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*Public Relations Activities
for Agricultural Education Programs*

Public Relations: A Necessity for Today's Agricultural Education Programs?

by Harry N. Boone, Jr.

At the time of the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917, nearly 50 percent of the population was involved in production agriculture. Because of the direct link between production agriculture and agricultural education programs at that time, the emphasis on a public relations strategy for secondary agricultural education programs was not as important as it is today. With less than three percent of the population involved in production agriculture and numerous career options for today's students, a sound public relations strategy is a must for a high school agricultural education program.

A good public relations strategy must begin with a strong instructional program. A strong school based agricultural education program starts with a classroom/laboratory component that includes contextual inquiry-based instruction and learning. The knowledge and skills learned in the classroom/laboratory are then enhanced with an experiential education component. Students continue their education by applying their knowledge and skills through the implementation of a supervised experience program (SAE). Their experiences are capped off with the development of leadership skills, personal growth, and career development through the FFA Organization. Too many teachers forget that the "total program" is a package deal. You must incorporate all three components of the program for your students to be successful.

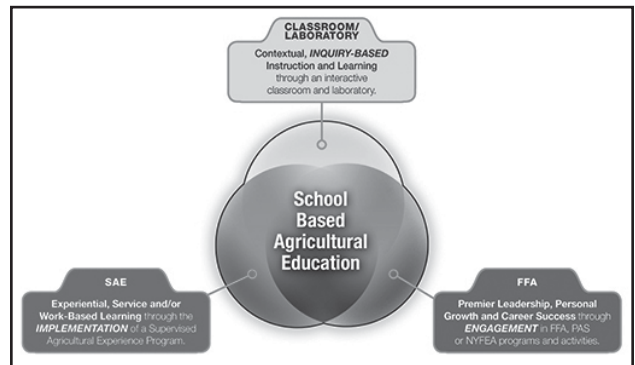
Without a strong "total program" of agricultural education your public relations program is bound to fail.

Just like an employer will see through the false claims of an unqualified applicant, the public will see through the "false claims" of a poor agricultural education program.

The next step is to set worthy goals for your program. These goals will take several forms. You may have a personal set of goals for your program. You will also have a set of goals that you develop in conjunction with your advisory committee. You may also have a set of goals that you develop with the assistance of your officer team. While it may seem that three sets of goals will lead to confusion, I will argue that there will be continuity among the three sets of objectives. They will be very similar, however, the focus and wording may be slightly different depending on the group involved.

Involve key stakeholders in your public relations activities. Let's start with your advisory committee. The advisory committee should be diverse and represent the agricultural interests of the local community. This diversity will assist in identifying activities that meet the needs of all aspects of the local community. Don't forget to involve your students. They will be the key to reaching the next generation of students for your program.

Include a variety of activities in your public relations plan. Many young teachers will develop their public relations activities around current trends, specifically social media. While social media will help you at-



tract the current generation of youth into your program, it may not attract the financial and physical support that you need. As a young teacher just out of college, you probably do not remember a time when the mobile (cell) phone (and now smart phones) was not a part of society. Remember there are a number of us still active in the work force that can remember when phones always had cords and personal computers were in their infancy.

I will leave you with a few thoughts: develop a quality agricultural education program, set goals for your program and your public relations activities, involve all key stakeholder groups in the development of your plan, and use a variety of activities to "sell" your program.



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Cover Photo: Products generated as a part of the educational activities can be a positive aspect of a public relations program. South Harrison High School (WV) .
Back Cover: Photos from the 2015 West Virginia Career Development Awards Ceremony. (Cover photos courtesy of Stacy Gartin.)

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In the Field with Arizona Agriculture

by Monica Kilcullen Pastor

I love my trading cards! I can't wait to show them to my parents and tell them what I learned today." This was said to me by a fifth grade student, in front of the grant manager ("Thank you, very much!"), during one of two "field days" coordinated with funds from the Arizona Department of Agriculture Specialty Crop Block grants. The University of Arizona College

Two fairs were coordinated, one in the fall and one in the spring. Four elementary schools participated with a total of 900 students, 36 teachers, and four principals. Individual classes visited each of the eight learning stations for 15 minutes. A ninth station was arranged for students to get drinking water. Two sessions were held each day with nine classes circulating amongst the stations in the morning and nine in the afternoon.

days after they saw the academic content. The school district secondary science specialist served in an advisory capacity and also was the expert at one of the learning stations. After the students participated in the activity, they were handed a "trading card" with the photo of the expert on the front and the concepts the students learned at that station on the reverse. This was developed so the students could reinforce their knowledge while relating the day's activity with their parent/guardian. The cards were similar in size and on laminated card stock just like a baseball trading card.

A partnership with elementary school(s) to develop an agriculture fair can be a fun and educational recruiting tool for your program.

of Agriculture and Life Sciences Cooperative Extension Agricultural Literacy Program was awarded the grant.

In the Field with Arizona Agriculture was designed to coordinate agriculture education fairs in urban schools in Maricopa County, Arizona. The purpose was for elementary students and their teachers to have an opportunity to participate in an extracurricular activity without sacrificing curriculum content. The fair was comprised of eight learning stations run by FFA members in collaboration with agriculture and nutrition experts. The students and their teachers were taught the benefits of agriculture and the importance of healthy food choices, thereby increasing the likelihood of children and adults consuming specialty crops, specifically those grown in Arizona.

An agriculture or nutrition expert was teamed with two or three FFA members at each learning station. The first two class rotations visiting the stations had the expert leading the hands-on activity. The FFA members were able to observe the teaching of the required content and then they finished with the remaining seven classes with the expert serving in an assistant role.

Each station had a hands-on component to reinforce the subject matter being taught. All the content came from the *Arizona Grown Specialty Crop Lessons* (agclassroom.org/az). The lessons were designed to reinforce knowledge being taught in the classroom and were aligned to the academic standards. The program coordinator personally visited with each principal to share all of the activities in which the students would participate. The principals enthusiastically supported the field

The station activities were as follows:

1. Students learned the essential components of what a plant needs to grow by creating a bracelet with different colored beads representing seed (orange), nutrients (black), water (blue), air (clear), sun (yellow), nurturing (red for love), and of course, the result is a plant (green).
2. A farmer read the story, *If it Weren't for Farmers*, by Allan Fowler. Then the farmer described their agriculture operation. Water is vital to agriculture and our method to irrigate crops was demonstrated to the students while they practiced siphoning water from one bucket to another with a tube.
3. Photosynthesis was demonstrated to the students through two methods. Leaves were held under water so students could observe the leaves emitting oxygen bubbles. They were also given various leaves and covered por-

tions of the leaves with foil. They were instructed to keep their leaves in the sun and could observe the change in leaf color from prolonged sunlight deprivation to the covered portion of the leaf.

4. Students learned about the various functions of the root, stem, leaf, flower, and fruit of the plant through interactive discussion. Students then guessed examples of parts of the plant they were eating when eating a fruit or a vegetable.
5. The nutrition station gave the students an opportunity to taste a vegetable and fruit they may not have ever eaten. Every fruit or vegetable they sampled was grown in Arizona.
6. Students had the opportunity to learn about the difference between fruits and vegetables. They participated in a sorting activity in which they sorted the Arizona grown fruits from the vegetables.
7. The parts of the seed station allowed the students to dissect a lima bean, so they could identify the embryo, seed coat, endosperm and cotyledon.
8. Pecans are a crop grown in Arizona that gave the students a unique opportunity to learn about calligraphy while writing with pecan shell ink. This station was a chance to learn about the history of ink, a chance to write using pecan ink as colonists did, and to understand that pecans are a good source of protein.

Surveys with 32 questions were administered by the teachers in their classrooms prior to the event and then one week following the event.

The survey analysis showed statistically significant change in students' understandings on all but two of the 24 knowledge based questions. This means that the students as a whole were able to answer these 22 questions more correctly, that this increased ability was substantial, and that their ability to do so is due to what they learned at the agriculture fair. The remaining eight questions sought to quantify student's likelihood to consume fruits and vegetables. The student answers to the questions could not statistically infer that the fair led to an increase in fruit or vegetable consumption.

The agriculture fair had substantial educational value in increasing student's knowledge about the subject matter content. The participation by the FFA members was extremely valuable both educationally and as a promotional event for the FFA program. The members came from the local high schools in which the elementary students would attend. The event was an excellent opportunity for the young students to observe the FFA members in their official dress and to learn about agriculture from these exceptional youth. A partnership with your elementary school(s) to develop an agriculture fair is highly recommended as a fun, educational recruiting tool for your program.



One method to irrigate crops was demonstrated to the students while they practiced siphoning water from one bucket to another with a tube.

