



# *FFA Guide to Recruitment and Retention*



Ideas, tips and strategies for promoting your agricultural education program.

# FFA Guide to Recruitment and Retention

Ideas, tips and strategies for promoting your agricultural education program.

Sponsored by Monsanto Company as a special project of the National FFA Foundation.



## The FFA Mission

FFA makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for **premier leadership, personal growth and career success** through agricultural education.

## The Agricultural Education Mission

Agricultural Education prepares students for successful careers and a lifetime of informed choices in the global agriculture, food, fiber and natural resources system.

Prepared and published by the National FFA Organization in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Education as a service to state and local agricultural education agencies.

The National FFA Organization affirms its belief in the value of all human beings and seeks diversity in its membership, leadership and staff as an equal opportunity employer.

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# FFA Recruitment and Retention

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# FFA Recruitment and Retention Credits

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**Special Note:** Permission is given to reproduce information from this manual for agricultural education recruitment efforts.

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# FFA Recruitment and Retention

## Introduction

*Student recruitment and retention does not "just happen." Agricultural education instructors need to coordinate purposeful activities that attract students to enter and continue in their programs.*

Agricultural education is essential to offering students a complete and well-rounded education. Agriculture courses provide a hands-on approach to learning scientific, communication and career-skill lessons not available in most other courses.

Nonetheless, many "roadblocks" come between students and agricultural education programs. Perceptions, attitudes, scheduling conflicts and even a lack of qualified instructors create a need for recruitment and retention efforts that are both intentional and effective. FFA advisors are called to address the need and thereby serve students, local agricultural education programs, communities, the agricultural industry and their own professional goals.

The *FFA Guide to Recruitment and Retention* provides the tools needed. Use it to find information, insights, ideas and how-to details to create top-notch recruitment and retention efforts.

### How to Use This Guide

The *FFA Guide to Recruitment and Retention* provides:

- Insights into recruitment rationale and program quality;
- An overview of the recruitment process;
- Tips and samples for a recruitment and retention plan and calendar; and
- Suggestions for overcoming roadblocks that stand between students and agricultural education enrollment, including tips and samples for specific strategies.

The term "program" is used throughout the manual to refer to the complete scope of agricultural education, including instruction, supervised agricultural experience programs (career-related projects) and FFA involvement.

# FFA Recruitment and Retention Basics

## In This Section

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**Why Recruit?**

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## Why Recruit?



Recruitment and retention involves attitude as much as activities. To successfully recruit and retain quality students, you must believe these areas are important and translate that belief into action.

The most important job you do is teach. The results of your teaching are only evident in the quality of students who go forth from your agricultural education program. The more students, the wider and more influential your results.

The task of maintaining and replenishing the supply of students who benefit from agricultural education programs falls directly on the teacher's shoulders. Although many others can assist, it is up to you to ensure that potential "customers" (students) and those who influence their "buying" decisions (administrators, counselors, parents and others) realize the benefits of becoming and remaining involved in agricultural education.

Selling your program to students, parents and the community doesn't just happen. It requires hard work and dedication. Those who are most successful at student recruitment and retention make these matters a priority. They take ownership of recruitment and retention activities. If you are committed to the future of agricultural education and your agricultural education program, you must be willing to invest time, money and effort in recruitment.

This guide is designed to help you prepare for, create and carry out purposeful, ongoing recruitment and retention efforts.

# FFA Recruitment and Retention Basics

## Job One: A Quality Program

The first step in preparing to “sell” your program to potential students is to ensure it is a high-quality, good-value product. Does it provide the benefits today’s students need—relevant information, interesting learning activities, career readiness and preparation for further education? What “price” do students have to pay to pursue those benefits—do they have to forfeit a “college prep” program, give up other activities or risk their peers’ ridicule?

## Local Program Success

Local Program Success is a national initiative to build quality agricultural education programs. Teachers and other agriculture and education leaders have identified the following seven keys to success in agricultural education:

- 🍏 One overall guiding factor, program planning
- 🍏 Three Components of Local Program Success
  - Strong classroom and laboratory instruction (contextual learning)
  - Supervised agricultural experience (SAE) programs (work-based learning)
  - Active FFA chapters (a connecting activity between school and careers)
- 🍏 Three Strategies of Local Program Success
  - Strong community and school partnerships
  - Marketing
  - Professional and program growth

Once you attain a quality program, selling it will come easily.

## Recruitment and Retention Are Integral to All Your Efforts

Everything you and your students do tells someone about your program. How you teach, what you teach, how you relate to students, how active your students are—all these say something about your program to other students, teachers, administrators, community leaders and parents. Do students want to be a part of these activities? If they perceive them to be worthwhile and fun, they likely will.

FFA is an integral part of a complete agricultural education program. FFA activities should not “drive” your program, but they do complete its offerings. Involving every student in FFA means providing every student with a complete education in agriculture. Recruitment and retention play important roles as this philosophy is used to educate counselors, administrators and others about the value of agricultural education and FFA.

## Others Can Help

While recruitment and retention are your responsibility, you don’t have to tackle them alone. It is highly recommended that you involve students. For one thing, students can often create approaches that “speak” to their peers much better than an adult can. In addition, student recruiters expand their learning and leadership while serving the agricultural education program. Most of the materials in this guide can be used by students to complete recruitment and retention activities.

FFA Alumni and members of your advisory council can also be effective student recruiters, as well as role models and mentors who encourage students to remain involved in your program. See page 10 for suggestions on involving these individuals.

## Build Program Quality

What is quality in agricultural education? The Local Program Success initiative, a joint program of national agricultural education organizations, has identified strong classroom and laboratory instruction, supervised agricultural experience (SAE) programs and an active FFA chapter as the three key components of a quality local agricultural education program. Additionally, quality programs employ the strategies of strong community and school partnerships, marketing and professional and program growth. Finally, program planning is critical to each component and strategy.

A quality program attracts quality students. As explained below, the components and strategies of quality local programs are also keys to successful recruitment and retention.

Quality programs do not just happen. They cannot exist without a commitment from the teacher to develop the areas that are key to creating quality in an agricultural education program.

## Teacher

The teacher is the key to a successful recruitment program, just as the teacher is the key to a quality instructional program. Students relate, or fail to relate, to teachers based on a number of variables—instructional quality, personality, commitment, caring, innovativeness, etc. It is important that you, as the teacher, commit to recruiting, and then retaining, students.

## Curriculum

“If you build it, they will come.” An innovative, science-based curriculum is the cornerstone to developing program quality. Without a quality curriculum, students may be recruited, but they will not be retained. Curricula should be updated on a regular basis (every two to three years) with many activities incorporated into each unit of instruction. Curricula must be challenging and interesting to students, as well as applicable to their daily lives.

## Support

Program support is essential if you are to attract and retain high-quality students. Especially important is the support garnered from administrative, guidance, community and funding resources. For people to support your program, they must know about it. They must also be able to take some ownership of it.

## SAE

Supervised agricultural experience (SAE) programs create interest in subject matter, provide for individualized instruction, motivate and add an element of continuity to a student's program. The prospect of participating in an SAE may be an effective recruitment tool with career-focused students. SAEs are also very effective in the retention of students. They provide an opportunity for teachers to connect with students, both personally and in a teacher-student setting.

## FFA Chapter

Teachers believe an active FFA chapter is key in developing a successful recruitment and retention program. An active FFA chapter provides opportunities for students to experience individual and group successes and to develop the interpersonal social skills emphasized by employers. Involvement in FFA activities provides the continual motivation needed to sustain student interest in an educational setting. FFA activities are also very effective in retaining students once they have registered for your program.

## Make the Most of Curriculum

Both the content and the structure of your agricultural education curriculum will influence its appeal and availability to students. Consider the following issues:

**Local priorities:** As often as possible, adapt state-provided curriculum or core standards and competencies to address local needs and issues.

**Science credit:** Work to have your agricultural science courses receive science credit. This allows more students to have access to your classes, raises the perception of rigor in your program and is a very effective recruiting tool.

**Semester offerings:** Short-duration, stand-alone courses can attract students who may be able to fit only one semester of agricultural education into their schedules.

**FFA:** Find every opportunity to incorporate FFA-related learning activities into the classroom. Career development events (CDEs), for example, are solidly tied to coursework.

**Concurrent enrollment:** College courses taught in your program are yet another tool to increase enrollment and retain students.

## Make the Most of SAEs

The following indicators of a quality SAE program also influence the attractiveness of SAE programs in recruiting and retaining students:

**Documented:** A quality SAE incorporates a record-keeping system that allows for careful and complete project evaluation. This ability to prove results makes students more attractive to employers and colleges...which makes SAEs attractive to students.

**Curriculum Based:** By using information learned in your curriculum, a quality SAE demonstrates that agricultural education is practical and applicable. Students are attracted to learning that connects with the real world.

**Student Managed:** Students seek opportunities to serve as their own boss. By the time a quality SAE has reached completion, nearly all the decisions are student initiated.

**Planned and Comprehensive:** A quality SAE progresses from short-term action to long-term goal setting. Students appreciate actually learning to do planning, rather than just talking about it.

**Recognized:** Students participate in activities in which they gain recognition. A quality SAE garners peer, parent and teacher recognition, as well as the possibility of local, state and national awards. For more information on SAEs, consult SAE: Experiencing Agriculture. (See “Resource” section for ordering information.)



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## Support

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Program support is essential if you are to attract and retain high-quality students. Especially important is the support garnered from administrative, guidance, community and funding resources. For people to support your program, they must know about it. They must also be able to take some ownership of it.

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## Make the Most of Program Support

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Students' decisions about your program can be heavily influenced by parents, other teachers, guidance counselors and administrators. Build their support with ongoing communication and involvement.

- Include parents in your recruitment contacts with other parents. (See "Overcome Roadblocks" section for sample parent contact letters.)
- Become involved in activities that parents are involved in so you can get to know them.
- Invite and encourage parents to attend at least one departmental function, such as an FFA banquet or open house.
- Distribute a program newsletter to parents, other teachers, guidance counselors and administrators.
- Maintain supportive relationships with other teachers.
- Maintain supportive relationships with counselors and administrators.
- Have students report to the school board on a regular basis.
- Recognize program supporters.

For additional information, consult *A Guide to Local Program Success*. (See "Resource" section for ordering information.)

# Sample Quality Checklist

The agricultural education community, through its Local Program Success initiative, has identified activities that move agricultural education programs to high quality levels. Review this list and check off the things you are doing already. Then, highlight your least active areas and plan ways to address them.

## Program Planning

- ☐ Develop a shared vision for your program.
- ☐ Create action plans to fulfill your program's vision.
- ☐ Implement your plan.

## Instruction

- ☐ Spend time on planning at all levels, including the lesson, activity and program levels.
- ☐ Create an instructional program based on student interests and agricultural career opportunities.
- ☐ Make "real-world" connections for learners.
- ☐ Engage all students across all ability levels.
- ☐ Care about students and be an advocate for their needs.
- ☐ Accept and recruit students with diverse ideas, abilities, backgrounds and cultures.
- ☐ Become part of your community on a personal level. Show a vested interest in the community.
- ☐ Stay up-to-date on technology. Consider the equipment you use in the classroom and the agricultural technology you teach about as class content.
- ☐ Be a student of teaching. Keep learning *how* to teach, not just *what* to teach.

## SAE

- ☐ Plan comprehensive SAEs.
- ☐ Link SAEs to the curriculum and a career.
- ☐ Let students manage their SAEs.
- ☐ Document the SAE by using recordkeeping and analysis.
- ☐ Take an active role as supervisor of SAEs.
- ☐ Recognize students for their SAEs.

## FFA

- ☐ Link FFA leadership activities, award programs and competitive events to high-quality agricultural education curriculum.
- ☐ Recruit and retain new members from diverse populations.
- ☐ Inform every student about the diverse opportunities in FFA.
- ☐ Elect capable officers and train them well.
- ☐ Ensure that all members share responsibilities and have access to leadership and other opportunities.
- ☐ Formulate a workable constitution and bylaws.
- ☐ Develop a challenging program of activities.
- ☐ Secure adequate financing.
- ☐ Build school and community support.
- ☐ Conduct well-planned, regularly scheduled chapter meetings.
- ☐ Maintain proper equipment and records.

## Partnerships

- ☐ Identify potential partners.
- ☐ Identify benefits of involvement for partners.
- ☐ Present benefits to potential partners.
- ☐ Establish a plan for involving core partners.
- ☐ Reward partners by recognizing their contributions and support.

## Marketing

- ☐ Identify key customers in each of these groups: general community, administration, school, students and parents.
- ☐ Establish a plan to ask, involve, and recognize key customers and report successes to them and the

## Professional Growth

- ☐ Create a vision for your program and teaching philosophy, and develop a professional growth plan to accomplish your vision.
- ☐ Commit to lifelong learning.
- ☐ Revitalize the profession and your program. Recruit students you think would benefit from agricultural education and be good teachers.

## Integrate Recruitment and Retention

Everything you and your students do tells someone about your program and has recruitment implications. Here are some examples, with suggestions for addressing the recruitment and retention “angles” in each area.

Role/Area of Action	Recruitment and Retention Components	Ways to Strengthen Components
<b>Program offerings</b>	Course titles and content are the first—and sometimes only—thing others see.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer a top-quality program.</li> <li>• Use descriptive course titles and explanations.</li> </ul>
<b>Instructional effectiveness</b>	Students are motivated when they are in well-run, meaningful classes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use cooperative and hands-on learning activities.</li> <li>• Look for every opportunity to improve teaching skills.</li> </ul>
<b>Classroom management effectiveness</b>	Programs should be efficient and organized.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage students in learning that fits their needs so discipline is not an issue.</li> </ul>
<b>Administrative effectiveness</b>	Support administrators’ needs for timely and accurate information. You may find them more supportive in helping to promote your program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep up with the paperwork. As appropriate, involve students in administrative tasks.</li> </ul>
<b>Interpersonal effectiveness</b>	Students and others want to be with people who respect and care about them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remember you are always a teacher, and every action influences others’ perceptions.</li> <li>• Cooperate with colleagues and others.</li> </ul>
<b>Teacher’s leadership roles in school</b>	The things you do outside the classroom influence who will choose to enter your classroom.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be an active and positive participant in school and teacher activities.</li> </ul>
<b>Teacher’s leadership roles in community</b>	To attract community support, you have to be part of the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get involved in community groups that meet your professional and personal interests.</li> </ul>
<b>Teacher’s leadership roles in agricultural education</b>	Professional recognition improves your program’s attractiveness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in the National Association for Agricultural Educators (NAAE).</li> <li>• Volunteer to assist with FFA, FFA Alumni, Young Farmer, National Postsecondary Agricultural Student Organization (PAS), and other student activities.</li> </ul>
<b>Supervised agricultural experience programs</b>	Stay current—update SAE offerings to attract a variety of students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expose students to a wide variety of SAE possibilities.</li> <li>• Encourage students to create SAEs in “nontraditional” areas.</li> </ul>
<b>FFA chapter</b>	The chapter, its members and its activities are often the most visible reflections of your program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work to make every student an FFA member.</li> <li>• Guide students to create a well-rounded Program of Activities.</li> <li>• Seek wide exposure for strong, positive FFA activities and leaders.</li> </ul>

Role/Area of Action	Recruitment and Retention Components	Ways to Strengthen Components
<b>Student portfolios</b>	Students need to see immediate and ongoing benefits and possibilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiate student leadership portfolios with all new students. (See pages 40-43 for sample portfolio.)</li> <li>• Help students use portfolios as tools to chart the benefits of their immediate and continued involvement in your program and FFA chapter.</li> </ul>
<b>Public relations efforts</b>	Misperceptions about agriculture are tenacious and require frequent “reminders” about today’s realities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Train students to present the total scope of your program.</li> <li>• Make friends with reporters.</li> <li>• Be an “expert source” on today’s agriculture.</li> </ul>
<b>Parent-teacher conferences</b>	This may be your one face-to-face chance to sell parents on your program, and they are a substantial influence on students’ choices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a positive message to convey to each parent you meet.</li> <li>• Focus on the benefits parents care about...career preparation, recognition and scholarships.</li> <li>• Present your best self.</li> </ul>
<b>Facility and equipment</b>	When people see your work area they should think “advanced mechanical systems.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure your facility is a working lab, not a shop.</li> <li>• Seek corporate sponsorship for state-of-the-art equipment and training aids.</li> <li>• Insist on computer access.</li> <li>• Reflect diversity, current careers and positive messages in all visuals.</li> </ul>

# FFA Recruitment and Retention Process

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## Basic Ingredients

Successful recruitment and retention efforts are a bit like the “secret” recipe for your special barbecue sauce. You start with some basic ingredients, add your own unique touches, apply and serve.



# FFA Recruitment and Retention Process

## 1 STEP One Establish a Source

Any communication originates with a person who has ideas, information and attitudes to convey to another person. In coordinating recruitment and retention efforts for the agricultural education program, that person is you, the teacher. Your commitment to an overall recruitment “attitude” is the essential source of subsequent recruitment and retention activities, no matter who actually carries them out.

Once you establish your own commitment, it’s time to delegate, delegate, delegate! With you providing vision and coordination, student leaders can take charge of many aspects of a recruitment campaign. Many of the strategies detailed in this manual can be given to students for development and implementation. Train student recruiters using materials available from the National FFA Organization.

(See “Resource” section for contact information.)

### Involve Adult “Recruiters”

FFA Alumni, parents of current students and members of your advisory council often have influence with parents, administrators and others that you as a teacher may not have had a chance to develop. They offer a unique perspective to your program since they are not directly involved in its day-to-day operations. As recruiters, they may be perceived as more credible because they have less self-interest in increasing agricultural education enrollment.

Contact parents and other adult supporters in person.

Ask adults to serve as recruiters to contact specific potential students’ parents. Provide sample phone scripts (adapt from page 74) or letters (see pages 54-59) to assist them. Establish timelines to monitor progress in contacting parents.

Follow up each contact with a letter to the parents from you and your recruitment chairperson.

Recognize adult recruiters.

For more ideas in involving parents and other adult supporters in recruitment and retention efforts, see “Overcome Roadblocks” section.

