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*The FFA Mission: FFA makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education.*

## NATIONAL FFA ORGANIZATION

### MEMORANDUM

**Date:** April 7, 2010

**Subject:** Integral Nature of FFA and Agricultural Education Instruction

**To:** Agricultural Education Leaders

**From:** Larry D. Case, Ed.D., National FFA Advisor/CEO, Coordinator for Agricultural and Rural Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education

In my capacities with both the National FFA Organization and the U.S. Department of Education, I am asked from time to time to help clarify the integral nature of FFA and the system of public instruction in agriculture (i.e., agricultural education). While many references describe this relationship, it may be helpful to collect some of them into a single document.

The half million-member FFA student organization has long been recognized as an integral part of public instruction in agriculture. As such, it is *intracurricular* to the program, working hand-in-glove with contextual classroom/laboratory instruction and experiential learning as part of a complete agricultural education program. The roots of this time-tested approach run deep. Preparing students for entry into productive careers in the science, business and technology of agriculture—or connecting them to relevant postsecondary educational pathways—depends on the delivery of all components of the three-circle model of secondary agricultural education.

#### **Smith Hughes Act of 1917**

The Federal government played an instrumental role in the formation of FFA. In 1917, the U.S. Congress passed the Smith-Hughes Vocational Education Act, thereby creating the Federal Board for Vocational Education. The Act led to the establishment of programs of education in agriculture for high school students. Federal funds flowed to states for the promotion of “vocational agriculture” education. The Act stipulated that “students of vocational agriculture, in addition to their studies in school, must have in operation a program of supervised practice for at least six months of the year.”

## **Future Farmers of America Formation in 1928**

Within 10 years of the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act, most states had created vocational agriculture programs for high schools, and many had developed supporting organizations for students. Regional and national competitive events had become important educational complements to the instructional programs. Under the leadership of individuals from the Federal Board for Vocational Education in Washington, D.C., a series of conferences led to the creation of the Future Farmers of America in 1928. Dr. C. H. Lane, Chief of the Agricultural Education Service of the Federal Board for Vocational Education, was elected as the first national FFA advisor. In order to provide a national headquarters for FFA in the Agricultural Education Service, the FFA constitution specified that the national advisor would be the Chief of the Agricultural Education Service and the national executive secretary would be a member of that staff. Today's National FFA Constitution and Bylaws are explicit in stating that the organization will function as "an integral part of the organized instructional programs in agricultural education which prepare students for a wide range of careers in agriculture, agribusiness and other agriculture-related occupations."

A committee formed in 1929 to improve the administration of FFA issued a report to the Federal Board for Vocational Education and noted that "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."

## **1950 Federal Charter for FFA**

In 1950, the U.S. Congress clarified the relationship of FFA to the Office of Education by issuing a Federal Charter to the organization. Signed by President Harry S. Truman, Public Law 81-740 placed five members of the Federal Agricultural Education Service on the FFA board of directors along with four state supervisors of agricultural education. Federal leadership of FFA was meant to ensure the student organization was utilized in support of agricultural instruction in public schools. By this time, 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.

## **Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act**

In 1984, the U.S. Congress authorized the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act. Its purpose was to provide federal funding and leadership to increase the quality of career and technical (vocational) education within the United States in order to help the economy. Most recently revised in 2006, the Perkins Act today stipulates that "career and technical student organizations...are for individuals enrolled in a career and technical education program that engages in career and technical education activities *as an integral part of the instructional program.*" Among other purposes, Perkins funding is meant to enhance state leadership in "support of career and technical student organizations, especially with respect to efforts to increase the participation of students who are members of special populations." Through Perkins, the U.S. Department of Education provides direction and underwriting to state and local units delivering an integrated model of agricultural education.

## **U.S. Department of Education/National FFA Organization Memorandum of Understanding**

In March 2008, the Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education, concluded a Memorandum of Understanding with the National FFA Organization. The document underscores the importance the Department places on the student organization component of agricultural education as “benefitting students, communities and the industry of agriculture by providing well-educated, productive individuals for the work force who are capable of leading innovation.” Through the Memorandum, the Department attests “that formalized instruction, supervised agricultural experience, and premier leadership, personal growth and career success [from the FFA mission] are key components of an integrated agricultural education program that connects technical instruction, work experience and the school community.” The memorandum also restates that, by law, the Secretary of Education is designated to serve as chairman of the National FFA Board of Directors, along with four other members of the Department and four state supervisors of agricultural education.

### **Statement of Troy Justesen, Former Assistant Secretary for the Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education**

In a 2006 letter to the Career and Technical Education community, Dr. Troy Justesen, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education, elaborated on the role of student organizations in career and technical education. Dr. Justesen affirmed that the “Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) recognizes the educational programs and philosophies embraced by CTSOs [Career and Technical Student Organizations]” are “an integral part of career and technical education instructional programs.” He added 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.” OVAE would, according to Dr. Justesen, “facilitate technical and supportive services to assist [CTSO] organizations through state agencies in their efforts to improve the quality and relevance of instruction, develop student leadership, enhance citizenship responsibilities, eliminate sex and race discrimination and stereotyping, and serve students of special populations.”

### **National Quality Program Standards for Secondary (Grades 9-12) Agricultural Education**

The National Quality Program Standards for Secondary Agricultural Education were developed to ensure consistent delivery of high-quality agricultural education programs across the nation, focusing on relevant instruction, rigorous clear goals, continuous program improvement and development of essential skills for student success. Developed under the auspices of the National Council for Agricultural Education, the standards help educators and administrators evaluate local programs and develop clear goals for program improvement. Central to a standards-based curriculum and reinforced throughout the national standards is the requirement to provide a complete, integrated model of agricultural education including classroom/laboratory instruction, experiential learning (SAE) and student leadership and personal and career development (FFA). Put another way, all enrolled agricultural education students must have a relevant SAE and be active FFA members. 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.

For almost a century, the three-circle model of agricultural education has been hailed for connecting theory with practical application and motivational reinforcement necessary for student success. By integrating personal, academic and career development experiences, the agricultural education profession today offers local school systems a proven program to enhance student achievement, boost graduation rates, prepare a 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce, guide students to postsecondary opportunities and develop leaders who will build local communities and secure agriculture's next generation.

Perhaps now more than ever, it is important to work purposefully with local and state administrators to ensure they understand the integral nature of the agricultural education program and the support the U.S. Department of Education contributes towards its success.

Please let me know if I can address questions or share additional resources to help you tell this important story.

Thank you for your leadership on behalf of the students and communities you serve.

cc: National Association of Supervisors of Agricultural Education Board of Directors  
National Council for Agricultural Education Board of Directors  
National Association of Agricultural Educators Board of Directors  
American Association for Agricultural Education Board of Directors  
National FFA Board of Directors  
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