

Excellence in Ag Sample Application 2

American Farm Bureau Federation Young Farmers & Ranchers Excellence in Agriculture Award

Note: Remember to write in first person narrative for questions I-V. Remember no state specific identifiers.

I. **PERSONAL BACKGROUND** (family, education and personal interests)

I was raised on a small dairy farm in the rolling hills of our state. At an early age I found interest in animals and acquired a love for agriculture. As a young teenager I reluctantly became involved in FFA. My father said, " Try it out for one semester and if you don't like it, you don't have to continue." Later I became a very active FFA member throughout high school and I was honored to receive the American FFA Degree. I was also involved in Track, Forensics, Band, Choir, Church Youth Group, and a community charity group. Through FFA, I learned to be a leader and to give back to my community, friends, and family. It has always been my philosophy to put others before myself. I guess that is why I ultimately became a teacher. Upon graduating from a state university with an animal science bachelors degree, I continued my schooling as a graduate student in agricultural education. During my time at college, I became highly involved on campus in many different areas including a nationally recognized social and professional agricultural fraternity. My time as a leader in this fraternity greatly helped me grow as a leader and helped me gain confidence in my profession as an educator. I have now been an instructor for almost 10 years. I am married to a wonderful woman that has given me two beautiful daughters. I am also blessed to have three wonderful "bonus" (step) children. We live on a small farmette where we have a menagerie of animals, fruit, vegetable and garden products. We also make small square bales of hay for the fun of it! We enjoy our family, friends, and our farmstead. I remain an active participant in our community and continue to take an active role in promoting agriculture with each passing day.

II. **AGRICULTURAL INVOLVEMENT**

A. Please explain the applicant(s) occupation.

I am currently an agricultural education instructor at a two-year technical college. This was not my initial career choice. As I stated earlier, my passion was for animals. I attended a bachelor's degree program and graduated with an animal science- pre-veterinarian degree. Before graduation, I realized that I did not want to be a veterinarian, therefore, I went back to school to become an agricultural educator. I am very happy about the decision that I made. After graduation I taught at the high school level and was a very active FFA advisor for three years. We experienced a great deal of success as a chapter during that time. Three of my past students became state FFA officers and we were recognized as a gold national chapter each year. As an agricultural educator I was able to influence the next generation and even have some past students pursuing a degree in Agricultural Education. I thoroughly enjoyed my experiences teaching at the high school level. I truly was blessed with excellent students, community members, and school officials to work with. We teach our students to seize the opportunities, so I followed my own advice and in my fourth year, I was hired at a local two-year college to develop a brand new agricultural program. This program gives students another option for agricultural career success. It is a one-year program designed to create a career pathway for those students interested in agriculture that may not have an interest in a four-year or two-year program. Over the last six years, I have planned, designed, and built an agriculture program that has gained a great deal of respect at the local, state, and national level. This program has been recognized as the state outstanding program winner in 2012 and has competed against other programs on a regional and national level. After implementing the new program, I also started a student organization that is tied to agriculture. Students in this organization have competed at the state and national level and have earned recognition at those levels as well. I was humbled to be recognized this year by this organization as the "Advisor of the Year" at the state and national level. These are all great accomplishments, but by far my greatest accomplishment is seeing students succeed in their chosen career path with good paying, family supporting jobs/careers in the agricultural industry.

II. AGRICULTURAL INVOLVEMENT (continued)

B. Please explain the applicant's (applicants') personal involvement in agriculture/agribusiness.

I believe to be effective at your vocation, you have to embrace it as your avocation. Not only do I teach agriculture, I'm involved in it at home every day. I may not have hundreds of acres or a large herd of cattle, but I do try to share the diversity of agriculture with my family, friends, and students on my 25 acre farmette. My family and I raise and care for 4-6 steers, 4 horses, 40 laying hens, 20 broiler chickens, 2 rabbits, and a variety of cats. We also have a substantial garden with a large plot of strawberries. I've established an orchard that consists of apples, peaches, pears, nectarines, grapes, raspberries, blackberries, blueberries, rhubarb, and asparagus. This endeavor has grown each year and will continue to grow in the future. I hope that my students, family and friends can learn from what we do on our "lab" farm. I'm always planning a new "experiment" and trying something new. Part of our operation also includes making our own small square bales of hay. We own 7-8 acres of hay ground and bale up another 10 acres of waterways on our neighbor's farm. We have an agreement with our neighbor that they receive 30% of the bales that we make. It works out great for both of us.

