

THE FUTURE FARMERS OF AMERICA

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Immediately following the passing of the Smith-Hughes Act in 1917 which made possible vocational agricultural training for rural youth, high school boys began to organize agricultural clubs. These clubs were organized by the boys' own initiative and they were guided and directed by the local instructor of vocational agriculture. Several local schools met and organized districts and some even went so far as to organize state associations. These state and local organizations were organized under various names, and some of the most popular were Future Farmers, Young Farmers, and Junior Farmers.

The first recommendation for a national organization of vocational agricultural students was made in 1928 by the Western Regional Conference of Vocational Teachers. This conference was held in Denver and Mr. W. A. Ross, now National Executive Secretary was one of the foremost promoters of the recommendation for a national organization. This conference went on record as favoring a national organization of vocational agricultural boys with a constitution patterned very closely after that of the Future Farmers of Virginia.

The organization of the Future Farmers of Virginia was among the earliest of state organizations. This organization was under the guidance of Mr. Henry C. Groseclose, who is now National Treasurer of the organization of Future Farmers of America.

The first National Convention was held in the Baltimore Hotel in Kansas City, Missouri in 1928. Leslie Applegate from Freshhold, New Jersey was elected first National President. Dr. C. H. Lene, at that time Chief of Agricultural Education, Washington, D. C. was the first National adviser and Mr. Henry C. Groseclose was selected as the first executive secretary and treasurer.

Since the first National Convention which was held in 1928 a convention has been held annually at Kansas City, Missouri. Each chartered state association is represented by two voting delegates at the National Convention, and the voting delegates carry on the business with the National President presiding over the convention.

It was decided in the beginning to collect ten cents from each active member as membership dues. Since that time the dues have been neither raised nor lowered, nor has any special assessment been made. The organization has been financed from the membership dues and from royalties which have been paid by various companies selling official FFA merchandise, and since the beginning the organization has never been in debt.

Everyone is acquainted with some kind of a high school club or organization, such as literary clubs, library clubs, athletic clubs and social organizations, and the activities of such organizations are looked upon as extra-curricula activities. The organization of Future Farmers of America has unfortunately been placed in this category by a few people who have not understood the fundamentals of the organization, and the principles upon which it is founded.

The founders of the organization of Future Farmers of America did not have in mind building a one-sided organization of vocational agricultural students in which anyone could become a member. They had in mind building an organization of the boys, by the boys, and for the general welfare of the boys. They were not thinking in terms of extra-curricula activities, on the contrary they were thinking about an organization so interwoven with the vocational agriculture class and instructor until it would become inevitably an extra-curricula activity.

The fundamental principals of the organization are as follows: To promote competent rural aggressive leadership, cooperative young men, who uphold high scholastic standards, young men who are thrifty and at the same time promoters of an improved agriculture, young men who are good sports, good citizens, patriotic, with strong character, and young men who specialize in community service and developers of organized recreation for entire communities.

Upon those fundamentals the organization of future Farmers was founded, and as a consequence the small convention of 1928 grew to the great convention of more than ten thousand boys in 1938. The organization today reaches from Maine to Hawaii and from Washington to Porto-Rico. There are approximately two hundred thousand members in over six hundred local chapters.

#### VALUE OF FFA

The first party to receive benefit from any organization is the individual member. The Future Farmers of America Organization is no different in that respect from any other organization, and the benefits of the organization to the individual are many. The organization furnishes inspiration, develops character, teaches cooperation, develops aggressive leadership, fosters patriotism, develops thrift, encourages scholarship, creates a love for the farm, widens social contacts, improves thinking ability, improves farming skill, develops appreciation of good farming, increases ability as public speaker, and ability to participate in and conduct public meetings, gives financial experience, improves morale, develops pride in achievement, develops unselfish interest in community, develops initiative and self-reliance.

There are many recipients of direct benefit from the organization of Future Farmers of America other than the individual member. For instance, the farm family and farm home from where the boy comes. The organization helps raise the moral tone or standards of living, improves agricultural practices, increases interest in community, lightens the family's burden, provides improvements and conveniences, increases family enthusiasm and pride, encourages and inspires

younger members of the family, increases faith of family in farming and education, increases faith of family in boy, and above all improves family relations.

In addition to helping the farm family the FFA helps the school in many respects. It improves scholarship, improves school spirit, and morale, helps bring school and patron closer together, helps hold interest of boy in school, reduces disciplinary troubles, improves school surroundings, brings honor to the school and adds to its prestige, enlarges school's field of service and improves efficiency, helps make school a better community center, the chapter serves as a guide and pattern for other school activities, improves instruction in vocational agriculture.

The Future Farmers of America also helps the community in many different ways, it helps make the youth conscious of community affairs, improves agricultural standards, offers a distinct type of service to community, stimulates cooperation, tends to raise moral standards and tone of community, insures community of good farmers in the future, encourages and provides organized rural recreation and social activities, educates toward the farm rather than away from the farm.

The state and nation also receive direct benefits from the organization, because after all the United States of America is an agricultural democracy, and its future depends a great deal upon the future development of agriculture. The organization develops a higher type of citizenship, fosters patriotism, and focuses attention of rural youth on unselfish service.

The organization provides a nation-wide farm boy organization with high ideals and unselfish purposes, absolutely free from politics and "isms," it teaches members to work for a living and pay their way as they go, and it emphasizes dignity of labor, especially farm labor.

In summarizing there are five groups who receive direct benefit from the organization of Future Farmers of America. They are the individual member, his family, his school, his community, and his state and nation.

There are a few characteristics which characterize a future farmer, and some of the outstanding characteristics are his age, which is from fourteen to twenty-one, his honesty, his rural mindedness, and he is modest and ambitious. He has a strong faith in his own ability, and he feels a strong "gang" spirit. Within the heart of every future farmer there is a deep sense of justice, a love for competition, and a willingness to give and take. He is business-like and very practical minded, being both dependable and impressionable. He thinks for himself, plans ahead and consults older people for advice. He insists upon real values and the genuine rather than the false and artificial; he is loyal, tolerant, honorable and gentlemanly. All future farmers have some well developed work habits and a strong faith in democracy and the future of America and American Agriculture.