You can do this: An Instructional Manual to Starting an Agricultural Program

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You can do this.

An Instructional Manual to Starting an Agricultural Program

by

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Starting a program was an idea, a dream I had but never one I would have guessed would come to me at the beginning of my professional career. I had all the enthusiasm in the world to give this community, these students, every opportunity I could through agricultural education. While it was enthusiasm that drove me, the enthusiasm and excitement had to be paired with a greater understanding of patience, discipline, the willingness to fail forward, and many, many questions.

The many questions asked, the patience, discipline and willingness to fail forward with starting an agricultural program, and the higher education gained so far through this master’s degree, has encouraged me to think more of those that are starting agricultural programs as well as those who are contemplating going into or staying, in the profession. Additionally, I hope to provide ideas to the 23% of agricultural instructors in the United States that have less than five years of teaching experience; which also includes myself (ffa.org).

It’s not a secret that interest in starting agricultural programs has increased in the past decade. In fact, the Iowa FFA Foundation and Nationwide have partnered together to work to offer recognition and support to those that are starting programs. Both mention that while “agriculture is the backbone of America” there aren’t enough teachers or enough programs to fulfill that need (Iowa FFA Foundation, 2018). My goal is to provide instructors that are accepting the challenge and privilege of going into agricultural education and/or starting a program, a resource to assist and support starting
opportunity for the community, students, and school served. A resource to encourage instructors that starting an agricultural education program, and or choosing to stay in the agricultural education profession, is possible and can happen.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW
When broken down, agricultural educators in the United States, 11,000 of them in all, are delivering “cutting-edge and integrated curriculum to students. Ninety-two percent offer agriscience; 71% offer advanced agriscience and biotechnology; 59% offer agricultural mechanics; 49% offer horticulture; 43% offer animal science; and 24% offer environment-related. In 2001, 59% of qualified agricultural education graduates pursued teaching as a career; over 35 agriculture programs closed due to lack of a qualified teacher and 365 agriculture teachers teach in more than one school, and 23% of teachers have five or fewer years of teaching experience” (Fayetteville-Perry School District, 2009).

In addition to the statics above, in 2016 in the midwest (region 3) alone, only 77 instructors graduated from college with an agricultural education degree. This includes Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. Of those that did, 60 of them actually went into teaching middle/high school agriculture (TAG Report, 2016). Out of the six states that are in region three, it equates to about ten new teachers per state, which leaves a small selection to choose from. In addition not enough agricultural instructors are available to fill the needs of agricultural instructors. This statistic doesn’t include however, those that started out teaching high school agriculture and then after a year, two years, or five years, decided to leave the profession.

In the 2016 school year, across the United States 149 new agricultural programs began. Additionally during that school year, 175 new positions were created in
agricultural education. While all 175 of those new positions were not to create new agricultural programs, many of them were to fill those 149 new programs across the country. In the midwest region of the United States specifically, region 3, 20 new agricultural programs within Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Nebraska, and North and South Dakota were opened. Which created 19 new positions needing to be filled (TAG Report, 2016).

According to Osborne in 2009, from the Journal of Agricultural Education, “some [agricultural instructors] enter and remain three years or less” because the profession “literally devours its young.” This issue has been further recognized at the national agricultural education level. Launching in 2009, the National Teach Ag campaign has provided resources and information about what teaching agriculture looks like. The campaign has answered questions such as; what does teaching agriculture mean? Does one need to have an agricultural background? Arguably the most important question, why is agricultural education important? The Teach Ag campaign has worked to answer these questions and provide leverage throughout its short existence. In 2014, the campaign was highly influential across the United States and encouraged many to recognize the need and importance of teaching agriculture (National Teach Ag Campaign, 2014).

The National Teach Ag Campaign does continue to answer several questions related to getting into the agricultural field, but the question specifically related to, how does one start an agricultural program, is not directly answered. There is discussion about how to obtain tools and resources to teach agriculture, but nothing specific to starting an agricultural program. It is discussed in the National Teach Ag campaign that there has been a large growth in agricultural programs in the past decade. It is mentioned 253 new
programs have been opened in the past decade. Other than this statistic, it is discussed that agricultural educators operate as a family sharing resources with one another (National Teach Ag Campaign, 2014). Which can be seen through platforms such as Communities of Practice.

Outside of the National Teach Ag Campaign, other resources that can be found to assist educators in starting an agricultural program are still limited. Ffa.org, hobbyfarms.com, the North Carolina FFA Organization, and a few others, provide a few ideas to starting a program that new instructors may quickly find. Speaking specifically to ffa.org, there are many great pieces of advice and steps on how to start an agricultural program, but they are roughly outlined and don’t speak to the pieces that can oftentimes be forgotten, or merely have to be experienced. The steps that are outlined, guide program planners and the committee through assessing the communities agricultural education needs, goals, and steps to take to accomplish starting the program (ffa.org).

While it is a positive the National Teach Ag Campaign and a few other organizations mentioned have taken initiative to highlight and promote the importance of agricultural education, becoming an agricultural educator and staying in the agricultural field, the next discussion piece is how agricultural educators can stay in the profession, get into the profession, and to speak specifically to, how to start an agricultural program. This question must be discussed if the profession is expected to continue to fill the 253 and growing, agricultural programs in the United States.

As seen by the statistics, it is clear agricultural instructors have plenty on their plates. As agricultural enthusiasts, instructors, and community members want to continue
to open more agricultural programs, obtain and keep agricultural instructors, all for “cutting-edge and integrated curriculum,” the need for a game plan which includes helpful instructional methods, balance, resources, and encouragement are a few sources that must be prioritized and discussed in the agricultural education sector. Students that graduate in agricultural education and those that are young in the profession, need encouragement to actually go and stay in the profession of educating secondary agriculturalists.

