

**The Relationship Between Participation In
Selected FFA Activities and the Career Choice of
Program Completers in Vocational Agriculture in Texas**

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Three components contributing to the program of vocational agriculture are laboratory and classroom instruction, supervised occupational experience programs (SOEP's), and activities of the Future Farmers of America (FFA). The latter, FFA activities, is an integral part of programs of vocational agriculture (Johnson, 1980); they provide a vehicle for the development of leadership and personal competencies necessary for occupational success (Gartin, 1984). Leadership contests, judging contests and livestock shows are three activities of the FFA that have a high priority in numerous Texas programs of vocational agriculture.

There has been much controversy concerning these activities and their relationship to vocational agriculture. They are criticized for taking valuable time away from classroom work and for over-emphasizing the winning aspect. On the other hand, they are praised for their value as incentives and for motivating students to learn (Key, 1977). Many people outside vocational agriculture view FFA activities as having little value in the students' education or vocational preparation. In Texas, the Select Committee on Public Education (1984) recommended that students participating in "extracurricular" activities maintain a passing grade in each school subject. The assumption of the committee was that any benefit derived from participation in an activity was less than the benefit of being in the classroom, or of studying after class.

Debate over the role of "extracurricular" activities, including FFA activities in vocational agriculture, has not been resolved. The value of these activities has been established for members' leadership skills and development (Ricketts & Newcomb, 1984; Townsend, 1981). But what is the value of these activities after the student has graduated? For example, how does FFA involvement relate to one's vocation? Answers to such questions are needed!

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between participation in FFA activities and career choice of program completers in vocational agriculture. The following specific objectives were identified to accomplish this purpose:

1. To determine the degree of student participation in FFA activities by program completers of vocational agriculture.
2. To determine the employment status of program completers of vocational agriculture.

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3. To determine if student participation in FFA activities is related to career choice.

4. To compare career choice of students who had participated in a variety of FFA activities to students who had a high degree of participation in one FFA activity.

Methodology

The instrument used to collect data consisted of three sections: personal and background characteristics, participation in FFA activities, and current occupational status. Herring's (1979) instrument, used to study occupational success of vocational agriculture graduates, served as a model for the development of the instrument.

The population consisted of 1980 high school graduates who completed programs of vocational agriculture in Texas (approximately 7,000 students). A cluster sampling technique was used with the sample development by randomly selecting 100 schools in Texas offering vocational agriculture. Eighty-one vocational agriculture instructors responded to a first or second request; they furnished 653 names and addresses of program completers in 1980. This number exceeded the 364 needed to sample accurately the population of 7,000 (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970).

The questionnaires were sent to each of the 653 identified subjects. A total of 165 subjects responded to the initial mailing of the questionnaire, and 125 responded to a follow-up mailing of the questionnaire. Total response was 290 (44.4%) with an additional five subjects identified as deceased, three were out of the country and 101 had unknown addresses.

Two groups of respondents were dichotomized as early respondents and late respondents. Research (Goldhor, 1972) has shown that late respondents are similar to non-respondents; therefore, one way to estimate the nature of the replies of non-respondents is through late respondents. A t-test analysis found no significant difference ($p < .05$) in the primary variables of importance to this study (e.g., FFA offices held, judging contest participation, leadership contest participation, career choice) between early and late respondents; the assumption was made that there were no differences among early respondents, late respondents, and non-respondents. The results of this study were generalized to the entire population of 1980 high school graduates in Texas who had completed a local program of vocational agriculture.

Results

A majority of respondents in the study were male (238, or 82.4%), while 51, or 17.6%, were female, as seen in Table 1. Previous follow-up studies of vocational agriculture graduates had found percentages of females between 2% and 3% (Herring, 1979; Johnson 1980).

Respondents were asked to indicate their highest level of education. Data in Table 1 indicate that 40.1% of the respondents graduated from high school and received no further formal education; 41.2% attended college (<4 years); and 18.7% graduated from college.

Table 2 reflects the number of years of membership in the FFA, highest degree of FFA membership, and number of FFA offices held by the respondents. Over 61% indicated that they had been members of the FFA for four years. The average number of years of membership was 3.7.