The partners in the agriculture fair included the school district, the University of Arizona, Arizona Nursery Association, Maricopa County Farm Bureau, Master Gardeners, and SNAP-Ed nutrition educators.



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Past, Present, and Future: Increasing Awareness of Agricultural Education

by Darla J. Romberger

You've spent countless hours developing curriculum for your courses, numerous meetings getting your scope and sequence approved, and even squeezed time in to clean up your classroom and shop space. What missing in this picture? The students of course! The question now becomes what have you as an agriculture instructor done to promote your program to potential students and the community?

When tackling public relations for any agricultural education program, it becomes important to iden-

It is important to have a target audience for each public relations event to adequately match their needs and interests.

tify the different audiences to which you will be promoting your program. In order to provide marketing efforts for any agriculture education program, it is imperative to focus on the past, present, and future. This marketing strategy includes successfully engaging alumni (past), students, parents, administration (present), and of course, future students. Cumberland Valley Agricultural Sciences is a growing program within a school district of over 8,000 students, so planned public relations is imperative since over 300 elective options are offered at the high school level.

In order to bring positive attention to the program and engage the past, present, and future of our pro-

gram, the Cumberland Valley Agricultural Science program, in conjunction with Cumberland Valley FFA members, hosts two major events to accomplish this immense task.

Agventure Day

Each year, Cumberland Valley Ag Sciences hosts its annual "Agventure Day" where every 4th-grade student and teacher in the district is welcomed to the high school Agricultural Science Department for a day of agricultural programming. With students and teachers being welcomed from seven different elementary schools, this creates a need for numerous FFA members to be actively involved in

conducting the event. This gives them a sense of ownership in the program.

Each elementary classroom is placed into one of five groups that embark on an "Agventure" through various agricultural activities. At last fall's event, students rotated through workshops about pesticide education, service dogs, maple syrup production, Pennsylvania hardwoods, and a farm animal education area. Cumberland Valley FFA members gave a presentation on the process of creating maple syrup while Cumberland Valley FFA Alumni provided various farm animals for the farm animal education workshop. In partnership with the Pennsylvania Hardwoods

Council, Penn State Pesticide Education, and Susquehanna Service Dogs, FFA members assisted these groups in presenting the remaining three workshops.

All workshops took place within the classrooms, laboratory spaces, and work areas of our ag department to showcase the facilities to the 4th-grade students, their teachers, and the parents that served as chaperones for the day. This provided all attendees a chance to see the variety of student projects, equipment, and coursework currently offered by the department; hopefully providing a meaningful memory of the agricultural sciences program to students when they are handed a course selection sheet in 8th grade.

To facilitate over 800 attendees, the day is divided into a morning and afternoon session with students from four elementary schools attending in the morning and three elementary schools in the afternoon. Additionally, all students, teachers, and chaperones are provided with a bag lunch while at the event.

In the future, the department hopes to include a "Farm to School" theme into the event since Agventure Day is usually hosted in October (which is "Farm to School" month). This could include featuring local produce into the bag lunches, harvesting hydroponic lettuce grown in the school greenhouse, or providing a workshop discussing the origins of a common school lunch.

A-Day For Agriculture: Connecting Communities

Along with engaging future students, it is also important to connect

with alumni of the program to continue garnering community support for current program students. Now in its fourth year of operation, this county fair-style event takes planning throughout the entire school year from many alumni and students in the program.

The goal of “A-Day” is to connect the community and promote awareness for the food and fiber industry by hosting a family-friendly event with activities for attendees of all ages. The hub of the event is the agriculture department at the rear of the high school. It is important to have an “open door” policy and invite visitors to participate in an active Agriculture program. This past May, the program welcomed over 700 community members to the 4th annual “A-Day for Agriculture.”

This free event features a “Farm Animal Education” area, local food vendors, pony rides, a hayride, tractor show, free “Ag in the Classroom” activities for kids, and an agricultural-themed “Kid’s Games” area. In addition, bedding plants, flowers, and vegetable plants raised by students in the plant science classes are also made available for purchase. New events were added to the schedule of activities for 2015 and included an Ag Olympics competition, stockman’s contest (participants can test their knowledge of livestock equipment, breeds, and management), line dancing, and agricultural demonstrations conducted by Cumberland Valley FFA members.

Although the targeted audience for this large event is the general public, this event also is successful at engaging alumni and encouraging current students to take greater ownership in the program. To old and recently graduated alumni, A-Day serves as a “homecoming” atmosphere to see familiar faces, meet

the new members of the FFA chapter, and see any facility upgrades. For this reason, many alumni are active participants and volunteer to assist with numerous events throughout the day. Program alumni could be seen providing hayrides, judging the tractor show, and coordinating the farm animal education area. This alumni engagement is critical for any program’s success as alumni often become your advisory board members, mentors for student SAE projects, and most importantly, your best program promoters and recruitment individuals in the community.

And let’s not forget about this event’s impact on current students who often are often a huge untapped resource when it comes to public relations. By taking responsibility in the planning of such a visible community event, students become deeply committed to a certain portion of A-Day. While working to coordinate their portion of the event, students naturally develop skills in promotion, marketing, and communication and recruit more students to help their cause. The ripple effect continues as students continue to create excitement for A-Day which leads many students (who previously were inactive in the program) to bring their families to the event. This is often the first interaction (besides the FFA banquet) that some parents have with the agriculture program; all because of their child in the program wanting to be a part of the event. Never underestimate the ability of a student’s potential to be an effective public re-



An FFA member talks to kids about poultry production during the Ag in the Classroom activities at the 2015 “A-Day for Agriculture” event.

lations tool.

In conclusion, it is important to have a target audience for each public relations event to adequately match their needs and interests. It is always important to connect with the future of your program (i.e. future students and parents), but is it equally important to recall the importance of connecting with program alumni and engaging current students. Alumni prove to be an invaluable asset when promoting the program to various community members while current students hold the potential to energize curious teenagers and their parents to learn more about the endless potential of an agriculture program. Past, present, or future; what’s the best path to promote your program?



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Moving the Needle: A First Year Teacher's Perspective

by Robby Branscum and Jon W. Ramsey

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world – Nelson Mandela

As a graduate of a larger, affluent high school, what are some obstacles that you may face at this smaller, low income school?" When my future superintendent asked me this question during my first job interview, I struggled for a moment then replied, "My

ering the demographics of the area, several factors stand out. The community unemployment rate of Oilton (16%) is double the Oklahoma state average (7%). As a result, 100% of all students in the district receive free breakfast and lunch each day. Education is often not a high priority; only 9% of adults over the age of twenty-five possess a college degree. In terms of parental involvement in school, 74% of parents in Oklahoma attend a minimum of one parent/teacher conference each year; however, only

dition, strong parental involvement has been shown to increase student achievement (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989).

While parental support will increase student achievement, a lack of parental support can have a detrimental impact on a child's education. In Oilton, 19 percent of the community lacks a high school diploma; therefore students may not value their own education due to the lack of reinforcement at home (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2013). As I began my teaching career in this small community, my main objective for the Oilton Agricultural Education program was to gain the support of the Oilton community.

Moving the Needle on Community Involvement

Engage students first. Most parents will take part in activities that their children are passionate about. On the other hand, a community will not stand behind a program that the students are not excited about. As an agricultural education program, we began to connect fun activities with our monthly chapter meetings. We concluded FFA meetings with activities such as a drive-in movie night, fear factor, spook trail, or a Wii Mario Kart tournament. By making chapter meetings fun, our average meeting attendance consistently exceeded 80 percent of chapter membership.

Once students are engaged, parents will follow. Eventually, several parents began to attend chapter meetings to find out what their children were so excited about. During our local livestock show last year, we initiated a parents' showmanship contest.

Through the implementation of public relation strategies the program has received tremendous support from the community. These activities have directly impacted the students as well.

goal as an educator is to better each student that walks into my classroom, the economic status of these students does not change that."

As a recent graduate of Oklahoma State University, I had a "fairy tale" vision of my role as an agricultural education instructor. I had dreams of impressing my passion for agriculture on students while helping them achieve their goals. It wasn't until my first year as an educator at Oilton Public Schools that I began to understand the impact socioeconomic status and parental support has on an agricultural education program.

Oilton is a small community in the heart of Oklahoma. When consid-

30% of Oilton parents attend these meetings annually (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2013).

Community Impact on Agricultural Education Programs

According to Israel & Hoover (1996), community support "is the cornerstone of a successful agricultural education program" (p. 1). Community members can impact student success through financial support, attendance at chapter functions, and as volunteers through guest speaking or training for career development event teams (Seevers & Rosencrans, 2001). However, the strongest community impact occurs at home through parental investment in children. In ad-

The parents of each student exhibited the animal while the students gathered around to offer their parents advice.

