

A Description of Chapter Participation in the 2000-2005 Texas FFA Leadership Development Events

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ABSTRACT

The Texas FFA conducts twelve events each fall that facilitate classroom learning, enabling students to apply leadership skills in competitive situations. These events are known as Leadership Development Events (LDEs). The study's purpose was to describe the level of participation of Texas FFA chapters in LDEs, beginning in 2000. The study's population was Texas FFA chapters participating in LDEs from 2000-2005 (N=980). Data was reported by the 52 district teacher presidents to the Texas FFA executive director and compiled using an Excel spreadsheet. Each year, a 100% response rate was achieved.

The vast majority (785 chapters, or 80.10%) of FFA chapters participated in LDEs in 2005, meaning 195 (19.90%) programs did not participate. Nine Areas reported over 77 percent of its chapters participating in LDEs. The highest percentage participated in Chapter-level FFA Creed (64.69%) and Greenhand FFA Creed (48.47%), while Ag Issues (15.71%) and Greenhand FFA Skills Demonstration (18.98%) had the lowest participation. The greatest increases from 2000 to 2005 were in Job Interview (65.74%) and Public Relations (49.18%), while Greenhand Chapter Conducting and Ag Issues experienced slight decreases. Total participation for the six-year period increased by more than 18 percent.

KEY WORDS: *Agricultural Education, Agricultural Science, Agriscience, FFA, Career Development Events, Leadership Development Events*

INTRODUCTION

Agricultural education is a total educational program that involves three integral parts – classroom and laboratory, supervised agricultural experiences, and FFA (Fraze & Briars 1986; Newcomb, McCracken & Warmbrod 1986; Phipps & Osborne 1988; Staller 2001). These three essential and interdependent components identify an exemplary program when systematically and properly promoted. The agricultural education teacher has the primary responsibility of seeing that the curriculum is implemented and that the

FFA becomes an important function of that curriculum. The success or failure of the FFA organization may depend upon a multitude of factors, but the FFA advisor is perhaps the most important factor in the equation (Croom & Flowers 2001). Furthermore, administrators have viewed candidates' experience in FFA activities and programs as the most important job-related duty of an agricultural education instructor (Cantrell & Weeks 2004).

Morrison (1978) wrote, "From a very small beginning in 1931, hundreds of FFA chapters and thousands of FFA members are now involved in, what has become, a highly competitive activity," concerning the leadership development events held during the fall semester in Texas. Those many years ago the Sam Houston Vocational Agriculture Club, now the Sam Houston State University Collegiate FFA, recommended to C. L. Davis, the Texas FFA state supervisor, that a public speaking and a debate contest be held. "Some six or seven debate teams and seven or eight public speakers showed up for this humble beginning for the State FFA Invitational Leadership Contests" (Morrison 1978).

The role of leadership and career development events continues to focus on motivating students and encouraging leadership, personal growth, citizenship and career development (National FFA Career Development Events 2006). Contests are an integral part of the FFA at the local, state and national levels (Binkley & Byers 1982). These competitions are amplified by the sheer numbers of chapters and students involved in the various events. Leadership contests, judging contests and livestock shows are three activities of the FFA that hold a high priority in numerous Texas agricultural education programs (Fraze & Briars 1986).

The National FFA Organization invests more than \$7 million dollars annually to maintain existing programs and develop new programs for its membership (Croom & Flowers 2001). Career development events motivate students and encourage leadership, personal growth, citizenship and career development (National FFA 2006).

Supporting FFA and many other student organizations, as well as various extracurricular activities, Dworkin, Larson, and Hansen (2003) found that young people viewed extracurricular activities as an important growth experience in which psychological skills such as goal setting, time management and emotional control were learned. Adolescents reported characteristics such as leadership, wisdom, and social intelligence were acquired through life experiences fostered by extracurricular activities (Steen, Kachorek & Peterson 2003). Also, many youth organizations such as Boys and Girls Inc., provide youth development experiences that are aimed at providing a healthy transition from adolescence to adulthood (Gambone & Arbretton 1997).

Various research studies have found a close association between participation in leadership activities and student career development (Dormoody & Seevers 1994; Gleim & Gleim 2000; Wigenback & Kahler 1997). FFA activities provide a vehicle for the development of leadership and personal competencies necessary for occupational success, and students who participate in FFA activities tend to enter an agricultural occupation (Bowen & Doerfort 1989; Fraze & Briars 1986; Garten 1984).