## 2 STEP Two Define Audiences

The universe of potential students for your agricultural education program may be broader than you realize. Don’t limit your thinking to only the “new kids” in school. Even students who have been exposed to your recruitment efforts many times before may now realize that agricultural education fits their needs and interests.

Your list of potential students might include:

- Students who are first eligible to take your courses this year;
- Students who will be first eligible to take your courses next year;
- Students with “extra” elective hours;
- 4-H members;
- Members of other agriculture-related organizations;
- Students working at agriculture-related businesses;
- Students working in agriculture-related jobs for nonagricultural businesses;
- Science fair entrants; and
- Entrants in youth fair agriculture-related categories.

Recruitment plans also need to acknowledge the importance of partners—including teachers and administrators in feeder schools and 4-H leaders—and other “gatekeepers” who influence potential students’ decisions.

Build a critical mass of prospective students by targeting more students than you actually need. Even the most successful recruitment efforts are unlikely to pull in 100% of your prospects.

Identify specific audiences for your retention efforts, as well. Students in introductory classes are a natural. So are current students who stand out for their genuine interest in agricultural subjects. Remember, students will only stay with your program if their needs are met, their abilities are challenged and they can see current and future benefits. Provide instruction, SAE opportunities and FFA involvement that fulfill those criteria.

With strong success, you may even find that entrance into some courses becomes a selective process. If students feel they must perform at a high level to be retained in your program, they will usually rise to the challenge.

### **3** STEP **Three**

#### Focus Your Message

Successful recruitment and retention plans require focused messages custom-designed for each audience. Each interaction with an audience member should address his or her interests, concerns and needs. Aim for messages that convey how each audience member can benefit from entering, continuing in or supporting your program.

### **4** STEP **Four**

#### Remove Roadblocks

The last thing you want is to inspire a student to enroll in your program, only to discover it is impossible. It's almost guaranteed that perceptions, attitudes, communication difficulties, scheduling conflicts and other roadblocks will get between you and your intended audience. This interference often distorts, deflects or even negates your messages. The "Overcome Roadblocks" section provides suggestions for addressing roadblocks that may stand between students and your program.

### **5** STEP **Five**

#### Select Strategies

Choose specific recruitment and retention strategies only after you have identified the audiences and messages you want to connect. Match strategies to fit your message and the talents, interests and preferences of the target audience.

Tips and samples for a variety of recruitment strategies also appear in the "Overcome Roadblocks" section.

### **6** STEP **Six**

#### Seek Feedback

Feedback is an important element in any educational or communication process, including recruitment and retention. How do potential students respond to recruitment and retention strategies, and why? What benefits are important to them and their gatekeepers? How could you adapt your efforts to better match their needs with your offerings? Make sure your recruitment and retention plans include activities to collect and analyze feedback.

## Recipe for Success

### Planning a Recruitment Activity

Before conducting a recruitment activity, address the following areas:

- Identify your audience. Try to limit the activity to a specific group (i.e. 8th grade science students or a 4-H horticulture club). Consider the talents, interests and preferences of the target audience.
- Reflect on your program. List the benefits of your program and see how they relate to the target audience. Plan the recruitment activity to include only those items that relate directly to your target audience.
- Balance the educational aspect with fun activities. Include audience participation as much as possible to retain interest and excitement.
- Involve current students and FFA chapter officers to promote your program. The audience will be more receptive if the activity includes someone their own age.
- Provide each participant with a brochure, handout or flyer with additional information. Be sure to include your name and contact information. (See pages 67-68 for sample brochure ideas.)

# Sample Recruitment and Retention Messages

Following are some key messages and paragraphs about agricultural education that you might adapt for your recruitment and retention efforts:

## Agricultural Careers are “Hot”

“Are you looking for a challenging career that will broaden your horizons? Would you like to be involved in a dynamic, exciting industry? Today’s food and fiber industry offers these benefits and more. Whether you are interested in business, computers, mechanics or communications, America’s largest industry— agriculture – has a place for you.”

(Source: *Special Reprint*, “*The Industry Too Big to Ignore*,” American Careers, Fall 1992.)

“Looking for an exciting career that pays well and keeps you motivated and challenged? Look into agriculture. Your talents and interests are bound to match with one of the more than 300 exciting, diverse careers in agriculture. And with more job openings than qualified graduates to fill them, agriculture offers countless opportunities for students.

(Source: *Think About It* brochure, National FFA Organization.)

“National studies show that in the coming decade, companies and agencies of every size will be looking for people trained in agriculture. Agriculture needs people who can look beyond the obvious, ask tough questions and find good answers.”

(Source: *Do Not Open* brochure, National FFA Organization.)

## Agriculture is More Than You Think

“Today’s agriculture is biotechnology, international marketing, genetics, engineering, food science, computers, horticulture, communications, finance, veterinary science, wildlife management and much more. Agriculture is our nation’s largest employer.” \*

“Today’s agribusiness is high-tech. From biotechnology to GPS-guided machinery and computer-monitored livestock, agriculture is on the cutting edge.” \*

## A Complete Education

“Agricultural education teaches more than job-specific skills. Through courses, self-directed career projects and FFA involvement, young people gain the knowledge, skills and experiences needed for success in life. The leadership, self-image, communication skills and citizenship developed in agricultural education are important lessons for any future. Agriculture students have the choice of entering the workforce directly or pursuing higher degrees.” \*

“The world of tomorrow comes from choices made today. Agriscience classes and the FFA are developing leadership for a lifetime so young people are equipped to make better choices.” \*

“Companies want people with an agricultural education background, in part because they are generally more responsible, trainable and able to work.” \*

“Agriculture students discover innovative ways of using science and information in agriculture. They learn to think analytically using real-life examples.”\*

## It’s Fun!

Make sure students tell their peers that agricultural education is not only serious business...they have fun while learning!

\*These samples provided by Ripon FFA Chapter, Wisconsin



## Target Feeder School Audiences

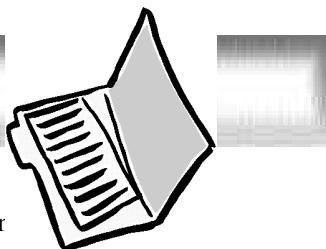
*One of your key target audiences will be each year's "new crop" of students coming into your school for the first time. These might be elementary students moving into the middle grades, middle grade students entering high school or high school students selecting a magnet or technical school. In all cases, early contact with and positive impressions of your program are keys to recruitment and retention success.*

Recruitment of students in feeder schools begins with your public relations program and FFA program of activities. Often, these students have already formed an impression of you and your program through exposure to activities such as Food For America, an agricultural literacy program; Partners in Active Learning Support (PALS), a mentoring program; or, elementary and middle school agriculture programs.

Ensure that you tap into feeder school audiences with the following strategies:

- Include feeder school administrators, guidance counselors and teachers in your ongoing efforts to build program support.
  - Develop working relationships with some of the premier teachers in feeder schools.
  - Secure a master list of students from principals or guidance counselors at your feeder schools.
  - Call or visit your key teacher contacts, securing an "unofficial" rating of each student on the master list. Base the rating on the characteristics of students who succeed in your program, like leadership involvement, hands-on learning preferences or academic abilities. You might rate students on a four-point scale: 1=Below Average, 2=Average, 3=Good, 4=Must Recruit.
  - Provide general information about your program to students in all rating groups.
  - Ask the feeder schools' administration for the opportunity to meet with at least the two top-rated tiers of students.
  - Select outstanding and charismatic current students to join you in presenting a recruitment program to the targeted students.
  - Focus on the quality of education, leadership, career opportunities and recognition that your total program offers. Remember that students must perceive your courses to be fun and educational.
  - Ask feeder school students to make a commitment to enroll in your program. Have them fill out a "Reservation Request" to "hold" a place in your courses. Be sure to get names, addresses and phone numbers on the forms.
  - Send a follow-up letter or place a phone call to each student who completes a form with intent to enroll in your class.
- Send a letter of interest to parents or guardians. This might come from you or an FFA officer.
  - Try to visit students prior to the actual course registration period.
  - Follow up with a thank-you letter to those who helped facilitate the recruitment effort, like the feeder school administrator, guidance counselor or teachers, etc.

# Presentations



Student-to-student presentations are a great way to create interest in your program. They also give current students a chance to develop and practice leadership skills!

## **1 STEP** **One** Choose a Target Audience

Recruitment presentations might be given to:

- Students in a related organization (like 4-H or Key Club) or subject area (like science or computers) who could be taking agricultural education courses right now;
- Students who will enter your school next year;
- Elementary children (who could enter your program in a few more years); or
- Parents of students who could be taking your classes now or in the future.

## **2 STEP** **Two** Choose a Message

Depending on your audience, you might want to create a presentation that shows agricultural education is:

- Fun and interesting
- Hands-on
- Career-oriented
- Important and relevant
- More than production agriculture
- Challenging and stimulating

## **3 STEP** **Three** Design a "Lesson Plan"

Create a lesson plan custom-made to reach your targeted audience with your chosen message. FFA members can use their leadership skills to create and present effective programs. Remember to:

- Include an introduction, body and conclusion or challenge
- Be professional and friendly
- Make eye contact and smile
- Wear official FFA dress
- Include activities that involve the audience
- Stay within a time schedule
- Adapt the presentation to fit the audience, mood and situation; and
- Directly ask participants to enroll in agriculture courses.

## **4 STEP** **Four** Practice

Practice and time your presentation before giving it. If possible, have a few people from your target audience watch a practice presentation and give feedback. Make sure you are familiar with any props and audiovisuals you will use.

## **5 STEP** **Five** Just Do It...and Have Fun

If you believe in what you're doing, telling others about the benefits of agricultural education can be a breeze and a blast. Enjoy yourself!

# Sample Activities for Presentations

Consider building a presentation around one of the following activities. Be sure to alter activities to fit the group to which you are presenting.

## Activity 1:

Fill a pie plate full of whipped cream and bury a piece of candy in it. Challenge the person to get the piece of candy without using any hands.

*Message:* You have to do the dirty work to achieve your goal.

## Activity 2:

Write each letter of the alphabet on small pieces of paper, except for the letter “u.” Give one letter to each person. Ask participants to try to make words out of the letters; the person with the “q” will not be able to make any words.

*Message:* Participation is needed from all in group.

## Activity 3:

Provide each participant with a balloon. Have them line up next to one another behind a line. Next, ask them to fill the balloon with air but not tie it. Have participants try to hit a target by letting go of the balloon.

*Message:* The balloon didn’t have direction and couldn’t hit the target. The same is true for you if you don’t have goals, for they provide you with direction.

## Activity 4:

Ask for a volunteer. Challenge the person to hold his or her ankles and try to jump over a dollar bill. This won’t be possible if the person jumps forward. (Solution: It can be done if the person jumps backwards over the bill!)

*Message:* Think outside the limits.

## Activity 5:

Ask for two volunteers and have them come to the front of the room. Have the volunteers race to a certain point. Then, give them a bat and ask them to put their head on the bat and spin around it 10 times. Then, the volunteers must race back to the finish line.

*Message:* Outside factors can influence your ability to focus.

## Activity 6:

Divide participants into two teams and have each team form a line. Provide each team member with a toothpick. Next, put a lifesaver on the toothpick of the first person in each line and have that person pass the candy down the row. Provide a prize for the team that wins the race.

**OR**

Blindfold a volunteer. Set up an obstacle course of chairs and have two other volunteers lead the blindfolded person across the chairs.

*Message:* Cooperation and teamwork are essential.

# Sample Presentation

## Sample

### Opening:

- Play upbeat background music that is popular with students.
- Have FFA leaders come in as if for a “varsity line up.”
- They should wear uniforms or carry props that reflect their school involvements, like sports and band uniforms, FFA official dress or school mascot. An announcer introduces the “starting line-up” as if it is a sporting event.

### Body:

- When each leader’s name is called, the person steps forward, introduces self and talks about personal involvement in agricultural education.
- Present a five to eight minute video or slide show that illustrates the total agricultural education program.
- AND/OR
- If possible, bring along equipment and experiments (like hydroponics, small animals or computer models) that demonstrate what students do and learn in agriculture courses.
- Cover some of the career opportunities available in agriculture. Challenge participants to try to name a career area that cannot be related to agriculture.
- Talk about the available courses. Hand out course descriptions.

### Conclusion and Challenge:

- Ask participants to “join the winning team” by enrolling in an agriculture course.
- Distribute and collect “reservation request forms” on which participants indicate their interest in taking agriculture. (Use these later for follow-up contacts!)
- Ask for and answer questions.

## Sample

### Opening:

- Conduct activity 3 from previous page.
- Explain that agricultural education is a great way to target your goal—success.

### Body:

- Ask participants to brainstorm their definitions of “success” (answers will probably reflect things like money, friends, respect or fame). Compile a master list.
- Next, have participants identify tools they will need to achieve each kind of success (answers might include a good job, skills, self-confidence or luck).
- Explain how agricultural education helps young people build the skills they need for success. Talk about agricultural career opportunities. Explain how FFA members develop leadership and communication skills that help in every setting.
- Present a five to eight minute video that illustrates the total agricultural education program.
- Conduct activity 1 from previous page.
- Explain that looking for success doesn’t have to be like finding a needle in a haystack or candy in a pile of whipped cream. There’s an easier way—enroll in agricultural education!
- Distribute course descriptions.

### Conclusion and Challenge:

- Ask participants to target success by enrolling in an agriculture course.
- Distribute and collect “reservation request forms” on which participants indicate their interest in taking agriculture. (Use later for follow-up contacts!)
- Ask for and answer questions.

# Target Audiences

## Target Middle Grade Audiences

Instituting a full agricultural education program—or just a few electives—for middle grade students can dramatically increase your enrollment. Even if these options are beyond your reach, educational and recognition activities targeted at middle grade students can lay a solid foundation for your recruitment efforts.

Your efforts to bring agricultural education to middle grade\* students exposes them to career and leadership options and improves agricultural literacy while strengthening the agricultural education program. Agricultural concepts can be introduced to middle grade students in a wide variety of ways.

## Agriculture in the Middle Grade School

Does agricultural education belong in the middle grades? Of course! When speaking with administrators, parents and others, emphasize the following ways agricultural education can benefit middle grade students.

- Agricultural education can enhance learning in other subject areas by applying academic concepts to real-life, hands-on examples.
- Agricultural education exposes students to a wide range of career choices.
- Agricultural education addresses a range of topics and issues that touch students' lives every day—the environment, natural resources, food, safety, resource management, leadership, citizenship, global interdependence and career exploration.
- Through related student organization activities, agricultural education offers middle grade students meaningful opportunities to experience success, strengthen personal skills and fill positive roles in the school, family and community.

Source: *Middle Grade Agricultural Leader's Guide* (National FFA Organization, 1996).

Topics that may be particularly interesting to and appropriate for middle grade students include:

- Food safety, consumer relations and pesticides
- Food-from farm to you
- Leadership and human relations
- Careers in agriculture
- The future of agriculture
- Agricultural science and experimentation
- Agricultural engineering
- Agricultural vocabulary
- Agriculture's important relationship with the environment
- Societal significance of agriculture; and
- Global significance of agriculture.

## Collaborate with Colleagues

If agricultural education is already being offered at the middle grade school(s) that feeds into your program, collaboration with your fellow agricultural educator at the middle grade level is essential. Ideally, the middle grade and high school programs will offer a continuum of curriculum, hands-on experience and FFA opportunities. With courses, SAEs and chapter activities targeted to the specific needs of each age group, middle grade agricultural education can be a funnel that naturally leads students into your high school program.

The need for collaboration is just as great for middle grade agriculture instructors. Helping to ensure a successful high school agricultural education program serves your goals of improving students' agricultural literacy and career success.

## Key Resource

For more information on incorporating agricultural education into middle grade schools, consult the *Middle Grade Agricultural Leader's Guide*, available from the National FFA Organization. (See “Resource” section for ordering information).

## Target 4-H Audiences and Other Youth Groups

Recruitment of 4-H members begins with your public relations program and FFA program of activities. In these activities you and your students are likely to have already worked with many 4-H members at various livestock shows, workshops, public speaking events or other activities.

FFA and 4-H both start young people on the path to success, though each has a unique manner to accomplish this goal. Young people who start in 4-H gain a foothold in leadership and personal skills development. They can further develop those skills and prepare for careers in agricultural industry through your program, including the FFA chapter.

It's a symbiotic relationship, and both organizations are stronger because of the other's existence. Make sure you establish ongoing, cooperative relationships with local 4-H leaders.

Target individual 4-H members for your personalized recruitment efforts.

- Obtain a list of students from the 4-H leader(s).
- Keep an eye out for news about 4-H members. Send congratulatory letters in response to their accomplishments.
- Select outstanding and charismatic current students to join you in presenting a recruitment program to the targeted students. Focus on the fact that you are seeking quality and that each student in attendance represents that quality. Emphasize the advantages these students have in the agricultural industry because of their 4-H background. Remember that young people must perceive your courses to be fun and educational.
- Ask 4-H members to make a commitment to enroll in your program. Have them fill out a "Reservation Request" to "hold" a place in your courses. Be sure to get names, addresses and phone numbers on the forms.
- Send a follow-up letter or place a phone call to each student who completes a form with intent to enroll in your class.
- Send a letter of interest to parents or guardians. This might come from you or an FFA officer.
- Try to visit students prior to the actual course registration period.
- Follow up with a thank-you letter to the 4-H leader(s).