My parents also operate a dairy farm. They run 460 acres and milk registered Jerseys. I try to help them out as often as I can, but I don't get there frequently because their farm is about three hours away. Our family is currently working with my parents on farm succession planning. We are looking towards the next generation and what enterprise will work best with our farm's land and facilities. Whenever I have a free moment, I'm involved in the production side of agriculture or spending time with my family. It truly is a passion of mine, which is now rubbing off on my five children. They all have an interest in something on our farm. The farm has been a great teaching tool for my students and especially my children. The life lessons learned on our small farmette will be with them forever and will continue to help them grow as individuals.

III. IMPACT ON AGRICULTURE

What does the applicant(s) do to positively promote and impact the agriculture industry?

I live, breathe and work agriculture every day. If I'm not teaching, I'm producing. If I'm not producing, I'm promoting. If I'm not promoting, I'm learning. Every part of what I do is touched by agriculture in some way. I really enjoy teaching family, friends, and people I meet on the street about the importance of agriculture and where their food comes from. I work with many highly educated people and it always amazes me how uneducated, or misinformed, they are about the world of agriculture. There isn't a day that goes by that I don't speak with someone about these issues. I am also involved with several community groups where questions about agriculture arise as well. Whenever I speak with these groups they always have lots of questions and want to learn more. Speaking with these groups, colleagues in non-Ag related fields, and others in the community helps me make an impact on their understanding of the agriculture industry. I am also involved with several agricultural organizations, including Farm Bureau, where we actively promote the agriculture industry. Within Farm Bureau I have been involved with the Ag in the Classroom committee for the past 5 years. Our county Farm Bureau is fortunate to have an agriculture education trailer that we use to actively promote the agriculture industry to consumers and youth at various events. I have worked with this trailer and others in county Farm Bureau to set up and design activities to promote agricultural commodities, educate consumers about how their food is produced, and teach youth about the importance of farm safety. This has been an integral part of our community and festivals where people continuously come to ask questions and share experiences. I am also highly involved in the county tractor safety program. I have organized the equipment and tractors and worked with students on their practice drives. I have also been one of the certifiers for the past 5 years. I was recently elected to serve on the county fair board where I have worked on the sponsorship committee over the last three years and will continue that role as the committee chair this year. This last year we raised over \$40,000 to make improvements to the fair. And of course I am always promoting the diversity of agriculture in the classroom and helping students understand there is more than one way to milk a cow, raise a chicken, or grow corn.