Display Student Achievements.

A former Oilton FFA member and alumni, Brandon Baumgarten, represented Oklahoma as the National FFA Officer Candidate. Initially, the chapter officers wanted to travel to Louisville, KY to hear the national officer results. This plan would be expensive and impact only a handful of students. As an alternative, we hosted a "Brandon Watch Party." For this activity, we invited the community and live-streamed the final session of the National FFA Convention. The officer team developed a presentation highlighting Brandon's experiences during the officer selection process and what his role would be as a national officer.

Community members were impressed and became aware of the prestige that comes with serving as a national FFA officer. The following week, as Brandon returned from national FFA convention, students and community members lined the streets to cheer his return during a surprise fire truck escort into town. Showcasing students is a must when striving to engage community support. Parents love to see their children praised and a community loves to see their members successful.

Assist with Community Functions.

This past year, Oilton celebrated its 100-year anniversary. The week prior to the celebration, the FFA chapter cleaned the entire park in preparation for the centennial festivities. During the past year, students served meals for the school veteran's day celebration, partnered with the local Rotary club to host a speech contest, and teamed up with the local Mason-

ic lodge for fund raising events. It is important that community members don't see agricultural education students solely at FFA functions. When community members recognize the program's willingness to help them with their endeavors, they will return the favor.

Keeping the Needle on Full Throttle

Through the implementation of public relation strategies such as student engagement, displaying student achievement, and assisting with community functions, the Oilton agricultural education program has received tremendous support from a community that two years ago, was disengaged and had no previous expectations of the program. For example, our chapter banquet attendance doubled from 75 people the previous year to 160 attendees this year.

However, these public relations activities not only provided community support, they directly impacted students as well. By carefully planning a program of activities that engaged both students and community members, the Oilton FFA Chapter was named both a National Models of Excellence Finalist as well as a National Models of Innovation Finalist in Student Development. In 2014, a small community of 1,000 citizens raised over \$9,000 to fully fund the students' trip to the National FFA Convention. While the students might have accelerated the program to full throttle, the parents were now in the passenger seat fully supporting a thriving agricultural education program.

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An Instagram from Home: Using Instagram Posts and Social Media to Promote Student Achievement and Interest in FFA

by Anna Bates and Theresa Pest Murphrey

A frequently asked question is “how do you get so many kids involved in your chapter?” There are many simple traditional strategies that can impact involvement; but recently, the effective use of popular social media outlets to promote face-to-face home visits and chapter activities has truly enabled broad publicity.

al home visit. An initial home visit preferably in the fall of freshmen year serves as the foundation for the student’s involvement in the classroom, with their SAE project, and with FFA. Following the home visit a creative Instagram photo with their teacher is made to promote the home visit and highlight information about the student in a supportive, creative way. Using the #SLOFFAhomevisits maintains a record of all students vis-

shared with family and friends, followed by community members, and referred back to by instructors; the potential for positive public relations is incredible. It serves as a paperless, simple, and fun way to track students in your program. In fact, numerous parents have started following the account and this has sparked conversations about the agricultural program among their friends in the community. Siblings of students as young as sixth grade are using Instagram and following the account to obtain ideas for future program participation based on their peers’ involvement. In fact, using Instagram can create anticipation among students and family as they watch to see who will be featured next. One element that makes this approach unique is the fact that the parent takes the photo to be posted on the teacher’s Instagram account. Even the process of taking a unique photo offers a wonderful opportunity to engage with the student’s family and talk about areas of interest. This initial investment of time at the beginning of a freshmen student’s high school career will lay the foundation for future courses, participation in FFA activities, and possible SAE project options. More importantly, it serves as a direct means to inform parents, on a personal level, about the FFA, the SAE project process, and the classroom components included in the program.

Effective and strategic use of popular social media platforms is one more way to harness the power of publicity for the good of agricultural education.

Public relations activities are critical in the promotion of high school agricultural education programs and social media use is a component that cannot be overlooked. Communicating with students via social media will 1) leverage technology to recruit and retain students, 2) increase engagement of students in FFA and SAE projects, and 3) build community between students, parents and alumni. One of our most powerful approaches combines current popular social media with the traditional concept of a home visit where teachers strive to build a personal relationship with their students.

This method of current social media use involves the use of Instagram as an element of the tradition-

ited for future recruitment and retention strategies. Popular “emojis” are used to illustrate the student’s interests. This process serves as a capstone to the home visit. “My home visit and Instagram post showed me just how much I could do in the Ag department. It also showed my parents what FFA is really about. It allowed them to ask questions. My visit not only allowed my teacher to see inside my life, but helped to make connections with me for my future” (2014-2015 Freshmen Student).

Some might wonder what impact posting these photos can have on their program. Recent experience reveals much more impact than one might think. Given the fact that these positive photos can be re-posted,

Recognizing achievements and the promotion of each student’s success in the beginning of their high school career is another element that makes this approach successful. Our youth are looking for feedback and

the use of Instagram allows for a teacher to provide positive feedback and showcase the talents of each student. Adding emojis (i.e., picture letter characters) that showcases students' interests adds to this element of recognition. The use of a hashtag to group the students based on interests creates a database that the teacher can use to indicate areas of involvement. For example, if a student is interested in joining a particular career development event team (CDE) the hashtag will group these students by interest for future reference. Ex. #NoviceParliPro or #AgWelding. The publicity of 'interest' by the student validates the recognition from the teacher and serves as the 'hook' for students who are considering 'showing up to the first practice.'

Promotional videos are another great way to publicize your program. Students can create promotional videos about their SAE projects as part of their Agriculture Communications curriculum and Agriculture Leadership courses. YouTube channels provided a chapter a means of creating a database of chapter meeting and FFA activities for use by students who have missed a meeting and future promotion of events. Recap videos of these events should be approximately a minute long, include fun music, and a combination of pictures and videos. These videos are perfect to promote events via Facebook and Instagram accounts. The creation of a capstone music video each year can showcase the diversity, creativity, and talent of your chapter and create incredible publicity. An additional approach is the creation of a video showcasing FFA alumni and the impact it has made on their lives during National FFA Week. This showcase video encourages students to interview alumni and community members to be highlighted in the video. One might wonder how to accomplish the creation of

these types of videos. The examples shared in this article were led by the FFA student publicity committee and supervised by the advisors. Different sources of video editing software has been used to create these projects, but most of them can be accomplished using basic video editing programs included in standard Mac and Windows computers. Some students even use their iPhones to create their video clips. Example videos can be found on the YouTube under the title of San Luis Obispo FFA.

Social media can be very powerful. Friends, parents, potential incoming students, and community members see activity in social media and recognize the serious commitment between teacher and student. The combination of meetings with individuals in person to establish a personal connection and promoting visits and activities via social media is an impactful partnership for the entire community. While these strategies require time and effort, is time and effort well spent that will expand the reach of your program, increase FFA awareness, and enhance community support. Effective and strategic use of popular social media platforms is one more way to harness the power of publicity for the good of agricultural education. Effective use of social media coupled with personal



Social media is used at all levels to communicate with students in agricultural education.

connections with members is the answer to "how do you get so many kids involved in your chapter?"



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Utilizing Agriculture Business and Industry Mentors to Aide in 4-H Youth Development Programming

by Joshua E. Rice and Frank W. Mumford

Youth development professionals in 4-H and FFA are regularly hearing that the United States is facing a shortage of agricultural scientists. Youth today are not aware of the opportunities that are available to them in the field of agriculture. Two of the primary goals of the new 4-H Science of Agriculture program is to increase agricultural literacy and career opportunity awareness for 4-H youth. The nonformal educational

the eight steps in the engineering process to formulate a potential solution to the agricultural issue that they identified and create a 20 minute presentation that is evaluated by a panel of agricultural experts. The teams are all competing for scholarships that will be used to continue their education in a post-secondary institution.

Each team is charged with identifying a mentor from agriculture business and industry to help them formulate a strategy to address their issue as well as provide the teams with the resources needed to be suc-

The lack of highly trained individuals entering agricultural career sectors has a direct impact on agriculture business and industry entities throughout the United States. To help ensure that youth are exposed to meaningful experiences and opportunities, agriculture industry professionals were purposefully included in the development and implementation of the program. Agriculture businesses helped identify potential mentors, provided relevant agricultural issues for teams to investigate, and also provided financial support for the program. The long term benefits that the program provides, (i.e. a potential workforce, agricultural literacy and the longevity of agricultural industries) create a need for them to become actively engaged in the program.