*\* Middle grade students are those in sixth through eighth grades. Students in grades five and nine are sometimes also included. For purposes of National FFA Organization membership, the middle grades are grades seven and eight.*

## Match Strategies to Audiences

*Recruitment strategies should be custom-selected for each audience and message you wish to convey. Here are some suggestions for strategies that might match the talents, interests and preferences of target student audiences:*

### ***Audience***

### ***Suggested Recruitment Strategies***

Feeder school students (including middle grade students)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ongoing agricultural literacy activities such as Food For America or Ag in the Classroom</li><li>• Ongoing service activities such as FFA Partners in Active Learning Support (PALS) or reading programs</li><li>• Ongoing educational activities such as courses, science lessons or field trips</li><li>• Presentations</li><li>• Recruitment video</li><li>• Personalized letters</li><li>• Phone calls</li></ul>
4-H members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ongoing cooperation and support</li><li>• Presentations</li><li>• Recruitment newsletter</li><li>• Personalized letters</li><li>• Phone calls</li></ul>
Students now eligible to take courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Home visits</li><li>• Multimedia approaches</li><li>• Brochures</li><li>• Course descriptions</li><li>• Phone calls</li></ul>
Science students or science fair entrants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Home visits</li><li>• Multimedia approaches</li><li>• Personalized letters</li><li>• Phone calls</li></ul>
Students with proven agricultural interests (jobs or fair entries.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Brochures</li><li>• Home visits</li><li>• Personalized letters</li><li>• Phone calls</li></ul>
Current agriculture students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• FFA involvement</li><li>• Home visits</li><li>• Presentations</li><li>• Brochures</li><li>• Newsletters</li><li>• Multimedia approaches</li><li>• Personalized letters</li><li>• Parental involvement</li></ul>

*\* Look for samples in the "Overcome Roadblocks" section.*

# Sample Recruitment and Retention Checklist

*Have you covered these basics in your recruitment and retention efforts?*

- ☐ Student needs are inventoried.
- ☐ Classes are interesting and exciting to students.
- ☐ Curriculum is scientific in nature.
- ☐ Expect every student to be a member of agriculture classes.
- ☐ It's easy to become part of the program.
- ☐ It's "cool" to be a member of the agriculture program.
- ☐ There is a middle grade agricultural education program.
- ☐ The FFA chapter conducts activities involving elementary and/or middle grade students.
- ☐ Send recruitment letters to students.
- ☐ Send recruitment letters to parents.
- ☐ Assign mentors to new students.
- ☐ There are special activities for new students.
- ☐ Expect students to join FFA.
- ☐ All students participate in at least one FFA activity.
- ☐ The FFA chapter hosts chapter leadership conferences.
- ☐ The chapter regularly wins district, state and national FFA awards.
- ☐ All students have SAEs.
- ☐ Make SAE visits.
- ☐ Encourage nontraditional SAEs.
- ☐ The program retains at least half of eligible students from year to year.
- ☐ Have an active, written public relations program.
- ☐ Encourage students to expect greatness for themselves and the program.



# FFA Recruitment and Retention Plan

## In This Section

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Recruitment and Retention Budget	26
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## Develop the Recruitment and Retention Plan



You've heard it a million times: "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." To be successful, your agricultural education program's recruitment and retention efforts must be well-researched, well-focused and well-implemented...in other words, well-planned.

A detailed recruitment and retention plan provides the framework needed to guide program efforts. By recording a recruitment and retention plan on paper, you demonstrate a commitment to agricultural education and the future of your program. There is no one-size-fits-all recruitment and retention plan. To be effective, your efforts must be custom-crafted to meet local needs. Here is a step-by-step guide to developing your recruitment and retention plan.

# FFA Recruitment and Retention Plan

## **1 STEP** **One** Analyze the Current Situation

Begin your recruitment and retention effort by documenting the current status of your agricultural education program. Analyze enrollment trends. What percentage of students continue in your program after an introductory course? What percentage take only one course? At what point in the high school years do they take it? Obtain information about students who are eligible and available to choose your courses. What percentage of these students enroll in your courses? Check students' scheduling options to see if they can really get into your courses.

Collect and analyze information students receive when deciding which courses to take. What are they being told, and by whom?

Identify roadblocks that discourage students from enrolling in agricultural education. Talk to current agriculture students and survey students who have not enrolled about why students do NOT take agriculture courses.

## **2 STEP** **Two** Clarify the Goal

Use the collected information to set a specific and realistic goal for your recruitment efforts. This might be expressed in numbers (e.g., filling each class to current capacity) or as percentages (e.g., enrolling 100% of eligible freshmen, 100% of sophomores, etc.)

Focus on the long-term growth of your program, not simply the year to come. It's okay to set incremental goals for increased enrollment, but don't procrastinate, thinking the program will grow "naturally" year to year. Successful recruitment and retention requires paying attention and responding to students' needs.

Share your recruitment and retention goals with student leaders and adult supporters. Ask them to join you in committing to continuous program improvement and growth.

## **3 STEP** **Three** Detail the Plan

Identify the audiences, messages and strategies involved in reaching your goal. Ideas are provided throughout this manual. Solicit ideas and feedback from students and adults. Evaluate past recruitment and retention efforts, and identify the most successful ones. Create new approaches from ideas found in this manual and by observing other successful programs.

Create a detailed master plan.

## **4 STEP** **Four** Assemble the Resources

Recruitment and retention take time, a supportive atmosphere and, usually, some money. Your time can be multiplied by involving others. Your first step might be to recruit student leaders and adult supporters to help carry out recruitment plans. Recruitment and retention activities can be valuable leadership and learning experiences for students, and suggestions for incorporating them into coursework or supervised agricultural experience (SAE) programs are included throughout this guide.

Adult supporters can be particularly helpful in contacting potential students' parents and in helping craft solutions to many of the roadblocks that keep students from enrolling and remaining in your program.

Build support for your recruitment and retention plan by presenting it to school administrators, the school board and community partners. Explain how a stronger agricultural education program will benefit students, the school and the community. Ask for their support.

Develop a recruitment and retention budget that details all related costs and sources of funds.

## 5 STEP Five

### Do It! Budget Tips

Recruiting and retaining students comes with a price—but it may be the most productive investment you make each year. While some activities can be completed at no cost, many will require some financial outlay. Here are some tips for developing a recruitment and retention budget!

- Be realistic during planning stages so you can find the resources to carry out your plan. Research to find out printing or transportation costs.
- Build flexibility into the budget if possible. Despite careful planning, some activities may cost more than expected, or an unanticipated opportunity may arise. Try to build in \$100 for miscellaneous expenses.
- Develop a system to accurately track recruitment and retention expenses. This will strengthen your future planning and budgeting.
- Explore a variety of sources for funding recruitment and retention activities:
  - development of multimedia and print materials might be incorporated into course budgets, if part of student learning;
  - face-to-face and personalized strategies like presentations and letters might be valid program administration costs;
  - FFA chapter funds might cover some costs; and
  - FFA Alumni, agribusiness partners and others might be interested in sponsoring specific activities, like a special event or brochure.
- Demonstrate how to be an action-oriented, self-motivating, inspiring recruitment and retention leader.

## 6 STEP Six

### Evaluate and Adjust

Constant feedback, evaluation and adaptation need to be integral parts of your recruitment and retention efforts. Survey new students to see why they enroll. Survey others to see why they (still) do not enroll or remain in agricultural education. Look for additional approaches that might work in your program. Experiment with new activities.

Review and update the recruitment and retention plan on an annual, or more frequent, basis.

# Sample Recruitment and Retention Plan

## Introduction

Agricultural education at <Central High> School is essential to offering students a complete and well-rounded education. Agriculture courses provide a hands-on approach to learning scientific, communication and career-skill lessons not available in most other courses. The strength of the local, regional and global agricultural industries translates into career opportunities and employer needs for agriculture-savvy graduates. Specific, intentional efforts are needed to ensure the myriad benefits of participation in agricultural education are available to and understood by all <Central High> students.

## Background

The <Central High> agricultural education program currently serves <number> students. This is roughly <x%> of students eligible to take agriculture courses. An analysis of available information suggests that the following roadblocks prevent students from enrolling and continuing in agricultural education:

- <list and explain roadblock>;
- <list and explain roadblock>;
- <list and explain roadblock>; and
- <list and explain roadblock>.
- <Present other relevant information you collected while developing the recruitment and retention plan.>

This plan has been developed to respond to these roadblocks and increase agricultural education enrollment.

## Goal

The goal of this recruitment and retention plan is to strengthen the <Central High> agricultural education program by increasing enrollment to <number or percentage>. Interim goals are reflected in the timeline included with this plan.

## Planned Activities

Specific activities to be completed in reaching the goal include the following.

- Program Adjustments: <detail planned changes to scheduling or program offerings>
- Face-to-Face Strategies: <detail planned activities>
- Multimedia Strategies: <detail planned activities>
- Print Materials: <detail planned activities>
- Personalized Contacts:<detail planned activities.>

# Sample Recruitment and Retention Plan (continued)

## Timeline

### January 15

- Complete and disseminate recruitment and retention plan.

### Spring

- Select and train student and adult recruiters.
- Develop multimedia and print materials.
- Conduct recruitment activities for potential students in advance of course sign-up for next school year.
- Conduct retention activities for current students in advance of course sign-up for next school year.
- Interim goal: face-to-face contact with <all feeder school students> and <x%> of current <Central High> students.
- Meet with guidance counselors to discuss program benefits and provide useful materials.

### Summer

- Follow up with newly enrolled students and others who have expressed interest.
- Conduct a special event for potential and re-enrolled students.
- Conduct recruitment and public relations activities at community events.
- Send "welcome back" letters to re-enrolled students.
- Refine multimedia and print materials for use in fall.
- Plan and prepare for scheduling and program changes.

### Fall

- Conduct recruitment activities for students who have not yet chosen fall courses.
- Implement scheduling and program changes.
- Survey newly enrolled and not-enrolled students about recruitment and retention strategies.
- Interim goal: <number> total enrollment.
- Conduct ongoing efforts that influence recruitment and retention.
- Analyze recruitment and retention efforts and adjust recruitment plan.

*<Continue a detailed timeline for the first 18-24 months of the program. Include specific activities and interim goals>*

## Evaluation

Progress toward this plan's goal will be assessed annually based on:

- Number of face-to-face, telephone and written contacts;
- Evaluation of recruitment and retention activities;
- Number of expressions of interest and/or intent to enroll;
- Percentage of eligible current students who re-enroll;
- Total program enrollment; and
- Feedback from targeted audiences.

*At least once a year, the agriculture instructor will ensure that this information is collected, analyzed and reviewed with student and adult recruitment and retention leaders, so the plan may be adjusted accordingly and future activities planned.*

# Sample Recruitment and Retention Plan Budget

Budget Item	Amount	Funding Source
<u>Program Analysis and Planning</u>		
Advisory Committee Meeting		
Transportation reimbursements	\$_____	Program budget
Refreshments	\$_____	FFA Alumni
Supplies (meeting announcements, etc.)	\$_____	Program budget
<Block Scheduling> Task Force Supplies	\$_____	Program budget
Recruitment Task Force Supplies	\$_____	Program budget
<u>Face-to-Face Strategies</u>		
Presentations		
<name of feeder school>:		
Transportation	\$_____	FFA budget
Supplies	\$_____	Program budget
<name of feeder school>:		
Transportation	\$_____	FFA budget
Supplies	\$_____	Program budget
<4-H Club>:		
Transportation	\$_____	FFA Alumni
Supplies	\$_____	Program budget
Home Visits		
(Combined with SAE visits; supported by program budget.)		
<Etc.-Detail each face-to-face strategy.>		
<u>Multimedia Strategies</u>		
Website		
Subscription fee	\$_____	Program budget (agricultural communications)
Radio Program		
Transportation	\$_____	FFA Alumni
Recruitment Video		
Videotape	\$_____	Program budget
Editing assistance	\$_____	FFA budget
<Etc.-Detail each multimedia strategy.>		
<u>Print Materials</u>		
Brochure		
Printing	\$_____	Sponsored
Advertisements		
<local newspaper>, <size>, <number of times>	\$_____	Sponsored
<feeder school yearbook>	\$_____	FFA Alumni
<Spring Festival Program>	\$_____	FFA budget
<Etc.-Detail each print material strategy.>		
<u>Personalized Contacts</u>		
Letters to student leaders		
Supplies	\$_____	Program budget
Postage	\$_____	FFA budget
Letters to targeted potential students and parents		
Supplies	\$_____	Program budget
Postage	\$_____	FFA budget
<Etc.-Detail each personalized contact strategy.>		

# Sample Recruitment and Retention Plan Calendar

## Ongoing

- Respond to all requests for information.
- Send congratulatory letters to potential students who excel in 4-H, science fairs, etc.
- Maintain recruitment and retention supplies.
- Maintain program website.
- Keep administrators, guidance counselors and adult supporters informed.
- Use current, diverse, positive-image visuals in classroom.
- Cooperate with other academic and career-oriented programs.
- Ensure news releases and other public relations tools portray the total scope of your program.
- Analyze and address enrollment roadblocks. (See “Overcome Roadblocks” section .)
- Ensure some type of agricultural education is offered to middle grade students.

## June-July-August

- Send welcome letters to newly enrolled students and their parents.
- Conduct SAE and home visits with returning and newly enrolled students.
- Set up and staff exhibit(s) at local and state fairs that show total scope of program.
- Volunteer in a leadership role at the local or state fair or other community event.
- Work with FFA leaders to conduct a barbecue or other fun event for returning, newly enrolled and potential students.
- Update course materials and classroom visuals.
- Develop and distribute a recruitment newsletter.
- Speak with or send letters to students who have not yet chosen fall courses.
- Send "welcome back" letters to students continuing in your program.
- Prepare for the agricultural education program's best-ever year.

## September

- Implement program updates.
- Conduct FFA chapter recruitment activities.
- Set up opportunities for each student's parent(s) to observe and/or participate in the program.
- Distribute recruitment information at back-to-school events. (See “Overcome Roadblocks” section for related ideas and samples.)
- Conduct and publicize a high-profile field trip (like a state fair trip or lake clean-up) for agricultural education students.
- Conduct SAE and home visits.

# Sample Recruitment and Retention Calendar (continued)

## October

- Survey students about why they have or have not enrolled in a course. (See *A Guide to Local Program Success* for survey forms.)
- Tally and analyze enrollment results.
- Ensure agricultural education and FFA scholarships are in place and publicized.
- Have students work on multimedia and print recruitment materials during agricultural communications courses and SAE . (See “Overcome Roadblocks” section for related ideas and samples.)
- Ensure program facilities and displays present the most positive possible image during parent-teacher conferences.

## November

- Contact feeder schools' teachers for recommendations about high-potential future students.
- Devote an advisory committee meeting to analyzing enrollment roadblocks and solutions.
- Revise course descriptions as needed.
- Meet with guidance counselors to discuss scheduling and the enrollment process for next school year.

## December

- Review recruitment and retention plan.
- Produce recruitment and retention materials.
- Host administrator and counselor visits to agriculture courses and labs.
- Place an advertisement in feeder school's yearbook.

## January

- Update recruitment and retention plan and goal.
- Present plan to students, adult supporters, administrators, guidance personnel and school board.
- Select and train student and adult recruiters.
- Conduct SAE and home visits.
- Offer a short-term adult education course.
- Work with students to develop a recruitment videotape.



# Sample Recruitment and Retention Calendar (continued)

## February

- Send recruitment letters to feeder school students and their parents.
- Work with students to develop and give presentations at feeder schools.
- Send follow-up letters to students who fill out the "Reservation Request Form" at presentations.
- Work with adult recruiters to contact potential students' parents.
- Conduct and publicize a high-profile field trip (like a visit to a university agriculture department and basketball game) for agricultural education students.
- Place radio announcements to air during upcoming events, like National FFA Week, National Ag Day and Farm-City Week.

## March

- Distribute recruitment and retention materials to current and unenrolled students. (See "Overcome Roadblocks" section for related ideas and samples.)
- Describe other agriculture course offerings during classes.
- Train student leaders to help other students figure out how to fit agriculture courses into their schedules.
- Ensure program facilities and displays present the most positive possible image during parent-teacher conferences.
- Work with advisory committee members and FFA leaders to host an Agriculture Awareness Night, perhaps in conjunction with National Ag Day.

## April

- Send "welcome" or "welcome back" letters to all students who signed up for next year's courses.
- Publicly recognize agricultural education students who receive scholarships.
- Conduct SAE and home visits.

## May

- Invite current and newly enrolled students and their parents to the annual awards banquet.
- Place print advertisements in fair programs, community events, etc.

# Overcome Roadblocks



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It's almost guaranteed that perceptions, attitudes, communication difficulties, scheduling conflicts and other roadblocks will get between you and the students you want to attract to and keep in your program. This interference often distorts, deflects or even negates your recruitment and retention messages.

The pages that follow provide suggestions for addressing roadblocks that may stand between students and your program, like:

- Course scheduling conflicts;
- Students' other choices and demands;
- Block scheduling;
- Conflicting graduation requirements;
- Student continuity in your program;
- Lack of diversity in your program;
- Lack of awareness about your program;
- Perception of your courses;
- Perception of careers in agriculture; and
- A mismatch between the program and student and community needs.

# Overcome Roadblocks

## Working with Administrators and Counselors

Squeaky wheels may get a quick shot of grease, but they're likely the first ones replaced, too. Get the attention of administrators and counselors without getting on their nerves by approaching sensitive areas as problems to be solved together. We're all on the same team.

Here are some ideas for building ongoing relationships that support your student recruitment and retention goals.

- Know your job and do it well.
- Keep administrators and counselors informed of your program and professional goals, plans and accomplishments.
- Give credit and praise when due.
- Serve on school and community committees beyond program needs.
- Involve administrators and counselors in program activities—instructional, SAE and FFA. Involve them in situations that allow them to have contact with other adults who support your program.
- Send copies of newsletters and other program publications to administrators and counselors. Give them a complimentary subscription to *FFA New Horizons* magazine.
- Actively seek ways to improve negative situations. Be open to constructive criticism.
- Do not expect more than is reasonable from administrators or counselors.

## 1 Road BLOCK

### Course Scheduling Conflicts

No single scheduling pattern will work for all students, or for all classes. The key is to be sure that yours is not the course blocked out by another course either required for graduation or needed for college.

Most teachers accept whatever master schedule the administration or guidance department constructs, even if that schedule is detrimental to the agricultural education program. Complaining may relieve the situation temporarily, but a more effective solution may be to help the administration find a solution. Put your own effort into constructing and proposing a master schedule that works.

Here are suggestions for addressing this roadblock.

- Start well in advance, obtain a master schedule of courses from the guidance counselor or principal.
- Work through sample schedules as if you were a student. Complete this exercise for different types of students, like academically oriented, career focused, part of various "academies" or "career paths". Consider giving special consideration to the needs of students you most want to recruit and retain.
- Once you have found a scheduling pattern that works, consult with the guidance counselor or administrator to rearrange your course offerings so targeted students may enroll.
- Consider offering courses at alternate times, such as before first period or during summer school. During these times, provide the courses most likely to appeal to and serve the needs of schedule-challenged students.
- Make sure students are shown that agriculture courses are an option.

