

“TAGGED” a High School Agricultural Education Immersion Program

A Senior Project

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By

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Introduction

Agricultural Education

In 1917, a federal piece of legislation was passed known as The National Vocational Education Act, formally known as the Smith Hughes Act. This provided federal aid for public schools to promote agricultural and vocational education, and thus, agricultural education was funded in the United States. Throughout the years, Vocational Education became formally known as Career Technical Education, enhancing students through hands on instruction and leadership (“Agricultural Education - Early Congressional Efforts, An Early Philosophy of Agricultural Education”, 2017).

As of 2017, more than 80,000 students in California are enrolled in an agricultural education course and this number shows a steady increase each year. However, as the number of students enrolled in Agricultural Education courses increases, the number of agricultural educators is not meeting the demand. In 2014 alone, there was a 40% increase of students enrolled in agriculture courses; whereas, California only increased its number of agriculture teachers by 15% (“Agriculture Teacher Shortage”, 2016).

Many students are introduced to the agriculture industry solely by taking an agriculture course(s) in middle school or high school. According to the Teach Ag California campaign, agricultural educators inspire students to become leaders in and out of the agriculture industry, leaving a lasting effect on the lives of students, and in turn, the industry as a whole (2015).

Therefore, there is a need for an Agricultural Education Immersion Program to assist in informing students in California about the profession of agricultural education. At this multi-day event, students entering their sophomore through senior year can attend workshops and sessions to better understand the need and benefits of becoming an agricultural educator.

Background

According to the 2014 National Association of Agricultural Educator’s (NAAE) National Teach Ag Campaign Report, a total of 96 agricultural teaching positions went unfilled across the nation. California is located in the region with the highest number of unfilled positions. 739 teachers left the profession nation-wide, testifying to the growing issue of retention in the field of Agricultural Education.

As reported by 2016 Agriculture Teacher Supply and Demand Overview the national average salary for high school agricultural educators is \$40,142. However, compared to the average California agricultural instructor starting salary, beginning teachers can earn \$53,393 and on average, 5-year teachers earn \$62,987, according to data from the California Agricultural Education, Teacher and Program Demographics R2 Query Report 15/16.

To further understand barriers of entry to the field of agricultural instruction, the California Agricultural Teachers Association is currently completing its Vision 2030 Project. This project is defined on the CATA 2030 Vision website as:

Vision 2030 started as a consensus of interest by California agriculture educators towards “re-calibrating” and taking a reflective look at the history, progression, and current standing of California’s agricultural education profession within the California Agricultural Teacher’s Association (CATA, 2017).

Within this project, Agricultural Educators outlined areas of concern for the profession, which include: curriculum, funding, mentoring, Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) Projects, and other miscellaneous areas of concern (Gossman and Stroud, 2015). Each of these factors contributes to the retention of educators in Agricultural Education.

Agricultural Education Immersion Program

Minnesota piloted the first Agricultural Education Immersion Camp in the summer of 2015. During this program, students participated in activities including: “preparing and presenting a 15-minute lessons with hands on activities, touring agricultural education departments, listening to a panel of experienced, beginning and aspiring agricultural education teachers and visiting with collegiate recruiters,” (Willette, 2015). For California to launch its first immersion program in agricultural education, a similar framework will be used, however, it will be important for this program direct the immersion towards the needs of agricultural education in the state of California, along with working to affectively change the student cognitive behavior.

Methods

Southern Minnesota Center for Agriculture created an Agricultural Education Camp in 2015. The first step in planning the Agricultural Education Immersion Program is to contact the individuals who planned the event. This initial contact is to listen to personal experiences from the personnel who planned and executed the event. It is also an opportunity to ask to view planning materials, such as agendas, invitations, internal structure documents, etc. Lastly, it will be important to understand their recommendations and accommodations surrounding the event.

The next step will be to identify existing efforts to recruit and retain educators, such as the National Association of Agricultural Educator’s (NAAE) State Teach Ag Results (STAR) Program, the California Teach Ag campaign directed by Bonnie Baxter, and the National Teach Ag Campaign directed by Ellen Thompson. These campaigns serve to promote and advocate for the agricultural education profession aimed towards high school agricultural education students. Ms. Baxter and Ms. Thompson will be helpful to understand the current status of the campaign and help shape the direction of the Agricultural Education Immersion Program in progressing these efforts.

Knowing the agricultural education needs in California and the framework for the Minnesota FFA Immersion Program, the objectives of the program can be established. Once the objectives are established, it is important to identify how each of the objectives will be accomplished. This will allow the schedule to be formed session by session.

The next step is to identify possible sources of funding and/or resources, such as collaboration between the Teach Ag Campaign, the California FFA Association and Foundation, and the California Agriculture Teacher’s Association (CATA).

Results and Discussion

As a result of these findings, it is suggested that the Agricultural Education and Immersion Program be planned in partnership with the California Teach Ag Campaign and be named “TAGGED.” This partnership will enable the Teach Ag Campaign to continue their efforts in promoting agricultural education as a profession. Along with this partnership, it is also proposed that the program base its objectives that align with the National Association of Agricultural Educator’s (NAAE) State Teach Ag Results (STAR) Program. The following objectives of TAGGED are based on the STAR Program’s current Recruitment and Communications Strategy Guide, Minnesota’s current Agricultural Education Immersion Camp, and the Teach Ag Campaign objectives: 1. Engage with and cultivate mentoring relationships with agricultural education professionals, 2. Understand the extrinsic and intrinsic value of teaching agriculture, 3. Be exposed to real life experiences as an agricultural educator, 4.

Discover what steps to take in order to become an educator, and 5. Receive professional and leadership development training.

To accomplish these objectives, students will engage in large group sessions that facilitate why there is a dire need for retaining agricultural educators, how to become an educator, and what students have to look forward to in this profession. In addition, students will attend workshops that help them understand their strengths, engage with teachers in a panel-style seminar, and uncover effective teaching strategies to aid in preparing their capstone project – teaching a short lesson to their peers. Students will also experience agricultural related workshops that broaden their exposure to the agriculture industry. In order to cultivate relationships with professionals, incoming teachers, and collegiate representatives, the first night of the program will host a networking reception. A department tour will be coordinated with a surrounding agriculture program.

Overall, “TAGGED,” an Agricultural Education Immersion Program, will encourage high school students to consider a career as a high school agricultural educator through a hands-on experience.

References

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