By including agriculture industry professionals in the creation and implementation of new youth development programming, a symbiotic relationship is created.

setting that 4-H youth development provides has the potential to help repair and fill the pipeline for agricultural careers. In order to fulfill these goals, the inclusion of agriculture business and industry professionals as mentors working with 4-H youth in the development and facilitation of the program, is crucial for the program's success.

The 4-H Science of Agriculture Response program asks youth in grades 6 thru 13 to work on teams of three to four to identify a local agricultural issue that is present within their community. The teams utilize

successful. While most mentoring programs for youth focus on addressing and improving youth's emotional and social health, family relationships, and/or reducing delinquent behavior of youth, the Science of Agriculture program focuses on 4-H youth recognizing that their 4-H involvement can lead them to a post-secondary education opportunity (college or a trade school) and into an agriculturally related career. By pairing youth teams with mentors from agriculture business and industry youth see an accurate depiction of a potential career in agriculture.

The Minnesota 4-H State Science of Agriculture team recently held five regional roundtable discussions with 33 agriculture business and industry leaders to discuss the programming and development of the Science of Agriculture Challenge program. There were two main external goals of the roundtable discussions and three internal goals.

The first external goal focused on agriculture industry representatives identifying potential topics for youth teams to utilize as their focus for the 2016 challenge. The first goal was achieved by the roundtable participants identifying more than 150 different topic areas that are related to each agriculture business and industry representative's agriculture sector and/or community.



The Minnesota 4-H Science of Agriculture team including Dean Durgan, and Associate Dean Freeman.

The second external goal focused on identifying potential mentors from the agriculture organizations that were invited to attend the roundtables. These mentors could serve 4-H by volunteering their time and knowledge to youth teams from their local area to help validate a solution and/or point them in the right direction for more information and support.

There were three internal goals of the roundtable discussions: to establish relationships, build excitement, and identify potential funding partnerships for the program. By utilizing the roundtable approach, multiple organizations were brought together in the same room to discuss and identify common interests, they began working in a collaborative manner, and they identified why it is important that their organization aide in the development of the new 4-H Science of Agriculture challenge program.

Through written invitations and contacting targeted agriculture organizations and businesses over the phone, relationships started to take form prior to the roundtable events. Time

was allotted during the events for attendees to eat lunch and network with other participants. This format provided an opportunity to visit with many participants instead of just one person. By sharing details of the youth development programming within these group settings, questions, topics, and discussions started to surface through active discussion by the participants. This breakthrough allowed insight to be gained by the Minnesota Extension 4-H Youth Development staff while also creating a sense of ownership for the new 4-H program from the roundtable attendees.

Many of the individuals who attended the roundtables did not have an established relationship with Minnesota 4-H prior to the roundtable events. They now have an inside window to a new 4-H program that directly aligns with their business's or organization's mission and values. Multiple sources of new funding have been identified to support the 4-H Science of Agriculture program. A follow up protocol was developed after the events to ensure that new and relevant program information keeps flowing to the newly acquired partners.

Youth development programs and agriculture business and industry professionals have a vested interests in developing and informing younger generations of agriculturalists. 4-H youth today have the potential to become tomorrow's agricultural leaders. By including agriculture industry professionals in the creation and implementation of new youth development programing, a symbiotic relationship is created. Increasing agricultural literacy, developing 21st century and STEM skills, and exploring agricultural career opportunities are ways to help increase opportunity awareness for youth. Holding roundtable discussions between key stakeholders is one of the best ways to cultivate a bright future for agriculture.



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Public Relations Strategies and Potential, Emerging Outlets for Our Agricultural Profession

by Helen M. Barela

What are Public Relations?

As per the Public Relations Society of America (2015), "Public relations are a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics." Furthermore, as a management function of public relations (PR) encompasses managing the resources of an organization (PRSA, 2015). These may include marketing; financial; fund raising; employee, community or government relations; and other programs." Rather than being a passive activity it is one built over a continuum span of time similarly, to agricultural business relations.

Agricultural Capacity Funding

Historically, domestic agriculture has been a key priority of public policy within the United States (Anderson, Lester, 1976). Land-grant universities are tied to state budgets and to NIFA/Extension grants for a portion of their funding (Agri-News, 2013; Wired, 2013).

Appropriations for research at land-grant universities (often called "capacity funding"), which fund agricultural research services and extension activities as of 2013 all suffered a cut of 7.61 percent from prior year funding levels in 2012 (Agri-News, 2013; Wired, 2013). Extension education has been heavily relied on by communities and local farmers/ranchers as a means for improvement of production operations and overall access of food security within communities by providing critical knowl-

edge to producers (Wired, 2013). Budget cuts within the farm bill impacted varying areas and transformed priority areas within agricultural divisions. Grant funding became a pressing top priority in requirements of many extension and agricultural education position descriptions and more critical to many universities than before (AAAE, Faculty Positions, 2011; 2012; 2013; 2014; 2015).

As of 2011, we witnessed threats of governmental sequestration which threatened to lessen monetary availability or even put a halt to necessary grant funded projects (USA Today, 2015; Wired, 2013). With an agricultural business lens, these and other rapid changes are indicative of added volatility to the agricultural profession at the university and industry level. This is not to say many projects are not remaining funded however, this is to highlight the pressing need in our agricultural education profession for further strategizing and expanding our potential, emerging outlets within public relations for our agricultural profession.

The State of Affairs

There are over 318,000,000 people living in the United States (U.S. Census, 2015). Of that population, less than 1% claim farming as an occupation (and about 2% actually live on farms) (EPA, 2013). As the U.S. farm population has dwindled, the average age of farmers continues to rise (EPA, 2013). The graying of the farm population has led to concerns about the long-term health of family farms as an American institution (EPA, 2013).

In 2007, farmers and ranchers receive only 16 cents out of every dollar

spent on food at home and away from home, in 1980; farmers and ranchers received 31 cents (Farm Bureau Federation, 2015). Farm production expenses average \$109,359 per year per farm and many farms that meet the U.S. Census' definition would not produce sufficient income to meet farm family living expenses. Less than 1 in 4 American farms produce gross revenues in excess of \$50,000 (EPA, 2013). This financial unviability has impacted the landscape of agricultural ownership/production.

As of 2013, China owns a large share of the pork industry in Virginia. Smithfield foods company takeover valued at \$7.1 billion and to be considered the largest ever Chinese acquisition of an American company (Reveal News, 2015).

Border Foods was purchased in 2011 by Japanese based company, Mizkan (Bloomberg, 2011). Located in Deming, New Mexico, Border Foods began operations in 1972 and is the United States oldest and most established processors of green chile, jalapeno and tomatillo peppers.

These are only two examples of various American owned agricultural companies that were historically locally owned recently being purchased by international companies (Reveal News, 2015; Bloomberg, 2011). Therefore shares of agricultural production have shifted from domestic to international ownership (Reveal News, 2015; Bloomberg, 2011).

Agriculture and Potential Emerging Outlets of Public Relations

What can we do being amidst the current volatility within our profession and uncertainty in our future

governmental funding? Agri-companies as those mentioned above and others will continue to need a quality educated and skilled labor force. Universities are the suppliers and producers of an educated and skilled labor force. However, in several instances companies because of the current dis-connect which remains between industry and universities must re-train college graduates as their knowledge base is usually different from the needs of a company. This is not to imply inferior learning standards rather, it is to imply industry is by nature a far more rapidly changing environment and as such, their curriculum needs are changing at a more rapid rate while academia holds fairly consistent curriculum over vast spans of years. Furthermore, in some instances graduates do not possess desired skill sets as their university curriculum did not contain information pertaining to specific needs or processes within a company. The historic viewpoint, universities are separate entities for which graduates hail from and any university being separate from industry is one that will hinder our profession and damper our public relations as we continue to experience volatility in capacity funding. Certainly, some of our graduates are employed within a company and recruiting for more of our graduates but, earnestly, we need to gear up our public relations several notches if we are to remain strong and competitive within the volatile market place of ever changing governmental capacity funding. Stronger partnerships and collaborations need to be made beyond typical internship experiences/scholarship creation in professors need to be continually partnering with industry to be better aware of the very fabric of curriculum needs within industry.

The leadership within Land-grant universities need to aggressively ap-

proach agri-companies and other leading companies. An opportunity and emerging outlet of public relations is continuing as many of our domestic agricultural production businesses are being purchased by international businesses and it is important we forge these bonds of public relations early and continue to build from these public relations. Public relations require initiating contact and consistently working to build over time the strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics (PRSA, 2015).