While there will never be a perfect resource to provide agricultural educators new to the profession and those starting a program, it has been recognized that guidelines and encouragement are necessary. The first tip of encouragement for most may revolve around, “just go for it.” Going for it is what has to be done when starting a new program. What specifically does that look like however? It’s more than just a checklist outlined by the few resources discussed. It’s more than just getting the necessary tasks to starting a program completed. It first starts with before the agricultural instructor is even a thought. It starts with a vision—a vision to start a program that does more than just open, but flourish. A program that showcases all three areas of the agricultural education model, supports the community and the instructor, and incorporates a passion for agriculture in and outside the classroom.
CHAPTER 3
OBJECTIVES

The goal of this guide is to provide encouragement interwoven with resources to provide content and advice to starting an agricultural program through these objectives:

1. Provide current and new agricultural instructors with steps and objectives to assist them in starting a program; before, during, and “after.”
2. Provide resources to starting an agricultural program in the areas of instruction, FFA and Supervised Agricultural Experiences for the instructor and those involved in the planning process.
3. Set and develop obtainable goals for the new instructor and program.
4. Provide words of wisdom, advice and balance to stay in the profession.
CHAPTER 4
THE PRE-PLANNING PROCESS

Before an agricultural program can actually begin, there are items that can be done before the agricultural instructor is hired. In fact, the more pre-planning that can be done, the faster some of the more detailed information and material can be done for the instructor. The hiring of an agricultural instructor will feel more confident walking into the program if it can be noted some work has been done beforehand to create success for the instructor.

There are a few steps and specifics in beginning the pre-planning process. One of those steps would be networking and integrating the agricultural committee or search team, in other agricultural programs. Even before this step however, an agricultural committee and or search team needs to be in place. The agricultural committee needs to include agricultural community members from a variety of different agricultural professions and backgrounds. Members should be available to guide the process, provide input to developing the program, and be involved in the whole pre-planning process.

To begin the networking process with the then developed agricultural committee, committee members should begin by taking a look at other schools within the area and outside the area is helpful to getting a glimpse into what programs can look like. Taking time to intentionally invest in going and observing other programs is not only important, but also helpful to understanding what possibilities could occur within the anticipated new program.

Coupled with this idea, it’s also important to observe and talk to other agricultural educators. Many schools at the secondary level are used to having teachers who teach a
couple of different classes throughout the day, but agriculture instructors may teach up to eight periods a day and eight different classes. Plus have responsibilities of the other two components of the agricultural education model, FFA and Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAE). Which brings up the second pre-planning point, investment in understanding the agricultural education model; classroom, FFA, and SAE.

The agricultural education model is important as a pre-planning committee to understand because it provides the committee with a glimpse into what is involved with being an agricultural instructor. Seeing each of these components by going and visiting other instructors is a great way to gain exposure to this model. Doing this will not only create more familiarity within the agricultural committee, but will create a deeper understanding of what an agricultural program can look like. As the agricultural committee, being able to guide and support the future instructor in explaining what the agricultural program is will allow the program to thrive and reach others quickly.

The third pre-planning tip which fits right in with networking with other agricultural instructors, is space design. Maybe a plan has already been devised about where the program/classroom environment is going to be set-up, but it’s vital to be active in discovering more about how to design a space in which the students and the instructor are going to be working in. The space needs to match not only the goals, objectives, and needs, but it also needs to be done well enough to provide for the future. To ensure the space fills the need, again speak with other instructors in the area and outside of the area. Ask what their dream space would look like, what changes would be desired, and if no suggestions are stated, maybe a discussion of needs and wants for the space related to equipment, supplies, etc. Again, the space should fulfill the goals and objectives of the
program, but should also strive to meet needs within each course that will be taught and or may be taught in the future. For example, if there is a course such as Animal Science that integrates ‘hands-on learning’ through dissections, it would be beneficial for the program to have sinks, tables and equipment that would cater to those needs.

**The Instructor**

While the pre-planning process may go well, this next step could be one of the hardest steps; finding an instructor that will fit the goals, objectives and community. As equally important as it is to find someone who will fit the needs, goals and objectives, it is vital to find someone who has the enthusiasm, drive, and willingness to grow your program. It is important to have someone who really does want to see all the pre-planning work to come to life. Whomever is chosen to fulfill this need as has been stated before, needs to be someone with enthusiasm, drive and a willingness to grow the program. To fill this need, instructors with or without experience can be considered. If there is someone that hasn’t had any experience teaching yet, don’t take that instructor out of the running. That instructor may match what is needed. Granted an instructor with some experience will probably help, but no matter what starting a new program is still new no matter how experienced or inexperienced an instructor is.

**The Beginning Stages**

After an instructor is chosen, goals are set, the instructional environment has been decided on, and it’s time to fill the room with students, what comes next? Remember the networking, reaching out, and making connections that was discussed in connection with figuring out how to create the space and hire an instructor? These methods don’t stop
there. These steps continue not only in the beginning stages, but all throughout the rest of the career of the program.