# Sample Student Schedule Worksheet

Use this form to work through imaginary student schedules based on your school's proposed master schedule. Test whether students in various situations can fit appropriate agriculture courses into their schedules.

## Student Description

Imaginary student is...

- In grade ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 ☐ 11 ☐ 12
- In a "college prep" sequence, "general" or "applied"
- Education sequence career pathway or academy
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Applicable Agriculture Courses

I want this student to be able to take the following agriculture course(s):

---

---

## Optimal Available Student Schedule

Customize the form for your situation. Write in period or block times (use only as many spaces as needed). Start by filling in when students can or must take required courses each semester. Then, work in study or resource periods and other electives, especially agricultural education.

Period or Block	Fall Semester	Spring Semester

## Next Steps

Identify master schedule conflicts that prevent students from enrolling in agriculture courses. Look for times when you are offering the most appropriate agriculture courses for particular students, but those students must be scheduled into required courses. Identify ways to reschedule your courses so they are offered at times when targeted students have a real option to take them.

## Students' Other Choices and Demands

In a quality educational system, it is to be expected that several quality programs will co-exist. That means students will have to choose from among many attractive options. To recruit and retain students, you are challenged to provide a top-value “product” and to make it easier for students to choose agricultural education.

### Make It Worth the Price

Just as in the consumer marketplace, your program is a product that must be perceived as worth its cost. For students, the cost of taking an agriculture course will often be forfeiting other attractive, worthwhile, meaningful courses. Agriculture classes must provide more benefits than band, chorus, foreign languages, internships, cooperative jobs and a multitude of other choices.

The first step in stacking up against students' other choices and demands is to ensure your program offers as many high-value benefits as possible.

These benefits should include:

- Needed graduation requirements, such as science; and
- Content and credits needed for college admission
  - Opportunities for scholarships;
  - Personal development; and
  - Attractive career options.

### Ease the Choice

Hard-sell demands that students give up other choices to devote themselves to agricultural education will likely backfire. Instead, look for ways to help students combine their interests in agriculture and other areas.

Cooperation is the key to co-existence. Programs that work together are more likely to thrive than those that compete. Following are suggestions for establishing a cooperative atmosphere among instructional and co-curricular programs.

- Seek ways you can help other teachers and programs. If you or your program are perceived to be a threat to other teachers or their programs, it is unlikely you will receive their support.
- Offer your laboratory facilities to science classes. Biology classes might use your hatchery for a unit on embryo development and chemistry students could conduct water quality testing experiments in your aquaculture tanks.
- Team teach courses—science, applied mathematics, food science, safety and more.
- Participate in joint learning emphases or theme projects.

- Develop and lay out a demonstration patio which math teachers can use to teach the practical application of the calculation of cubic feet.
- Share computer equipment and expertise.
- Provide equipment and assistance for art and drama set design and construction projects.
- Supply decorative plants for other departments' special events.
- Groom FFA leaders to teach public speaking in English or communications classes.
- Share students. Find ways students can take your courses and others. This may mean rescheduling courses to a time you consider less convenient, but the payoff in larger enrollments will be worth some inconvenience.

### Collaborate With Colleagues

If others think highly of you, they will likely think highly of your program and pass compliments along to students.

- Learn about and tap other teachers' expertise. Approach them for help as a compliment, not an obligation.
- Support other teachers in their activities.
- Never express a negative viewpoint about another teacher in front of students.
- Compliment others for outstanding achievement. Write them congratulatory letters.
- Be a leader in professional development activities for all teachers.
- Send copies of your agricultural education newsletter to other teachers.
- Recognize colleagues who contribute to your program's success. Give awards at the FFA banquet and at faculty recognition events.



## Block Scheduling

Some form of block scheduling is likely to be a part of school systems for years to come. Block scheduling necessitates change in the agricultural education program, and change can be a challenge. It can also be an opportunity to reexamine and improve all aspects of your program.

Depending on the situation, students and administrators generally love block scheduling, while teachers give it mixed reviews. Even though block scheduling solves many problems, especially those dealing with fitting college requirements into a student's schedule, the system also creates some challenges for agriculture teachers. How do you convince students to conduct SAEs, maintain FFA membership and re-enroll in agriculture if you lose contact with the student for a semester or year at a time?

### Block Scheduling Overview

There are two basic systems of block scheduling, with countless variations and even more terms to describe them. Here's an overview.

#### 4x4 Block Schedule

In this schedule, students enroll in four courses each semester, attending each class during a 90-minute block every day of the week. With class periods twice as long as in a traditional schedule, students complete a year's worth of coursework in one semester. Also known as block and accelerated block.

#### 4x2 Block Schedule

Like the regular block, in this schedule and its variations, each day consists of four blocks approximately 90 minutes in length. Rather than have four classes every day for a semester, however, students have four classes one day, then four different classes the next day. As in a traditional schedule, courses may cover a full year or a semester. Also known as "alternative block," "modified block," and "AB block."

Here are suggestions for transforming the block scheduling roadblock into a recruitment on-ramp.

- Be positive. Look for opportunities to advance your program using blocks.
- Block scheduling generally makes it possible for more students to enroll in your courses. Make sure students and guidance personnel understand what you offer.
- Higher enrollment often means more courses and even additional teachers. In some states that have adopted block scheduling, the majority of agricultural education programs are now two- or three-teacher departments.
- Take advantage of longer class periods to provide additional in-depth, hands-on, student-directed and off-site learning experiences.

- Develop a retention plan. Some students will stray from agriculture if they cannot "see" how to plan their schedules. Draw up a four-year plan for each student (see samples on page 38). Even if you lose the student for a semester, try to arrange the student's schedule so you have each individual in class sometime during the year.
- Use the FFA as a lifeline. FFA offers an opportunity to keep students linked to the program, even if they are not enrolled that semester. Plan FFA activities with the knowledge that you will now likely have to call students (or send messages to other classes) to announce activities rather than making the announcement only in your own class.
- Schedule SAE reviews throughout the year. This may mean the student must visit with you immediately, before or after school.
- Involve students in managing FFA and SAE activities. Students can be invaluable in making calls, scheduling visits or assisting you with activities normally associated with the position of advisor.

### Making Blocks Work with FFA

When block scheduling hits your school system, it's time to let go of the idea that students must be in your classroom for the entire year to be FFA members. While there are certainly advantages to daily contact with members, it is possible to have a strong FFA chapter that involves and benefits students who are not currently in an agricultural education course because of block scheduling.

Here are suggestions from experienced advisors.

- Find ways to communicate FFA news to students who are not in your classroom. Chapter newsletters, school announcements, bulletin boards, locker signs, monthly calendars, phone calls and e-mail are all effective.
- Plan ahead to ensure students can be enrolled and ready to compete when needed. This may mean working with your state office to examine event eligibility rules and providing all introductory courses in the fall. Some programs enroll both (known) fall semester students and (anticipated) spring semester students at the beginning of the year.
- The Official FFA Manual (page 70, Article V. Membership, Section B) states, "to become an active member and retain membership, a student must: "While in school, be enrolled in at least one agricultural education course during the school year and/or follow a planned course of study..."
- Take advantage of activity, advisement and lunch periods to bring FFA members physically into your department's space. Provide computer access, career development event coaching, committee meeting space or, even, just a place to eat lunch with FFA friends.

Source: *Block Power* (National FFA Organization, 1997).

# Sample Block Schedule Offerings

Here are some examples of courses that might be offered in a one-teacher department.

## Basic 4x4 Block

Blocks	First Semester	Second Semester
<b>1</b> (8-9:30am)	Introduction to Agriscience	Forestry and Wildlife
<b>2</b> (9:38-11:08am)	Horticulture I	Horticulture II
Lunch/Resource (11:14 am-12:15 pm)	Lunch FFAadvising, meetings, etc.	Lunch FFAadvising, meetings, etc.
<b>3</b> (12:24 pm-1:54 pm)	Planning period	Planning period
<b>4</b> (2:02-3:32 pm)	Agricultural Communications	Introduction to Agriscience

## Basic 4x2 Block

Block	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<b>1</b> (8-9:30 am)	Introduction to Agriscience	Horticulture II ↓	Introduction to Agriscience	Horticulture II ↓	Introduction to Agriscience
<b>2</b> (9:38-11:08 am)	Horticulture I		Horticulture I		Horticulture I
Lunch (11:16 am-12:16 pm)	Lunch FFA	Lunch FFA	Lunch FFA	Lunch FFA	Lunch FFA
<b>3</b> (12:24-1:54 pm)	Planning	Agricultural Engineering II	Planning	Agricultural Engineering II	Planning
<b>4</b> (2:02-3:32 pm)	Agricultural Engineering I		Agricultural Engineering I		Agricultural Engineering I



## Conflicting Graduation Requirements

Most educational systems today are pressured to ensure all graduates are prepared to pursue higher education. In many locations, career pathways or career academies funnel groups of students into specific course sequences. Both situations often translate into increased, more-rigid graduation requirements. Agricultural education programs are challenged to find ways for their courses to meet or fit into these requirements.

Any time requirements for “college bound” or “career academy” students conflict with their ability to take agriculture courses, your recruitment and retention efforts will suffer.

Here are suggestions for addressing the roadblock of conflicting graduation requirements.

### Arrange Cross-Disciplinary Credits

Tips for arranging cross-disciplinary credits:

- Become familiar with performance standards in the discipline for which you are seeking credit. Use texts and reference materials that relate to that subject.
- Have students complete projects that demonstrate the skills and knowledge required in the other discipline.
- Present students’ work to administrators, parents, the school board and other teachers.
- Meet one-on-one with administrators and department heads to discuss your goals and the mutual benefits of cross-disciplinary credit.
- Meet with small groups of teachers. Show them materials you plan to use, and make them aware of your students’ SAE programs and classroom and lab projects.
- Ask for and incorporate their input.

Source: *A Guide to Local Program Success* (National Council for Agricultural Education and National FFA Organization, 1997).

### Offer Cross-Disciplinary Credit

A strong response to conflicting graduation requirements is to arrange for agriculture courses to count as credits in another subject area. At least one instructor has secured art credit for her program’s floral design course. Many agriculture courses have been approved to fulfill science credit requirements. You may be required to obtain cross-certification in science, but agriculture instructors who have pursued this option report that the rewards in enrollment, program improvement and professional growth are worth the effort.

For further information about qualifying your courses for cross-disciplinary effort, contact your state supervisor of agricultural education.

## Participate in School-to-Career Efforts

A quality agricultural education program thrives on the three essential components of school-to-career education:

- School-based learning (instruction);
- Work-based learning (supervised agricultural experience programs); and
- Connecting activities between school and careers (FFA chapter).

It’s not enough for you to be aware of the connections between agricultural education and school-to-career components. For your program to survive, decision makers—administrators, school-to-career coordinators, tech-prep coordinators, guidance counselors, school board members and legislators—must also realize that today’s agricultural education fits perfectly with school-to-career efforts. You should be an involved and outspoken member of your school’s school-to-career development team.

- Be familiar with the overall goals, scope and approach of local and state school-to-career efforts.
- Share your experience managing school-to-career components with other educators.
- Explore various approaches to school-to-career education. There are many different interpretations and ways of reaching the school-to-career goals. Find out about them through your professional publications and meetings.
- Suggest adaptations that might work well at your school (and improve recruitment and retention in your agricultural education program).
- Analyze which of your courses could serve students in various career pathways or academies offered at your school. The underlying skills learned in agricultural communications, marketing or economics courses, for example, would serve students in a range of career fields. There may be ways to team-teach such courses with other teachers who can help students apply the lessons to their specific career area.
- Offer to help middle grade teachers incorporate school-to-career lessons. They are often looking for opportunities to take students on field trips or to career fairs, place them in job shadowing situations, or match them with career mentors.
- Devise ways that you, your students and your industry contacts can serve these needs while exposing middle grade students to the exciting world of agricultural careers.

Remember: the more students exposed to you and your program, the more chances you have to subtly sell the benefits of enrolling in agricultural education.



## Assist with Service-Learning Initiatives

In some schools, emphasis on students' community service and citizenship education has evolved into formal service-learning programs and courses. Through these programs, students earn credit by participating in individual and group volunteer and service experiences plus attending classes that address service-related skills and community issues. Class time is also used to report, reflect on and celebrate service-learning experiences.

You can tie agricultural education into service-learning initiatives by helping to place students in volunteer and service situations. There may be great opportunities for agriculture students to advance their SAE programs while earning service-learning credit. Agriculture courses built around the FFA Partners in Active Learning Support (PALS) program might also qualify for service-learning credit.

## Provide Concurrent-Enrollment Courses

Concurrent-enrollment courses are ones for which students earn both high school and college credits. They can be taken at either the high school (proxied by the agriculture instructor) or a nearby college. These types of courses are a definite attraction to students who plan on college after high school.

Consult with your state education department and nearby universities and community colleges to explore the possibilities for concurrent-enrollment courses in your program.

# Sample Four-Year Plans

## Student Interested in Horticulture-Related Careers

Student Year	Semester 1	Semester 2
<b>Freshman</b>	Agricultural Science I (for science credit)	Agricultural Science II (for science credit)
<b>Sophomore</b>	Agricultural Technology	Environmental Science (for science credit) Plants and Gardens (independent study)
<b>Junior</b>	Greenhouse Management	Agricultural Communications
<b>Senior</b>	SAE Co-Op	Floral Design (for art credit) Agricultural Marketing (concurrent enrollment for post-secondary credit)

## Student Interested in Agricultural Education Careers

Student Year	Semester 1	Semester 2
<b>Freshman</b>	Agricultural Science I (for science credit)	Agricultural Science II (for science credit)
<b>Sophomore</b>	Biotechnology (for science credit)	Small Animal Science Agricultural Mechanics (for science credit)
<b>Junior</b>	Plants and Gardens	Agricultural Communications Service-Learning Course
<b>Senior</b>	Agricultural Management	Leadership/PALS Course Agricultural Marketing

## Student Continuity in Program

The days when nearly all agriculture students started the program as freshmen and were in classes throughout the next four years are probably past. Students' many options and requirements mean only a small core of students will probably take agriculture courses every semester of every year. Your challenges are to find ways to increase the size of this core group and also to explore alternative delivery methods that might keep students in your program even at times when they're not in your classroom.

Students who continue in agricultural education for four solid years have expanded opportunities to develop instruction-related SAE programs, prepare for success in career development events and excel in the FFA.

Nonetheless, all these benefits can also be available to students who take a limited number of agriculture courses.

Here are suggestions for addressing the roadblock of limited student continuity:

### Build Excitement

When students are excited and motivated about the things they learn in agricultural education, they are more likely to find ways to continue their involvement.

- Never underestimate the value of exposing students to exciting agricultural education while they are in the middle grades.
- Don't hold back the "good stuff" for advanced-level courses. Involve students in hands-on, meaningful learning experiences from the first time they enter your classroom.
- Use student leadership portfolios to help students recognize the benefits of continued enrollment and involvement.
- Encourage exploratory SAEs. Students may be more likely to give it a try if they are not overwhelmed with a multi-year commitment. (For more information on exploratory SAEs, consult *SAE: Experiencing Agriculture*. See "Resource" section for ordering information.)
- Involve students in FFA activities right from the start. Invite them to social events, take them on trips or hold a recognition ceremony for new members.
- Provide special recognition for four-year students. Offer some scholarships for only this population. Map out what it means to be a "program completer" by designating course sequences and requirements.
- Provide special certificates and recognition to program completers.

### Build in Flexibility

The traditional course sequence of "Agriculture 1, Agriculture 2, Agriculture 3, Agriculture 4" seldom serves today's realities of block schedules, increased graduation requirements and student needs and interests.

After a single-semester introductory course, most students will likely prefer flexibility in choosing among career-related semester courses.

- Consider offering the introductory course both semesters, every year, so students who can only start with agriculture in the second semester are then free to pursue whatever future courses they want.
- Explore alternative scheduling and delivery methods for the introductory course. Could it be offered during "zero hour" (before other classes start) or summer school? How about computer-based instruction combined with portfolio assessment, so students could complete the course through independent study? Perhaps some students could even "test out" of the introductory course requirement through a written exam and demonstration of skills they have developed through past agriculture-related experiences.
- Use SAE programs, student advisements and FFA experiences to help students synthesize their agriculture courses into a coherent understanding of today's agricultural industry.
- Open courses to any interested student, not restricted by grade level. Limit prerequisites and/or ensure that any prerequisite courses can be scheduled, in sequence, by most students.

### Redefine "Continuity"

The SAE and FFA components of a quality agricultural education program ensure that students can be continuously involved in the program even when they are not continuously in agriculture classes.

- Make the most of SAEs. Help students explore whether their SAE programs could fulfill assignments and requirements in other courses, such as science, business, cooperative education or communications. Surely students' SAE experiences could be worth extra credit in a variety of courses, from mathematics (profit calculations) to English (composing business letters).
- Remind students that records and reports from their SAEs make strong additions to their student portfolios.
- Arrange to be the "homeroom" or "advisement" teacher for agriculture students who are not currently in your classes. This builds in continuous contact.
- Maintain students' involvement in your FFA chapter by offering activities and opportunities at times when a variety of students can participate.

## Student Leadership Portfolio Outline

Build student continuity by providing all new students with a “road map” to the exciting possibilities in agricultural education.

The student leadership portfolio is a collection of materials that introduce students to agricultural education and give them tools to map their continued involvement in your program. Customize portfolio contents to fit your program offerings and needs.

Suggested initial student leadership portfolio contents are:

- Introductory page;
- Agricultural interest inventory;
- Descriptions of all agricultural education courses;
- Two- to three-sentence descriptions of local students' SAE programs (plus other, nontraditional examples if needed);
- Brochure or newsletter of recent FFA chapter activities and accomplishments;
- Goals form.

You may want to supplement these materials with a recent issue of *FFA New Horizons* that covers membership benefits:

- An “access card” for use of the Internet in your computer lab, including important web addresses like [www.ffa.org](http://www.ffa.org);
- An SAE record book;
- Copies of the current FFA program of activities and chapter handbook; and
- Other materials as appropriate.

