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Leaders Make the Difference

Leadership is evident in every facet of life from schools and communities, to organizations and countries. We can see the positive difference strong leaders make; conversely, it is also apparent when leadership fails or is absent. Think Steve Jobs at Apple, or Ken Lay at Enron.

Agriculture educators pride themselves on developing leadership skills in their students, which tend to be exemplified when FFA members are wearing their jackets, serving as officers and competing in the leadership career development events. However, what about teachers as leaders? What does the agricultural education profession do to develop leaders within the teacher corps?

Teachers are encouraged to join their local and state teacher organizations along with the National Association for Agriculture Educators (NAAE). Each of these organizations offers training and provides opportunities to serve. Have you joined your professional organizations yet? If so, have you answered the call to serve?

Think Globally, Work Locally

Teachers who step up to the plate and serve frequently find that, much like they tell their students, they end up gaining more than they give. It almost always starts locally.

Hugh Mooney, NAAE Region I secretary from Galt, Calif., started serving when he was a first-year teacher. "I attended the California teachers' association Rules Committee meet-

ing that first year, and they needed a secretary, so I volunteered. That led to me becoming the state committee chair," Mooney says. "The only way to make things happen is to get involved; then it snowballs," he says.

"The biggest challenge we face as a profession is finding people to fill leadership roles," Mooney says. "Saying 'yes' to those opportunities to serve isn't always easy, but it is your opportunity to make a difference."

Developing Your Skills

In addition to serving in leadership roles, there are several ways teachers can hone their leadership skills. First, take advantage of the professional development opportunities offered by your school and district. Next, seek out those opportunities provided by the National FFA Organization and NAAE.

In 2005, FFA launched its first Delta Conference, which is focused on helping teachers become better leaders. Find out more about this cutting-edge program on pages 4-5. This year, FFA is debuting a new advisor program as part of the Washington Leadership Conference. Learn more about the enhanced program on page 8.

It doesn't have to stop with your professional organizations. Many teachers have gained influence by serving the community on the town council or on the little league or fire district boards. When we start seeking, we find countless opportunities to serve by leading. Each of these opportunities can be a learning experience that will pay off in your agricultural education program. And, when you encourage your students to become involved, you provide a great role model for them to follow!



2005 NAAE President Jeff Maierhoffer addresses the 78th National FFA Convention.

Building a Community of Excellence

the Agricultural and Food Sciences Academy in the suburbs of Minneapolis isn't your typical high school. This public charter school, which is in its fifth year of operation, attracts students from 20 different Minnesota school districts, 30 percent of whom are minorities (including Puerto Rican, Mexican, Haitian, East Indian, African American and Native American), and focuses its curriculum on agriculture.

The faculty at this budding institution has found ways to bring this diverse group together and build a rock-solid community of excellence. Consider, for example, the school's list of accomplishments:

- 2005 National Community Development Models of Innovation winner
- 2005 National Agriscience Teacher of the Year winner
- 15 students participated in the 2005 National Agriscience Fair
- one graduate received a full-ride scholarship with the Naval ROTC
- two graduates received full-ride scholarships to private universities
- an FFA state officer
- a State Star in Agriscience
- four 2006 state-winning CDE teams (poultry, ag issues, ag communications, marketing)
- a state agriscience student award winner
- in 2005, 67 out of 159 students, or 43 percent, qualified to participate in something at the state level
- out of 41 graduates (classes of 2004 and 2005), 33 percent are studying agriculture at the post-secondary level; four are majoring in agricultural education

By any measure, this school has established a track record of success. How are they doing it? Becky Meyer,

who serves as the school's director (a.k.a. principal), says it is all based on building a community environment where everyone can, and is expected, to excel.

Setting the Bar High

"Last year, we started by spending one full week setting the tone and establishing our values and expectations with the students," Meyer explains. "We incorporated a number of lessons from the LifeKnowledge



AFSA attracts students from 20 different school districts. The faculty has incorporated lessons from the LifeKnowledge materials to help bring this diverse group of students together and build a solid school community.

materials. Each of our 13 licensed teachers has a copy of the materials, and they each presented a lesson that week."

"Taking the time to build a community made a huge difference in our school," Meyer continues, "When you consider we have students coming from 20 different districts representing a wide range of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, it was important for us to establish community norms and make everyone feel like they had a place to call 'home,' a place they were

accepted and could be successful. It was a great way to cross cultural lines and get everyone on the same page."

Moving Along the Continuum

The effort to build a community didn't stop with that week's activities. Every Friday morning, the school sets aside two hours to focus on its internal community. "We implement a lot of team-building activities, then give our students opportunities to practice their leadership skills," Meyer explains. "In addition to teaching leadership in classes, we make an effort to infuse it across all aspects of our school."