More than likely, the agricultural instructor will have a few tools in his or her toolbox for curriculum. However, not only does the instructor have to think about curriculum for the classroom, but also establishment and development of the FFA chapter, and SAE implementation. While it can seem daunting for any instructor starting out to discover how to operate and balance all three areas of agricultural education, there are a few steps that can be taken to make the whole process a little less daunting. It begins with breaking down each sector.
CHAPTER 5
THE CLASSROOM

Curriculum Development

The instruction piece may arguably be the most important sector of the agricultural education model. More than likely when first beginning, the instructor will have some idea of areas of agriculture that are of high interest to him or her. Aside from the interests of the instructor however, research and networking with the ag advisory council, and school administration on what the school and the community has an interest in is equally important. These two interests have to be explored because this will guide what classes are chosen. If the instructor is struggling to decide what courses to teach, choose at least one class in which the instructor would consider their “niche.” One class that the instructor feels confident and maybe a little more experienced with.

Another element to consider when designing the course catalog, is considering if there is curriculum which can be used to support and guide the course to be taught. Even if the curriculum isn’t perfect that is used for the first year, are there resources that could be obtained the next year for curriculum? The Curriculum for Agricultural Educators (CASE) is an example of a curriculum available and helpful to get started and/or one that could be utilized in the future. CASE curriculum provides agricultural and science teachers with an applicable, hands-on approach to leading students through agricultural science concepts. The goal of the curriculum is to provide a foundation for educators to start on and if desired by the instructor, build upon what is already there. The benefits of having training in the multiple CASE curriculums, far outweigh the drawbacks some may have towards what the curriculum has to offer. The biggest benefit CASE provides a new
instructor, is somewhere to start. If later on the instructor would like to teach the course differently, it can easily be done. CASE is created to be modified/changed/flexible for the instructor. Having a professional development training such as CASE can provide confidence knowing one class is fairly to very well planned out and will allow for more focus on courses that the instructor may not feel as confident in. There are also grants available to fund CASE trainings. As a planning committee, it may be beneficial to apply for those grants so that when your instructor is hired, the opportunity to go to the training and purchase the materials for the classroom is available.

If CASE trainings are not available, educators have access to multiple different sources, curriculum, and social media platforms to put together curriculum. One of the most helpful resources is the Communities of Practice space offered by the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE). This web based site is designed to bring together agricultural instructors from across the United States giving them the opportunity to share with one another curriculum, links, resources, and lesson plan ideas. While not everything can be found on the site, the support and family atmosphere of agricultural educators is helpful and encouraging.

Similar to Communities of Practice, seek out similar groups such as Facebook groups that include agricultural instructors within your state, across the country and specified groups for a variety of concentrated areas within agricultural education. Often times posts can be found to guide instructors through questions, lesson ideas, and pure encouragement.

To be more specific about where to find curriculum, and if the instructor is unable to obtain CASE trainings initially, here are a few resources to get started:
Agricultural Business:
  - Colorado State Agribusiness I & II
  - Farm Credit Services from Missouri-- Ag Business/Ag Econ
  - [Agricultural Business & Economics Curriculum Map](#)

Animal Science:
  - Colorado State Animal Science Curriculum
  - [Georgia Agricultural Education: Animal Science](#)
  - [CTE Online: Animal Science Units](#)

Environmental Science
  - Look for your state’s [Envirothon curriculum](#)—this is a competition, but also gives an outline on how you can prepare your class for the competition in the spring.
    - Unit plans are included
    - [The Habitable Planet: Environmental Science Curriculum](#)
    - [Environmental Science Curriculum Maps](#)

Horticulture
  - [Minnesota Nursery and Landscape Horticulture Curriculum](#)
  - [Georgia Agricultural Education Horticulture Curriculum](#)
  - [CTE Online: Plant and Soil Science Curriculum](#)

Power, Structural, Technology, Mechanics and Welding Systems
  - [Georgia Agricultural Education: Power, Structural and Technical Systems (PST)](#)
  - MyCaert
  - The Power Portal from Briggs and Stratton
Additionally in the curriculum planning sector, ask the ag advisory council for help in teaching lessons, resources, and how they could contribute to the program. As hard as it can be to reach out and ask for help, and try to hold everything together, the more that is done to reach out, the more balance and support that will be felt throughout the beginning, present, and future parts of the program. For example, if the program would like to offer something in the sector of drone technology, reach out and make connections with area farmers and members of our ag advisory council about possible options and trainings that could be done to create this opportunity for the program. In the end, more value, expertise, and resources will be found to make an example like this one come to life than if the instructor would have strived to make this happen on his or her own.

Aside from these communities, one of the best places to seek out ideas, curriculum, and guidance would be the instructor’s high school agricultural instructor. Of course this scenario may not fit every agricultural instructor, no matter what, whether the instructor does have connections to an agricultural instructor from previous experience(s) or not, investing and reaching out to other agricultural instructors is one of the most powerful, helpful and encouraging tools that an instructor can gain.

Resources

While planning for courses does take majority of the responsibility when planning for the classroom sector, it is also vital to decipher what resources are available for the program. Likely the school will have set aside a budget, but may not realize that there are more needs than maybe thought in the beginning. The first task that can be done before
even beginning to ask questions or seeing if certain items can be bought, is to develop a list of vitals, needs and wants. In that list, include a section that explains what the product will be used for, and how much it will cost. Doing this allows the school board to see not only how important some of these items are to your program, but even better, where they could obtain some of these items for free or donation.

Not everything, however, is going to come for free or by donation. Work will need to be done through methods such as, extra fundraisers, grant writing, networking, perkins funding (if teaching within a public school) and probably even modifying for the first year with substitution materials. Given time, the resources will come.
CHAPTER 6
FFA

Becoming Chartered

This sector of building an agricultural program can often be one of the most exciting to develop, and one of the most challenging. Due to the fact that this is the sector that majority of the people on the outside see. It’s what first comes to mind to many when agricultural programs are discussed.