Review the portfolio contents and have students use the forms within the first weeks of your introductory courses. Over time, have them create and add to their portfolios:

- A report about an agricultural career that interests them;
- A résumé that showcases their progress in instruction, SAE and FFA;
- SAE forms and records (find these in SAE: Experiencing Agriculture; see “Resource” section for ordering information);
- Additional goal forms, updated at the start of each course, semester or academic year;
- Support materials and examples of their work; and
- Additional materials you determine.

You might provide students with FFA binders to hold their portfolios, or ask them to provide their own notebooks or folders.

# Agriculture Student's Leadership Portfolio



Your guide to achieving school,  
personal and career excellence  
through agricultural education.

# Sample Student Portfolio:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Review the provided information about agricultural education courses, career-related projects and leadership opportunities. Then, rate your interest in the following areas. Write a number in each blank according to how much the item interests you:

**1 - very interested**

**2 - somewhat interested**

**3 - interested**

**4 - not interested**

## *Agricultural Education Courses*

*Course name*

*Course name*

*Course name*

*Course name*

*Course name*

*Course name*

*Course name*

*Course name*

*Course name*

## **Career-Related Projects (Supervised Agricultural Experience Programs)**

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## **Leadership Experiences (FFA Chapter Involvement)**

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> committee work           | <input type="checkbox"/> public speaking              | <input type="checkbox"/> fund-raising and finances |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public relations         | <input type="checkbox"/> chapter officer              | <input type="checkbox"/> community service         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> recreation and health    | <input type="checkbox"/> scholarships                 | <input type="checkbox"/> career skills             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> recruitment              | <input type="checkbox"/> awards and recognition       | <input type="checkbox"/> sponsors and supporters   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> environmental activities | <input type="checkbox"/> service activities           | <input type="checkbox"/> citizenship activities    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> agricultural awareness   | <input type="checkbox"/> district or regional officer | <input type="checkbox"/> state or national officer |

# Sample Student Portfolio: Goals Form

## My Agricultural Goals

Name\_\_\_\_\_

Considering the areas that interest you, outline your goals for the short term (next two months) and long term (next 12 months). Track your progress and what you learn in columns four and five.

	Next two months	Next 12 months	Accomplishment/Date	Comments
Courses and Grades				
Premier Leadership				
Personal Growth				
Career Success				
SAE Success				

## Lack of Diversity

Most human beings are naturally drawn to groups that are pretty much like themselves. This is especially true in students' peer-dominated world. Your targeted efforts to recruit and retain diverse students can make your agricultural education program a more "natural" choice for a wider range of students.

To be diverse means to be composed of distinct or unique qualities. In education, diversity of students may include students of different races, religions, gender, intelligence levels, motivation levels and social or economic backgrounds. In agriculture, the diversity of interests among students who live in rural settings on farms or not on farms, in suburban settings or in urban settings can also be significant. All diverse student groups should be represented in your agricultural education program in proportions that reflect the school's student population.

By increasing the diversity of students in your program, the educational experience is enriched. As students share experiences, beliefs and perspectives, all will likely gain an understanding and appreciation not otherwise available. In addition, diversity promotes personal growth and a healthy society as stereotypes and preconceptions are broken down. Finally, diversity of students provides the groundwork that allows students to succeed in a complex, global workplace.

## Recruit for Diversity

Recruiting for diversity is not just one person's responsibility. Call on administrators, guidance counselors, community members, alumni, advisory committee members, chapter officers and state FFA leaders to help.

Here are suggestions for recruiting for diversity:

- Actively participate in workshops that focus on the importance of recruiting for diversity in the classroom and the FFA. At least one workshop series is frequently offered at national and state events.
- Focus recruitment and retention efforts on a variety of careers. If your school is in a rural setting, consider highlighting urban careers or vice versa.
- Develop a poster series to complement national recognition dates (i.e., African American Month, National Handicapped Awareness Week, etc.) with pictures and facts about relevant agriculture-related people, traditions and programs:
  - Request posters from the National FFA Organization or create your own.
  - Include students in the design and use of the poster series.
  - Devote class or meeting time to discuss the group being celebrated. Brainstorm how agricultural education can better accommodate the targeted groups.

- Tailor your recruitment and retention plan to better reflect the school's student population:
  - Introduce *Make It Happen! FFA Project Growth* video and student worksheets. (See "Resource" section for ordering information.)
  - Encourage students to actively participate in related workshops at state and national FFA conventions.
- Publicize the accessibility of scholarships available through agricultural education and the FFA.
- Work with fellow teachers, guidance counselors and administrators to identify and include students from diverse backgrounds:
  - Provide training on diversity awareness to FFA chapter officers.
  - Ask state and national FFA staff to conduct workshops on diversity recruitment and retention issues.
- Work with your advisory committee to set diversity goals and plan ways to accomplish them that accurately reflect the community:
  - Assess local community diversity.
  - Identify the needs of the local agricultural job market. Work with your advisory committee to analyze where the needed workers will come from in the future. Overall, the United States population—and pool of future employees—is becoming more and more diverse. The agricultural industry will need to tap a wider diversity of workers to maintain its momentum.

Suggestions adapted from findings and recommendations of Carlos Lopez, National FFA Recruitment Intern, Summer 1997.

## Assess Your Own Attitudes

Most people believe they resist stereotypes, but subtle behaviors often reveal beliefs and attitudes that undermine our efforts to enhance diversity.

Here are some tips for improving your diversity commitment, awareness and success.

- Never believe stereotypes.
- Don't ignore stereotyped comments or "jokes." Ban them from your classroom.
- Be open to the benefits of diversity.
- Strive to learn about and be sensitive to different cultural communication norms that influence students to interact and learn in a variety of ways.
- Familiarize yourself with possible cultural differences, such as students' level of comfort with communicating emotions and thoughts to you and their peers.
- Seek helpful books, classroom activities and curriculum.

Source: *A Guide to Local Program Success* (National Council for Agricultural Education and National FFA Organization, 1999)



# Sample Diversity Checklist

These actions reflect a conscious effort to enhance diversity in your program. Can you check each criterion?

- ☐ Add diversity to your curriculum through a variety of course offerings and activities.
- ☐ Break down the "sows and plows" mindset by offering courses in, and focusing public relations efforts on, nontraditional agriculture (i.e. aquaculture, organic food production, food science, horticulture and small animal care).
- ☐ Become involved in activities outside of those normally associated with agriculture. Be active in a science teacher's organization, a local cultural festival or Special Olympics.
- ☐ Support other staff members' diversity-enrichment activities.
- ☐ Offer a variety of courses, FFA activities and SAE options that recognize, value and interest students from all backgrounds and cultures.
- ☐ Promote an agricultural industry that has opportunities for all people by:
  - Encouraging all points of view to be discussed;
  - Using bias-free instructional and program materials;
  - Using diverse role models in teaching and encouraging students; and
  - Disciplining in a fair and firm manner.
- ☐ Vary your teaching style. Use hands-on activities, team or group situations and individual learning assignments to appeal to different student learning styles.
- ☐ Focus on community service activities that appeal to a diverse community and that will provide widespread exposure.

## Perception of Courses

Most people tend to remember things "the way they were" without bothering to explore the way they are now. This

tendency may be affecting your agricultural education enrollment, as parents and other adults pass along impressions about agricultural education left over from their own school experiences. Although this is ancient history to today's students and to quality agricultural education programs, misperceptions must be directly addressed.

To attract and retain students, you must break stereotypes and teach people about today's agricultural education. The first step, of course, is to ensure your program is of the highest quality and matches the needs of students and the community. With a quality program in place, you are ready to tackle misperceptions about agricultural education courses.

Here are suggestions for addressing the course perceptions roadblock.

- First, size up the roadblock. Find out what people believe goes on in your courses. (*A Guide to Local Program Success* contains survey forms. See "Resource" section for ordering information.)
- Write out messages that directly address each misperception. For example, if many people believe agricultural education is a dumping ground for unsuccessful students, point out that 81% of FFA members nationwide expect to continue their education after high school. Publicize the percentage of your students who are college bound, if it's already an impressive number.
- Identify opportunities to convey your messages in every possible way. Consider course descriptions, public relations efforts, meetings with administrators and counselors, school board and parent night presentations, etc. (See "Overcome Roadblocks" section for a variety of strategies.)

## Top-Notch Education

Many people still believe agricultural education is only for students who want to pursue careers in production agriculture. Instead, today's agricultural education provides job-specific knowledge, college preparation and transferable skills that are needed in all careers.

To build positive perceptions of your courses, illustrate how your agricultural education program provides students with unique opportunities to:

- Interact with people outside the school setting;
- Earn local, state and national recognition;
- Establish career skills;
- Establish work experience;
- Apply school lessons to real-life situations;
- Meet influential people;
- Take the lead;
- Learn to handle pressure;
- Enjoy real-world results;
- Build a positive attitude;

- Develop self-esteem;
- Accept real responsibility and challenges; and
- Learn to work on teams.

- Scrupulously avoid reinforcing stereotypes and misperceptions. For example, students undoubtedly learn important career and personal lessons through livestock judging. Outsiders who view a picture of a student with a cow, however, can't see all that. Most will take one glance and figure it's "those farmers" and "why does that belong in our schools?"
- Carefully consider every photograph and written item that goes out from your program, including the FFA chapter. Help students learn to build an image of your program as relevant, cutting-edge and high-quality. Every single word, picture and action counts!
- Remember the value of hands-on education. People who experience quality agricultural education cannot hold on to misperceptions.
  - Insist that administrators and guidance counselors visit your classes. Ask them to work alongside students during labs that demonstrate use of advanced math, science, communication and thinking skills.
  - Offer short-term adult education courses in the agricultural education facility. Focus on topics of general interest, like gardening, Internet usage, small animal care, landscape design, wildlife management, etc. While adults are in the courses, be sure to give them a complete tour and overview of your program.
  - Work with advisory committee members and FFA leaders to set up an agriculture awareness night. Feature employer and college booths, industry speakers, demonstrations and hands-on activities...and a free meal or snack. Invite eighth graders, parents, high school students and adult supporters.
  - Take advantage of agriculture-related topics that make the news. If the "hot topic" is biotechnology, for example, invite a reporter to come see a related classroom lesson. Be prepared with facts and a cool head to address related public concerns.
  - Look for and create "excuses" to bring people into your facility. Host a community banquet, sponsor a grandparents' day event or offer free seedlings at an open house. Make the most of the exposure. Set up students to demonstrate course projects. Ensure every visible poster, flyer, note and computer screen conveys a current image of agricultural education.
  - Host an "agricultural challenge." Recruit a team of adult school and community leaders to complete problems that reflect today's agricultural careers and involve activities from your courses...use of computers,

Internet research, applications of scientific concepts and more. Choose activities of which most adults would think, "I can do that," but that are in fact not so simple.

Afterward, ask the adult participants to provide quotes about their experience. Encourage the local paper to cover the story.

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## Course Descriptions

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Don't forget that the "standard stuff" distributed to students and parents during course registration is one of the most important recruiting tools you have. Use the opportunity to emphasize your program's relevance, hands-on learning, usefulness and results.

Glitzy promotional pieces may attract attention, but before students enroll in your courses, they and their parents will want to know what is going to be taught. It is important that promises of high-tech, cutting-edge learning are supported by actual course content.

While they do need to be factual, course descriptions do not need to be boring.

Here are some tips for writing course descriptions that encourage enrollment.

- Avoid jargon and academic language. Present the information so agricultural "outsiders" know what will be covered.
- Remember that the descriptions will influence recruitment and retention. Present the topics to be covered in terms of the benefits they offer to learners.
- Describe what students will know and be able to do by the end of the course.
- Reflect the inclusion of supervised agricultural experience SAE programs and FFA as an integral part of agriculture courses.
- Provide information about course sequences and four-year plans if appropriate.

# Sample Course Titles

The most effective course titles accurately describe course content while appealing to students' needs and interests. Here are a few examples.

**Agricultural Engineering and Power**

**Agricultural Production**

**Agricultural Science**

**Animal Care Technician**

**Animal Science**

**Biotechnology**

**Business Practices in Agriculture**

**Companion Animal Care**

**Economics and Finance in Agriculture**

**Environmental Science**

**Forestry and Wildlife**

**Horticultural Science**

**Leadership in Agriculture**

**Marketing Agricultural Products and Services**

**Mass Communication and Agriculture**

**Outdoor Recreation Management**

**Plants and Gardens**

**Technology in Agriculture**

**Veterinary Science**

## Sample Course Descriptions

**Agricultural Power:** (grades 11-12) one-semester course, .5 credit

*Prerequisites: Agricultural Science I & II or instructor's permission.* Learn advanced skills in the repair, adjustment and overhaul of small gas engines used in lawn care, greenhouse, recreation, crop and animal production and other agricultural businesses.

**Agricultural Science I:** (grades 9-12) two-semester course, 1 science credit

Sample the world of agriculture while learning and applying scientific principles. Discover the "secrets" of animal science, agricultural mechanics, agricultural business, careers and leadership. Students help choose covered topics and create personalized "supervised agricultural experience" projects. Units may include agribusiness, fish and wildlife management, floriculture and food science.

**Agricultural Science II:** (grades 10-12) two-semester course, 1 science credit

*Prerequisite: Agricultural Science I or instructor's permission.* Expand your understanding of how the natural world works. Explore plant and crop science, soils, entomology, horticulture, forestry and more. Apply your know-how with hands-on experiences in careers, leadership and business, and expand your supervised agricultural experience project.

**Agricultural Structures:** (grades 10-12) one-semester course, .5 credit

*Prerequisite: Agricultural Science I or instructor's permission.* Learn and apply skills in electrical wiring, electric motors, concrete, masonry, welding, plumbing and more while building a house for Habitat for Humanity. Additional activities apply these skills to agriculture with work on farm fences, product handling and processing equipment and farm building problems.

**Agricultural Management and Economics:** (grades 11-12) two-semester course, 1 credit

*Prerequisites: Agricultural Science I and II or instructor's permission.* Learn to succeed in any agricultural career setting, including your own business. Master written and verbal communication, human relations, computers, economic principles, planning, agribusiness functions and management practices.

**Animal Science:** (grades 10-12) one-semester course, .5 credit

*Prerequisite: Agricultural Science I or instructor's permission.* Learn to care for, breed and conduct research related to small and large animals. Study animal health and nutrition, feed preparation and ration balancing, breeding basics and more. Complete related experiments and participate in career development events.

**Supervised Agricultural Experience Co-Op:** (grades 11-12) one-semester course, .5 credit

*Prerequisite: instructor's permission.* Work in an agricultural business or agency and review your learning with your supervisor and agriculture instructor. Start by developing a training plan and signed agreement, then earn credit and hands-on experience.

*Samples adapted from Aurora High School, Missouri*

## Perception of Careers in Agriculture

From children's toys to "coffee table books" to news reports, the images most people receive about agricultural careers focus strictly on production agriculture. To attract and retain students, your challenge is to expand their vision to include the wide range of exciting, meaningful and rewarding careers across the entire range of the agricultural industry.

Nearly 20 percent of all Americans are involved in the agricultural industry. Less than two percent of those workers are involved in production agriculture. That leaves a huge selection of careers in agricultural marketing, processing, communications, research, education, horticulture, natural resources, forestry, agribusiness and more.

You must help people understand the broad spectrum of today's agricultural careers. Here are suggestions for addressing this roadblock:

- Ensure that your course offerings and curriculum do, in fact, prepare students for a wide variety of today's agricultural careers.
- Provide students with real-world examples of a variety of agricultural careers. Set up field trips to research laboratories and agribusinesses. Within each course, invite speakers to discuss the marketing, communications, research and management aspects of related careers. Invite past students who are now studying agriculture at a postsecondary institution or college to discuss their studies and how they fit into agricultural careers.
  - Even if your community is very production oriented, you can find speakers to broaden students' horizons. Look to local agricultural suppliers and the companies that supply them. Contact the nearest college-level agricultural education programs for recommendations of graduates who work in your area.
- Seek publicity for student field trips and speakers related to "nontraditional" agricultural careers. Invite counselors and administrators to join you for the events.
- Spread the message about agricultural career opportunities at every occasion. Careers are at the top of many parents' and students' lists of concerns. They need to know that agricultural careers are available and rewarding in terms of salary, advancement and personal fulfillment.
- Emphasize the outstanding opportunities for careers in agricultural education. Teaching is a professionally rewarding career with strong salaries and fringe benefits. Along with the many rewards

that stem from helping students discover their own success, the limited supply of teachers compared to the demand means qualified candidates can choose from positions all across the nation. Recent statistics indicate there are only about two-thirds as many qualified candidates as there are open agricultural teaching positions.

- Even students who eventually decide teaching is not for them will benefit by pursuing a college degree in agricultural education. Agricultural education graduates work in schools, extension offices, government agencies and businesses. Their professional education and communication skills make them very attractive to a variety of employers.

- Use the excellent resources available regarding agricultural careers. The National FFA Organization offers several full-color, impressive brochures, posters and videos. (See "Resource" section for ordering information.)
  - Make an appointment to show a video and discuss career materials with administrators and counselors. Screen videos and pass out materials at parent nights and school open houses. Send brochures home with students after recruitment presentations.

# Sample Agricultural Education Careers Flyer

## **Agricultural Education- Agriculture's People Profession**

# Looking for a great career? Consider teaching agriculture!

A career in agricultural education lets you make a difference in the lives of students, agribusinesses and the community. If you are motivated and enjoying working with people, you might make an excellent agriculture teacher.

### **Ask Yourself...**

- Why might I enjoy being a teacher?
- Do I sincerely want the chance to make a positive difference in the lives of young people?
- Do I enjoy being around young people?
- Can I motivate young people, even to do things that don't necessarily interest them before we begin?
- Am I inspired by the diversity and fast pace of change in agriculture?
- Am I willing to take initiative, ask questions and seek out opportunities?

If you answer "yes," look into agricultural education careers!

### **Choices, Choices, Choices**

Agricultural education graduates are in high demand for careers in:

- Middle schools and high schools;
- Post-secondary schools;
- Extension;
- Government agencies;
- Natural resource management; and
- Agribusiness sales and training.

With a college degree in agricultural education, the choice is yours!

For more information, see your agriculture teacher.

