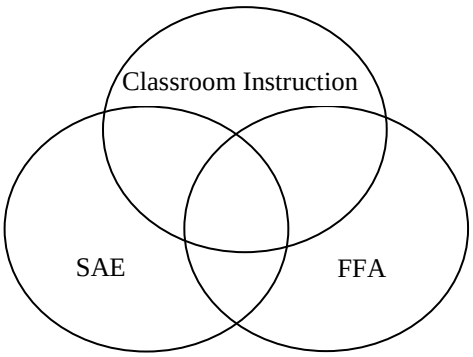
What is Agricultural Education?

As a part of the overall educational program, agriculture education is designed to provide students with competencies to make them aware of and prepared for the world of work. Agriculture is a dynamic, rapidly changing industry that has an exciting future. The “New Agriculture” consists of the intriguing new frontiers of biotechnology. While the primary thrust of the program is for those students who are preparing for employment in agricultural occupations requiring less than a baccalaureate degree, agricultural education has a long tradition of preparing students who continue their education in agriculture at the postsecondary level. The program concentrates on the development of essential technical skills that are vital to the success of people entering a career in agriculture. Just as important as the technical skills are the skills developed in leadership through the comprehensive nature of the program. Since its inception, agricultural education has trained youth in the skills necessary to assume leadership positions in agriculture. As agriculture addresses controversial issues such as genetic engineering, leadership training takes on increasing importance among our youth. People will be needed who not only have an understanding of the technical aspects of the issues, but who also have an understanding of the ethical and philosophical issues.

Agricultural Education is composed of three distinct, yet interrelated components. A basic component is classroom and laboratory experiences. In the classroom, students learn concepts and theories dealing with a broad spectrum of agricultural and agribusiness topics. The classroom is followed by the laboratory mode of instruction where concepts and theories are carried through to their application. Here, the students are taught “hands-on" skills that ensure that the skills learned are practical and usable.



Both classroom and laboratory instruction are put to use in the Supervised Agricultural Experience Program (SAEP) component of the program. In this approach, students work and learn in a real-life situation where they obtain on-the-job skills. SAEP can vary from the traditional home projects to entrepreneurship or cooperative work experience in production or agribusiness.

The third component, FFA, provides an avenue for developing leadership skills. As an integral, intracurricular component of the agricultural education program, FFA has numerous systems to deliver instruction in leadership. In addition, FFA provides incentives for improved student performance through its awards program. Teachers of agriculture have always stressed the

problem solving and decision making approach to teaching. Through this approach, students are better equipped to cope with changes that are constantly occurring, not only in agricultural industry but also in life in general. The strength of the program lies in the flexibility and dedication of teachers whose philosophy is, "We don't just teach agriculture, we teach students.

The optimal benefit of the program is received when a student is an active participant of all three parts of the program. A program that is developed to include the three components with equal weight is said to have a "balanced approach" and therefore, is providing optimal opportunities for all students. The challenge is developing the balance and maintaining it. The focus for all programs in relation to total school improvement is to stay focused on a balanced program, develop strategies to remain focused, and evaluate the effectiveness of our balanced program.

Agricultural Education provides:

- Employability skills students can transfer from the classroom setting to their careers.
- Life knowledge and all the soft skills that employers seek.
- Instruction that brings to life the concepts of rigor, relevance, and relationships by engaging students in a three-circle model that has worked since 1917 with the inception of agricultural education in public schools.
- Instruction that will engage students in the globalization of agriculture as the solution for environmental demands, food safety, technology, natural resource protection, and urbanization.
- Immediate application of the principals and theories taught in core the academic subjects, Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies.
- In some states, potential for college credit while in high school.
- In some states, potential for high school core academic credit through agricultural education courses.
- Creation of future entrepreneurs.
- Learning for diverse student populations including ethnicity, special needs, socioeconomic levels, cultural backgrounds, etc.
- Opportunities for students to engage in service-learning in real world situations.
- Character development of all students.
- Supervised Agricultural Experience projects provide real-life training in money management, budgeting, and maintaining financial records.
- FFA and leadership development activities that help develop the whole person and promote interpersonal relations and communication skills, problem solving, teamwork, and character development.