School organizations, such as the FFA chapter, hold their meetings during community time. Incidentally, because the school board feels FFA membership is integral to each student's experience, the activity fee covers each student's FFA dues.

In addition, the school has a 30-minute advisory period every day. The teachers frequently use activities gleaned from the LifeKnowledge lessons during these advisory periods to continue building the school's community and its students' leadership skills.

Student Focus

Reflecting on the whirlwind of activities at the school, Meyer concludes, "The community piece is the most important. The students have to feel safe and cared for before they'll be comfortable enough to explore their interests, let alone work to excel. In this age of constant accountability, it is common to cut out the extra pieces and focus solely on the academics. But, my experience has been that if we don't take time to build the community, we won't experience success in academics or other areas. Building the community is the foundation of all our success."

Making a Difference

FFA Advisors Making a Difference is published eight times a year to assist FFA advisors in making a positive difference in the lives of students.

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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.

The Agricultural Education Mission

Agricultural education prepares students for successful careers and a lifetime of informed choices in the global agriculture, food, fiber and natural resources systems.

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Watch for the LPS Logo



The logo shows how this issue of FFA Advisors Making a Difference relates to Local Program Success, a national initiative to strengthen agricultural education programs. You'll see this icon on all FFA materials. The shaded apples show which areas the materials address.

Perspectives

Choosing to Lead

i am a teacher of agriculture by choice, not by chance. If you think about this, you realize that you chose this profession and, in turn, you have obligations to the profession and to your colleagues.

This obligation is accentuated by the abilities you develop and then demonstrate in your school and community. I really believe the success of agriculture teachers as leaders is honed by their involvement in their communities and their school districts.

I have relied on my students to help me grow and, as a result, they have developed leadership qualities that are being demonstrated in the community today. My students are equal partners with me in our continual development of four local school district foundations, a county fair foundation and major fund drives for our FFA initiatives for school and community projects. Our local Agriculture & FFA Foundation has cash assets of more than \$60,000 and donated property worth over \$250,000. The students are working to finish a database of all past Randolph graduates, which will be the springboard for many future initiatives in this school district. While I chair these efforts, the students are learning to be tomorrow's leaders.

I have twice had the opportunity to serve as an officer of the Wisconsin Association of Agricultural Educators. My current service as president has allowed me to grow professionally. I am:

- involved with the Secretary of Agriculture's Task Force on Agricultural Education in Wisconsin;



By Keith Gundlach,
Agriculture Teacher
Randolph, Wis.

- helping to develop a new SAE committee in Wisconsin to strengthen student SAEs;
- active in promoting and encouraging advocacy; and
- working with the Wisconsin Team Ag Ed in developing a unified message for the public regarding agricultural education.

This work has been a team effort by our WAAE board and many of Wisconsin's agriculture teachers. Being a part of these efforts has strengthened my resolve to serve our association.

Because my agriculture students have experienced success in their SAEs, I have been asked to present SAE workshops. I have done so at FFA conferences and at the WAAE Summer Conference. Providing a workshop to the agriculture teachers in South Dakota allowed me to learn more from them than I may have taught them, and I was able to use their ideas in my classroom. Getting to know these teachers better affected my decision to serve as a member of the Region III NAAE member services committee.

I am certainly not a dynamic personality. I try to lead by example. I read somewhere that what you do today is what you face tomorrow. In my 29 years of teaching, I have found that statement to be very true. If agriculture teachers take the initiative to become involved in the leadership of their schools, communities and professional associations today, they will find the benefits reaped tomorrow are well worth the investments made.

Becoming a Part of the Delta Force

picture a group of 48 teachers from across the country assembling in a hotel lobby last July. Each has arrived with a set of expectations and a bit of anxiety. “What is Delta Conference?” is the question each is pondering. They didn’t know it, but they were about to become agricultural education’s inaugural “Delta Force.”

Hugh Mooney, a veteran teacher from Galt, Calif., says, "I expected to learn more about how to use the LifeKnowledge materials in my program, but it was so much more than I expected. Delta Conference really makes you look inside yourself, examine your educational philosophies and determine how you can become a better teacher."

Real Work, Real Time, Real Life

The teachers who attended the first Delta Conference received a letter notifying them they had been selected to attend. The letter included this statement: "Consider this. What if you had an entire week to totally focus on you; an entire week to focus on your influence in your classroom; an entire week to focus on your influence in your school; an entire week to focus on your influence in your community? What if you had a week that was about real work done in real time, for real life? What if you could walk away from that week reconnected with why you chose to become an agriculture teacher in the first place?"