## Mismatch Between Program and Student and Community Needs

All the marketing in the world won't build enrollment in an agricultural education program that simply does not meet the needs of students, parents, the school system and the community. Your challenge is to carefully craft a high-quality program that fulfills current student and community wants and needs while also "raising the bar" to optimize customers' expectations.

The best agricultural education programs are student-, parent-, administrator- and industry-driven, not teacher-driven. In other words, a quality program is not built around what you want to teach, but around what others want and need students to learn.

Here are suggestions for realigning program offerings with student and community needs:

### Student Wants and Needs

The most effective way to discover what students want from agricultural education is to ask them. (*A Guide to Local Program Success* includes an appropriate survey form. See "Resource" section for ordering information.) If local students are like other American youth, they will want:

- To be treated with respect and fairness;
- Equal opportunity to be recognized;
- The chance to learn in ways that suit them best;
- Connections between classroom lessons and the real world;
- Preparation for well-paying and satisfying careers;
- The opportunity to contribute to society; and
- Fun and meaningful lessons.

Many of these wants overlap with student needs. In today's educational climate, students need to experience career exploration and development activities. They need to develop transferable work skills and citizenship. They need self-motivation and self-discipline. They need to develop a positive attitude about continuing to learn throughout their lives. And, almost all need to graduate in a position to continue their education after high school if desired.

### Parent or Guardian Wants and Needs

As with students, the best way to discover what parents want from your agricultural education program is to ask them. In addition to surveys, you might conduct a focus group discussion with students' parents. Also, be sure to include at least one parent on your program's advisory committee.

Parents' "wants" for their children's secondary education include:

- Preparation for higher education;
- Preparation for promising careers;
- A safe and disciplined school environment;
- Student opportunity to succeed;
- Fair treatment for students and themselves;
- Help for students dealing with maturity and social adjustment issues; and
- Development of practical hands-on and interpersonal skills that can be used at home.

Many busy parents also want and need schools to provide character-building lessons and, even, social services. Some need the agricultural education program to provide adult education for their own career and personal development. Most want or need scholarship help to cover college costs. All need encouragement and support to remain involved in their adolescents' lives.

### School Wants and Needs

After years of educational reform efforts, your school most likely has a written set of goals for its graduates. It is imperative that your agricultural education program fulfill those goals. Clarify the connection between the school's goals and your program for administrators and school board members. Provide them with an annual report describing activities that meet school goals. Track your program's graduates, and report their successes.

Schools and administrators also need cost-effective educational programs. Ensure that your program provides the highest possible value. Work with companies and industry groups to help underwrite the cost of equipment and out-of-school student learning experiences.

Your administrator needs you to be a "team player."

### Community Wants and Needs

The many constituencies that make up your local community likely have wants and needs that often overlap, but may sometimes conflict. Most taxpayers want the highest-quality educational system at the lowest cost. Community organizations want student volunteers and, perhaps, access to facilities. Booster groups want victories and trophies and the budget to pursue them. Employers want low-cost but loyal student employees for today and career-ready graduates to fill tomorrow's jobs, either directly after high school or after further education.

### The Advisory Committee

An advisory committee is an ideal way to obtain continuous feedback about customers' wants and needs. Make sure the committee includes members from your key customer groups, including:

- Representatives of local agricultural businesses, industry and production agriculture;
- Parents;
- Administrators (perhaps as "ex officio" members);
- Other teachers;
- Community leaders (i.e., community organization officers, government agency staff, etc.); and
- Students.

Advisory committee meetings should be discussion-focused. Don't use the time to tell committee members about your program (you can do that with pre-meeting phone calls or written materials). The priority should be to unleash creative ways to improve your program and better meet customer needs.

For details on setting up and working with an advisory committee, consult the *Agriculture Teacher's Manual*. (See "Resource" section for ordering information.)

## Putting It All Together

No program can be everything to everybody. You cannot fulfill all the wants and needs of all your customers all the time.

However, you can—and must—ensure that each thing you do addresses at least one want or need of a key customer group. Almost every item mentioned with this "mismatch" roadblock can be legitimately addressed within the total scope of a quality agricultural education program.

Start by making a list of your key customers' wants and needs. Then, brainstorm all the ways each item is fulfilled in your program. Note the areas that need improvement, and prepare for needed changes. For your program to be successful, it must adapt to its ever-changing environment.

Be conscious, too, of areas that are suspiciously lacking in wants and needs from your key customers. Lack of demand may reflect apathy, hopelessness or lack of awareness rather than lack of need. For example, local agricultural employers may focus only on the jobs they need to fill with students and high school graduates. Don't let that limit your vision of what the entire agricultural industry needs—bright, innovative, college-ready, high-performing graduates. Consider the fulfillment of expressed local wants and needs as the bare minimum. Build from there to create a program that expands horizons for students, parents, the school and the community.

Finally, expose this exceptional program to as many customers as possible. Information throughout this guide and in other national resources can help.

## Home Visits

Home visits don't have to be limited to supervised agricultural experience (SAE) programs! Help ensure your program fits local needs by interacting with students and parents on their own "turf."

Visits to current and prospective students provide the opportunity to reach out to students and families. They also allow you to build support from parents and even younger siblings. Keep the following tips in mind:

- Plan home visits in conjunction with SAE visits. When planning an SAE visit, take a couple of minutes to find addresses of one or two prospective students who live in the same area. Make better use of your mileage by making two or three nearby stops rather than just one.
- Consider including current students or chapter officers on the visits. Prospective students might feel more at ease if one of their peers is on hand to answer questions or concerns.
- A personal visit can be a spontaneous visit or a planned stop at a student's home or residence. Gauge your community's preferences.
- Schedule visits at times when parents are home. Getting to know parents is important if you are to recruit their son or daughter. A parent's compliment about you or your program, delivered after you have left, may be the determining factor in a student's decision to enroll in your course.
- Have an agenda. Your purpose for visiting should be known—especially by you. As trite as this sounds, many recruiters visit without a purpose. Have a reason for the visit. It may be as simple as delivering a brochure, introducing yourself or paying the student a compliment.
- Keep your visit brief. Complete your agenda, offer further assistance or information, then leave. Parents are busy, and most do not want to be bothered at home.
- Follow up your visit with a written note. This may be a short letter or other type of note that acknowledges your visit and offers further assistance. Send the letters whether visited students have indicated they will enroll in your course or not. Remember, you're planting seeds for a future crop. The student may not enroll immediately, but may remember your interest at a later time.



## Lack of Awareness

You may have one of the best educational programs in your school, but if students and parents are not aware of its quality, you will not reap the rewards in student numbers. Constant awareness-building efforts are the solution.

Positive public awareness doesn't just happen—it requires conscious, constant effort. Although "marketing" seldom appears in an agriculture instructor's job description, it's up to you to build awareness of your program. Successful teachers use program planning and marketing to help focus on what's important for students, parents and others who influence recruitment and retention—administrators, community members and other teachers.

In agricultural education, marketing is the creation and retention of satisfied "customers" among these key groups. Here are suggestions for tearing down the lack-of-awareness roadblock.

### GASP for AIRR

You can find and fill key customers' needs by following two steps in a simple process called "GASP for AIRR!" Start by identifying key customers in each of the following groups:

General Community  
Administration and School  
Students  
Parents

Then, establish a plan to:

Ask  
Involve  
Recognize  
Report

### Key Resources

For detailed information about how to create and implement a marketing plan for your program, consult *A Guide to Local Program Success* (which includes details and worksheets for *GASP for AIRR*). Also look for opportunities to participate in the FFA sponsored workshop, "Keeping Your Head Above Water: Strategies for Marketing your Program."

### Awareness Building Blocks

Marketing your program is a constant, continuous, creative effort. The following questions reflect some of the basics you may want to have in place. Work toward being able to answer "yes" to each question.

- Is my program using agricultural concepts and content that meet customer needs and wants?
- Do guidance counselors know the curriculum and content I am teaching students?

- Does my program send information to parents, alumni members, school board members and local businesses?
- Have I worked with another teacher in the middle or junior high school?
- Would someone walking into my school for the first time know where the agricultural education department is?
- Have I, or any of my FFA members, participated in a radio program this school year?

Source: *Agriculture Teacher's Manual* (National FFA Organization, 1998).

## Personalized Letters

Personal letters to students and parents can be effective recruitment and retention tools if used correctly. Research shows that targeting certain students is more effective than mass mailing. Printing and postage can add up, but careful planning can provide you with the maximum bang for your mailing bucks.

Personal letters can drum up student interest, create community support and increase program awareness. Begin by building a list or database of potential students with their home addresses and phone numbers. Remember to include students already in your school as well as those who will soon move up from feeder schools.

## Plan a Campaign

Most of us despise "junk mail," but the professionals who create such letters know a few things about persuasion. One of the most important is that a single contact is not enough.

Use that lesson by planning to send a series of targeted, personal letters to students who would be well served by your program. This might include:

- Pre-recruitment letter that simply establishes your interest in, and goodwill toward, the prospective student;
- Initial contact letters to prospective students and their parents that link your program to the student and invite further discussion; and
- Follow-up letters to prospective students and their parents that provide details after a face-to-face contact and/or course enrollment.

## General Tips for Effective Letters

- Remember, appearances count. Use school or program stationary and a good-quality printer.
- Check and double-check that there are no spelling or grammatical errors.
- Personalize the inside address, greeting and envelope. Word processing programs and databases make these tasks fairly easy. Students may be able to help you enter the information.
- Try to limit yourself to a single page. Remember, you can't say everything in one letter. Include a recruitment brochure to give additional details.
- Strive for a professional but friendly tone. Express warmth and respect for the reader, your program...and yourself.

## Tips for Pre-Recruitment Letters

A pre-recruitment letter provides an opportunity to familiarize prospective students with your program and to create goodwill. An effective program uses these early contacts to lay the groundwork for later recruitment and retention activities.

- Focus on a current accomplishment of the student, like:
  - 4-H award or office;
  - Honor roll nomination;
  - Science fair entry or prize;
  - Award or office in an FFA chapter that feeds into your school or program;
  - Student government office;
  - Civic organization or citizenship recognition;
  - Participating in agriculture-related areas of fairs and festivals; or
  - Honors in “Odyssey of the Mind” or other leadership or academic programs.
- Congratulate the student on a job well done. Be as specific as possible. If you mention an award, include the appropriate award or nomination title.
- Connect the accomplishment to agricultural education. Explain how skills the student has demonstrated are needed in the agricultural industry.
- Identify exciting career opportunities in agricultural education today.
- Encourage the student to visit with you to discuss enrollment in your program.
- Provide contact information.

## Tips for Initial Contact Letters

A well-targeted initial contact letter can be one of the most effective recruitment tools. It may be the first type of communication prospective students and their parents have had with a secondary school:

- Consider contacting both the prospective student and his or her parents.
- Explain program opportunities and how the student can benefit.
- Highlight activities, FFA and other opportunities that build interpersonal skills.
- Mention recent accomplishments of your program's students. Explain what skills students obtained in the process.
- Elaborate on immediate employment opportunities in agriculture today.
- Link student qualities to your program.
- Encourage program support and request that the student visit with you concerning enrollment.
- Provide contact information.
- Enclose course descriptions and a brochure or recruitment newsletter.

## Tips for Follow-Up Letters

Even after a student has enrolled in your courses, the recruitment and retention process has only begun. Continue to establish rapport and respect with students and parents through a follow-up letter:

- Consider contacting both the student and parents.
- Congratulate the student's enrollment.
- Reiterate the importance of agricultural education to student development.
- Emphasize career opportunities.
- Showcase your program and FFA special awards or activities.
- Encourage involvement in and support of the agricultural education program.
- Provide contact information.

# Sample Initial Contact Letter to Student

<Date>

<Jennifer Smith>

<203 Maple Street>

<Story City, IA 50248>

Dear <Jennifer,>

Congratulations on nearly completing the <eighth> grade! I am sure that you are looking forward to attending <high school> and exploring the many different opportunities available there. I would like to take a moment to explain some of the expanding horizons associated with your advancement to this level. One of the areas with the most opportunities is the agricultural education program.

I think you would be amazed to learn about the many benefits of involvement with agricultural education and the FFA. The freshman <Agricultural Sciences> class is designed specifically for students like you. It is a class that emphasizes hands-on experiences related to science in agriculture. You can learn about the food industry, pets and other animals, and share in exploring our natural resources while earning science credit.

In addition, by enrolling in <Agricultural Sciences,> you have the opportunity to join the FFA organization. FFA affords you the chance to make new friends, build your leadership skills and take part in activities that may improve your chances for college scholarships. It's a great way to become involved in the school and community, and provides many fun activities.

I hope that you consider agricultural education and will enroll for the <Agricultural Sciences> class. Please feel free to stop by my office or call me at <phone> if you have any questions about agriscience or about your transition to <high school.> Best wishes!

Sincerely,

Agriculture Instructor and FFA Advisor

<Central High School>

# Sample Initial Contact Letter to Parents

<Date>

<Tom and Jane Smith>  
<203 Maple Street>  
<Story City, IA 50248>

Dear <Mr. and Mrs. Smith,>

In <April,> <Jennifer> will register for her <freshman> classes at <Central High> School. She will soon be receiving course descriptions and various options for her <high school> program. Several teachers from <Boone County Middle School> recommended that I contact you concerning <Jennifer's> entry into the agriscience and leadership program here at <Central High.>

I have heard a great deal about <Jennifer> from the <Boone County Middle School> faculty. They tell me she is not only a good student, but a wonderful person as well. I know you are very proud of her. I hope you will continue to support her success by encouraging her to enroll in the freshman <Agricultural Sciences> course when she completes her registration form in <April.>

You might be surprised at the diversity of opportunities offered through the agriscience program, FFA and the dynamic industry of agriculture, which employs more than 20 million Americans. There are many career opportunities in agriscience, including veterinary science, international marketing, computer programming, biotechnology and genetic engineering. Our agricultural education program offers exceptional academic and career preparation. Through hands-on experience and by putting classroom theory into laboratory practice, students learn the problem-solving and analytical skills that are valued by employers and are critical for success. Field trips, workshops, seminars and conventions help provide a well-rounded experience for each student.

<Agricultural Sciences> is a course designed especially for students like <Jennifer>-ones who are intelligent and have excellent leadership potential. It is a science-based course designed to emphasize the practical applications of science. Students who have taken this course in the past have done well throughout their high school and college years. The course provides full science credit toward graduation and college entrance requirements.

Students enrolled in <Agricultural Science> can also be members of the FFA student organization. In FFA, there are areas in which everyone can excel. Our program emphasizes leadership and citizenship development, while trying to provide each student with skills to be successful in college and careers. The FFA program provides enough activities so nearly all members can earn scholarships to various colleges and universities. If <Jennifer> continues in agriculture for four years, she is almost certain to be recruited by one of these schools.

I hope you will encourage <Jennifer> to register for <Agricultural Science> and become involved in the agriculture program so she may benefit from the many learning and leadership experiences provided in agricultural education and FFA. If you have any questions, or if I can be of help in any other capacity during <Jennifer's> transition to high school, please feel free to contact me at school <phone number> or at home <phone number>. I have enclosed a list of agriculture courses and a brochure I hope will be helpful.

Sincerely,

Agriculture Instructor and FFA Advisor  
<Central High School>

Encl.: Course Descriptions; Program Brochure

# Sample Follow-up Letter to Student

<Date>

<Jennifer Smith>  
<203 Maple Street>  
<Story City, IA 50248>

Dear <Jennifer,>

I just received the good news that you have enrolled in next fall's <Agricultural Sciences> class. Congratulations! You have made an excellent decision. I hope you are looking forward to entering <Central High> School next fall.

In addition to many classroom activities, you will be eligible to join the <Central High> FFA Chapter. FFA is unique in that every student who is involved has the chance to excel. Whether you have an interest in pets and animals, the environment, horticulture, leadership or crop science, you have the chance to develop and complete activities that fit your interests.

In addition, FFA provides you with the chance to make new friends, develop leadership skills and prepare yourself for college and careers. It's a great way to become involved and make the most of your high school years.

The FFA chapter will be hosting a <barbecue> for new and returning students in <August.> Chapter leaders will contact you with information this summer. I hope you will be able to attend.

I look forward to getting to know you better through class and FFA activities. I know you will be glad you have joined the agricultural education program. Please feel free to stop by or call me at <phone number> if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Agriculture Instructor and FFA Advisor

<Central High School>

# Sample Follow-up Letter to Parents

<Date>

<Tom and Jane Smith>  
<203 Maple Street>  
<Story City, IA 50248>

Dear <Mr. and Mrs. Smith,>

I just received the good news that <Jennifer> has enrolled in next fall's <Agricultural Sciences> course. She has made an excellent decision, and I hope this is just the first of many agriculture courses she will pursue in the coming years. I have heard many wonderful things about her from the staff at the middle school.

Many people who are not familiar with our program may think that agricultural education is only for those interested in farming. Nothing could be farther from the truth! While some of our students enter the work force after completing high school, most agriculture students go on to college. And, most of them receive scholarships, due in part to their participation in the many activities available through membership in the FFA. As you see, <Jennifer> is off to a good start.

FFA is unique in that there are ample opportunities for everyone to excel. <Central High> FFA has won several honors this past year, and we hope to continue our success next year. Our program emphasizes students' development in leadership and citizenship, while trying to provide students with the necessary skills to be successful in college and careers.

There are many activities in which <Jennifer> may participate next year. Freshmen are offered a sampling of all areas of agriculture and FFA, while receiving extensive exposure to the sciences. They learn how to write and deliver speeches, conduct business meetings, learn about types and sources of agricultural products and develop many other life skills. Next year's freshmen activities will include career development events and community service opportunities. <Jennifer> will also have the opportunity to begin a supervised agricultural experience program, which will provide her with opportunities to apply information learned in class.

I hope you will encourage <Jennifer> to be active in the agriculture program so she may benefit from the many experiences our program has to offer. If you have any questions, or if I can be of help in any other capacity during <Jennifer's> transition to high school, please feel free to contact me at school <phone number> or at home <phone number>.