Many agricultural education teachers expend tremendous time and effort developing their own skills, and committing time and effort in the development of those skills of students is remarkable. The instruction in career development skills and personal motivation to youth provides the teacher with a sense of accomplishment. The prestige of having won a state career development event and advancing to national competition may be one of the intangible rewards teachers earn in a life devoted to teaching (Croom, Moore & Armbruster 2005).

This study was part of a larger study conducted to identify and describe the participation levels of FFA chapters in Texas beginning in 2000. This study only utilized the participation levels for the Leadership Development Events. The specific objectives of this study were to:

1. Describe the participation, by Area, of Texas FFA chapters in any of the Leadership Development Events in 2005;
2. Describe the participation rate of Texas FFA chapters in Greenhand-level Leadership Development Events in each of the ten Areas in 2005;
3. Describe the participation rate of Texas FFA chapters in Chapter-level Leadership Development Events in each of the ten Areas in 2005;
4. Describe the participation rate of Texas FFA chapters in open-level Leadership Development Events in each of the ten Areas in 2005; and
5. Describe the participation rate and level of change in participation of Texas FFA chapters participating in Leadership Development Events in 2000-2005.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The population of this study (N=~980) was the FFA chapters in Texas participating in fall career development events from 2000-2005. In Texas, fall career development events are called the State Leadership Development Events (LDEs) and those events occurring in the spring are called Career Development Events to simplify the management of each of the various contests.

The Texas FFA executive director created a reporting questionnaire for each of the 52 district teacher presidents or their representatives. This instrument gathered data concerning various FFA and teacher activities for each year, and represented the activities of the 980 FFA chapters in Texas. The data was submitted to the state FFA office and compiled using an Excel spreadsheet. All 52 district teacher presidents of the Vocational Agriculture Teacher Association of Texas, and each area teacher president or coordinator of the 10 areas of the Vocational Agriculture Teacher Association of Texas submitted data each year for a 100% response rate.

Data entry error is an issue that was reduced through a data review process in which the data submitted to the state office by the district and area teacher presidents, or their designate, was returned for their review. Corrections were made as necessary. To meet the needs of this study, only data specific to participation in the fall Leadership Development Events was utilized. Figure 1 illustrates the Texas Area organization with each geographic area having between four and seven administrative districts totaling 52 districts. District size ranges from 7 to 33 chapters, with an average of 23 chapters per district.

Simple descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data for this study. Frequencies were computed for selected events. Sums and percentages were calculated when necessary.

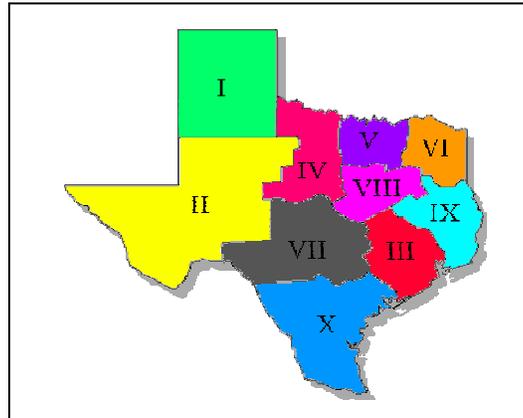


Figure 1. Texas FFA Association Areas.

RESULTS

The first objective was to describe the participation rate of Texas FFA chapters in Leadership Development Events (LDEs) in each of the ten Areas during the fall semester of 2005. The data were organized and compiled according to FFA Area participation. The frequency of FFA chapter participation in the fall 2005 Leadership Development Events is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency of Chapter Participation in District LDEs by Area in 2005

FFA Area	Total Chapters in Area	Number of Chapters Participating	Percentage of Chapters Participating
Area I	89	75	84.27
Area II	78	63	80.77
Area III	146	122	83.56
Area IV	76	62	81.58
Area V	116	90	77.59
Area VI	90	70	77.78
Area VII	100	78	78.00
Area VIII	100	82	82.00
Area IX	89	76	85.39
Area X	96	67	69.79
Event Total	980	785	80.10

The findings showed that 785 (80%) of the 980 chapters in good standing in Texas participated in at least one of the fall FFA LDEs. The highest participation rate was found in Area IX (85.39%), followed by Area I (84.27%) and Area III (83.56%). The area with the lowest participation rate was Area X (69.79%). There were 195 (19.9%) programs that did not participate in even one LDE.

