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Fishing Exhibit Excites Members, Draws Interest from Advisors

By Geoffrey Miller

Heading out to a fishing hole during a school day is a sure way to earn an unexcused absence and a pretty good chance of trouble for FFA members.

If Mark Gintert of The Bass Federation (TBF) has his way, though, that might change soon.

Gintert, the national youth programs coordinator for TBF, is in Indianapolis for the 82nd National FFA Convention with an interactive traveling fishing exhibit for both FFA members and advisors – complete with a casting competition and an interactive Wii fishing game.

The TBF, Gintert says, is launching a new program called the Student Angler Federation for high school students and their schools. Why, then, does he have two sponsor-wrapped bass boats and an interactive exhibit set up in Lucas Oil Stadium at the national FFA convention?

“Agriculture students are the perfect fit for this program,” said Gintert.

But how does fishing mix with studying in the agriculture classroom?

“This is designed to get kids in school involved in fishing clubs,” said Gintert.

Through fishing clubs, students can study aquatic science, they can study the plant life in the water and they can study the habitat along the shoreline, said Gintert. Then they can apply what they have learned to their fishing. It’s perfect for students both in and out of the classroom, he said.

Gintert and the TBF have an ambitious goal for the student angler program. Within three years, they are aiming to have 100,000 members from across the United States.

Once a school expresses interest in the program, an instructional DVD and a copy of the fishing-based curriculum is provided to introduce the program to the students and teachers. Should a school decide to take on the nine-lesson program, opportunities will be made for students to earn scholarships and even fish competitively.



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Bo Stallings, a junior from the Tishomingo FFA Chapter in Oklahoma, stood in line to compete in the casting challenge. He was clearly ready for his advisor to adopt a similar program in his classroom.

“I fish every weekend,” Stallings said. “I think having a program like this would be a great way to get more people involved in fishing and FFA.”

Stallings watched as members in blue jackets stood on top of a mock boat and tried using a fishing pole to flip a rubber lure toward small targets at varying distances in front of them. Each target had a point value, and a hit meant members could win fishing-related prizes.

Meanwhile, advisor Anne Etcher from the Suwannee Middle School FFA Chapter in Live Oak, Fla., surveyed the situation as one of her students stood on a stage flipping a Wii remote as part of an interactive bass fishing game being shown on a big screen on the side of a trailer. Etcher didn't know much about the student angler program, but she was certainly interested in learning more.

“It's right up [the students'] alley,” said Etcher. “Anything that will help them get motivated is worth trying.”

The exhibit travels to several of the biggest fishing tournaments across the nation, Gintert said. Judging by the reaction to the fishing competitions and the programs he wants to offer, TBF's Gintert seems to be on the right track by setting up shop at the national FFA convention.

“Our intent is to get the kids excited about fishing and interest from the ag teachers,” said Gintert. “From what I've seen, that seems to be working pretty well.”

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