Sincerely,

Agriculture Instructor and FFA Advisor

<Central High School>  
<Story City, IA 50248>

# Sample Welcome to the Agricultural Education Program Letter

<Date>

<Jennifer Smith>  
<203 Maple Street>  
<Story City, IA 50248>

Dear <Jennifer,>

I just received the good news that you have enrolled in next fall's <Agricultural Sciences> class. Congratulations! You have made an excellent decision. I hope you are looking forward to entering <Central High> School next fall.

In addition to many classroom activities, you will be eligible to join the <Central High> FFA Chapter. FFA is unique in that every student who is involved has the chance to excel. Whether you have an interest in pets and animals, the environment, horticulture, leadership or crop science, you have the chance to develop and complete activities that fit your interests.

In addition, FFA provides you with the chance to make new friends, develop leadership skills and prepare yourself for college and careers. It's a great way to become involved and make the most of your high school years.

The FFA chapter will be hosting a <barbecue> for new and returning students in <August.> Chapter leaders will contact you with information this summer. I hope you will be able to attend.

I look forward to getting to know you better through class and FFA activities. I know you will be glad you have joined the agricultural education program. Please feel free to stop by or call me at <phone number> if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Agriculture Instructor and FFA Advisor

<Central High School>

## Multimedia Strategies

Students love technology! Likewise, they love programs that embrace cutting-edge technology. From "good old" school announcements to a flashy Internet homepage, multimedia recruitment and retention approaches grab students' attention.

### Get "Out There"

Using current technology in recruitment and retention conveys a variety of messages. Not only is agricultural education meaningful, career-oriented, challenging and fun...it's also on the edge, taking things to the extreme. Even if you're no technological guru, your program can use a variety of media to aid in recruitment and retention.

- Put students in charge of developing multimedia tools. Most won't think twice about tackling some computer programming or videotaping.
- Ask for help and advice from "experts" in your school and community.
- Make development of multimedia recruitment tools a project in your own classes or others. Your school might have a computer, video production, marketing or other program or club that would love a meaningful project.

### Home, Home on the Web

More and more students use the Internet and World Wide Web for information about everything from homework assignments to registering for college classes. An Internet homepage creates opportunities to present your program to students who may not consider it otherwise. A homepage also demonstrates that technology is an integral part of your program.

Establishing a homepage is no longer a difficult task. Students might even develop one as part of their SAE program or coursework.

See page # for a sampling of homepages that have been selected as "hot sites" and showcased on *National FFA Online* ([www.ffa.org](http://www.ffa.org)).

### In the Laboratory

Some agricultural education programs are blessed with computer labs that are the envy of the school. If yours is among them, capitalize on the recruitment and retention potential by:

- Bringing other students into the lab as often as possible;
- Challenging current students to create screen savers that encourage other students to sign up for an agriculture course; and
- Providing a computer-based presentation or trivia game about your program that students can explore on their own.

## On the Waves or the Wires

Young people spend hours a day "plugged in" to radios and televisions.

See page # for samples of recruitment-oriented radio announcements.

See page # for suggestions about recruiting via in-school, cable and over-the-air television outlets.

### Ready, Set, Action!

A student-produced video can give prospective students and other "outsiders" a glimpse inside your program. Many schools or community facilities have fairly sophisticated videotaping and editing equipment. Creating a program recruitment video could make a great agricultural communications course project or SAE.

Here are some tips for effective "home" videos.

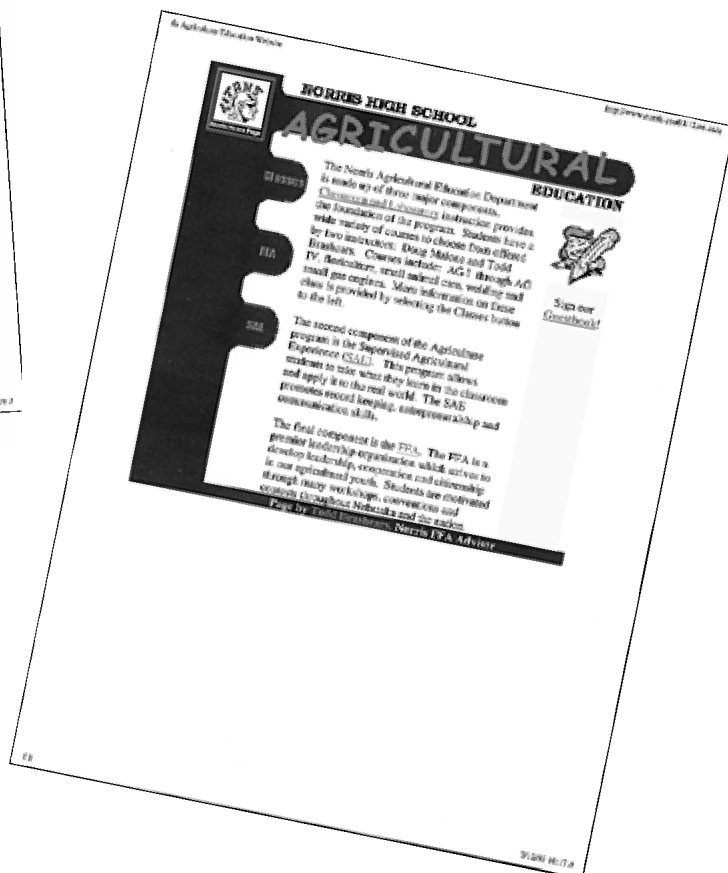
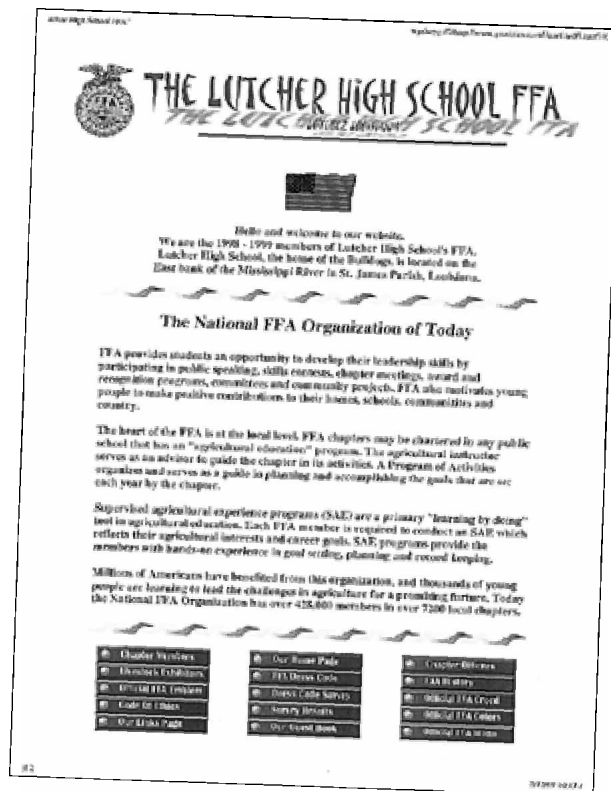
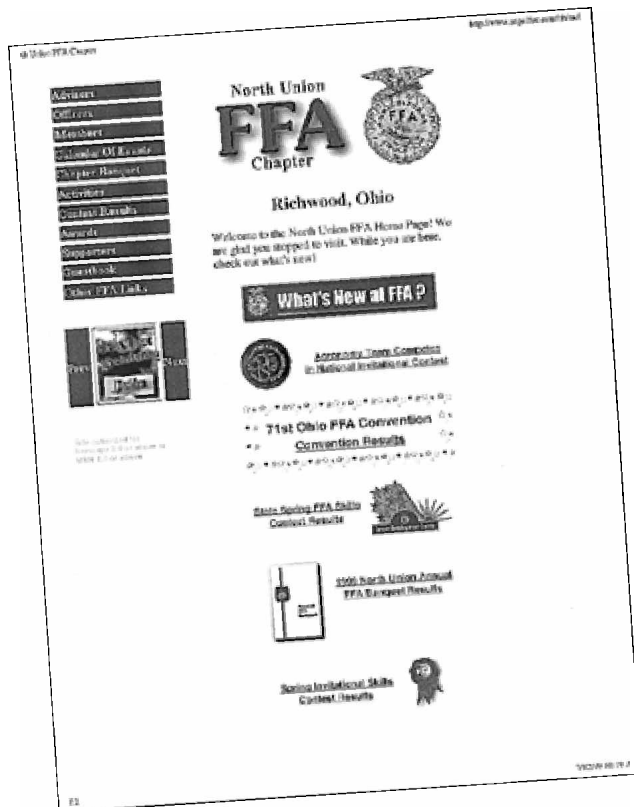
- Plan for a 5- to 10-minute finished video. Figure out a "storyboard" in advance, sketching out what you want to show. Shoot videotape during actual events, then edit bits together for the final product.
- Use a brand new tape. Be sure to turn off the date and time feature on the camera. Clean the camera lens with a soft cloth and approved cleaning solution.
- Use a tripod when shooting about 50% of the time. When not using a tripod, be very steady with the camera.
- If outdoors, shoot (videotape) with the sun to your back. Avoid shooting on a windy day; it will distort the sound.
- Do not videotape while you walk. Do not get zoom happy (in-out-in-out-in-out).
- Compose video frames as if they were photos. Do not cut off people's heads.
- If you are interviewing someone, have the person look into the distance rather than directly into the camera when talking. Set up the picture so there is open space toward the side where the person is looking. Make sure the person is close enough to the microphone to be heard.
- Edit together 10- to 15-second-long live-action clips with narration and perhaps still shots showing important words.



# Sample Homepages

The following is a sampling of FFA chapter homepages. Review and consider these options when developing your own page.

- [www.geocities.com/Heartland/Lane/3922/](http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Lane/3922/)
- [www.norris.esu6.k12.ne.us/ag/](http://www.norris.esu6.k12.ne.us/ag/)
- [www.angelfire.com/oh/nuffa/](http://www.angelfire.com/oh/nuffa/)
- [www.nwoca.ohio.gov/~pet\\_www/ffa/](http://www.nwoca.ohio.gov/~pet_www/ffa/)
- [www.angelfire.com/al/cheerleader01/ffa.html](http://www.angelfire.com/al/cheerleader01/ffa.html)
- [www.geocities.com/Heartland/Ridge/1925](http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Ridge/1925)





# Sample Radio Announcements

[ :20]

FROM BIOTECHNOLOGY TO GPS-GUIDED MACHINERY AND COMPUTER-MONITORED LIVESTOCK, AGRICULTURE IS ON THE CUTTING EDGE. THE <CENTRAL HIGH> SCHOOL AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION PROGRAM PREPARES TODAY'S YOUNG PEOPLE TO LEAD TOMORROW'S AGRICULTURE, COMMUNITY AND WORLD. FIND OUT MORE AT <THE AGRICULTURE PROGRAM'S OPEN HOUSE>, <DATE>, <TIME>. ADMISSION IS FREE.

[ :20]

DID YOU KNOW THAT AGRICULTURE IS OUR NATION'S LARGEST INDUSTRY? TWENTY PERCENT OF AMERICANS WORK IN A CAREER RELATED TO AGRICULTURE. EIGHTEEN PERCENT ARE EMPLOYED IN DIVERSE INDUSTRIES, LIKE ENGINEERING, FOOD TECHNOLOGY, ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE AND COMMUNICATIONS. THERE ARE AT LEAST 300 DIFFERENT AGRICULTURAL CAREERS, AND THERE ARE SHORTAGES OF QUALIFIED EMPLOYEES. YOUNG PEOPLE LOOKING FOR CHALLENGING, HIGH-TECH CAREERS CAN FIND OUT MORE FROM <INSTRUCTOR'S NAME>, IN THE AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT AT <CENTRAL HIGH> SCHOOL.

[ :30]

TODAY'S AGRICULTURE IS BIOTECHNOLOGY, INTERNATIONAL MARKETING, GENETICS, FOOD SCIENCE, ENGINEERING, COMPUTERS, HORTICULTURE, COMMUNICATIONS, FINANCE, VETERINARY SCIENCE, WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AND MUCH MORE. DO YOU WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY, NATION AND WORLD? CONSIDER A CAREER IN THE HIGH-TECH, GROWING INDUSTRY OF AGRICULTURE. TO FIND OUT MORE, STOP BY <STORE OR BUSINESS LOCATION> AND PICK UP A BROCHURE ABOUT THE <CENTRAL HIGH> SCHOOL AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION PROGRAM.

[ :30]

EDUCATION SHOULD PREPARE YOUNG PEOPLE FOR LIFE. AT <CENTRAL HIGH> SCHOOL, THE AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION PROGRAM DOES JUST THAT. AGRICULTURE STUDENTS LEARN TO THINK ANALYTICALLY USING REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES THROUGH CLASSES IN <AQUACULTURE, FORESTRY, WILDLIFE, WATER MANAGEMENT, SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE, AGRISCIENCE AND MARKETING.> THEY PREPARE FOR MORE THAN 300 CAREERS IN AGRICULTURE...AND AN ALMOST-ENDLESS VARIETY OF OTHER CAREERS. FIND OUT MORE BY <VISITING THE AGRICULTURE PROGRAM'S BOOTH> AT <NEXT WEEK'S COMMUNITY FESTIVAL>.

# Sample TV-Based Strategies

With the availability of sophisticated video equipment, in-school television networks and regional cable stations, television coverage is more accessible than ever.

Involve students in producing video clips that can be used on your school's Channel One broadcasting, in-school TV station or video announcements. You might create:

- Video announcements of upcoming events like career shows, field trips, open houses, etc.;
- 15- to 30-second clips the station might use as "fillers" that show students completing an exciting agricultural learning activity and say, "Agriculture: It's More Than You Think"; or
- Coverage of a motivational classroom speaker whose message might be of interest to nonagriculture students and teachers.

Also work with the local cable television station to gain program exposure while helping the station provide interesting local programming. You might propose or provide shows about:

- Plant care, gardening, pet care and other general-interest agricultural topics;
- Agricultural career fairs and field trips;
- Student-presented lessons in leadership topics like public speaking, parliamentary procedure, etc.;
- A computer how-to series, including how to find agricultural information on the Internet;
- Specials that provide an overview of local agriculture at National Ag Day or during Farm-City Week;
- Highlights from classroom presentations, field trips, award banquets, etc.;
- A series of profiles on successful local agriculture students; or
- A cable editorial commenting on recent local or national events that relate to agricultural education.

Coverage on commercial stations' news and "local interest" programs usually provides widespread and prestigious exposure. Consult the Reporter's Solution software for guidelines on obtaining television coverage. (See "Resource" section for ordering information.)

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## Television Tips

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It is important to remember that television is a visual medium. Study the advertisements and informational programs people usually see on TV. Your programming must be just as interesting! Here are a few tips:

- Use high-quality visuals and change them frequently. A "talking head" usually won't hold people's attention.
- Ask a professional or experienced amateur to help you edit your program.
- When you are being interviewed, arrive at the studio early. Try to wear official FFA dress or wear solid colors. Avoid white, red or busy patterns, because they don't photograph well.
- Speak up, but speak naturally. Talk as if you were having a conversation with friends. Be honest, sincere and confident.
- Avoid FFA jargon (MFE, CDE or NLCSO).
- Avoid saying too much.
- Establish why the audience should care. Focus on the message you want to give. Come prepared with five-second-long explanations and answers.
- Look at the interviewer's eye that is closest to the camera.

# Sample Video Script

*Visual:* Upbeat, casual student narrator.

**Narrator:** "Are you looking for learning that's hands-on, real-world and fun? Come with me as we look into the <Central High> School agricultural education program."

*Visual:* Door opening to see agriculture lab with lots of activity inside. Then, clips of different courses and areas discussed.

**Narrator:** "Welcome to the <Central High> School agriculture lab. This is where it all happens! When you take agriculture classes, you can learn about <taking care of animals ... growing plants ... using computers ... raising fish (that's called aquaculture) ... carrying out scientific experiments ... making the world's food supply more abundant and safe ... making money ... managing wildlife> ... and lots more!"

*Visual:* Still shot of wording that lists agriculture course names.

**Narrator:** "These are the agriculture courses you can take at <Central High> School. Each one helps prepare you for success in a career and in life. There are more than 300 careers in agriculture. And, agriculture courses give you the skills for success in other careers, too."

*Visual:* Clips that illustrate a variety of agricultural careers– field trips to agribusinesses, SAEs, Agricultural Career Show, etc.

**Narrator:** "In agricultural education, we don't just talk about careers, we experience them. We take trips to agricultural businesses and industries. We use hands-on career skills during class experiments. We create our own plans and start building our careers through the supervised agricultural experience program."

*Visual:* Clips of FFA activities.

**Narrator:** "Of course, success means more than hands-on skills. It also means being a leader and knowing how to learn for a lifetime. That's where our FFA chapter comes in. FFA members take charge of projects that improve ourselves, our school, community, state and nation. Lately, our chapter has been <describe and show chapter projects and competitions>."

*Visual:* Clips of students having fun in class, SAEs and FFA.

**Narrator:** "Yes, studying agriculture opens the door to success. But you know the best part? It's so much fun! Where else in school can you express yourself, earn recognition, tackle hands-on projects and take the lead?"

*Visual:* Narrator departing agriculture lab but leaving the door open.

**Narrator:** "The door is open! Come on in to agriculture ... for the education of your life."

## Brochures

Brochures are no substitute for face-to-face and personalized contact with potential students, but they can provide information about your program in a different manner than you may do in person. By providing a brief overview of your program, a brochure can highlight program activities and point students toward your door. A well-planned brochure can serve multiple purposes. It can be included in mailings to students and parents, provided at the end of a recruitment presentation or distributed to your community to increase awareness and solicit program support.

Brochures are meant to supplement and attract. To accomplish this they must be attractive and eye-catching. However, they do not have to be expensive productions. Simple but well-designed, well-targeted brochures can accomplish superior results over slick pieces that don't "speak" to your audience.

### 1 STEP One

#### Choose a Target Audience

Most likely, your brochure will target prospective students. Choose topics, wording and pictures that fit the audience.

### 2 STEP Two

#### Determine and Answer the "Burning Questions" ...and More

- What is agricultural education?
- What are the benefits of enrollment?
- What career opportunities exist in the agricultural field?
- What role does FFA play in the program?
- What do current students say about the program?