When beginning a brand new agricultural program, the very first item of business to take care of, is to contact the state executive secretary. To become an official FFA chapter, a charter must be put in place. To become chartered, the chapter must have a roster, program of activities, chapter constitution, and dues paid by December first. The state executive secretary will have a few examples of what these items are to look like, as will other advisors.

As much as any advisor would like the officer team to help in the development of these documents, at this point an officer team has not been decided upon. Therefore, and for the best, the instructor will need to put together these materials. Purely because the advisor is going to have the most knowledge in developing these documents that the officer team will not yet have. If there is one area of these materials that the soon to be officer team can help with, it would be the section that includes the program of activities- the calendar for the year. The officer team will want to help put that together since the activities and events that will be put together were probably some of their ideas in the first place.

When it comes to the constitution, specifically the area that discusses misconduct, have a few concrete ideas in mind, discuss those with the future officer team and
administration, and see if those ideas are a good fit and correspond with the rules and regulations that are already in place for the school district. Lastly, if at all possible, complete these documents before the school year begins. This will ensure that plans are in place for the development and growth of the new chapter.

The Officer Team

The choosing, development and growth of the officer team is one of the most exciting pieces of developing a brand new chapter. Purely because their excitement for the new program most of the time matches the excitement of the instructor. To create an officer team, put together an application that can be passed out at school (if possible) before the instructor begins the new school year. With that application, include an informational sheet that lays out what each officer position does, and how they will be utilized as an officer in the new FFA program. This is not necessarily an easy step, but by setting this up for the instructor, confidence and promise will be developed. Knowing that there will be at least six students that will know the advisor from the get-go and be apart of the FFA educational process will greatly help in spreading information and excitement about the new chapter.

If it at all possible, as soon as the officer team is put together, work to put together an officer retreat/meeting to begin the educational process, discuss roles, objectives and goals for the first year of the FFA program. Set standards, expectations, a missions statement, modes of organization, communication and a discussion about what the vision of this new chapter is to be. This will not only again help the instructor in spreading knowledge and understanding of what the FFA program is, but also create relationships, team bonding skills, and a space to develop the overall tone of the new FFA program.
New Members

More than likely, there are going to be a group of students that have been anticipating joining FFA for a while and if there is, that’s awesome! If not, be patient! It is easy to get wrapped up in numbers and trends of FFA programs. The focus can get shifted from quantity over quality and that is where problems can begin to develop. Whether or not these new members join the very first day, the last day to sign up for the year or three years later, there is a plan. Aside from this thought process, what needs to be done when new members come? When it comes down to it, it comes down to two concentrated areas: parent involvement and relationships.

To create a strong team of parent involvement put together an informational event at the beginning or near the beginning of the school year that explains what an FFA program is, and how they can be involved. If at all possible, look for community members, parents, the use of your officer team, administration, etc. to help put the event together. Fully anticipate the instructor doing most of the explaining about what the FFA program is going to look like. As always, the more others are involved with explaining what the FFA chapter is all about (the officer team and the agricultural advisory council), the more investment others will want to put into the program.

Additionally at this informational event, give students, parents and community members an understanding and appreciation of how to be involved, what FFA can provide, and why FFA is such a great investment to partake in. Provide each parent with physical materials that can be taken home about the program. Give each family a folder that includes the chapter constitution, the calendar (POA), a list of the career and leadership development events, member and parent expectations, contact information,
registration information, apparel and official dress sign-up sheets, and an overview of what the agricultural program has to offer as a whole; the mission and vision. Possibly even encourage each family to take an FFA handbook if possible (usually the local Farm Bureau will donate those). That way, even more information and a way to educate those involved and others about what an FFA chapter is will be available.

When it all comes down to it however, investment in relationships are vital to the chapter’s success. As the instructor, meet parents, engage with the community, get to know students’ backgrounds; build relationships. In the end, that will be the best asset in growing a successful chapter.

As far as the more detailed information goes, dues, the roster, chapter meetings, ordering jackets, designing apparel, planning fundraising events, and actually doing events and activities that are put together, here are a few other tips of advice to guide the instructor in completing these tasks.

First, dues at the national level are seven dollars, and while it varies by state, state dues are around the same. Twenty dollars is a common amount that some FFA chapters implement. Especially in the first year, this amount may not be a bad idea so there is a little bit of extra money (especially in the beginning) to work with. The roster doesn’t have to be turned in until December 1, but the sooner dues are paid and the roster is put together, the easier for the instructor. This is not to discourage members from joining late, but encourage students to sign up and get dues in by the beginning of October so that if people do decide to join later, they will have a little bit of a grace period to do so.

Digging a little bit deeper into this topic, sometimes programs choose to have all students that are in an agricultural class be a member of FFA whether they want to or not.
There are many pros and cons that go into doing it this way but in the end the decision goes down to the question of, ‘will having all agricultural students as FFA members grow quantity or quality?’ If the motive is just to have a bigger chapter number that may not be the best motive to produce a quality chapter. If the motive however is to provide students with the opportunities (whether they want to or not) available to them and involve them in events, that may be a great reason to have all agricultural students be in FFA. Whatever is decided, focus on quality over quantity.