IV. ISSUES FACING AGRICULTURE

A. Please list and explain three important issues that agriculture needs to address in the next five years.

1. Jobs. I, like many in our industry, grew up on a farm. In the future, our industry will not have the luxury of hiring people that grew up on farms. Farm numbers are shrinking, therefore, less students and graduates are coming from farming backgrounds. Even if every "farm kid" was hired by industry, there still would not be enough to meet the demand. This is something our industry is going to have to face. Many of our agribusiness companies have the philosophy that "they will hire any farm kid" because of their work ethic. With less of these "farm kids" available, the industry is hiring employees that have very little experience in tractor driving, animal handling, and mechanical repair. These are qualities that many "farm kids" have developed over many years of experience. This is what I call "farm-sense." Because many of us grew up on farms, we retain the work ethic and experiences that we learned growing up on those farms. Today we expect our employees to have that same work ethic as we have even though they may have not grown up in the same environment. The phrase "Work until the job is done" is hurting our industry because we are losing employees that don't necessarily want this kind of lifestyle. They are finding higher paying jobs in other sectors of the economy because they want to raise a family and long for time to themselves. This is sometimes referred to as "Brain Drain." When we expect industry professionals to work from 6am to 11pm, 6 or 7 days a week during the busy season, we will face a shortage of employees. The industry needs to find ways to make planting, harvesting, and crop management jobs more desirable in today's employment market to retain the knowledgeable and experienced individuals that work in the agricultural sector. The other factor that compounds this issue is farm kids are not growing up with the same experiences that farm kids did 20 years ago. Parents are keeping their children out of the bigger machinery and away from the facilities because of the many dangers associated with farming today. The equipment is substantially more expensive and isn't as easy to "tinker" with so mechanical skills are less prevalent as well. Everything is bigger and potentially more harmful or complicated. Therefore, they gain less experiences.

2. Public Perception. The world is communicating at a high rate of speed. There is more information being exchanged every day than was exchanged in the prior day. This is a good thing, if all of the information is accurate. As we all know only a fraction of the information on websites, social media, and media publications is accurate. Because of this, misconceptions occur in the eyes of the consumer and even our own agriculturalists. For years the consumers told the industry that they didn't want to know where their food came from. They simply wanted a safe, reliable, and affordable food supply and were happy that they didn't have to produce their own food. Many of these individuals grew up on farms and remembered the hard work that it was producing their own food. This generation of Americans appreciated being able to spend their leisure time doing what they wanted instead of growing food. Along comes the millennial generation, whom are three generations or more removed from a farm. Many of them question where their food is coming from and how it is produced because they haven't experienced the hard work and frustrations of raising their own food. Therefore, questions arise. These questions have brought about a food revolution. Millions of Americans now question the reliability and safety of our food supply. This is a dramatic shift in how the industry has historically been perceived. In general, most of our industry has been reactive in responding to public concerns about animal handling, food safety, Genetically Modified Organisms(GMOs), hormone usage, antibiotic usage, and the list goes on... Unfortunately I believe we are facing an uphill battle, with less than 2% of Americans involved in production agriculture, we are severely outnumbered. However, it is still a conversation worth having and we have to continue to be advocates for Ag and teach the current and future generations the truth about the American agricultural industry.

3. Adequate and safe food for everyone. The world population now breeches 7 Billion. Estimates say we could be around 13 Billion by 2050. How will these people get enough food to survive. The United States produces the majority of agricultural products world wide. The U.S. has some of the best soil in the world. We have to continue to look at new and innovative ways to feed more people. With the use of GMOs and other technologies we are continuously surpassing prior year's yields. What if we could grow corn that fixates it's own nitrogen? What if we didn't need commercially produced nitrogen fertilizer anymore? These are all things that agricultural biotechnology companies are working on. Even though we are on a fast track to producing more, we still need to think about how much we use. The U.S. not only produces the most food in the world, we also consume and waste the most. Thinking about how we need to control consumption and minimize waste is the next step in providing enough safe and healthy food for everyone.

IV. ISSUES FACING AGRICULTURE (continued)

- B. Choose one of the issues in your response to IV (A) and discuss how you personally have addressed, or can address, that issue and work towards a resolution.

I think one of the major issues that faces the agricultural industry is "Brain Drain." We hire highly educated and experienced "Farm Kids" to come to work in our industry and we work them to the breaking point. Many of them leave the industry to find more desirable jobs that are less stressful, more flexible and higher paying. This is clearly visible in the agricultural education profession and other professions aligned with the stressful planting and harvesting seasons. Many of the students that I have in my classes understand how stressful it will be for them to work in the agriculture industry, but others find out in a hurry that this is something they will not do. I work hard every day trying to encourage young people to enter the field of agriculture. That's a tough job when many farm kids that don't even consider a career in their own industry. Many times they underestimate the value of the skills learned on their own farms. My own parents told me almost every day growing up on our farm, "Don't ever milk cows." When I recruit at various events, I always ask the FFA members, "What do you want to do someday?" Most of the FFA members tell me they want to be doctors, nurses, accountants, sports trainers, etc. Many of them don't even consider a career in agriculture. Our industry and society has taught them that agricultural jobs are hard work and that they will have little time for a vacation and family. Somehow we have to turn that around and make it desirable to work in the agricultural industry again.

