

Stretching, Embracing and Adapting Tendencies in Rural and Urban FFA Members

A member's level of involvement in FFA can vary widely—from not being involved in any activities to competing at the National FFA Convention & Expo. What barriers exist that prevent FFA members from being fully involved in FFA? The National FFA Organization and Purdue University surveyed high-school FFA members from 60 schools to help answer this question.

Survey participants came from 60 FFA chapters—31 classified as being in a rural area and 29 in an urban area! There were 590 usable responses from current FFA members². Most responses (about 90%) came from members of urban FFA chapters. While this research study³ was not the largest study of FFA members in terms of the number of respondents, it was the most racially and ethnically diverse pool to date.

This report focuses on how FFA members report stretching and embracing tendencies in relation to comfort zones and levels of adaptability. Forthcoming reports will focus on other aspects of this research study.

Rural members' responses reveal they are more likely to be in their comfort zones than urban members.



Part of the survey measured stretching and embracing tendencies to assess members' ability to step out of their comfort zones. Responding to statements like, "I am the type of person who really enjoys the uncertainty of everyday life" and "I frequently seek out opportunities to challenge myself and grow as a person," FFA members rated themselves on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is very slightly or not at all and 5 is extremely⁴. Responses reveal that rural FFA members showed less embracing and stretching tendencies than urban FFA members; the average overall score for an FFA member from a rural area was 3.06, while the average overall score for an FFA member from an urban area was 3.33. The difference in scores was statistically significant on "stretching," "embracing," and on the overall score.

	Stretching*	Embracing*	Total Average*
Urban members	3.41	3.24	3.33
Rural members	3.05	3.08	3.06

*Statistically significant at the 0.05 level

¹ Chapters were selected based on their urban or rural classification according to the National Center for Educational Statistics, Classifications 11 and 12 were used for the urban chapters while classifications 42 and 43 were used to identify the rural chapters.

² Not all responses were usable if the FFA members' parent did not fill out a consent form.

³ McBride, S. M., & Talbert, B. A. (2021). Barriers to full involvement: A study of rural and urban FFA chapters [Research presentation].

⁴ National FFA Organization, Indianapolis, Ind.

Curiosity and Exploration Inventory-II (CEI-II). PSYCHOLOGICAL SCALES. (2022, February 19). Retrieved June 9, 2022, from <https://scales.arabpsychology.com/s/curiosity-and-exploration-inventory-ii-cei%E2%80%90ii/>

Urban members had higher adaptability scores than rural members.

We asked FFA members responding to the survey to rate themselves on a list of strengths, and these ratings measured members' adaptability through subscales of concern, control, curiosity, and confidence.⁵ Ratings revealed that urban FFA members are generally more adaptable than their counterparts from rural areas. The difference in scores between urban and rural FFA members was statistically significant for "concern," "control," "curiosity," and the overall score. The difference was not statistically significant for "confidence." The overall adaptability score for urban FFA members was 3.83, while the overall adaptability score for rural FFA members was 3.52.

	Concern*	Control*	Curiosity*	Confidence	Adaptability*
Urban members	3.91	3.87	3.73	3.83	3.83
Rural members	3.48	3.59	3.37	3.64	3.52

*Statistically significant at the 0.05 level

Members who are outside of their comfort zones and show high levels of adaptability will connect more with the opportunities available through FFA.

Although urban and rural FFA members showed a difference in embracing and stretching tendencies in relation to comfort zones and levels of adaptability, results show that overall, respondents were moderately outside of their comfort zones and approaching a very strong level of adaptability. The study found a positive correlation between FFA involvement and comfort zone and FFA involvement and adaptability.



Involvement scores from the FFA Involvement Scale, which measures a member's involvement in FFA through various questions, revealed FFA members in rural areas were significantly more involved in FFA activities than those in urban areas.⁶

⁵ Career adapt-abilities scale. Kent State University. (n.d.). Retrieved June 9, 2022, from <https://www.kent.edu/exploratory/career-adapt-abilities-scale>

⁶ Copeland, B. A., Talbert, B. A., LaRose, S. E., & Russell, M. (2020). College and career ready? A snapshot of 12th grade National FFA members. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 61(4), 90-108.<http://doi.org/10.5032/jae.2020.04090>; McBride, S. M., & Talbert, B. A. (2021). Barriers to full involvement: A study of rural and urban FFA chapters [Research presentation]. National FFA Organization, Indianapolis, Ind.

The mean score for urban and rural members (see below) reflected that of all responding FFA members — the majority of responding FFA members scored within the “lightly involved” range. There was a relationship between a greater FFA involvement and a higher level of stretching, embracing, and adaptability. Therefore, it is likely that students who can easily step outside of their comfort zones and adapt to different situations will connect more with the opportunities available through FFA.⁷

FFA involvement score of urban FFA members: 8.2

FFA involvement score of rural FFA members: 12.0

*A member scoring between 1-14 on the FFA Involvement Scale is considered “lightly involved.”

Why did the responses of FFA members in urban areas show less likelihood of staying in their comfort zones and a high likelihood of being adaptable? The traditional nature of FFA in some schools is a potential factor. It may require urban students to stretch and adapt to different situations more than their rural counterparts. Opportunities to participate in ag-based experiences may be rarer in urban areas than in rural areas. The stigma of agriculture and FFA, based on stereotypes FFA has (and has not) historically engaged in, persists. Findings may reflect the occasional resistance from rural FFA members to broadening FFA activities from more traditional programming.

Activities that are interesting and accessible to all can help draw in FFA members for years to come.

FFA can promote recruitment and retention of members from different backgrounds by providing innovative FFA activities that are accessible to any member in any environment and go beyond those possibly viewed as stereotypical by some members.

Students who will connect with FFA are willing to step outside of their comfort zones and adapt. Developing what FFA membership looks like can help local FFA chapters attract members for years to come. Inclusion of all members is also a priority for the National FFA Organization. One of the organization’s 2022-25 strategic priorities is to engage communities and partners to expand access and prepare FFA members to succeed in diverse and inclusive workplaces.⁸

For more information, email evaluation@FFA.org.



⁷ McBride, S. M., & Talbert, B. A. (2021). Barriers to full involvement: A study of rural and urban FFA chapters [Research presentation]. National FFA Organization, Indianapolis, Ind.

⁸ National FFA Organization 2022-25 Strategic Plan Implementation Blueprint – Y1 (2022).