

**Guidelines for Illinois Superior FFA Chapters as
Perceived by Successful Superior
Chapter Advisors**

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The early founders of the FFA brought forth an idea to provide students of vocational agriculture with an organization for the students to apply what they had learned in the classroom to their own farming experience (Johnson, 1978). Today, the FFA must be an integral part of vocational agriculture in the public school. Public Law 740 made vocational agriculture/FFA a single instructional program.

FFA members can participate in 30 awards areas offered by the National FFA and/or the Illinois FFA (National FFA, 1984). Members may also compete in several judging contests. These contests provide the students with the opportunity to demonstrate abilities developed in the agriculture class. Chapters may compete in four programs. Each of these programs was developed to relate directly to the primary aim and purposes of the FFA.

Problem Statement

The primary aim and purpose of the FFA is the development of an individual's agricultural leadership, cooperation and citizenship. In a study conducted by Ricketts and Newcomb (1984), evidence indicated that members from superior chapters scored higher than members from non-superior chapters on a leadership and personal development test. The data indicated that superior chapters provided the individual with more opportunities to develop personally.

Even though the FFA organization as a whole has enjoyed success and prosperity, there have been concerns and problems. Some chapters have become inactive or non-successful in fulfilling the aim and purposes of the organization. These chapter advisors have denied FFA members the opportunity to compete in contests and demonstrate or develop individual leadership characteristics (Cogdill, 1984a).

In 1984, only 65% of the chapters in Illinois were rated as successful (Cogdill, 1984b). This figure indicated that there needs to be improvement. This study was designed to investigate activities participated in by superior FFA chapters in Illinois. What activities improve the quality of the local FFA chapter?

Research Questions

The researchers identified the following research questions:

1. Are superior FFA chapter advisors active in the Illinois Association of Vocational Agriculture Teachers?

2. Do superior FFA chapter advisors believe membership in the Illinois Association of Vocational Agriculture Teachers is helpful in attaining superior status?

3. Do superior chapter advisors believe former membership in the FFA was helpful in attaining a superior chapter?

4. What activities should an advisor follow to improve the quality of the FFA chapter?

5. To what extent is there a relationship between the ranking of the participation activities by the top 25 advisors in achieving a superior program and advisors of the second 25 top chapters in Illinois?

Research Method and Procedure

Study Population

The vocational agriculture programs are divided into 25 sections in Illinois. The population of vocational agriculture teachers (FFA advisors) selected for this study was the advisor of the top two superior rated chapters in each of the 25 sections. The FFA advisors of the top two superior rated chapters in each section were selected based upon their superior FFA chapter status (1984). Mr. Eldon Witt, Executive Secretary of the FFA, supplied the researchers with a list of the top two superior rated chapter advisors in each of the 25 sections. The total study population was N=50.

Instrument Design

A two-page questionnaire was designed to gather information about the advisors and the activities of superior chapters. The FFA advisors were asked to rank each activity on a scale from one to five. A rank of one indicated the advisor strongly disagreed, two indicated the advisor disagreed, three indicated not sure, four indicated agreed and five indicated the advisor strongly agreed. A cover letter accompanied the questionnaire. The cover letter included a brief introduction of the study, the purpose of the study, a statement of confidentiality, and how the responses would provide important data.

To test the validity of the questionnaire, the researcher asked the Executive Secretary of the FFA, the Associate Secretary of the FFA and the Head Consultant of Vocational Agriculture Education in Illinois to review and suggest changes in the questionnaire. Suggestions for improvement were incorporated into the final questionnaire.

The reliability of the questionnaire was tested using the test-retest method. The researcher used the questionnaire to survey two established advisors in each of the five sections in District V that were not included in the study's population. The coefficient of correlation was $r=.96$.

Data Collection Procedure

Mr. Eldon Witt, Executive Secretary of the FFA, identified the two top advisors (N=50) in each of the 25 sections. The selection criteria were based upon the advisor's performance as a superior FFA chapter advisor (1984).

The addresses of the advisors were obtained from the Illinois Association of Vocational Agriculture Teachers Directory (1984-1985). The

questionnaire was mailed with an introduction letter and a self-addressed, return envelope. Two weeks after the initial mailing, the researcher made follow-up calls to the two non-respondents.

Treatment of Data

The data were analyzed using mean rankings and the Spearman correlation. The first section of the questionnaire asked the advisors to answer yes or no, or how strongly they felt toward the activity. Percentages were used to present the results of the data in section one. In section two, the advisors were asked to rank the activities from one to five. The researcher used mean averages to determine the advisors' opinions of the importance of each activity. The Spearman correlation was used to determine the extent of the relationship between the opinions of the top 25 advisors (one advisor from each of the 25 sections) and the opinions of the second 25 advisors (one advisor from each of the 25 sections).

Results

Research Question #1: Are superior FFA chapter advisors active in the Illinois Association of Vocational Agriculture Teachers?

Fifty (100%) advisors indicated they were members of the Illinois Association of Agriculture Teachers. The various offices held by the advisors in the Illinois Association of Agriculture Teachers (IAVAT) during the school year 1984-85 varied from no office held to a state officer in the IAVAT. Eleven advisors (22%) were currently serving as section chairperson (Table 1).

