

Visuals and Pathways in the Agricultural Industry

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Introduction

Agriculture is the largest industry in California worth nearly \$37.5 billion. The agricultural industry generates \$100 billion in related economy (NASDA, 2017). It is imperative all students learn the importance of agriculture in their lives. For students who have a Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapter at their school, the program enables students to be exposed and embrace the value agriculture. However, there is a lack of value given to agriculture by students who do not have either an FFA chapter or agriculture related courses taught at their school.

The purpose of this project is to interact with and educate young high school students about jobs offered in the agriculture industry around them on the Central Coast. Because the central coast is so rich in agriculture, it can help those who still don't have an idea of what they want to study for after high school.

Background

California's Central Coast is home to a wide range of mountains and valleys that stretch for miles where farming operations excel, according to researchers at UC Davis. These small valleys provide unique climatic niches and soil types which are ideal for year-round production of many fruits, vegetables and seed crops. Vegetable production constitutes a \$175,743,000 industry in San Luis Obispo County, a \$328,620,574 industry in Santa Barbara County and a \$296,839,000 industry in Ventura County (Vegetable Research and Information Center, UC Davis, 2017).

California leads all other states in farm income. It's positioned as the agricultural powerhouse of the United States. About 73% of the state's agricultural revenues are derived from crops while livestock commodities generate 27% of revenues. (Netstate.com, 2016). According to the researchers at Netstate, (Netstate.com, 2016) top five agricultural products are dairy products, greenhouse and nursery products, grapes, almonds, and cattle and calves. California produces almost all of the country's almonds, apricots, dates, figs, kiwifruit, nectarines, olives, pistachios, prunes, and walnuts. It leads in the production of avocados, grapes, lemons, melons, peaches, plums, and strawberries (Netstate.com, 2016).

Therefore, with such a high economic impact, careers within the California agricultural industry are needed, profitable and valuable. High school students need to be made aware such opportunities exist. Spreading the knowledge and awareness of agriculture related programs, organizations and careers are important. Many in the Central Coast believe that agriculture simply means farming but the industry extends far beyond farming. "Agriculture includes the study of plants, soil, animals, lab work, nutritionists and research. There are over 30 majors within the field of agriculture as well as a number of different career opportunities" (Studying Agriculture in the U.S).

Methods

In order to present quality information about agricultural careers to high school students, specific steps and tools were required. The project developers began by selecting the most effective method of providing information, which was preparing visually appealing posters for the classroom (Miller, 2007). By doing so, the audience would be engaged with realistic images and testimonies from current industry leaders to provide a better understanding of potential agricultural careers.

The information provided on the posters was collected using online data, information from personal interviews with Cal Poly counselors, college alumni, and information from the Career and Services office at Cal Poly. The specific majors the workshop focused on were those listed within the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Science. Some examples of the majors were Agricultural Science, Fruit Science, Viticulture, Dairy Science, and Animal Science. Courses in each major were listed as a subtopic, such as Introduction to Poultry Management, Pomology, Citrus and Avocado, General Dairy Husbandry and others. By giving major and course perspectives both students and counselors were able to distinguish between the various fields the agriculture industry entails.

Examples pertaining to the various job opportunities in the agriculture industry were provided including Mission Avocados, Driscoll's, Taylor Farms, or other agriculture companies. Other positions discussed were management positions, human resources, sales, research, biosecurity, and operations.

Prior to the formation of the posters the developers conducted several interviews with agriculture industry professionals. The project developers compiled their research and career findings into three, 11x14 inch posters. Each poster featured a career, actual person in that career, and data surrounding that particular job. Posters created included: Field Representative, Assistant Production Manager and Quality Control. The posters were printed and provided to local high school for feedback. Pioneer High School in Santa Maria, California, enabled the project developers to bring the posters to an agricultural leadership class. The class was divided into four groups and each group evaluated all three posters. The students provided group feedback regarding poster appeal, colors, font, content and impact it had their perspective on agriculture.

The posters aid in demonstrating to students agriculture goes beyond the paradigm that agriculture is simply working on a farm. Once students analyzed the posters, the project developers implemented a survey. The surveys were used to quantify and measure the effectiveness of the career posters and information provided.

Results and Discussion

The results obtained from the survey proved the information provided to high school students was effective and served its purpose to educate a potentially uninformed audience about agriculture career opportunities. The results from the survey were collected and recorded in a graph to show the effectiveness of the posters and the improvements needed to make the posters more effective. The data also showed an increase of agriculture awareness among the high school students and counselors as the reviewers were asked specifically, if they learned anything after looking at the posters.

For future references, the author would suggest to have multiple posters to present to the students in order for them to have a wide range of career opportunities in the agriculture industry. Also, being able to present to multiple classes will help the authors gather better feedback of how effective this project is. Improvements to be made for future implementations would be the size of the posters. If the posters are printed larger students would have an easier time reading and viewing the information provided. The creators realized that high school student enjoyed discussing the posters more than reading them themselves. For future implementation it would be ideal to have the creators present about the majors and career rather than passing out the posters and have student review over them.

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