Andy Armbruster, an education specialist with the National FFA Organization, who manages the Delta Conference and authored the letter, says the conference is designed to be a hands-on learning experience. “In developing Delta Conference, we asked ourselves, ‘How can we help teachers become better teachers and better leaders?’ We focused on



Members of this Delta community group display the results of an activity called 'Barriers and Breakthroughs,' where they identify the teacher they desire to become, and the barriers keeping them from becoming that teacher.

providing learning theory, then rehearsal and coaching. The participants received peer-to-peer feedback and were coached in the moment. This is all about real work done in real time for real-life application."

According to Mooney, that is exactly what he received. “Delta Conference gave me the opportunity to look at how I teach and how I connect with my students. It gave me the tools to approach teaching differently through the use of e-moments and other strategies.”

He continues, "I teach four different classes. With the freshman, I can do anything because they haven't had me in class before. They really enjoy the e-moments. I also tried a few e-moments with my seniors. They thought I was crazy, but it got their attention. Once they got over the shock, they really got into it."

E-moments are strategies that capitalize on how students learn best; these are moments when students become engaged, get connected and make personal meaning of the content they are learning.

Mooney adds, “At first, using these strategies wasn’t very comfortable. But,

when you vary your approach, you can really see the students respond. You quickly learn which students respond to which strategies. Once you start using them, you begin to understand how to apply the various strategies with different contexts. And, you can apply the same precepts to academic content.”

The bottom line? According to Mooney, it is all about engaging his students. “You know you’re doing a better job teaching because you can see it in your students’ eyes. They are paying attention; they are engaged; they aren’t watching the clock. You can just feel it in your classroom.”

Continuous Improvement

Armbruster says, “While one of the primary goals for Delta Conference was to have more teachers using the LifeKnowledge materials in their programs, we also wanted to help teachers develop their personal strategies and methods of engaging all learners and help them become stronger leaders in

their classrooms and communities. Each teacher left Delta Conference with an Influence through Implementation, or I², plan – a living, breathing document they can use in their local programs.”

It is through these I² plans that the teachers can continue to evaluate their work and improve their skills.

Mooney adds, “The biggest thing Delta did for me was cause me to self-evaluate. I’m always thinking, ‘Did I do that as good as I could have?’ The process helps you improve yourself and your skills incrementally every day. Without a doubt, this was the best conference I’ve ever attended. Nothing else even comes close.”

Paul Larsen, who teaches agriculture at Freedom Schools in Freedom, Wis., agrees. “Instead of being a conference based on a topic, Delta is a conference about us as teachers and what we can do. The experience taught me how to focus on my strengths. How I look at what I do every day has changed. I’m constantly thinking about how I can reach every student every day. I’m more open to the uniqueness of every child.”

The Next Step

Kelly Hoelting, who teaches agriculture at Mission Valley High School in Eskridge, Kan., took it one step further. “A group of seven teachers from Kansas participated in last summer’s Delta Conference, and we had lots of time in the van traveling back and forth to the conference to talk. We felt that Delta had provided us with a set of tools to communicate how academics fit into agriculture and how to help others better understand what we do. We needed to bring these skills back to Kansas and find a way to share the experience with our colleagues.”

Hoelting was serving as the Kansas Association of Agriculture Educators’ inservice chairperson and suggested they

find a way to share during the upcoming inservice meeting. “We had been in a state of complacency in Kansas until we hosted a presentation by Dr. Ann Benson, who is with the High Schools That Work initiative. It was a fairly rude awakening to discover that we were behind the times.”

“We discussed how to help students realize how what they are learning in our agriculture classes relates to their other classes. Helping students make those connections makes such a huge difference!”

Hoelting continues, “The Delta Conference identified our weaknesses as well as our strengths. We became determined to incorporate the Delta information into our state meeting. We asked Randy Vlasin, one of the Delta mentor teachers from Nebraska, to present the LifeKnowledge workshops and focus on how to integrate academic language into our courses.”

The other major component of the inservice meeting was a focus on academics, with workshops on math, reading and science. “We focused on the basics of integrating academics and technical reading,” Hoelting explains. “We discussed how to help students realize how what they are learning in our agriculture classes relates to their other classes. Helping students make those connections makes such a huge difference!”

Based on the post-meeting survey, Hoelting and crew met their objectives. The feedback included comments such as:

- “...best conference I’ve ever attended.”
- “...life-changing, made me excited to teach.”
- “...learned things I could have been using for years.”
- “...would like more of the same, more about reading strategies and integrating academic language.”