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Dr. Helen M. Barela currently works in the retail industry using Agri-business, Agri-sales and Agri-leadership concepts.

Making Time to Share Our Story

Using NAAE's Communities of Practice

by Kellie Claffin

A few weeks ago my school to-do list included preparing lessons, grading, ordering banquet awards, touching base with FFA officers, completing my professional development plan for teacher licensing, and hosting 200 elementary school students through the ag room. For many teachers this is par for the course as we balance classes, FFA, supervised agricultural experiences, FFA Alumni meetings, school paperwork, and more throughout the school year.

As agricultural educators, we are responsible for marketing our program.

Ag teachers are not strangers to squeezing in everything we need to do while balancing it with our personal lives. However, I made sure that I sent an all-district email with pictures from the elementary event, posted pictures on the ag program Instagram account, and helped the FFA reporter send in a news release to the local paper.

Why is it important to make time for sharing our story? Publicizing our programs ensures that stakeholders including administrators, parents, alumni, advisory board, and community members stay informed about the program accomplishments. It helps in recruiting and retaining students by showcasing the awesome things that are happening in the agriculture program. In addition, publi-

cizing helps us to build relationships in the school and community.

The National Quality Program Standards for Secondary Agricultural Education (The National Council for Agricultural Education, 2009) provide an outline for agriculture teachers with standards towards which they should strive to have a quality agricultural education program. Standard five revolves around marketing the agriculture program through sharing goals, activities, and accomplishments. The quality indicators for this standard include:

1. Stakeholders including school administrators, board members, FFA Alumni, counselors, parents and staff are familiar with the goals, objectives, prerequisites, activities, and accomplishments of the agricultural education program.
2. A positive school and community relations program is planned and conducted annually.
3. A communication plan for key stakeholders is developed, implemented, reviewed and completed annually.
4. A recruitment and retention plan is annually developed and implemented for prospective and current students.
5. The teacher collects and reports relevant agricultural education program data/information to key stakeholders and other entities.
6. Relationships are built with local, state and national decision makers, including elected officials, through education and outreach. (The Council, 2009, p. 56)

How in the world do we balance promoting our program while just trying to maintain the program? We need to also focus on instruction, facilities, assessing students, supervised agricultural experience programs, FFA, professional development, and educational items required by local and state departments.

For some of us, sharing items on social media or writing a press release comes easily. If you are like me, publicizing your program is on your mind, but it is pushed aside when things come up during the day. That's where NAAE's Communities of Practice (<http://communities.naae.org/>) comes into the picture. Communities of Practice is a professional networking site for agricultural educators to share for idea and resources.

Marketing Your Ag Program Community

Communities of Practice has been a lifesaver in helping with curriculum ideas, classroom management strategies and FFA advice. However, there is so much more. Did you know that the National Association of Agricultural Educators' Communities of Practice has a "Marketing Your Ag Program" community? I have served as the facilitator for the community for the past three years

and am continually amazed at the wealth of information available for busy ag teachers.

In the online community, you will find discussions on promoting the agriculture program and FFA. There are great ideas on community relations including open houses, using technology and social media, and building relationships with stakeholders. Many teachers have posted about the success they have had with students presenting to local civic organizations like the Kiwanis or Rotary Club. You could have an ag issues team present or have a parliamentary procedure demonstration. Not only would this be an educational activity, but those individuals will talk about the good things going on in the program with others in the community.

During my first year teaching, I posted in search of an ag interest survey to identify what pathways students were interested in to revamp the course offerings. I was able to share what I created for other teachers to use. It may not be perfect, but we could all use some inspiration!

The highlight of the Marketing Your Ag Program community is the Minnesota Public Relations Toolkit. There are tons of fantastic resources to access including sample letterhead, department newsletters, news releases for guest speakers, connect with parents, and more! I utilized the testimonial survey that was posted to send to past students and current seniors to collect quotes that I can use in newsletters, brochures, social media, and more to promote the program.

What do I do?

One of my best marketing tools to share information with stakeholders is a Wordpress site that I created for the agriscience program (www.gillettageducation.wordpress.com). Early

in my teaching career I was looking for a medium that would allow me to reach a wide range of individuals including students, parents, community members, and administrators. I chose a Wordpress blog format because new posts could be emailed to subscribers and sent to the Gillett Ag Education and FFA Facebook and Twitter accounts automatically. Students post news releases and updates from the ag program and scholarship opportunities are posted and pages provide information on agriculture courses and the FFA chapter. Pictures are posted to show the diversity of the ag program and a Google calendar is attached to the site to share upcoming events.

FFA news releases are written by the chapter reporter and shared with the local newspaper, as well as posted on the chapter website mentioned previously. Examples of articles include the annual banquet, conferences attended and community service activities. Other classroom events, like a career day in which my students participated, have been included in the newspaper. Knowing that the school administrators and staff members are also stakeholders, I send out pictures through email showcasing our Food for America program or even cheesemaking in the food science course (complete with recipe). Sharing updates through email allows administrators and staff to see what students are learning in the agriculture department and the hands-on activities we do.

Twice a year the program presents to the school board about FFA and about what is going on in the agriculture program. For the past three years I have put together an annual report with our events, a listing of curricular advancements, grants received, course enrollment numbers and descriptions, and instructor pro-

fessional development and involvement throughout the year. The annual report is distributed to administration, school board members, and FFA alumni to share the full scope of the program. It's also a helpful tool for you to recognize all that your program has accomplished in the past year.

As agricultural educators, we are responsible for marketing our program. How can we accomplish this with all the other responsibilities we have to fulfill? First, recognize what awesome things you are already doing to publicize your program. Then, take a look at the quality program standards to see what areas you might focus. Use the Marketing Your Ag Program community on NAAE's Communities of Practice to get ideas and resources. We can't do it all, however we all can do something!

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Tricks of the Trade

by Beverley Flatt

On my drive in to work earlier this year, I was flipping through the local radio stations when I zoomed past one that was playing my favorite 80s rap song. Quickly, I twisted the dial back just in time to hear the words, “It’s tricky to rock a rhyme, to rock a rhyme that’s right on time. It’s tricky. It’s tricky (tricky) tricky (tricky).”

Public relations, simply stated, is a communications process between an audience and an entity.

Now, many people believe that RUN DMC’s hit song *Tricky* was written to represent the level of difficulty that exists in rapping and free-styling. However, it is my personal belief that RUN DMC actually meant to express how tricky it is to balance public relations in public education.

Public relations, simply stated, is a communications process between an audience and an entity, however, we all know it’s a lot more than that. Agricultural educators often find themselves having to do some form of public relations, but are given no guidance. How do I even do effective public relations? What about funding? How are these things evaluated? When trying to find the answers to these legitimate questions, on top of running an effective agricultural education program, it can feel like juggling a herd of feral cats. While each program and school district is different, four agricultural education programs in Nashville, TN found a

way to benefit from a larger career and technical education outreach campaign that incorporated marketing, advertising, and public relations known as the Community Outreach Campaign.

For the Community Outreach Campaign, student written statements communicating the enhanced abilities they have because of their participation in agricultural education and career and technical education programs served as the content.

For example, one student wrote “I can build a hydrogen powered car, and I don’t even have my drivers license yet.” These “I Can” statements showcased difference schools and were used in each advertising outlets. The “I Can” statements were selected for each advertising outlets based on proximity of the outlet to the physical school location and relevance of the statement to the advertising space or location.

The content of the advertisements also used three calls to action based on preexisting communications efforts. A Facebook page and Twitter account were developed, but were seldom used and has little engagement with followers and fans. Additionally, a blog was developed to showcase student work and accomplishment, however, traffic and engagement with the blog plateaued within months of its creation. Each outlet struggled to reach new peo-

ple and engage existing followers. Therefore, the call to action for each advertising outlets was to visit one of these sites to learn more about the programs and schools.

The Community Outreach Campaign began in 2012 in order to combat negative media attention towards career academies and career and technical education using both traditional and non-traditional outlets including:

- Newspaper Print Advertisements
- Digital Advertisements on local news websites and Yahoo!
- Metro Transportation Authority (MTA) bus and bench advertising
- Thirty-second preview advertisements in local movie theaters
- Point-of-Purchase Television at local gas stations

These outlets were selected due to cost efficiency, impression estimates, audience reach, and the ability to measure effectiveness and impact. All media outlets used in the campaign were examined to determine the effectiveness of reaching out to the local community and yielding a positive response to calls to action. Since we live in the world of education, data is king.

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Using Public Relations: One Program's Success

by Josette Nebeker

The Highland-Craigmont agricultural education program began in August 2008. It is located in rural north central Idaho where employment is heavy in the agriculture and natural resources industries. In August 2011, I took over as the third teacher of the program. There were fifteen FFA members the prior year and as I began to participate in community events, I realized that most community members were not even aware the school had an agricultural education program or an FFA Chapter.

