



INTEGRAL NATURE OF INSTRUCTION, FFA, AND SAE IN AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

MEMORANDUM

Date: August 27, 2024

Subject: Integral Nature of Instruction, FFA, and SAE in Agricultural Education

To: Agricultural Education and CTE Leaders

From: Travis D. Park, PhD
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Chair of the National FFA Board of Directors
National Director for Agricultural Education

As the National FFA Advisor, Chair of the National FFA Board of Directors, and the National Director for Agricultural Education, I aim to clarify the integral nature of leadership development through the National FFA Organization, work-based and experiential learning through Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE), and classroom and laboratory instruction in and about agriculture (agricultural education).

As we approach the 100th anniversary of FFA, the National FFA Organization, with over one million members, has been recognized as an integral and intracurricular¹, component of public, private, home-school, and distance-delivered instruction across the nation. The *intracurricular* nature of FFA means that a school-based agricultural education (SBAE) program is complete only when integrated with components of leadership, personal growth, and career development offered through the National FFA Organization. Additionally, the total agricultural education program includes work-based and experiential learning through Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE), conducted individually by students with the close supervision of the agricultural educator, employers, and other caregivers. Collectively and cohesively, instruction, FFA, and Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) define the integral nature of school-based agricultural education, illustrated by the interlocking three-circle model (Croom, 2008).

Substantial philosophical and empirical evidence supports the three-circle model of agricultural education. Through agricultural education we educate, engage, and transition students to careers and/or further education in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), business, and sustainability fields across the agriculture, food, and natural resources value chain. To this end, the National FFA Organization is "growing the next generation of leaders who will change the world" (National FFA Organization, 2024)

¹ Intracurricular means within an educational curriculum. The connotation is that *intracurricular* activities are necessary for completion of the curriculum.



Smith-Hughes Act of 1917

Prior to the early 1900s, agricultural education and rural leadership development were prevalent in public schools across the nation. The passage of the Morrill Land Grant College Act of 1862, along with the subsequent extensions of the act in 1890 and 1994, established land-grant institutions to advance post-secondary instruction in agriculture and mechanical arts in all states and federal territories. Public secondary instruction in agriculture developed from the work of the land-grant colleges of agriculture. The National Vocational Education Act of 1917, commonly known as the Smith-Hughes Act, created a Federal Board for Vocational Education and provided for the first federal funding to establish systemic and formal instruction in agricultural education, then referred to as "vocational agriculture" education.

The act established the federal expectation that schools "shall provide for directed or supervised practice in agriculture, either on a farm provided for the school or another farm, for at least six months per year" (National Vocational Education Act, 1917, p. 934). This particular language established today's SAE.

Future Farmers of America formed in 1928

Within a few years of the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act, most states established vocational agricultural education programs in high schools for students 14 years of age and older. Schools also realized the need for student organizations focused on leadership development in agriculture. Consequently, students began competing in regional and national events around agricultural production, including crop, livestock, and leadership competitions. One of the first recognized and organized state associations of agricultural students was the Future Farmers of Virginia (Virginia FFA, 2024).

In 1928, 33 delegates from 18 states attended the first National FFA Convention in Kansas City, Missouri. Dr. C. H. Lane, Chief of the Agricultural Education Service (AES) of the Federal Board of Vocational Education, was elected as the first National FFA Advisor. The National FFA Constitution of 1928 guided the establishment of a national FFA headquarters in the AES of the federal government. It specified that the national FFA advisor would be the Chief and the national executive secretary would be a member of that staff (Case, 2010).

Today, the National FFA Constitution explicitly states that FFA will

be an integral component of instruction in agricultural education, including without limitation, agriculture, food, and natural resources. As such, the corporation shall be intra-curricular to the agricultural education program, and will work with contextual classroom/laboratory instruction and work-based experiential learning in furtherance of a complete and comprehensive agricultural education program (National FFA Organization, 2019, Article II,1).

According to Dr. Larry Case, National FFA Advisor from 1984-2010, a committee formed in 1929 to improve the administration of FFA issued a report to the Federal Board for Vocational Education and noted

The original premise upon which we base our recommendation is that the program of the Future Farmers of America is an integral part of and should be inextricably linked with vocational education. As such, it merits the guidance and leadership of teachers in



communities, of supervisors in states, and of your agricultural education service for the Nation" (as cited in Case, 2010, p. 2).

Federal Charter for FFA, 1950, 1998, and 2019

In 1950, the U.S. Congress recognized the importance of FFA and its relationships to both vocational agriculture instruction and the Office of Education by granting a Federal Charter to the organization. This charter, along with subsequent amendments, underscores the integral role of FFA in agricultural education across the nation. By the time of the initial 1950 Federal Charter, the "integrated model of agricultural education was firmly established to include 1) classroom and laboratory instruction; 2) supervised agricultural experience (SAE); and 3) national student organization activities (FFA) that are intracurricular to the educational program" (Case, 2010, p. 2).