Specifically, data concerning the number of FFA chapters in good standing were identified. The level of participation in at least one Leadership Development Event (LDE) during the Fall of 2005 was identified. The events for which data were reported for participation by Greenhands only were: FFA Creed Speaking, FFA Quiz, Chapter Conducting, and FFA Skills Demonstration. The events for which data were reported for participation only by Chapter members were: Senior Creed Speaking, Senior FFA Quiz, Senior Chapter Conducting, and Senior FFA Skills Demonstration. Other events not designated specifically as Greenhand or Chapter events, referred to as Open events, included: Ag Issues Forum, Public Relations, Job Interview, and Radio Broadcasting.

Participation in Greenhand events was limited to FFA members enrolled in their first year and first semester in an agricultural science program. Such enrollment must be for obtaining high school credit toward graduation. Some participants may be 8th grade students as long as the course being taken will merit high school credit. Other participants, with the exception of FFA Creed participants, may be 10th, 11th or 12th grade students who have not previously been enrolled in an agriscience course for high school credit. FFA Creed contestants must be an 8th or 9th grade student. Data concerning chapter participation in Greenhand LDEs, the second objective, are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Number of Chapters by Area Participating in Greenhand LDEs in 2005

	Chapters in Area	FFA Creed	FFA Quiz	Chapter Conducting	FFA Skills Demonstration	Area Totals
Area I	89	56	38	17	18	129
Area II	78	73	22	17	10	122
Area III	146	90	85	41	31	247
Area IV	76	43	36	30	17	126
Area V	116	57	61	23	19	160
Area VI	90	49	48	19	14	130
Area VII	100	60	44	27	25	156
Area VIII	100	56	52	32	24	164
Area IX	89	57	55	24	17	153
Area X	96	32	26	13	11	82
Event Total	980	573	467	243	186	1469

The third objective was to describe Chapter, or senior, level student participation. Eligibility for this level requires only enrollment for the current school year in a high school agriscience course, as well as FFA membership. While not likely, those eligible for Greenhand events are eligible to compete in Chapter events, but cannot participate in the same type of event at both levels. Greenhand participation at the Chapter level does occur due to the limited membership of some chapters. It should further be noted that this opportunity became available with the 2002 events. Previously, participants could only participate in one event at any level with the exception of the FFA Creed. Data concerning chapter participation in Chapter LDEs are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Number of Chapters by Area Participating in Chapter LDEs in 2005

	Chapters in Area	FFA Creed	FFA Quiz	Chapter Conducting	FFA Skills Demonstration	Area Totals
Area I	89	73	40	17	17	147
Area II	78	74	29	15	10	128
Area III	146	100	87	42	48	277
Area IV	76	46	36	22	25	129
Area V	116	66	49	21	25	161
Area VI	90	49	48	22	23	142
Area VII	100	64	45	27	36	172
Area VIII	100	62	58	27	30	177
Area IX	89	59	53	21	32	165
Area X	96	41	32	17	22	112
Event Total	980	634	477	231	268	1610

The fourth objective was to describe the number of chapters participating in LDEs open to all members. Again, Greenhand and Chapter level members may participate in these events. It should also be noted that members may compete in two of the 12 different events, but as previously stated, may not compete in the same type of event at both the Greenhand and Chapter levels. Data concerning chapter participation in Open LDEs, the fourth objective, are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Number of Chapters by Area Participating in Open LDEs in 2005

	Chapters in Area	Ag Issues Forum	Public Relations	Job Interview	Radio Broadcasting	Area Totals
Area I	89	11	26	39	48	124
Area II	78	8	15	30	47	100
Area III	146	29	52	69	90	240
Area IV	76	12	16	16	48	92
Area V	116	14	31	38	53	136
Area VI	90	15	23	33	42	113
Area VII	100	18	35	40	59	152
Area VIII	100	24	31	38	60	153
Area IX	89	15	26	31	61	133
Area X	96	8	18	24	36	86
Event Total	980	154	273	358	544	1329

The fifth objective was to describe the total number of chapters, yearly event averages, and level of change in chapters participating in LDEs from 2000-2005. Again, the 2002 event began allowing students to participate in any two events for which they were eligible and it is possible that some increases in the total number of teams from year to year has been due in part to this rule change. However, this rule change should not have affected the total number of chapters participating. Furthermore, some events have seen fluctuating increases and decreases during this time, leading one to conclude that the increase in the total number of teams is not directly attributable to this rule change. Table 5 shows data concerning statewide chapter participation in LDEs from 2000-2005.