The neighboring community has had an agricultural education program for decades and there had been a number of unsuccessful attempts to start a program at Highland in the previous decades. The first year I taught at Highland, I learned a lot about the relationship between the community and the FFA chapter. One of the most educational experiences began with a conversation with local elderly farmer. As we spoke about the current events, the topic of FFA arose. He commented on the fact he wished Highland had an agricultural education program. I couldn't believe that in the fourth year, an active member of the local community was unaware of the program. He obviously was aware of the benefits and importance of the three circle model, but the public relations for the program was lacking.

This event prompted a huge push for additional time dedicated to public relations. The FFA reporter periodically wrote articles for the local paper, the *Lewis County Herald*, but only after events with results. Members were only interested in a few career development events and the

attendance at the banquet was less than thirty people. After my previous teaching experience and the chapter I was a member of as a student, I couldn't believe the lack of community interaction and support. Granted the chapter did not host any events for that public besides a donkey basketball fundraiser.

As advisor of a new group of FFA officers, I had more information about the community. The chapter

Food Sale fundraiser twice. The event proved to be financially profitable and increased public awareness with a demographic that was different than any other effort.

The community partnerships continued, as members of groups like the Chamber and the Craigmont Lions Club were invited to join the Advisory Committee. The FFA Chapter adopted a two mile piece of US Highway 95, the main north south corridor

What students participate in and learn, as well as how the community supports the program, will lead to career success of those students.

calendar included more events that focused on the community. The first effort was to put articles in the newspaper before and after events and the creation of a Facebook page.

Another change was the creation of photo cards as thank you's and invitations. Businesses began hanging them on bulletin boards and parents proudly displayed them in their homes. They are more eye catching than the traditional letters to invite supporters to events like banquets.

The other major change that took place was determining which community members to invite to events. It was amazing how quickly groups will offer to partner to help with projects, once you invite the people who know how to get things done. The Highland-Craigmont FFA Chapter was invited to partner with the Greater Craigmont Area Chamber of Commerce on their annual Easter Baked

through Idaho. The clean up efforts are now coordinated with the Craigmont Lions club to assist them with their four miles and add additional adult chaperones for the two miles which the FFA is responsible. This effort helped when the FFA members asked to use the Lions Burger Barn (concession stand) for a fundraiser at the homecoming football game. The Lions were excited to allow the FFA members to utilize it, as they have worked together with the FFA members and see the value of the program. The Lions have also supported the FFA members in their fundraising efforts to attend the National FFA Convention. This partnership has expanded to Lions Club members supplying fundraising ideas and opportunities to the FFA Advisor and FFA members many times throughout the year. As the financial standing of the chapter has increased, student participation has increased. On the other-

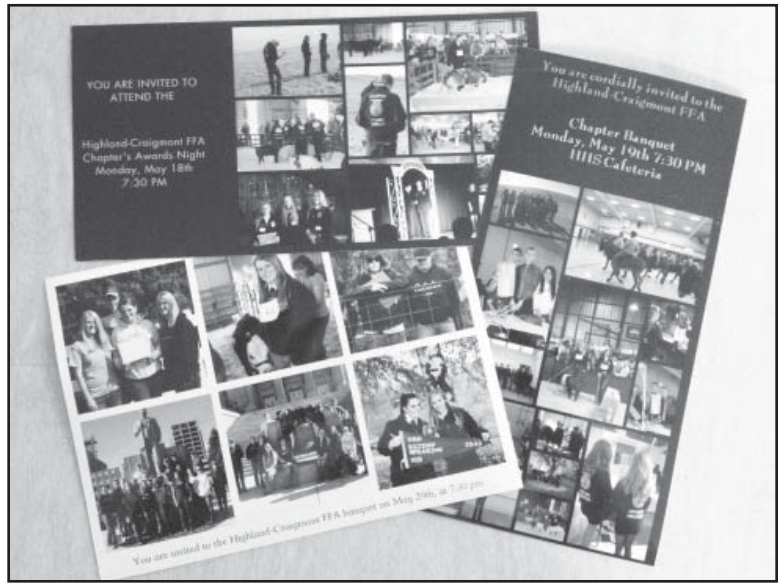
hand the cost of travel has decreased for individual students because fundraising has helped subsidize some of those costs.

The FFA chapter began selling can coolies and t-shirts at the annual Craigmont June Picnic in 2013. Members get to share their passion for the FFA with Highland Alumni and other community members. Many of the students have shared anecdotes of alumni being excited to support FFA and wishing they would have had the opportunity when they were students.

The latest public relations push was the creation of the Opening Social with Pie Baking Contest. This event was hosted by the chapter for the first time during fall 2014, with almost twenty pies entered by a wide variety of community members, a number of which had never attended an FFA function in the past. Students and community members alike participated in mock career development events, including tool identification, plant identification and cheese tasting. The winners were awarded a variety of prizes, but were most proud of their bragging rights of being the best in the community. Local ladies are already planning for the pie baking contest next year.

This year membership in the Highland-Craigmont FFA chapter was forty members, an increase of more than 100% in just four years. The extended contract for the advisor has

been doubled and the chapter now participates in nearly every event possible. The first member received his State Degree in 2011. Members are consistently District Star Winners and even State Star Finalists. The first member to earn his American FFA Degree will do so at the 2015 National FFA Convention. That major shift in the chapter started with the push to make more community members aware of the agricultural education program and the FFA Chapter. What students participate in and learn, as well as how the community supports the program, will lead to career success of those students. The Highland-Craigmont Agricultural Education Program scored very well on the new Idaho Quality Program Standards Grant Process this year. For a program being only in its 7th year, the community support has helped students experience success and build a culture of high expect-



Examples of public relations tools developed by the Highland-Craigmont FFA Chapter.

tations for members to push themselves for greatness in CDEs, SAEs and their future careers. The public relations push has taken additional time for FFA officers and the advisor, but the positive results have been almost instant and beyond what was expected.



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Next to doing the right thing, the most important thing is to let people know you are doing the right thing. - John D. Rockefeller

Many a small thing has been made large by the right kind of advertising.

— Mark Twain

Teach Ag! Avengers: Heroes in Agricultural Education Recruitment

by Daniel Foster

Who will carry your flag?

When we speak of public relations for our programs, whether at the post-secondary or secondary level, a primary question to ask is: Who will carry your flag? Or rather, who will be the “face” of your program when engaging potential stakeholders? At the same time, ask most agricultural educators what they are most proud of and they will inevitably indicate their students, beaming with pride as they say the “proof is in the pudding” with our students serving as the evidence of the effectiveness of our programs! While we understand the necessity of effective public relations in order to have programmatic success, we also acknowledge that public relations are not the core mission of our programming. Our core mission is student development. An opportunity exists to accomplish our public relations needs through purposeful, systematic integration into our student development programs! At Penn State, we started a program in 2012 to help with our public relations/recruitment needs to help address the shortage of agriscience teachers by utilizing our students and having the program purposefully assist in our teacher preparation program. As documented for decades (Camp, 2000; Camp, Broyles, & Skelton, 2002; Foster, Lawver, & Smith, 2015; Kantrovich, 2007; Kantrovich, 2010), there is a nation-wide shortage of agricultural educators entering the classroom. Out of this need came the Teach Ag! Avengers.

How it works

Investing in our students to further develop their skills and abilities, while leveraging peer recruitment, provides a win-win scenario. The program first needed to be branded to be identifiable by students and stakeholders. The university has an “ambassador” program and the college has an “advocate” program, thus the specific program level was named “Avengers”. The primary objectives of the TeachAg! Avenger program are:

1. To effectively recruit current secondary students to major in agricultural education.
2. To effectively recruit current post-secondary students to major in agricultural education, pursue double majors or post-baccalaureate certification.
3. To serve as the representative “face” of the Penn State Agricultural Education Teacher Education program at State and National Agricultural Education functions.
4. To serve as the student representative of the Penn State Agricultural Education Teacher Program for college and university functions.

5. To ensure that Penn State Agricultural Education has an appropriate social networking presence (Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, Instagram etc.).

Selection is a competitive application process. To represent the multiple campuses of the university system and the varied points of development, program planners sought two representatives from each grade level (i.e. freshman, sophomores, juniors). All students selected must be declared AEE majors with inten-

Investing in our students to further develop their skills and abilities, while leveraging peer recruitment, provides a win-win scenario.

tions to teach secondary agricultural education. Students are expected to create, conduct or represent at events for Penn State agricultural education; however, only one Avenger can “claim” any event. For example: the State FFA Convention may involve all six Avengers, but only one can have credit for conducting that event. In order to receive the incentive payment, each avenger must complete a minimum of 6 events.