Starting with the affiliation dues structure for FFA membership in 2009, and gaining momentum with the National FFA Board of Directors' decision to pursue a chapter-based participation fee structure in 2018. It is anticipated that a chapter-based participation fee structure will enable **all agricultural education students** enrolled in an agriculture course in grades 5 through 12 to be FFA members and participate fully in the leadership, personal growth, and career development opportunities at the local, district, state, and national levels.

Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Acts, 1984 to Present

Starting in 1984, the U.S. Congress authorized the initial Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act. The purpose of the act was to provide federal funding and leadership to increase and enhance the quality of career and technical education to strengthen the U.S. economy and maintain our position as a global superpower. The Perkins Act has been reauthorized four times (1990, 1998, 2006, 2018). Initially, the Perkins Act emphasized that "vocational student organizations [are] carried out as an integral part of the secondary and postsecondary instructional program" (Public Law 98-524, 1984, p. 2456).

Today's Perkins V Act supports "career and technical student organizations, especially with respect to efforts to increase the participation of students in nontraditional fields and students who are members of special populations" (Public Law 115-224, 2018, p. 1611). Additionally, it supports "establishing and expanding work-based learning opportunities that are aligned to career and technical education programs and programs of study" (Public Law 115-224, 2018, p. 1611). Perkins V provides direction and support for an integrated model of delivering impactful and effective agricultural education through classroom/laboratory instruction, work-based and experiential learning, and leadership development through FFA.

Office of Vocational and Adult Education Memo, 2016

The integral nature of FFA in agricultural education was reaffirmed in a 2016 memo from Dr. Troy R. Justesen, The Assistant Secretary, in the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE). In the memo, Dr. Justesen stated, "OVAE recognizes that the educational programs and philosophies embraced by the following CTSOs [Career and Technical Student Organizations, the list includes the National FFA Organization] as being an integral part of career and technical education instructional programs" (Justesen, 2006, ¶2). The memo emphasized that "OVAE recognizes the concept of total student development as being necessary for all career and technical education students to assume successful roles in society and to enter the labor market" (Justesen, 2006, ¶3).



National Quality Program Standards for Secondary (Grades 9-12) Agricultural Education, 2017

The National Council for Agricultural Education provides leadership for stakeholders in agriculture, food, and natural resources systems education. The Council developed the *National Quality Program Standards for Secondary Agricultural Education* (2017) to help local agricultural educators and state leaders prepare for and empower all components of an agriculture, food, and natural resource education program, including, "classroom and laboratory instruction, work-based learning, and career and technical student organization (referred to as, "Leadership and personal development through FFA")" (National Council for Agricultural Education, 2017). Central to these standards, which are adopted wholly or closely referenced by many states, is the requirement for an integrated classroom, FFA, and SAE model of delivery. Explained differently, "all enrolled agricultural education students must have a relevant SAE and be active FFA members" (Case, 2010, p. 3). Dr. Larry Case added, "FFA activities are not merely 'student development;' they provide active application and opportunities to reinforce classroom/laboratory instruction and SAE through hands-on learning and competitive event reinforcement" (Case, 2010, p. 3).

National Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resource Content Standards, 2024

The National Council for Agricultural Education established the National Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resource Content Standards in 2009 with subsequent revisions in 2015 and 2024. These standards specifically integrate FFA and SAE with classroom and laboratory instruction in agriculture. The standards state that

State leaders and local educators are encouraged to use the standards as a basis for the development of opportunities to learn, practice, and assess these skills through classroom instruction, Career and Technical Student Organization (CTSO) involvement (FFA), and work-based/community learning experiences (e.g., Supervised Agriculture Experience Programs, internships, service, etc.) (National Council, 2024, p. 1)

Summary

For over a century, our three-circle model of agricultural education has been recognized and emulated for connecting cognitive, affective, and psychomotor learning in the classroom with socio-emotional learning through FFA and experiential, work-based learning through SAE. This comprehensive agricultural education model motivates and engages students like no other educational system. The model is time-proven to enhance the school experience, boost academic success, keep students engaged, provide valuable community service, and connect students with agricultural and food system careers and advanced education. This model enables innovation in our food systems, sustains our resources, and empowers students and communities.

As we track boldly forward into our second century of agricultural education, let us reaffirm the value of our integrated model. By doing so, we can continue to deliver high-quality, effective agricultural education and most importantly prepare students for amazing successes.

The National Council for Agricultural Education Endorsement

The National Council for Agricultural Education endorsed the tenets explained in this memo on September 9, 2024.



Note. Special appreciation to Dr. Robert Torres (AZ, 2025 ACTE President), Scott Stump (CEO, National FFA Organization), and Ben Meyer (State Relations Specialist, National FFA Organization) for editing and providing additional documentation for the memo.

cc: National Association of Supervisors of Agricultural Education
National Council for Agricultural Education
National Association of Agricultural Educators
American Association for Agricultural Education
National FFA Board of Directors
National FFA Foundation Board of Trustees
National FFA Alumni & Supporters

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