I also think there is a bright future in agriculture. There seems to be a renewed interest by some of the younger generation to be involved in agriculture once again. With crop, milk, and meat prices at record highs over the last 5 years, younger Americans are seeing the opportunities that lie in the agriculture industry. Advertising and marketing has also helped to draw interest to the industry. And for the first time in a long time, mainstream society is showing appreciation for the American farmer and agriculturalists. You see more Agricultural themed advertisements and commercials than ever before. Hopefully, some of these efforts will continue to help build interest in our industry.

One way that I have helped make an impact on this issue is working with my college advisory committee. Many of the industry leaders and HR managers are a captive audience when I speak of these issues. I have brought this issue up more than once and the larger agronomic companies are taking a look at alternatives and finding ways to make those jobs more marketable to younger people, including those that did not grow up on farms. They admit that this is an issue and that they are having serious conversations about the very same topic. Over the last few years it has been increasing more evident to them that "work-life balance" is more important to their up and coming employees.

The Agriculture Education associations have reinvigorated their students in thinking about education as a career. I host an event at our college where we invite all of the other agricultural colleges in our state to meet with students interested in agriculture. We also invite high school juniors and seniors whom have an interest in the agriculture field. A big part of our program is reaffirming their interest in the agriculture industry and letting them know they have made a great choice and that they should consider some of the non-traditional agricultural careers in which we are in desperate need of future employees. This past year we had over 120 students from 12 different schools attend from the two county area of our district. Promotion across the country has helped recruit students into agricultural education, yet it hasn't addressed the overwhelming expectations of many of the sectors of our industry.

As educators we will also be tasked with finding alternative ways of educating these "non-farm" folks. But with less than 2% of the American population involved with production agriculture, "farm sense" is no longer "common sense" like it used to be when 98% of the population lived and worked on farms. We will have to find a way to teach them tractor driving on realistic sized equipment/courses, animal handling, and mechanical repair. To many "farm kids" these skills are second nature or "common sense." Farm sense is something that is learned by real life experiences working alongside equipment, animals, etc. Partnerships with industry and Farm Bureau will help move us in the right direction.

In summary, working with the industry leaders, we need to come up with ways to make our industry more appealing. We need the "Wow" factor. We are able to do that with the impressive size of operations and equipment, however, that doesn't always send the message that these careers will give someone time with their family, competitive wages, or valuable fringe benefits. We all know these items are important, and we all know that many of our careers have these things, but are we sending that message to the next generation?

V. GOALS

What goals does the applicant(s) have for the next five years related to his/her career, Farm Bureau involvement and involvement with other organizations?

By August 1st, 2019 I plan to have developed a 2 year track for the current program I teach at the technical college. I also plan to have assisted in the development of an agriculture, power and machinery technician program, precision agriculture specialist program, or a direct marketing entrepreneurial program.

My objectives include:

1. Recruit and Retain students to increase enrollment to 20 students.
2. Encourage administration to hire a part-time faculty person to assist with some of my current course load
3. Dedicate time to researching and developing curriculum for one of the programs listed above.

By August 1st, 2019 I plan to remain involved in the county Farm Bureau. I also plan to utilize local resources during local events to educate consumers about agriculture and use that information/media to create educational videos about agriculture and the misconceptions related to the industry.

My objectives include:

1. Develop a script of questions to be used that may bring out misconceptions about agriculture.
2. During a local event I will interview and video attendees. There will be over 100,000 people in attendance.
3. I will assemble the interviews into two educational videos. One video will be geared towards consumers and educating them about some misconceptions that are prevalent in society. The other video will be geared towards agriculturalists to teach them how to help correct misconceptions in a respectful way.