Also, provide contact information. Be sure to include names, telephone numbers and e-mail addresses of teacher(s) or FFA chapter officers to contact for more information.

### 3 STEP Three

#### Make the Words Look Good

Pick up brochure design clues from other publications.

Do use:

- Small blocks of text;
- A newspaper column format; and
- White space to break up the page.

Don't use:

- All capital letters;
- Fancy "artistic" fonts for body text; or
- Tiny or huge type.

### 4 STEP Four

#### Illustrate Your Point

Include pictures or graphics to help students visualize your program. Use color photographs or graphics if possible. Show students actively involved in projects. Include images that illustrate exciting careers in agriculture.

### 5 STEP Five

#### Explore Production Options

Once you have gone through the work of writing and designing an effective brochure, spend a little time and money to make it look good. Explore a variety of means to publish and print the brochure. Consider using colored or textured paper or ordering from a paper company that offers predesigned paper.

### 6 STEP Six

#### Explore Outside Funding if Needed

Have chapter officers visit with the alumni group or local agribusiness companies to seek funding to cover printing costs. Often, organizations or businesses will consider the cost a minimal outlay for a "free" mention on your brochure and association with a top-notch program.

### 7 STEP Seven

#### Do It Again!

Update the brochure as needed. As you make improvements to your program, make sure they are reflected in a new or updated brochure. This not only indicates your responsiveness to community needs...it may also spark the interest of new groups of students.

## Use FFA Brochures

The National FFA Organization offers a full-color brochure that highlights more than 300 challenging and exciting careers in agriculture. It's a great supplement to your local recruitment materials!

- *Think About It Brochure*

The National FFA Organization also produces s that promote FFA membership, an important benefit of entering the agricultural education program. See "Resource" section for ordering information.

Update the brochure as needed. As you make improvements to your program, make sure they are reflected in a new or updated brochure. This not only indicates your responsiveness to community needs...it may also spark the interest of new groups of students.

# Sample Brochure

Provided by the Ripon, Wis., agriscience program

**Paper boring class featured**

Agricultural education is hands-on and real-world. And it's not "just a class." either. Agriculture students learn and make a difference through their study of agriculture.

**Courses**

During class time, agriculture students work with plants, animals and machines...conduct experiments...use computers...research information...create products...and more!

**SAB Program**

Every agriculture student creates a personalized career project. It's called an SAB, for "supervised agricultural experience." You can study with a project that interests you. Some students stick with their projects for several years, start their own businesses and win national awards.

**FEA**

FEA is the national organization for agriculture students. It's your chance to take the lead...serve the community...travel...earn recognition...win scholarships...and much more.

Find your future in agricultural education.

Visit us on the Web at <http://www.address> or visit by our laboratories at Central High School.

For additional information, contact:

<Teacher's Name>  
Central High School  
<Address>  
<Phone Area Code>  
<Business Number>

Success  
Technology  
Careers  
Fun!

## We've Got What You're Looking For

Look into agricultural education and find your future.

<Insert graphic or photo of students in action>

**Are you looking for...**

challenges that will broaden your horizons?

the opportunity to make a difference?

increasing teamwork courses can apply to the real world?

achievement and recognition?

agribusiness today?

Agricultural education has all this and more. Agricultural education is an exciting career. Agricultural education is an exciting education. With agriculture, you're ready to succeed in the real world. Leadership, self-image, communication skills and other abilities help with education, on the job and in the community.

Survey the agriculture department and find what you're looking for in agricultural education.

<Insert graphic or photo of students in action>

**Agricultural Education Career**

<Insert graphic or photo of students in action>

**Agricultural education means a bright future.**

There are more than 100 careers in agriculture. 12 careers are in the top 100 careers in the U.S. Agriculture, people, plants, animals, nature, science, technology, and more...your future can be in agriculture. Agricultural education means a bright future. Agricultural education means a bright future. Agricultural education means a bright future.

**Sample SAB program**

<Insert graphic or photo of students in action>

**FEA Activities**

<Insert graphic or photo of students in action>



## Newsletters

An eye-catching newsletter can spark potential students' interest while also increasing awareness among current students, parents, fellow teachers, administrators and agribusiness supporters.

Experienced teachers report that newsletters can be very effective recruitment and retention tools. They provide current and prospective students and their parents with a glimpse at program activities and emphasize ways students may participate.

Consider having students develop a recruitment and retention newsletter as part of coursework or a supervised agricultural experience program (SAE).

### 1 STEP One

#### Choose a Target Audience

Determine the target audience of the newsletter. To be most effective, focus on a single audience with a common interest. For example, a newsletter targeted to middle school science students would have some different articles than one for local 4-H members.

### 2 STEP Two

#### Establish "Common Ground"

Identify areas where your audience's interests overlap with your program.

Make some quick calls to people involved with your targeted audience-middle school science teachers or 4-H leaders, for example. Look at some of the newsletters and publications your target audience reads.

Then, make a list of the topics, activities and experiences your program offers that will appeal to your target audience's interests and needs. Use this list as a guide for setting the newsletter's contents.

### 3 STEP Three

#### Plan and Develop Content

Brainstorm with others to decide what information to include in the newsletter. Consider highlighting scholarship opportunities, leadership-building experiences, upcoming social activities, a summary of FFA activities or maybe an interview of your current FFA chapter president.

Ask an English or journalism teacher to talk with students about how to write for a newsletter. Articles should be short, to-the-point and informative.

### 4 STEP Four

#### Make it Look Good

Create a professional-looking product. Word processing and desktop publishing programs often include newsletter

templates...use them! A journalism teacher or yearbook advisor may be able to teach students about working with a grid layout.

Do use:

- Small blocks of text;
- Newspaper column format;
- White space and graphics to break up the copy; and
- Professional-looking photographs and clip art.

Don't use:

- All capital letters;
- Fancy "artistic" fonts for body text;
- Tiny or huge type; or
- Clip art that reinforces stereotypes about production agriculture.

### 5 STEP Five

#### Explore Production Options

Consider using colored or textured paper or ordering from a paper company that offers predesigned newsletter formats. Spend a little time and money to make your recruitment and retention newsletter look its best.

### 6 STEP Six

#### Explore Outside Funding if Needed

If you're on a shoestring budget, be resourceful. Consider seeking support from your alumni group or the community. Look into selling advertising space. See whether your newsletter could be distributed with other publications, like a school newsletter or information packets given to youth fair entrants.

#### Sample Newsletter Article and Items

Here are some ideas you might cover in your recruitment and retention newsletter. Remember to choose topics based on the needs and interests of the newsletter's specific audience,

- In-class and FFA activities that relate to the audience's special interest (like science or small animals);
- Reports from field trips and FFA events;
- Quotes from current students about what they learn and how much fun they have in agricultural education;
- Success stories--current students who make the honor roll or win awards; past students' college and career successes; and
- Scholarship opportunities and local recipients.

## Growing Success

*News from the <Central High> School agricultural education program.*

### Make a Difference in Agriculture

Are you looking for a future full of challenge, excitement and meaning? Today's agriculture may be just what you are looking for!

Agriculture finds solutions to problems facing today's global society ... how to feed and clothe the world's people, how to make food safer and more affordable, how to preserve wildlife, how to manage forests and much more.

There are more than 300 careers in agriculture. More than 20 percent of

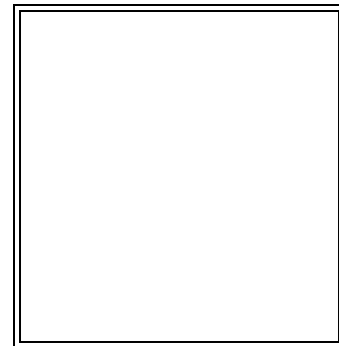
Americans work in agriculture...all but two percent of them do not work on farms or ranches. If you want a promising future in an important career, check out agriculture.

The <Central High> School agricultural education program prepares young people for success in careers and in life. And here's the best part: It's fun!

Agriculture students don't sit at desks and listen to teachers talk. They learn by doing. They have their hands on scientific

experiments, computers, plants, animals and machines. They have their minds on solving real-world problems. They have their hearts on leadership for today and tomorrow. They have their sights set on success for themselves, their community and the world.

Join the students who are making a difference. Sign up for an agriculture course today!



## Print Advertisements

Being "seen" in a popular publication can pay off in student interest—even if you have to pay for it! Advertisements can increase the perception that your program is involved, successful and worthy of serious consideration.

Advertising is part of American life. Although we might complain about the ways ads interrupt our reading, listening and viewing, they can also be informative and entertaining. Because we are so used to seeing advertisements for successful companies and products, advertising your agricultural education program can build a perception of legitimacy and success.

The study of advertising is a natural part of an agricultural marketing or communication course. Consider having students develop and place ads as part of coursework or a supervised agricultural experience program (SAE).

Be creative in identifying places to put print advertisements. Don't forget:

- Local newspapers and "shoppers";
- Regional papers and magazines;
- Newspapers and yearbooks for your school and feeder schools;
- Newsletters of organizations to which potential members belong;
- Fair guides;
- Sports and homecoming programs; and
- Community festival programs.

### 1 STEP One

#### Choose a Target Audience

Determine the audience you want to reach with each advertisement. This will determine both your message and where you place the ad.

### 2 STEP Two

#### Create a Message

What do you want to tell the audience? What concepts, words and visuals will reach them? Draft an advertisement, then test it on a few people within your targeted audience. Make revisions to better fit their needs.

### 3 STEP Three

#### Place and Fund the Advertisement

Newspapers, magazines and other print media count on advertising revenues to control subscriber costs and make a profit. If you want your advertisement to appear in a prestigious publication, expect to pay for that placement.

Check rates with the publication's advertising department. See if you can negotiate a reduced rate as an educational, nonprofit group.

Check whether local agribusinesses will sponsor an advertisement for your program. This places their name in the public eye while showing they are good local citizens that support worthwhile organizations.

Similarly, you may be able to convince a business to include a bit of agricultural program news in its weekly advertising.

With attention to a few details, you may be able to place a public service announcement (PSA). Such an advertisement has to live up to its name...it must be in the public interest, not just a "self-serving" program promotion. Since agriculture provides many important services to local communities, it may not be too difficult to create a PSA that also promotes agricultural education enrollment.

# Sample Print Advertisements

*For feeder school paper or yearbook*

## Fun. Achievement. Challenge.

Find your future in agriculture.

The <Central High> agricultural education program helps you learn about careers, leadership and real life.

More than <number> <name of feeder school> <eighth graders> have signed up for next fall's agriculture classes. Join them!

Ask your guidance counselor for information on <Central High> agriculture courses. It's the first step to finding your future...in agriculture.

*For a 4-H newsletter*

## Go the Distance

Do you like working with animals, plants and wildlife in 4-H? Take the next step: sign up for agriculture classes at <Central High> School.

Agriculture classes set you up for success. You prepare for more than 300 careers in agriculture. You work on your own hands-on projects. And, you can join the FFA and be part of some serious service, leadership and fun!

Go the distance with agricultural education. Ask your guidance counselor for information about agriculture classes today.

*For local newspaper*

## Nothing But the Best

We all want what's best for young people ... a quality education, promising future, leadership, service, laughter.

The young people in your life can find it all in agriculture classes. That's right, agriculture! It's all about life, learning and success. There are more than 300 careers in agriculture, and there's sure to be one that will take your student to the top.

With real-world learning and our active FFA chapter, the <Central High> School agricultural education program turns students into leaders who know what they want and how to get it. That's nothing but the best.

To find out more, call <name of instructor> at <phone number> to request a brochure or a return call.

Paid for by <name of business>, a proud agricultural sponsor.

*Public Service  
Announcement*

## **America has the world's safest, most abundant and most affordable food supply.**

American agriculture is keeping it that way, for our country and for the world. From agribusinesses to scientific and engineering laboratories, more than 20 percent of Americans work in agriculture. Only 2% of them work on farms.

Agriculture keeps America growing, and it needs leaders for tomorrow. Young people can find a promising future by studying agriculture. Find out more from <name of teacher> at <phone number>.

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## Phone Calls

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Contacting prospective students by telephone can be an effective recruitment tool. A quick phone call provides the opportunity to express excitement about your program and answer any immediate questions a student may have.

- Give careful thought to the timing of the phone contacts. While it may be hard to do, try to work around students' and parents' schedules to catch students at home.
- Use a "soft sell" approach when making phone contacts with prospective students. Present only one or two benefits of involvement in agricultural education, and encourage the student to consider enrollment and/or attendance at an upcoming function. You might want to adapt the sample phone call script provided.
- Call prospective students to invite them to a social activity (like a hayride, open house or barbecue). Students will be more apt to attend if fun activities are associated with the function.
- Involve your current students and FFA officers as much as possible. Research shows that students are our best recruiters. They should be included in any recruitment plan. A young student might relate better to chapter officers or other current students. They will likely ask questions of their peers that they may feel uncomfortable asking you. Assign chapter leaders specific students to call. They should also plan to personally greet and "hang out" with these students at chapter recruitment events.
- Plan a call-a-thon or contest to make the task fun for officers and students. Consider designating two evenings to do the calling and provide pizza afterwards. Or, plan the event in conjunction with a chapter meeting.
- Make calls to parents or guardians as well as to students. The teacher should make these calls, to show your excitement about the prospect of the parents' son or daughter enrolling in your program. Ask the parent to encourage the student to enroll. Again, use a soft sell approach by briefly explaining the leadership, growth and career opportunities in agricultural education.
- If the prospective student is not available, ask about a good time to call back. If you are not able to make contact in two or three tries, send a letter explaining the program and expressing regrets at not being able to speak to the student in person.
- Follow up on the letter with a call within one to two weeks to answer any questions.

# Sample Phone Script

**Caller:** Hello, this is <Name>, president of the <Central High> FFA Chapter. I would like to invite you to our upcoming <barbecue> at <time> on <date>. We are inviting students who have demonstrated superior leadership abilities to join us for an evening of food and fun. I hope you will be able to join us and learn more about the agricultural education program at <Central High> School. Do you think you'll be able to attend on <date>?

**Student:** Yes/no/not sure.

**Caller:** Again, the <barbecue> and program will begin at <time>. Following the <barbecue> there will be a short presentation about opportunities available through the agricultural education program. Have you heard about the agricultural education program or any of the advantages that come with enrolling in agriculture?

**Student:** Yes/no.

**Caller:** The agricultural education program is a great way to get involved in many activities and make new friends. Currently, we have <number> other <eighth graders> enrolled for the <fall agriscience> class. <Name> is the teacher. <He/She> plans hands-on activities that deal with <pets and animals, natural resources and food science> <or insert topics of interest>. In fact, one of the first things you'll be doing in <agriscience> is <description>. Would you like to know what else is involved in the <program?>

**Student:** Yes/No

**Caller:** Enrollment in the agricultural education program provides you with the opportunity to become involved in the FFA program. FFA provides every member with the chance to excel. Whether you have an interest in horticulture, the environment, animals, crops, business or communication, you can develop a project related to your specific interest. Last year, several students in the <Central High> FFA Chapter were successful in the local and state competitions and received awards for their projects. <Relate personal successes related to involvement in agriculture, i.e. awards, officer positions, etc.>

**Student:** How can I become involved? <Or ask the student: Do you know how to begin to get involved?>

**Caller:** First, plan to attend the <barbecue> on <date>. You'll be able to talk with our teacher, <Name>, and our current FFA officers. <Teacher name> will be able to talk to you about registering for <agriscience>. In addition, we will also have a flyer to announce our next FFA meeting. I think you'll be glad if you decide to become involved in the agriculture program. Please feel free to call me at <phone number> if you have any questions. I will be at the registration table to personally meet you. See you on the <date>!

# Sample Phone Attempt Follow-up Letter

<Date>

<Michael Jones>  
<203 Maple Street>  
<Story City, IA 50248>

Dear <Michael,>

I have been unable to reach you by telephone and thought I would send you a short note to invite you to our upcoming activity on <date>. The <Central High> FFA Chapter will be sponsoring a <barbecue> for students who have demonstrated superior leadership in community activities. I wanted to especially invite you to attend this event. In addition to the fun, you will have the opportunity to learn more about the numerous benefits of the agricultural education program.

I think you will be surprised to learn about the many opportunities and benefits to be gained from involvement in the agricultural education program at <Central High> School. There's still time to sign up for this fall's <Agricultural Sciences> course. <Agricultural Sciences> is designed specifically for students like you. It emphasizes hands-on experiences related to science in agriculture. You can learn about the food industry, pets and other animals, and share in exploring our natural resources while earning science credit. In addition, by enrolling in <Agricultural Sciences>, you have the opportunity to join the FFA organization. FFA gives you the opportunity to make new friends, build your leadership skills and participate in activities that often improve your chances for college scholarships. It's a great way to become involved in the school and community, and provides many fun activities.

<You may want to relate personal student success stories here.>

I hope that you can attend the <barbecue> on <date> and that you are excited to learn more about agricultural education. Please feel free to talk to me in school or call me at <phone number> if you have any questions. See you on <date>!

Sincerely,

President  
<Central High> FFA Chapter

# FFA Recruitment and Retention

## Resource Information

Resources referenced throughout this manual can be ordered from the National FFA Organization. Consult the current Agricultural Education Resources Catalog for additional details, the latest resources and pricing.

Request a catalog and order form:

National FFA Organization  
Call toll-free: 1-888-332-2668  
Fax toll-free: 1-800-366-6556  
[www.ffa.org](http://www.ffa.org)

### Referenced Videos and Publications

*A Guide to Local Program Success*

*Agriculture: An Industry Too Big to Ignore Brochure*

*Agriculture Teacher's Manual*

*Alumni Relationships Key to Program Success*

*Discover World Class Opportunities in FFA Brochure*

*Do Not Open Brochure*

*FFA: Building Tomorrow Video*

*FFA Official Manual*

*Make It Happen...Join FFA Video*

*Make It Happen...Student Video*

*Make It Happen...Teacher Video*

*Middle Grade Agricultural Leaders' Guide*

*Partners in Active Learning Support (PALS) Kit*

*Reporter's Solution Software*

*SAE—Experience It! video*

*SAE: Experiencing Agriculture Handbook*

*The Faces of FFA Video*

*The Industry Too Big to Ignore Brochure*

*Think About It Brochure*

*Today's FFA...It's You Video*



