers in the industry which the contest represents.
- c. The contest does not utilize application of knowledge gained or developed in the instructional program.
- d. The contest content is not in agreement with the stated national or individual contest objectives.
- e. The topic of the contest is no longer a major part of the curriculums in most schools and states.
- f. The current contest does not use instructional materials of the instructional program it represents.

The educational objectives formulated were, for the most part, within the cognitive and/or psychomotor domain. This was expected, given the vocational education and industrial orientation of those

involved in the study. Five of the 19 objectives, however, were within the affective domain, while two others were determined to have elements of all three domains.

The panel members generally desired to have the objectives written in measurable terms. Words that indicated behaviors hard to measure were changed to words indicating more measurable behaviors.

The administrative criteria selected reflected the concerns of the Delphi technique panel that the national contests have national significance in that: (a) the topic area represented by a contest is representative of and complementary to the curriculum of vocational agriculture nationally; (b) the content of a contest reflects the competencies and knowledge in the industry represented by a contest; (c) the contest be evaluated every three years by appropriate individuals to ensure educational value and quality; (d) the contest be in agreement with stated objectives (overall and individual); and (e) it have adequate resources to provide a quality educational experience.

The educational value of the contests as an instructional tool was implied by the Delphi panel. The panel, however, did caution that the contests should not be the focus or become the end toward which instruction in vocational agriculture is directed.

Recommendations/Implications

As a result of this study, several important implications and recommendations were made by the researchers. These implications and recommendations are directed toward those involved with and interested in national FFA contests.

From comments and suggestions made by the panel, the implication was derived that the contests should remain a part of the total program of the FFA and vocational agriculture. The contests, however, should never become the focus of or the end toward which instruction is directed. As such, those who are involved with the contests should make every effort to ensure that contests result from instruction and not instruction from contests.

The importance of evaluating present contests every three years was suggested by this study. These objectives and criteria should be used to aid in evaluating the contests. Such efforts will help ensure that the contests maintain and improve their educational value.

The objectives are recommended to be used when developing the objectives for individual contests to aid in the planning and operation of present and future national contests.

The administrative criteria are recommended to be used when decisions are made concerning adding, changing or discontinuing a national contest.

The educational objectives and administrative criteria should be approved by the National FFA Board of Directors and published in the National FFA Contests Bulletin No. 4 so that those involved with the contests would become familiar with them. This would also serve to communicate to other interested parties the educational objectives of the national contests.

The inclusion of more than just past contest participants and their FFA advisors is recommended when considering conducting research on any

national contest. This would be especially true if the research involved an evaluation of the contest.

Further research is suggested to determine the effectiveness of these objectives in influencing local, state and national contests and in adding, discontinuing or changing national contests. Research is encouraged to study the contests as a whole and individually to identify changes needed, whether formulated objectives are being met, and if competencies required by the contests were representative of agricultural industry and vocational agriculture instructional programs nationally. Additionally, states were encouraged to conduct similar studies to identify objectives for state FFA contests.

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(Newman & Henderson--Continued from page 44)

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