

## **Growing Our Own: Arizona Agriculture Education Proficiency Model**

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### **Rationale**

The National FFA Organization recognizes the achievement of student members through the Proficiency Award program. “Proficiency awards encourage members to develop specialized skills that will apply toward a future career” (National FFA Organization, 2003). Members are recognized at the local, state and national levels through an application evaluation process. Proficiencies are related to career areas associated with the field of agriculture. Students may be involved in entrepreneurship (self-ownership) or placement activities (working for others). Recognition is earned through the validation of student attainment of skills and experiences associated with particular agriculture proficiency. There are twenty-eight different proficiency awards in placement and entrepreneurship categories. Many are related to livestock production, crop production, agriculture technologies, and agriculture business. No single proficiency award focuses on the career of agriculture education; the classroom teacher.

The teacher shortage in agriculture education is well documented (Camp, 2000). Several studies suggest why teachers leave the profession. What is the agriculture teaching profession doing to actively recruit new teachers from the secondary agriculture education classroom? Will the creation of a proficiency award for recognition student skill attainment in agriculture education have a positive effect on recruiting students to become agriculture educators at a state level?

### **Method**

The Agricultural Education Student Internship program began in August of 2001. The project is funded through TRIF (Technology and Research Initiative Fund) to recruit and prepare agricultural science teachers in the state of Arizona. The program is designed to graduate 50 new agricultural science teachers in five years.

One of the activities of this grant is the internship program, which is intended to target junior and senior agricultural education students who are interested in pursuing a career as an agricultural science teacher. The length of the internship program is a maximum of 100 hours per year for a maximum of two years. The student is paid \$4.00 per hour once the internship is complete and an additional \$4.00 per hour the 4<sup>th</sup> week of the semester once the student has enrolled in the University and has declared agricultural education as their major. The maximum amount that a student can receive having participated as a junior and senior is \$1,600. The first half paid upon completion of the internship and the other half paid when the student has enrolled in the University.

The first step in the process is completing an internship application. Both the teacher and the student complete the application, which specifically identifies the competencies/skills the student

will develop or reinforce under the supervision of the teacher. The competencies must be directly related to teaching agricultural education. Examples of competencies/skills might include: Design and Delivery of a lesson plan, planning FFA activities, and accompanying teachers on student visits.

Along with specific competencies the student must outline the program of work. Once the application has been reviewed a letter is sent informing the individual as to whether their application has been accepted or rejected. When the agreement form is signed and returned the internship may begin.

Periodic phone calls are made to ensure that both the student and teacher are moving in the right direction. Each, internship is different depending on the competencies and the program of work outlined in the application. Once a student has completed his or her internship, copies of all materials and projects are sent to the department along with documented hours of the internship. Once all materials have been received the student is paid \$4.00 per hour of the internship. The additional \$4.00 is then paid once the student is enrolled in the University of Arizona and has declared agricultural education as his/her major.

### **Findings**

In 2001-2002 we had six students participate in the student internship program. Five of the six students were juniors. The one senior is currently enrolled in the agricultural education program and three of the juniors have been accepted to the University of Arizona. This year we have ten participants in the internship program. Along with the student internship program the department is in the process of designing a state proficiency award for Agricultural Education. This proficiency award can be directly tied to the internship program. The internship can be used as a source of income in both the record book and state proficiency award application. The design of the proficiency award is another avenue that we can pursue in an effort to recruit teachers. Many of the FFA activities that students or even officers participate in would qualify.

### **Recommendations for the future :**

Just one method is not enough to recruit the agricultural science teachers needed in Arizona. Our department continues to look at new and innovative ways to identify and target students in a variety of forms such as recruitment visitations and scholarship programs. Recommendations for the future include developing a Career Development Event for Agricultural Education that would tie directly into the internship program and the proficiency award, again providing a variety of activities for those students interested in becoming classroom teachers.

### **References**

Camp, W. (2000). *A National Study of the Supply and Demand for Teachers of Agricultural Education in 1996-1998*. American Association of Agricultural Educators. Retrieved December 5, 2003 at <http://aaaeonline.ifas.ufl.edu/Reports/2001/Supply%20&%20Demand%20Study.doc>

National FFA Organization (2002). *Official FFA Manual*. Indianapolis, IN