By January 1st, 2017 I plan to participate in the state Farm Bureau leadership training.

My objectives include:

1. Meet and network with people across the Farm Bureau community.
2. Gain leadership knowledge and skills.
3. Put my skills into action at the district or state level of Farm Bureau.

By August 1st, 2019 I plan to strengthen my relationship to a local agricultural organization that is working to establish public/private partnerships in hopes to build an "Agricultural Center," for educating consumers and the next generation of agriculturalists.

My objectives include:

1. Meet with the executive director of this local agricultural organization and share ideas.
2. Develop print and video media that highlights the public/private partnerships that have currently been created.
3. Develop a plan with college administration so that we can effectively maximize our public/private partnership.

VI. LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

- B. List other agricultural leadership roles, involvement opportunities, recognitions and/or awards received by the applicant(s), indicating service on committees, boards or as officers. (For example, Farm Credit, Soil Conservation, Farm Service Agency, farm cooperatives, 4-H, etc.)

Organization	Description	Years
National Post-Secondary Ag Students(PAS)	National Advisor of the Year	2014
State Post-Secondary Ag Students	State Advisor of the Year	2014
State University Ag Education Program	Student Teacher Supervisor	2013 - present
County Fair	Board Member and Sponsorship Chair	2013 - present
State 4-H Organization	Community Partnership Award	2012
State Association of Agricultural Educators	State Post-Secondary Ag. Program of the Year	2012
State Association of Agricultural Educators	Sectional Post-Secondary Ag. Prog. of the Year	2011
State FFA Association- District and Sectional	Speaking Contest Judge	2008 - present
County Fair	Sheep Superintendent	2008 - present
State FFA Alumni	Convention Planning Committee Member	2008 and 2012
State Association of Agricultural Educators	Sectional Winner - Young Member Award	2007
National FFA Alumni	Life Member	2007 - present
National Association of Agricultural Educators	National Conference Attendee	2007
State Association of Agricultural Educators	Board Member	2007 - 2008
National Alpha Tau Alpha Honorary Ag Ed Fraternity	Inductee/Member	2005
County Fair	Auction Committee	2005 - 2008
County Fair	Livestock Committee	2005-2008
State Association of Agricultural Educators	Member	2005 - present
Alpha Gamma Rho - Agricultural Fraternity	President & Vice-President	2003, 2002
National FFA Organization	American FFA Degree Recipient	2001

- C. List other community and non-agricultural leadership roles, involvement opportunities, recognitions and/or awards received by the applicant(s), indicating service on committees, boards or as officers (For example, civic/service clubs, church, school, volunteer leadership, etc.)

Organization	Description	Years
County Fair - Spring and Fall Flea Market	Volunteer	2014 - present
Local Chamber of Commerce	Business after five attendee and host	2013
Local Suicide Prevention Organization	Volunteer	2013 - present
Local School Board of Education	Board Member, Treasurer	2011 - 2014
County Young Professionals Group	Young Professional of the Year- County Winner	2010
Boy Scouts of America	Delivered Presentation on Recycling	2012
County Leaders Program	Presenter on Agriculture and Sustainability	2009 - present
Church	Member	1998 - present
Local Festival	Volunteer	2008 - present
Chamber of Commerce	Member	2008 - present
Local Optimist Club	Member/Volunteer	2008 - present
State University	Curriculum Committee - Student Member	2004
State University Agricultural College	Dean - Search Committee - Student Member	2004
State University	Chancellor's Award Finalist	2003
Greek Presidents Roundtable	Member	2002
Inter-Fraternity Council	Member/Chair	2002
State University	College Tutor	2003
State University	College Tour Guide	2001 - 2003
Alpha Gamma Rho - Agricultural Fraternity	Roadside Cleanup Volunteer	2002 - 2005
Local Charity	Benefit Event Committee Co-Chair	1998 - 1999