Fitting hand in hand with dues, and creating memberships, putting together the roster follows these two objectives. One of the easiest ways to put together the roster is to use The Agricultural Experience Tracker (theaet). This system makes it so simple, allows students to put in their own information in, and saves the instructor time and energy. The program varies in price depending on how large the chapter is, but is a great investment for any chapter. As soon as members’ information is in theAET, simply push members over to ffa.org and the roster is complete.

Dues are paid, the roster is done, now it’s time to begin chapter meetings. Even though chapter meetings are built to be for the members and they are to lead the meetings, more than likely the first year it’s going to be a lot of trial and error, interjecting here and there, and encouraging members to speak. Many of them will probably have never experienced this kind of format of an activity. Therefore, the first few meetings will be constant trial and error. To try to guide some of the trial and error there are a few things that can be done to help guide this process: setting up the atmosphere, the agenda, and implementing the idea of, “your vibe attracts your tribe.”
Believe it or not, the environment for the chapter meeting is one of the most important aspects of creating a successful chapter meeting. If space provides, hold chapter meetings in the agricultural classroom. Purely for the sake of the members who aren’t able to be in an agricultural class right away this allows them to experience the environment and atmosphere that the program is working to create. Additionally, if possible, provide some sort of snack. High school students love any sort of food and it always helps get student attendance up.

Prior to the setting, more than likely, the instructor will be putting together the first few agendas. In doing this process, involve the officer team, especially the secretary, with putting together the agenda. The program of activities should make developing monthly agendas simple. As far as the other duties of the other officers go, similarly to creating the first few agendas, the instructor will be in charge of majority of the FFA roles, duties and development of all officer duties. Especially during the first few years but as the years go by, keep working to push their roles and responsibilities onto them. It will be tough at first, but so rewarding for the instructor and the chapter as a whole.

More than likely there aren’t going to be many people that know what FFA is and there most likely won’t be any students that understand what FFA is either. The best action the instructor can do to balance this task, is involve the officer team and involve all agricultural students. Involve students in class to help spread the word about FFA business, put together packets for fruit sales, etc. As hard as it can be to reach out for help, make every effort to ask for lots of help from members in the first few years. Doing so will make the beginning work more enjoyable and will aid in decreasing any burnout that may occur.
Other tips of advice in the FFA Sector

At the beginning of the year, work to plan an officer retreat. While it can be difficult to make connections with the officer team before even possibly have met them, if applications were sent out prior to your arrival, include contact information on those applications. That way the instructor will be able to make those connections. Having the connection and involvement of the officer team from the beginning will not only help the chapter, but assist the instructor in sharing information about the new program.

Once the ground work with the officer team has been set, begin planning for FFA week early. Begin planning the week early because even though FFA week may seem far off at the time, FFA week can serve as leverage to encourage members, the student body, teachers, staff, parents, and the community to see what FFA is all about. This is the first week, the first time that people are able to see in full force what FFA has to offer. Incorporate activities that will not only encourage, excite and show passion for the current FFA members, but also for other constituents within the community. Work to involve the whole constituency in the week and involve as many as possible to encourage investment and commitment to the FFA chapter.

Tucked in the middle of many FFA weeks, is the first round of career and leadership development events. Members and parents are more than likely not going to have much background about what these events are and what they provide for members. Additionally to some of the handouts that were given to members and parents at the beginning of the school year, continual material and education needs to be spread to the group. A great way to incorporate and spread material about these events, is through the
use of the classroom. This is not to say that every class, every day needs to be for
competition preparation, but weaving in competition strategies, learning objectives and
skills into the classes that are already being taught. For example, in agricultural business
have students put together a resume and cover letter. Not only is this a skill that they will
need in the future, but make it come to life, bring in guests, and have students “compete”
in the job interview competition. This provides students with a view into what an event
looks like and allows them to do it right in school, which can save the instructor and the
student time when it comes to preparing students for the events. Events like these are so
valuable, and so connective to lessons learned inside, but more so outside the classroom
environment. Encouraging and assisting the instructor in guiding students to be involved
with these competitions is a great way to gain community involvement and showcase
appearance of how members are choosing to be involved in their newly developed
program. Additionally to this sector, encourage parents to come and watch these events,
or better yet, hold a mini “dress rehearsal” event to allow members a chance to practice
their event before the actual event. This gives a chance for students that aren’t in FFA as
well to see what it feels like to compete in a chosen or assigned event. The more
involvement and support that can be generated from the community and from the parents,
the more the chapter is going to thrive.

Another way to continually build involvement, is to use resources available to
promote the program. Newspapers, Facebook, Instagram, the local radio station,
whatever is available to help promote the program. Using these platforms allows the
program to educate the public, those inside and outside the program, about what
opportunities, resources, etc. that are available because of the agricultural program. This is pure agricultural education, yet while it is pure agricultural education, this isn’t something that the advisor should be fully in charge of. Work together with students and the agricultural advisory board to put together a committee that could lead this promotional area. Use the student led agricultural promotion committee to put together posts, pictures, questions, etc. to release to the public. Work closely with the chapter reporter to develop a brainstormed list of content that can be put together to share with the community about what the program has to offer and ways that the community can be involved.

Of course all new members are going to need FFA jackets and while it sounds simple, there are a few suggestions that can be implemented to make the process go smoothly. If at all possible, borrow some FFA jackets from a neighboring FFA chapter to assist with sizing. As much as ffa.org tries to help with sizing and measurements, having students actually put the jackets on and see how they fit is more beneficial. When ordering jackets, for sure for the boys, order one size bigger. For the ladies, more than likely what size fits currently will fit throughout the rest of high school.

