Agricultural education is an important component of public school instruction in every state of the United States and in five U.S. Territories. There are approximately 1,000,000 agricultural education students in the nation who are taught by nearly 12,000 secondary and two-year postsecondary teachers. It is estimated that the contact hours of in-school instruction in and about agriculture exceed 10 million annually. School-based agricultural education in the United States consists of three closely related components, including:

1) classroom/laboratory instruction  
2) experiential learning/education  
3) leadership development

The interaction of these three components helps to ensure students’ career success or continuation with higher education related to agriscience and/or agribusiness following high school graduation.

Classroom/Laboratory Instruction
Organized instruction is the classroom and laboratory component of agricultural education. This instruction may be carried out in a classroom, laboratory, greenhouse, or outdoor setting. Classroom and laboratory instruction include units based on natural and social sciences such as environmental science, agribusiness, natural resources, aquaculture, food science and safety, animal and plant sciences, entrepreneurship, and many other areas. However, students enrolled in these courses have the unique opportunity to apply their core content concepts in an agriculturally related context. For example, when using the STEM model, a student learning about hydrogen and covalent bonding in chemistry is able to apply these concepts when examining the chemistry of food processing. By enhancing their core content knowledge base with agriculture, students gain the real-world experiences that enhance college and career readiness.
Experiential Learning/Education

One example of experiential education in agricultural education is usually offering supervised agricultural experience (SAE) programs. These projects allow students to gain the application of their knowledge and learning, outside the classroom environment. An SAE is under the supervision of the agriculture teacher, an employer or parents. There are various categories of SAE’s from which students may choose. These may range from owning and operating their own business; working at a business, farm or organization to learn employability and industry skills; or engaging in independent research projects that enhance their learning. The interaction of the student, teacher, business site, and parent helps to ensure instruction is relevant to each individual student in his/her own learning environment. Agricultural education is preparing students for both college and careers far beyond the classroom.

Leadership Development

Leadership development, the third component of the overall agricultural education program, is provided through student organizations such as FFA, PAS (Postsecondary Agricultural Student Organization) and NYFEA (National Young Farmer Education Association). Student organization activities are designed to enrich the classroom/laboratory and SAE instructional components. Student organization activities provide students opportunities for leadership, personal growth, and career success. Through these organizations students have the opportunity to develop leadership and personal development skills that will help them succeed in the future. Students are also encouraged to participate in activities that highlight the success of their classroom and SAE experiences. These may include public speaking contests, agriculture sales and marketing, agricultural issues, food science, meat science, livestock judging and proficiency contests. Many members also have the opportunity to give back through service learning and development projects.