Costs/Resources Needed

The Avenger program is a truly an example of a “private/public” partnership. Students combine time investment for a passionate cause similar to a student organization/club and are provided a nominal financial incentive similar to student



The inaugural Teach Ag! Avenger Team from 2012. Pictured from right to left: Megan Slates, Caleb Wright, Jillian Gordon, Janae Herr, Matthew Reutlinger, Matthew Dodson

wage labor. Each student is provided a \$500 scholarship for completing six unique events over the course of the year. In addition, students are paid an hourly wage for two hours per week to maintain their social medial platforms and conduct events. Students are provided reimbursement for costs associated with events (mileage, hotel, meals, etc.). Some funds are set aside to provide students with brand clothing (a collared logo shirt), business cards, and professional development training each semester. Costs of attending state and national events for agricultural education youth organizations were subsidized through in-kind exchange of labor and services.

Results to Date

Students established a mission, vision, and set both programmatic and personal development goals for the experience. The mission developed was: "The purpose of the Penn State Teach Ag! Avengers is to cultivate awareness for agricultural and extension education." The Vision developed was: "Through our passion as positive agents of change, Penn

State Teach Ag! Avengers will empower individuals through involvement in agricultural and extension education; inspiring them to discover their career potential to influence and participate in the future of agriculture." Programmatic goals that

were achieved included:

1. Conduct 36 unique events promoting AEE in the calendar year.
2. Involve 30 other undergraduate AEE students in the programming in the calendar year.
3. Establish Penn State Ag Ed on five different social networking platforms.

Student Perspectives- What was the best thing about being an Avenger to you?

"I appreciated having the opportunity to shape and mold the opportunities available in AEE from a student perspective. As a student, we were able to collaborate with professors to increase student opportunity and continue to make the major both fun and rewarding." Jillian Gordon, 2012 Avenger, current graduate student at the University of Georgia

"While I was active with the other student organizations for Agriculture Education at Penn State, the

Avenger program gave me the most ability to influence the future of the program in its entirety. It gave students a sort of independence of how we accomplished our duties, yet we remained unified in our mission." Caleb Wright, 2013 Avenger, current agriscience teacher at Garden Spot HS (PA)

"I enjoyed the creativity of the Avenger program. We had the opportunity as a group to find creative ways to get students excited about a career path some high school students overlook." Meagan Slates, 2013 Avenger, current agriscience teacher at Penn Manor HS (PA)

"Being an avenger had many benefits including the great professional development we received throughout our yearlong term." Laura Metrick, 2014 Avenger, currently seeking an agriscience teacher position

"The best part about being an Avenger was getting out and meeting kids! It gave me a chance to go back to 4-H and present to students the opportunities that they may not have known about." Rachel Telesz, 2014 Avenger, current agriscience teacher at Union City HS (PA)

"I love how being an avenger keeps me tied and focused to my major while I'm still working through general education courses". Nathan Repetz, 2015 Avenger, current sophomore rank AEE major

Student Perspectives- Did serving as an Avenger assist you in pursuing your desired career?

"This program gave me more chances to find a way to craft messages to help garner interest in agriculture education. I also believe the Avenger program gave me a leg up through the interview process as I was able to speak about a more diverse experience while at Penn

State.” Caleb Wright, 2013 Avenger, current agriscience teacher at Garden Spot HS (PA)

“I was recognized by teachers in the state for the events we were holding for their students. This made me feel a part of the Ag Ed family before even student teaching.” Meagan Slates, 2013 Avenger, current agriscience teacher at Penn Manor HS (PA)

“It gave me experience speaking to students, it helped me meet and network with others involved in this career path from all across Pennsylvania and it helped to fuel my passion for agriculture education!” Laura Metrick, 2014 Avenger, currently seeking an agriscience teacher position

“I got to see the impact I made and realized that if only those short interactions were able to make a difference, imagine the impacts I could make as a teacher every day in the classroom.” Rachel Telesz, 2014 Avenger, current agriscience teacher at Union City HS (PA)

Student Perspectives- How do you see the Avenger program evolving in the future?

“I see the Avengers program continuing to grow through student directed leadership. Who knows how to recruit and support ag education better the students in the major themselves?” Jillian Gordon, 2012 Avenger, current graduate student at the University of Georgia

“One of the best aspects of the Avengers is that it is pulling in diverse students. These students are of varying ages and backgrounds, allowing their input to bring together the greatest potential impact. The program is set up in a way to identify the current and future needs of Penn State Teach Ag! allowing a select group of stu-

dents determine the best way to respond to them!” Caleb Wright, 2013 Avenger, current agriscience teacher at Garden Spot HS (PA)

“I see the Avengers potentially holding leadership conferences to serve the secondary students in the state. Teaching students the basic leadership would give them the positive reinforcement needed to believe they could be a teacher. (I realize this would take a lot of financial backing but I think it would be cool). I would also like to see the Avenger program partner with other colleges and recruit for ag teachers in other states and not just PA.” Meagan Slates, 2013 Avenger, current agriscience teacher at Penn Manor HS (PA)

“I see the program focusing its efforts on different events to reach students that are not already being exposed to agricultural education, such as current college of agriculture students.” Deanna Miller, 2014 Avenger, current agriscience teacher at Woodstown HS (NJ)

Student perspective- What advice would you give to another institution looking to start an Avenger program?

“Look towards your current students for ideas. The Avenger program will only remain valuable as long as it is student led, much like ag education!” Jillian Gordon, 2012 Avenger, current graduate student at the University of Georgia

“Have a clear and defined mission. Being one of the first Avengers, we worked through a lot of the initial challenges of starting a new student group. While questions arose, we often reflected back upon our main purpose as a group. I think identifying the weaknesses of your program and finding ways that students can help your institution should be the true ba-

sis of a program similar to the Avengers.” Caleb Wright, 2013 Avenger, current agriscience teacher at Garden Spot HS (PA)

“Be unique! This program must be about being passionate, enthusiastic, and goal oriented. Find creative ways to reach out to high school students.” Meagan Slates, 2013 Avenger, current agriscience teacher at Penn Manor HS (PA)

“Work to cultivate the idea that this program is for a select group to spread the message of Ag Education, but provide training, coaching, etc. about talking points when interacting with students. Evaluate, is the goal to plant a seed of interest, or to have students commit their college degree? Then take this goal and devise a select program of activities to execute your program goals.” Deanna Miller, 2014 Avenger, current agriscience teacher at Woodstown HS (NJ)

“My advice would be to make sure the Avengers are meeting students face-to-face but also are being active on social media as well!” Laura Metrick, 2014 Avenger, currently seeking an agriscience teacher position

“Let Avengers travel and create the interactions. It gives student's someone real to look up to when they start visiting colleges and programs.” Rachel Telesz, 2014 Avenger, current agriscience teacher at Union City HS (PA)

“Start working with your state FFA and 4-H, and make your program a vital part to what they do.” Nathan Repetz, 2015 Avenger, current sophomore rank AEE major

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Tricks of the Trade (continued from page 18)

The first evaluation data were used to determine a media outlet's effectiveness. In one year the Community Outreach Campaign resulted in more than 28 million impressions including 8 million from the MTA bus and bench ads, 6 million from newspaper print ads, 5 million from various digital advertisements, 3 million from movie theater previews, and 6 million from point-of-purchase television. The second most valuable statistic was the evaluation of cost-per-impression. Overall, the entire cost of the Community Outreach Campaign was less than \$0.003 per impression. The breakdown of cost-per-impression includes \$0.004 for MTA advertisements, \$0.013 for newspaper print ads, \$0.013 for digital advertising, \$0.017 for movie theater previews, and no cost for point-of-purchase television due to a donation from a local business partner.

Finally, we wanted to determine if our entire Community Outreach Campaign was actually impacting our calls to action. With all of the time, effort, and manpower that went in to the entire campaign, the status of the program would not have been a success if no one was responding to the calls to action. Fortunately, we saw significant increases in all areas. During the peak month, page visits to the Academies of Nashville blog increased more than 845 percent. Unique visitors to the blog increased 619 percent. Page views for the blog increased 497 percent. The page visit duration was extended by more than 13 minutes per visit. The results for our social media outlets had similar results.

For the Academies of Nashville Facebook page, the number of fans increased 384 percent, audience impressions increased by nearly 40,000

percent, audience reach increased by 22,000 percent, and audience engagement increased by 15 percent. For the Academies of Nashville Twitter page, the number of followers increased 892%, mentions increased 670 percent, and retweets increased 900 percent.