Lastly, when the school year begins (in comparison to another chapter that’s no brand new) more than likely nothing will have been set for National FFA Convention. Before beginning the planning steps to attend, be sure to ask if it’s even possible to take students that first year. While it is expensive to go if there isn’t a lot of funding available, it is a good way to gain some traction for the chapter and allow some of the chapter members to experience and see what FFA provides. Once it has been cleared that
attendance to the convention is possible, begin searching for a place to stay as soon as possible, and develop a schedule for the trip. It may be a possibility that another group that is going on a bus has space that possibly chapter members could go along with. Whether the program decides to send members to National FFA Convention or not that first year, be sure to discuss the importance and value that attending National Convention provides.

The biggest investment that going to National FFA Convention as mentioned earlier, is that it will provide students with a window to see all that FFA provides. From awards, to keynote speakers, members have a chance to gain understanding and passion for all the opportunities within FFA. One of the opportunities that students have the chance to learn more about during National Convention, is the importance and value Supervised Agricultural Experiences provide.
CHAPTER 7
SUPERVISED AGRICULTURAL EXPERIENCES

Supervised Agricultural Experiences, (SAE’s), are commonly the one sector of the agricultural education model that can, without meaning to or not, get overlooked. This sector however can be the most pivotal in encouraging and showcasing reasons why members, parents, and the community should be invested in the program. The experiences that students have had so far in life (if one has grown up in the sector or is apart of an agricultural experience already) stem from the experiences that have been held before being apart of the new program. Before choosing to become an FFA member. Some may not realize right away the passion stems from experiences in agriculture so far, but by digging into SAE’s, students’ passions are brought to life. It becomes something deeper than just cows, plows and sows. It’s something that students find pride in, where significant growth can occur, dreams can come true, and a more dedicated thought to how agriculture connects to everyday life.

That being said, encourage members right away to choose an SAE project. Whether they are someone that is in FFA or not, have each and every student that walks through the classroom doors have an SAE project. Make that SAE project something that can be weaved into the lessons, activities, and pride of the chapter. Have students enter journal entries (records) every other week in class and provide points for doing it. Use those projects to showcase to the community what amazing things their students are doing in agriculture today. People need to see young people today still care about agriculture. They need to see learning come to life, and if connections can be made from just learning about a concept in the classroom, to applying it outside of school, traction is
going to build. More students are going to want to invest in the program because they will be able to see that in agriculture class learning doesn’t just happen, but learning by doing happens.

To build this sector, use the resource of the Agricultural Experience Tracker (theAET). While theAET has been discussed, theAET really does provide great resources and set-up to help students keep track of and invest in real world skills to create and upkeep an SAE project. TheAET also allows students to use the records being taken and apply it to opportunities within FFA. Opportunities such as state degrees (which as the agricultural education model implies, overlaps exactly as it should) connect what students are doing outside the classroom and showcase accomplishments through investing in awards, scholarships, and other recognizable platforms within the FFA.

Students’ SAE projects are what will drive the FFA sector to thrive. Students’ SAE projects are what were already there before the program even began. Using that leverage encourages students to dig into what may already have been and give the program a chance to flourish with continued student investment. Community members are going to see that whatever each students is doing for an SAE project, that that project is providing opportunities in FFA that allow students to fine tune skills and learning objectives from inside and outside the classroom setting. Creating that opportunity and showcasing that buy in, is exactly why the SAE sector of the agricultural education model is so important; it showcases connection.

Some practical steps that can be taken other than utilizing theAET to allow students to begin investing in their SAE projects, is to also emphasize the fact that the
instructor gets to go out and visit these projects. More than likely, there has never been an instructor before at that school that goes out and visits’ students in the agricultural setting, outside of school. To some students at first that may seem different to them but whether students admit it or not, students do find value and importance in knowing that there is one teacher in school that wants to see what fuels each students’ passion. The hardest part from the instructors perspective is finding time to go out and visit these students’ projects. This area specifically instructors should not beat themselves up on; especially with a new program. Set up parameters, set up a list of dates that will work to go out and visit students’ projects. If anything, and if possible, set-up students’ SAE visits in the summer. The first week of summer preferable so that it’s still fresh in students’ minds. Perhaps make it a goal to visit each students’ project one to two times throughout high school. If more visits are needed, more than likely if that student really cares, they will ask for more than one to two visits during the high school term. Even though this sector can be extremely hard to balance, dig into it and as was stated before, use this leverage to drive the other sectors of the agricultural education model. Use this sector to encourage students to be some of the first to get their FFA degree, to get proficiency awards, to be featured in the local newspaper, or whatever it may be to grow and involve the community in the agricultural program through SAE projects.
CHAPTER 8
WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

From the beginning stages of searching for an instructor, all the way down to building the three core components of an agricultural education program, the theme of each of these sectors revolves around building relationships. While every single one of the sectors is essential to putting together an agricultural program, when it all comes down to it, relationships are what will build the program. Relationships with the students, parents, and the community. Finding the balance between being yourself, the instructor, and someone who genuinely cares about the program can sometimes be a difficult balance. The more the instructor stays true to these values, the more enjoyable the profession will be. Additionally to relationship building, one key that is so valuable from a student's perspective is that each student can find trust, find a little bit of vulnerability, and kindness from the instructor. There are going to be days where the material that is being taught isn’t very well known to the instructor and that’s okay. Some days it is more valuable and credible to just let the wall down, be willing to not know, and try again the next day. In the end, having trust, help and credibility from students is more valuable than knowing all the right answers.