Table 1

Sex and Educational Level of Respondents

	Number (N = 289)	Percentage
Sex		
Male	238	82.4
Female	51	17.6
Educational Level		
High school graduate	116	40.1
College, no degree	119	41.2
College graduate	54	18.7

Table 2

Years of Membership in the FFA, Degrees Earned, and Offices Held

	Number (N = 289)	Percentage
Years of Membership		
Two years or less	30	10.5
Three years	50	17.4
Four years	177	61.6
Five years or more	30	10.5
FFA Degree		
Greenhand	41	14.3
Chapter Farmer Degree	155	54.0
State Farmer Degree	79	27.5
American Farmer Degree	12	4.2
FFA Offices		
None	105	36.3
One	95	32.9
Two	49	17.0
Three or more	40	13.8

A majority of the respondents (54.0%) had received the Chapter Farmer Degree as their highest FFA degree. An additional 27.5% had earned the State Farmer Degree, and 4.2% had earned the FFA's highest degree, the American Farmer Degree. FFA offices were held by 63.7% of the respondents with the mean being 1.2 offices.

Subjects were asked to indicate the FFA judging and leadership contests in which they had participated, the levels of participation, and the number of years at each level (Table 3). A score of 1 was given for each year at each level of each contest. While this scoring seems to equate local and state contests, it must be remembered that a student must have participated at the local and district levels, for example, in order to reach the state level. So, the scores are cumulative. From this, total participation scores for FFA judging contests and for FFA leadership contests were computed for each respondent. Two hundred three respondents (70.2%) had participated in judging contests. The mean score for judging contest participation was 4.72. One hundred sixty-one (55.7%) had participated in leadership contests. Seventy-one respondents (24.6%) scored from 1 to 3, while 90 (31.1%) scored 4 or more on leadership contest participation. The average participation score on leadership contests was 2.84.

Table 3

Participation Scores of Respondents in FFA Judging Contests, FFA Leadership Contests and Livestock Shows and Fairs

Participation Scores	Number (N = 289)	Percentage
Judging Contests		
0	86	29.8
1-5	107	37.0
6-10	52	18.0
11 or more	44	15.2
Mean = 4.72	S.D. = 5.74	
Leadership Contests		
0	128	44.3
1-3	71	24.6
4-6	46	15.9
7-9	25	8.6
10 or more	19	6.6
Mean = 2.84	S.D. = 3.92	
Livestock Shows and Fairs		
0	54	18.7
1-5	90	31.1
6-10	85	29.4
11-15	30	10.4
16 or more	30	10.4
Mean = 7.06	S.D. = 7.95	

Respondents were provided a listing of the major livestock shows and fairs in Texas and space to indicate the number of years in which they had participated at each local, county and regional show. A score of 1 was given for each year of participation at each different livestock show or fair. Again, elimination at local levels causes students who participated at higher levels to have higher scores inherently. (In order to participate and score 1 at the state level, a student must have participated and scored 1 at the local level.) Only 18.7% had not participated in some livestock show or fair, while the mean score was 7.06 for livestock shows or fairs. Table 3 provides the distribution of scores for judging contests, leadership contests and livestock shows and fairs.

Participation in other FFA activities (e.g., National FFA Convention, Food for America Program, FFA banquets) by respondents is reported in Table 4. Only 15.9% of the respondents had not participated in one of the listed activities, while 45.7% had participated in three or more. The mean participation level of all respondents was 2.66 activities.

Table 4

Other FFA Activities Participated in and FFA Awards Received by Respondents

Activities/Awards	Number (N = 289)	Percentage
Activities		
None	46	15.9
One	60	20.8
Two	51	17.6
Three	38	13.1
Four	41	14.2
Five	23	8.0
Six	15	5.2
Seven or more	15	5.2
Mean = 2.66	S.D. = 2.19	
Awards		
None	147	50.9
One or Two	80	27.7
Three or More	62	21.4
Mean = 1.17	S.D. = 0.79	

One-half of the respondents indicated that they had not received any FFA award. One or two FFA awards had been received by 27.7% of the respondents, and about one-fifth had received three or more awards (Table 4). A score for "other FFA activities and awards" was calculated

by summing the number of activities and number of awards for each respondent.

The current occupational status of those responding to the survey is reported in Table 5. The largest single group was the non-agricultural occupations with 150 individuals or 51.9%. It should be noted that while agricultural occupations in the table are categorized, no attempt was made to categorize non-agricultural occupations. The largest agricultural category, totaling 29 (10.0%), was agricultural related occupations. Twelve respondents (4.2%) were employed in professional agricultural occupations (e.g., vocational agriculture instructors, county agents). Respondents attending college totalled 53 (18.3%), with some of these having reported employment in other occupations as well. Only three respondents (1.0%) reported being unemployed.