All in all, the Community Outreach Campaign has impacted career and technical education's reputation in Nashville. While the campaign was by no means simple or easily replicable, it was effective and balanced the tightrope walk that all educators face when it comes to managing public relations. The next time you are flipping through your radio stations and you hear a favorite 80s rap song, you won't have to worry about that "tricky" public relations plan you are trying to put in place. Instead, you can focus on the success and outcomes of your agricultural education program.

"If I was down to the last dollar of my marketing budget I'd spend it on PR!" — Bill Gates

Test Driving Your Dream Car: Reflections on Student Teaching

by Amanda Hannon

My experience student teaching was just like test driving your dream car. Before you start this experience, you have learned everything you could possibly know about the car and you've heard about the experience that everybody else has had with the car. However, until you personally turn that key and step on the gas, you don't really know what you are getting into!

At the beginning of my student teaching placement, I started slow; observing how the class behaved with my cooperating teacher and vice versa; just like you would while the dealer can see you from the lot. As soon as I hit that highway and was given the class to teach on my own, I slammed on the gas. In this test drive, this behavior did not give me the reaction I was expecting.

I quickly found that that I needed to alter my perspective and expectations to enable each student to succeed. Though I didn't realize it at first, I expected all of my students to be as motivated and passionate about agriculture as I was in high school. Because of this assumption, I had very high, and for some students, unattainable, expectations for students to grasp the content of my lessons quickly and to gain a lot of ground with my introductory unit. This way of thinking is just not plausible in the real world. Students have different degrees of experience, learning capabilities, and desires to learn the material you will teach. This early realization really changed my philosophy of teaching. I have realized that my job as an educator is to increase

each student's understanding of agriculture, no matter what level they are on before they take your class. This change of opinion made lesson planning more difficult because you have to plan multiple levels for all students to benefit. After I learned this, I slowed down my lesson delivery so that I thought at least all students were grasping something in the class.

job. Just like trying out new options in a car shopping adventure, I really enjoyed trying out new methods and being able to observe just how useful they were to my students. I worked on trying to make activities shorter so that we could change directions and reengage students to the topic. At first I was discouraged that I was not able to fit in all of the key parts

Student teaching was just like test driving your dream car.

There are favorite experiences as a student teacher that I will always remember and treasure. I enjoyed helping with the greenhouse program from almost start to finish. Even though I had taken horticulture and greenhouse management courses, this was my first chance to see the step-by-step process of planting seeds and plugs, making them grow, and marketing and selling them. My proudest moment would be when my cooperating teacher told me that some of the students I was getting to participate hadn't shown any interest in the class before. Most of all, I enjoyed seeing the spark of passion in my active students' eyes when they had the chance to do a FFA activity or talk about how excited they were to start land judging. This passion reminded me why I chose this major in the first place. It can be hard to remember this passion while in college because you are so disconnected from that world.

After I got into the swing of teaching classes and the students were used to me, I started to really enjoy my

of my lesson plan beginning with a motivation, then having three activities during the period, and formally summarizing the content at the end of the period. This process seemed doable during lesson planning, but I found that in my fifty minute classes, it just wasn't possible for me. A lesson plan I had created before student teaching for one class period would take a week to get through. Learning to cater the lesson to the class you are teaching and modify what you are doing to make the students really con-

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The Ups and Downs of Student Teaching

by Rebecca Swope

Standing in front of my horticulture class on the first day of student teaching and observing eighteen students blankly staring back at me, I was not overly excited about student teaching. I was not excited because this was a new area filled with people to be met. I felt a lack of confidence in myself and strangely out of place. Driving to school in the morning for the first week was a chore rather than

to high school seniors. The school day started with the 7th graders, which was one of my favorite classes. They were always energetic and ready to learn about the topic of that day. The most successful unit I taught to the 7th graders consisted of a two week crash course about welding. They were a little leery about using the welders at first, but with some help and encouragement they learned very quickly. It was rewarding to see how excited they were after making a nice weld and the students were actually

that we had chicks hatch in our classroom. We had been candling the eggs and anticipating their hatch. The students were looking forward to the opportunity to take the chicks home as a part of their SAE. On the day the eggs were expected to hatch, I got to school early with anticipation of arriving before the students. While parking the car, I noticed one of the students standing by the door to the agriculture shop. (This is where I entered in the morning.) As soon as I exited the car, he immediately came running over as fast as possible yelling “Miss Swope!, Miss Swope!” loud and excited. By the way he was yelling, I thought to myself, “Oh no, something went wrong and the chicks are dead.” After finally catching his breath he said the chicks were hatching and I needed to see them right away. By the way he was talking I thought maybe all the eggs had hatched. After entering the classroom and looking into the incubator only to see one chick staring back, laughter overwhelmed me. I had never seen someone so excited over a chick hatching and it was refreshing to have students really enjoy something that we had done in class.

It is a rewarding experience being with the students each day and watching them engage with something new.

something I looked forward to doing. This led to some questions about my choice of a career path. However, over the last three months of this dynamic student teaching experience, I have become attached to the students and have grown to love being an educator. Driving to school became something I looked forward to each morning. The forty-five minute drive one way became enjoyable after recognizing the success of working with students who would always find ways to make my day.

I had the privilege to student teach at Ravenswood High School (WV). While there, I taught two classes of Agriculture, Food, And Natural Resources, Horticulture, Advanced Principles of Agriculture, 7th Grade Agriscience, 8th Grade Agriscience, and often helped with the floriculture classes. On a typical day, these classes involved approximately 95 students ranging from 7th graders

upset that we couldn't weld for an extra week. Other lessons consisted of plant science, animal nutrition, pest management, AET record keeping, plant propagation, and landscaping. In addition to these lessons I also supervised the students as they worked in the two school greenhouses and eight raised beds. Spring vegetables were raised in the beds and we also had a hydroponic lettuce system in operation. Many times I brought in ingredients and showed the students how to make a new food dish with the vegetables that they had raised.

Many of my peers have stated “student teaching is like a roller coaster ride.” I completely agree with this statement. Most days were very good but there were always crazy days mixed in with a few “what was I thinking?” days. Upon completion of my student teaching experience, the good days stand out to me the most.

I will never forget the first day

Another situation stands out as one of my questionable days. The students and I spent a large amount of time working in the greenhouse and operating the hydroponic lettuce. About two months after the lettuce was growing, we started having problems with the pump. Several students volunteered to fix the pump and I allowed them to work in the greenhouse during 7th period to try and find a solution. Every ten minutes I walked out to check on their progress, but on one of the visits the students were goofing around rather than working. I quickly asked them to “stop being



Providing educational experiences in a laboratory, such as a greenhouse, is only one of the teaching activities experienced by student teachers.

bad” and get back to work, using some of the terms the students often hear me say. Right after this remark, an arm reached around and quickly picked me straight off the ground. As I dangled there, a little shocked and confused, the student said, “Miss Swope, if we were actually being

me. It is a rewarding experience being with the students each day and watching them engage with something new. Being a student teacher taught patience, flexibility, and gave me a good representation of what teaching is all about. I am originally

bad, what would you do about it?” At that point I was thinking “Oh my goodness, my students are out of control!”

After experiencing the ups and downs of teaching, becoming an educator is truly the career path for

from Columbiana County, Ohio and there are several agriculture education programs in the area. A position opened at West Branch High School and I was given the opportunity for an interview. I look forward to finding a school where I can continue as an agricultural education teacher and help students find career paths and interests in the field of agriculture.



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Test Driving Your Dream Car: *(continued from page 25)*

nect to the material is probably the most important skill I developed during my experience. Another method I tried to use in my classes was making more activities hands-on. Though I felt more comfortable just presenting a PowerPoint about the topic and giving my students a worksheet about it, I thought about how monotonous that probably was for students and tried to really change it up during my time teaching. We made posters, took notes from videos, followed a modified web quest, created picture flash cards to learn new material, and

played charades to memorize terminology. I had so much more fun planning these activities and watching the students complete them. I believe that these activities are what made some of the students more interested in the content.

Looking back, I see my experience similar to test driving a car for a multitude of reasons. It takes time to get used to new things. You can’t always slam on the gas with a new car and expect it to perform as you imagined. You have to weigh out the

pros and cons of choosing this option. Most importantly, student teaching is only a test drive; you have to return your students at the end of your experience. It is a short twelve weeks that lets you see if this is the best decision for your life. Before student teaching I honestly had decided that the route of teaching was not for me. However, this experience has completely changed my opinion. It may not have been the car I went to the lot to test drive, but it may be my best choice.