The ability to be trusting, a little vulnerable and kind goes right into creating clear expectations for the students and for the instructor. If expectations are not clearly set from the beginning, it’s going to be very difficult to ever get to the point of trust, vulnerability and kindness. Which means that while the instructor needs to stay true to him or herself, there still needs to be clear defined rules and boundaries laid out for the students and the program as a whole. Posting these rules and boundaries on the walls of
the classroom can prove helpful because then not only do the students see them every
day, but then as the instructor you can point them in the right direction when necessary.

When however, a student disobeys the rules and boundaries of the program, know
exactly the consequences to be faced. Make sure students know the consequences and
most importantly, follow through with those consequences. As a young teacher especially
this is so important. Nothing is harder than letting one student misbehave, letting it go
one time, and then trying to correct it later. As difficult as it may be, stick to the plan, and
find the balance between discipline, tough love, and staying consistent.

Another way to build relationships and create community connections for the
program is to find one agricultural community group to be apart of. Don’t take on a lead
role in the group, but be involved to get to know members within the group. They can
serve as people that can help grow the program, provide helpful connections and possibly
vital resources to growing the program. Being apart of the fair board for example may be
a great group to get involved in in the community. Especially if the county has previously
been very involved with the county fair and operations that revolve around that.
Additionally, being involved with a group like the fairboard would allow the instructor to
have more insight on how to prepare students for the county fair come fair season.

Aside from words of encouragement directly related to the profession of being an
agriculture instructor, it’s important to also recognize that the instructor is not everything
nor should the instructor become the everything. It is so easy for the instructor, especially
in the first few years of starting a program, to feel like everything and anything has to be
done by him or her. This however, should not be true. It is so important to remember that
the program is not the instructor’s program, it’s the school’s program. It’s what the students, parents, and community make it out to be. Yes, leadership from the instructor has to be there, but there also has to be a balance between the two.

As much as it’s important to do the best that can be done as the instructor, it is also vital that the instructor remembers to take breaks, do something outside of work life, and breathe. Being an agricultural instructor is definitely a great profession but like any profession, balance has to be found. Especially when starting a new program. This can be very difficult to find within the first few years especially but these first few years are some of the most important to finding that balance. Otherwise burnout can occur and another instructor is lost, and the thing is, that instructor probably had no intentions of leaving the profession when entering but then noticed by year two or three, burnout was present.
CHAPTER 9

REFLECTION

As much as anyone could prepare, as much research as one could do, experience and building relationships are probably the biggest keys to starting an agricultural program. Finding the balance, and getting to know the demographics, needs, and wants for the agricultural program that I have gotten the opportunity to be apart of, and hopefully stay apart of for years to come, have been some of the most valuable lessons that I have gained from starting an agricultural program.

Taking time to truly invest in thinking of the many others I do know and the future of agricultural education in the high school setting, has allowed me to not only think back on what I could have done better or what would I have done differently, but more importantly how much of a gift it is to be able to have the opportunity to hopefully help and encourage others as they start new programs as well.

Starting a new program is definitely a humbling experience, and I hope by breaking apart each sector of the agricultural education model those that are new to the profession or have been in it for a few years, find some aspects of this piece to be helpful to where they are at as an agricultural instructor and most importantly, encourage them to keep going and stay in the profession.

In developing this guide, it has also caused me to reflect on what I may have done differently when I started the program at Western Christian. Looking back, I’m sure there were many places where I wish I would have known this, or wish I would have done it that way. In the end, all of it was, and continues to be, a learning experience. Every challenge, every success grew my skills in management, communication and instruction.
A few items that come to mind specifically I may have done differently when I started the program, would be to get parents and constituents all on the same page about what an agricultural program involves. While I believed I was communicating with them via technology, more face-to-face interaction would have encouraged quicker buy-in to what the vision for Western Christian agriculture was and is about. From the instructional perspective, I wish I would have known I didn’t have to grade everything. The first couple of years I graded everything and while that’s not necessarily a bad thing, there wasn’t a lot balance between my personal life and professional life, which didn’t just stem from grading but over doing several aspects of being an agricultural instructor. I may have also worked to create a stronger balance between my personal and professional life. I found myself extremely burned out the third year and on the edge of wanting to walk out of the profession.

From an FFA stand point, I wish I would have known coming into the profession more about what opportunities and checkpoints there are within the organization. For example, while I haven’t had many state degrees, I wish I would have had more training in how to complete those prior to getting into the profession. However, this is one of those skills that with time and networking, has gotten better.

Aside from being more effective with communication with parents and constituents, striving to find a balance between personal and professional life, and having a greater knowledge of FFA, I don’t think I would have changed a single challenge or success that I went through in starting the Western Christian agriculture program. As far as striving to find a balance between personal and professional life, I think that includes giving yourself a lot of grace, taking care of your body through health and exercise, going
home to take care of your dog, going to the football games, and being okay with walking away from the crazy and choosing to take care of you. This is definitely easier said than done, but it’s absolutely vital to staying in this profession—especially as a teacher just starting out.

In relation to my experience in my graduate program as a whole, there have been several pieces that have guided, assisted and deepened my understanding and appreciation for agricultural education. I was encouraged to think more critically about the breadth of agricultural education outside of the secondary educational setting and connect how agricultural education affects so many other sectors in communities. I have also been encouraged to think more critically about the process and methods which go behind planning agricultural programs. There is strategy behind curriculum planning, creating an effective learning environment, and establishing goals and objectives which reach further than just in the walls of the program.