Table 5
Current Occupational Status of Respondents

Occupational Categories	Number (N = 289)	Percentage
Full-time farmer or rancher	19	6.6
Farm or ranch employee	25	8.7
Agri-business self-employed	6	2.1
Agri-business employee	16	5.5
Professional agricultural employee	12	4.2
Agricultural related occupation	29	10.0
Non-agricultural occupation	150	51.9
Homemaker	12	4.2
Military	1	0.3
Attending college	53	18.3
Unemployed	3	1.0
Part-time farmer or rancher	56	19.4

Note. Numbers and percentages exceed the total sample since some respondents reported more than one occupation.

Table 6 displays the relationships concerning participation in FFA activities with career choice (i.e., agricultural and non-agricultural). Point biserial correlation coefficients were calculated to describe the relationships between the variables. Statistically significant relationships were revealed between each activity score and career choice, with the exception of participation in leadership contests. In all instances, individuals in agricultural careers had a higher participation score in the FFA activity than did individuals in non-agricultural careers. Correlation coefficients of significance (alpha of .05 established a priori) ranged from .11 for participation in livestock shows and fairs to .20 for participation in other FFA activities and awards. Though the variables have a low association, the activities/participation occurred from five to nine years prior to the indication of occupational status. In other words, the influence of history (5 to

9 years) did not destroy the detection of statistically significant relationships between FFA participation and career choice.

Table 6

Point Biserial Correlation Coefficients Relating Career Choice (Agricultural vs. Non-Agricultural) to FFA Participation Factors

FFA Participation Factor	Correlation Coefficient Career Choice	Mean (Agricultural)	Mean (Non-Agricultural)
Years In FFA	.12*	3.79	3.60
FFA Officer	.14*	1.36	0.98
Judging Contest Participation	.12*	5.20	3.81
Leadership Contest Participation	.09	3.19	2.47
Stock Show and Fair Participation	.11*	7.69	5.99
Other FFA Activities and FFA Awards	.20**	3.86	2.78
Total FFA Participation ^a	.16**	25.09	19.63

^aTotal FFA Participation was a summation of scores of individual factors as shown above.

*p<.05. **p<.01.

Objective 4 was concerned with comparing career choice of respondents who had participated in all FFA activities with respondents who had a high degree of participation in one FFA activity. A table was constructed and phi calculated to determine association of type of participation with career choice. Data in Table 7 indicate that students participating to some degree in all FFA activities were more likely to enter agricultural occupations than students with a high degree of participation in one FFA activity ($\phi = 0.19, p < .01$).

Conclusions

From an analysis of the data collected and presented, conclusions have been drawn about program completers of vocational agriculture in Texas:

1. The number of females completing programs of vocational agriculture in 1980 had increased more than five fold from five years previous to a total percentage of nearly 18%.

2. Approximately 60% of program completers received some type of post secondary education.

Table 7

Career Choice Based on Participation In All FFA Activities Compared to a High Degree of Participation In One FFA Activity

Occupation	FFA Participation				All Cases	
	Some Participation All Activities		High Participation One Activity			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Agricultural	42	66.7	44	47.3	86	55.1
Non-Agricultural	21	33.3	49	52.7	70	44.9

Note. Phi = 0.19 (p<.01)

3. Program completers of vocational agriculture had a high employment rate; only 1% were unemployed.

4. Program completers of vocational agriculture who had high participation in FFA activities were more likely to enter agricultural occupations than those who had low levels of participation.

5. Program completers who participated in a balanced program of FFA activities tended to enter agricultural occupations at a significantly higher rate than those who had high participation in one activity.

Recommendations

1. Improvements have been made in the percentage of female students completing programs of vocational agriculture; however, this percentage does not approach the percentage of females completing high school. So, efforts should continue to involve females in the program.

2. Vocational agriculture teachers, school counselors and school administrators should be informed of the increasing number of program completers attending post secondary institutions. In addition, the curricular offerings in vocational agriculture need to respond to this trend.

3. With rate of unemployment in the general work force at 7%, the low rate of unemployment of participants in this study (1%) is especially noteworthy. This finding needs to be publicized to educators, educational policy-makers and the general public.

4. Because employment in agricultural occupations is a goal of vocational agriculture, high levels of participation in FFA activities should be encouraged.

5. Agricultural educators should promote the idea of the importance of a well rounded, balanced program of FFA activities.

6. An effort should be made to promote the philosophy that FFA activities are not just another "extracurricular" activity, but a vital, integral part of the program of vocational agriculture.

The following suggestions are made for further research:

1. Replication of this study in other states or nationally.
2. The effect of FFA activities should be compared with the effect of other activities and programs.
3. Research on the relationships of career choice and job satisfaction of program completers of vocational agriculture.

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