Table 1

Offices Held by Superior Chapter Advisors in the Illinois Association of Vocational Agriculture Teachers 1984-1985

Office	Response	
	f	%
Section chairperson	11	22
District director	3	6
State officer	1	2
Holds no office	35	70
Total	50	100

Research Question #2: Do superior FFA chapter advisors believe membership in the Illinois Association of Vocational Agriculture Teachers is helpful in attaining a superior chapter?

The superior chapter advisors were asked if membership was either very beneficial, helpful, somewhat beneficial or not beneficial in attaining a superior chapter. Thirty-two advisors (64%) indicated that

membership in the Illinois Association of Vocational Agriculture Teachers was very beneficial in helping to attain a superior chapter (Table 2).

Table 2

Attitudes Toward IAVAT Membership by Superior Chapter Advisors 1984-1985

Attitude	Response	
	f	%
Very Beneficial	32	64
Helpful	11	22
Somewhat Beneficial	3	6
Not Beneficial	4	8
Total	50	100

Research Question #3: Do superior chapter advisors believe former membership in the FFA was helpful in attaining a superior chapter?

Forty-seven (94%) of the 50 advisors were former members of the FFA. Twenty-seven advisors (54%) believed former membership was very beneficial, while 16 (32%) indicated that former membership was helpful. Only 4 advisors believed prior membership in the FFA was not of benefit to the teacher.

Research Question #4: What activities should an advisor follow to improve the quality of the FFA chapter?

The activities were ranked on a scale of one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree)(Table 3). The advisors ranked the following three activities as most important: (a) FFA included in instruction; (b) attend state convention; and (c) publicize FFA activities. The least important activities as perceived by the advisors were: (a) active advisory council; (b) field plots/demonstration; and (c) the Food for America program.

Research Question #5: To what extent is there a relationship between the ranking of the participation activities by the top 25 advisors in achieving a superior program and advisors of the second 25 top chapters in Illinois?

A mean rank was used to determine the rankings for both groups. The Spearman correlation between the two groups was $r=.74$. This correlation between the advisor groups was high positive (Hinkle, Wiersma & Jurs, 1979).

The two advisor groups were in agreement of the top three activities (Table 4). The most variance of opinions between the groups were: (a) all members have SOEP's; (b) advisor visit SOEP's; and (c) advisor is IAVAT member.

Table 3

Rank Order of Participation Activities for Superior Chapters as Perceived by Superior Chapter Advisors 1984-1985

Activity	Mean ^a N=50	Rank
FFA Included in instruction	4.90	1
Attended state convention	4.88	2
Publicize FFA activities	4.88	2
Members decide activities	4.78	4
Foundation awards	4.72	5
Leadership training school	4.68	6
Apply for state FFA degree	4.64	7
Parliamentary procedure contest	4.64	7
Advisor is IAVAT member	4.62	9
Judging contests	4.60	10
Meeting once a month	4.54	11
All members have supervised occupational experience programs	4.44	12
Advisor visit SOEP's	4.42	13
Attend national convention	4.34	14
Safety program	4.26	15
Building Our American Communities program	4.14	16
American Heritage program	3.98	17
Active advisory council	3.92	18
Field plots/demonstration	3.84	19
Food for America program	3.70	20

^aMean range was 1 to 5: 1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree.

Conclusions

Based on the results, the following conclusions were made:

1. Superior FFA chapter advisors were active in the Illinois Association of Vocational Agriculture Teachers.
2. Superior FFA advisors believe membership in the Illinois Association of Vocational Agriculture Teachers was beneficial in attaining a superior chapter.
3. Superior FFA advisors were former FFA members.
4. Superior FFA advisors believe being a former FFA member was very beneficial in attaining superior chapter status.
5. The three most important activities that an FFA chapter should participate in were: include FFA in instruction, attend state convention and publicize FFA activities.
6. The top 25 advisors strongly agreed that all FFA members should have SOEP's, and the chapter advisor should visit each SOEP while the second top 25 advisors as a group placed less importance on SOEP visitation.

Table 4

Comparison Rank of the Activities by the Top 25 Advisors and the Second Top 25 Advisors 1984-1985

Activity	Rank ^a of Top 25 Advisors	Rank ^a of Second 25 Advisors
FFA included in instruction	1	4
State convention	3	1
Publicize FFA activities	3	1
Foundation awards	3	10
Advisor is IAVAT member	5	11
Members decide activities	6	4
All members have supervised occupational experience programs	8	14
Members apply for state FFA degree	8	7
Parliamentary procedure contest	8	7
Advisor visit SOEP's	10	16
Attend leadership training school	12	3
Judging contests	12	6
Hold meeting monthly	12	9
Attend national convention	14	13
Safety program	15	11
Active advisory council	15	20
Building Our American Communities program	17	14
American Heritage program	18	17
Field plots/demonstration	19	19
Food for America program	20	18

Note. Spearman $r=.74$.

^aMeans were used to determine ranking.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested:

1. Future agriculture teachers should become involved with FFA, whether through their local high school chapter or collegiate chapter.
2. Agriculture teachers should become active members of the Illinois Association of Vocational Agriculture Teachers.
3. Beginning agriculture teachers should implement the activities as recommended by superior chapter advisors.
4. Require all FFA members to have a supervised occupational experience program.
5. Chapter advisors should visit each student's supervised occupational experience program.

(Continued on page 58)