I have also been able to have the chance to further my knowledge in agricultural topics through professional development opportunities at conferences and CASE trainings. These opportunities have allowed me to grow in my agricultural knowledge and network within the agricultural education world. I think specifically back to one conference in particular where I was able to gain a higher understanding of how I could better implement Supervised Agricultural Experiences in my program. Beneficial lessons such as this one have been incredibly helpful in growing myself professional in the agricultural sector.

Aside from the agricultural courses that I have been able to partake in through this program, I also gained professional skills and applicable methods of instruction through
curriculum instruction courses. I was encouraged to think about and apply methods to assist my students in learning agricultural concepts and objectives. Methods such as reading comprehension, how to cater to a variety of students needs, backgrounds and learning styles. All of which have encouraged me to be more intentional about lesson planning and instructional methods.

Agricultural education truly is an area of instruction that is completely different than any other subject. Being able to be apart of a subject area though that allows for a variety, a challenge and one that so deeply connects to the backbone of all other subject areas, is truly a gift. My hope is because of this opportunities others (especially within the profession and maybe even outside the profession) will realize how much of a gift it is to be apart of this agricultural community. If they are given the challenge and joy to start an agricultural program, they will have a place to start with the resources, steps, advice and words of encouragement within this piece they can take from. No matter where someone is in their agricultural profession, but especially if they get the chance to start an agricultural program, I hope they are encouraged to know that they can do it.
CHAPTER 10:

PLANNING CHECKLISTS

Starting an Agricultural Program: The Pre-Planning Process Checklist

This checklist is to be used during the pre-planning process specifically for administration, the agricultural advisory council and before the instructor begins their contracted year. This checklist is to be used after the school has made the decision to start an agricultural program. To use this checklist successfully, this process should begin at least one year prior to the start of the program.

**Fall**

- Build a strong and dedicated agricultural advisory council; include a variety of demographics.
- Develop the program vision, goals and objectives. This should include all areas of the three circle model and the anticipated instructor.
- Network with other program instructors within and outside the area to further develop, refine and shift the program vision, goals and objectives.
- Investment in agricultural education specific to the planning committee—specifically the three circle agricultural education model.
- Plan, solidify and or develop the program environment(s).
- Seek grants, perkins funding, and community involvement to begin investing in materials necessary for the classroom, curriculum and program overall.
Spring

- Begin instructor search and hire instructor by April.

- Coupled with the vision, goals and objectives, work with the newly hired instructor to develop, discuss and implement anticipated curriculum and the course booklet.

- Continue to seek funding for materials.

- Develop a list of needs and wants for the program with the instructor; include equipment, curriculum, materials, and even FFA items.

- Share officer application with anticipated FFA members--make it a goal to have six officers set in stone before the school year starts.

- Invite instructor to meet with anticipated students and community connections.

- Connect with your local state FFA Executive Director and obtain materials to begin the FFA chartering process.

- Decide if traveling to National Convention is possible. If so begin the planning process, funding, etc.
Starting an Agricultural Program: The First Year Checklist

This checklist is to mainly be used by the instructor (with the continued support of administration and the ag advisory council) during the first year of the program.

**Summer-Fall**

**July-August:**

- Plan National FFA Convention. Create an itinerary, find transportation and a hotel.
- Plan courses to be taught with the full intention of teaching all courses about all three sectors of the agricultural education model.
- Develop the Chapter Constitution, Program of Activities, list of members and Chapter name. Once completed send to your state FFA Executive Director for approval.
- Plan and hold an officer retreat.

**August-October**

- Plan and hold a student and parent informational welcome night that lays out what the vision and goals of the program are, and what an agricultural program includes.
- Set up all ag and FFA students on theaet.com. Check in with administrator to see if there is room in the budget to obtain this site. This will create simplicity for membership submission to the state and national level.
- Collect dues from members.
- Attend the district Greenhand Fire Up with as many students as possible.
Connect and get on the email list of the local extension office to stay up to date on fair and county information.

Prepare and enter Fall CDE participants into the state system.

Order FFA jackets. Borrow some from a neighboring school for sizing purposes.

Hold at least one fall fundraiser to get your chapter up and running.

**November-December**

- Submit memberships and dues to State and National FFA by November 1.
- Plan and hold a charting ceremony. Prior to this, the FFA Executive Director will need to approve you as an official chapter.
  - Obtain documents for the ceremony (ffa.org)
- Begin planning FFA Week with the officer team.
- Introduce to each class the various Career and Leadership Development Events and encourage students to get involved.
  - **CDE/LDE Options**

**Winter-Spring**

**January-March**

- Prepare Career and Leadership Development Event participants.
  - Develop a schedule and have students sign up for time to prepare for their event.
- Continue to plan and prep for FFA Week.
  - Highly consider inviting a couple state officers to come and interact with your classes for a day during that week.
☐ Ask students who is interested in showing through FFA at the county or state level.

☐ Enter and submit all Career and Leadership Development Event participants for Sub-Districts into the state system by February 10.

☐ Enter and submit all Career and Leadership Development Event participants for Districts into the state system by February 25.

☐ Plan State FFA Convention. Book hotel rooms and plan an itinerary that keeps students very involved and engaged.

☐ Be on the lookout for county and state fair information.

**April-August**

☐ Enter State Convention participants into the system by April 1.

☐ Enter Summer Career Development participants in the state system.

☐ Create a summer SAE visit schedule. Plan to visit each student within the first two weeks of summer.

☐ Attend the county fair. Check in with students but also find out what your role is at the fair.

☐ Attend the state fair. Even if you don’t have students there, it’s still good to get involved and see what’s going on.
REFERENCES