Table 5. Statewide Chapter Participation in LDEs from 2000-2005

Event	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Six-Year Average	% Change, 2000 to 2005
Greenhand Creed	531	533	520	545	559	573	544	+ 7.91
Greenhand Quiz	395	408	440	469	457	467	439	+ 18.23
Greenhand Chapter Conducting	259	246	252	243	275	243	253	- 6.18
Greenhand Skills	161	171	213	197	192	186	187	+ 15.53
Senior Creed	552	570	569	592	598	634	586	+ 14.86
Senior Quiz	381	415	477	482	530	477	460	+ 25.20
Senior Chapter Conducting	221	223	242	234	243	231	232	+ 4.52
Senior Skills	232	252	282	265	266	270	261	+ 16.38
Ag Issues Forum	155	152	149	164	149	154	154	- 0.65
Public Relations	183	200	204	222	235	273	220	+ 49.18
Job Interview	216	250	309	305	302	358	290	+ 65.74
Radio Broadcasting	443	466	473	474	504	544	484	+ 22.80
Total Entries	3729	3886	4130	4192	4310	4410	4110	+ 18.26

The six-year period in which chapter participation has been tracked (2000-2005) has seen some impressive increases in the level of participation. Events with the greatest increases during this period include Job Interview (65.74%), Public Relations (49.18%), Senior FFA Quiz (25.20%), & Radio Broadcasting (22.80%).

Disturbingly, Greenhand Chapter Conducting saw its level of participation decrease over the six-year period by 6.18%, and Ag Issues experienced a decrease of 0.65%. As previously mentioned, these events require perhaps the greatest amount of time for preparation, student knowledge, and number of team members.

Another positive aspect is that during the six-year period, total team participation increased by more than 18%. This increase has been constant as none of the five years following 2000 saw total team participation decrease from the previous year.

DISCUSSION

The researchers recommend detailed study seeking answers to the following questions:

1. Why do some FFA chapters choose not to participate in any of the Leadership Development Events? A glaring weakness identified was that during the Fall 2005 Leadership Development Events, 195 (19.90 percent) FFA chapters did not participate in any event at the initial, or district, level. Certainly, some programs choose other methods for providing students the opportunity to apply classroom and laboratory concepts in a different setting. Yet the focus on leadership development through competitive means is a valued commodity among high schools, and leadership qualities are prized assets among college admissions boards and employers.

2. Is there a relationship between the teacher's length of service, gender, professional membership, school size, chapter size, education, educational materials, prior teacher experiences, and program budget in regard to participation in Leadership Development Events? Teachers tend to place a higher emphasis and value on those educational opportunities and areas with which they have a higher comfort level. Such does not justify denying students the opportunity for their own personal growth and leadership development through competitive events such as those included in the study. It is noteworthy, however, that those events with the lowest levels of participation require a combination of more members on a team, leading to a higher degree of research, advanced preparation, and team practice versus individual preparation, as well as a higher degree of knowledge on the part of the teacher/advisor.
3. What do administrators identify as the reasons that agricultural education programs/FFA chapters in their schools choose not to participate in Leadership Development Events? Perhaps they are indifferent to the entire agriscience program or do not understand the value of these types of student learning opportunities. Regardless, it is ultimately the student that suffers.
4. What are the characteristics of agricultural education programs/FFA chapters that consistently participate in Leadership Development Events? Some chapters may excel in selected aspects of the agriscience program and FFA organization while seeing less value in other aspects. Tradition and teacher efficacy are likely to play major roles, but do student demographics have any measurable effect?
5. Agriscience teachers have massive demands on their time from instructional responsibilities, SAEP management and supervision, competitive events, and school-related responsibilities. Given these factors, it is difficult to expect these teachers to individually train teams for all events, especially in single-teacher departments. What resources do teachers need in order to assist them in preparing students for these types of competition?
6. Some of the increased levels of participation in certain events may be attributed to the allowance, beginning in 2002, for students to participate on two teams instead of being restricted to one. However, these increases continued in the years after 2002 at a sizeable rate, which warrants some merit. Was it simply a perception that led to these increased participation rates?

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