The Power of Change

Add up all the components of Delta and the common thread is change. Change in how teachers engage their students. Change in teaching methods. Change

in how teachers influence their students, schools and communities. Change in education, generally, and in agricultural education, specifically.

Mooney concludes, “You, too, can choose to join the Delta Force. We will know that we are successful if we can sustain small, seemingly insignificant, continuous improvement. Our students deserve it.”

Learn more about the Delta Conference at [\[www.ffa.org/ageducators/html/core_delta.html\]](http://www.ffa.org/ageducators/html/core_delta.html).



What is the Delta Force?

The Delta Force is a group of teachers that is a force for change in agricultural education. The group believes:

- Content is never more important than your relationship with your students.
- If the information you are teaching is important, then it is worth the time.
- What is important is how well the students learn, not how well the teachers teach.
- Testing is not the goal; learning is.
- Innovation is doing the right thing; are you doing the thing right or doing the right thing?
- Weakness-fixing prevents failure; strengths-building leads to success.
- Talent is a recurring pattern.
- Do not follow the path of others; leave a path for others to follow.
- Small, seemingly insignificant, continuous improvement can have a lasting impact.

Living to Serve: Reaching Out with Helping Hands

Iast fall when Hurricane Katrina struck, the FFA members at Arkansas City High School, Kan., and their advisors knew they had to do something to help. Working with other chapters, they gathered five semi-trailers full of supplies and donations and sent them south.



And yet, they didn't feel they had done all they could. In November, the Ark City group, still seeing devastating images in the news, decided they would create a work team and go to the hurricane-ravaged area to help over their spring break.

"We started planning and tried to connect with an FFA chapter we could help," says Cory Epler, one of the chapter's three advisors. "That didn't work out, so we found a way to offer our assistance through the Campus Crusade for Christ organization."

The Ark City team was assigned to work in Pass Christian, Miss., which is near Gulf Port, and has received substantial media coverage because it is the hometown of ABC News personality Robin Roberts.

Diving into the Details

Putting the trip together was no small feat. They had to get the school board's approval, then make all the travel arrangements. When the FFA members requested the school board's approval, one board member questioned whether other FFA chapters were planning similar trips. The school superintendent answered with pride, "This act of selfless service is what we've come to expect from our FFA chapter."

The Ark City group had access to a school van and knew they would be limited to nine students and three advisors. Costs for the trip were split between the chapter treasury and the participants. Each student was asked to pay half of their \$50 registration fee, which covered tent accommodations and meals. In 2005, the Arkansas City FFA Chapter had received \$500 for being named a National Model of Innovation. The chapter voted to reinvest those funds in support of the spring break trip.

Lending a Hand

As spring break approached, the excitement – and anxiety level – grew. What would they be doing? How would they be able to help? "The closer we got, the quieter it became in the van," Epler says. "We didn't know what to expect. When we began to see the magnitude of the devastation, our jaws just dropped."

"To be honest, I was nervous about giving up my spring break to go help," says Emilie Magnus, one of the Arkansas City FFA members. "That nervousness left when I saw all of the devastation. I immediately wanted to start working and begin helping out. I will never regret my decision to help and would do it again if given the opportunity. I don't think I could have found a more rewarding way to spend my spring break."

After spending Monday and Tuesday traveling to Pass Christian, the group was anxious to get to work Wednesday morning. Their assignments ranged from debris removal to helping residents repair their homes.

"I was so proud of our students," Epler says. "They were tired and eaten up by insects, but they never complained, and they wanted to do so much more. On Friday morning,

we had to decide whether to head home or work half a day first. They unanimously agreed to work another half-day to help one of the residents, Mary Helen, get her home cleaned up and livable."

Lessons Learned

"My favorite part of the trip was seeing the hope in the faces of the residents that we helped," Magnus says empathetically. "The feeling that it gave me is one that I can't describe. With our help, they have the hope of returning to a normal life in their old homes. This was a truly remarkable and touching experience for me, and I will remember it and those we helped for the rest of my life."

Fellow FFA member Josh Metzinger adds, "My favorite part of the whole trip was helping a lady get ready to move back into her house when FEMA was about to take away her trailer. I think working in her house was, above all, our whole group's favorite experience."

Metzinger continues, "I gained a lot of respect for everyone down there volunteering. To invest personal time helping someone in need shows a lot of character. Working down there was very rewarding; just seeing the happy looks on their faces was worth it."

Magnus adds, "This experience taught me to never take anything for granted and how fortunate I really am. One day those residents had the perfect life on the beach, and the next day everything they owned was ruined. This experience allowed me to see how bad the devastation is, which is completely indescribable."

Epler says the experience was life changing for the advisors who participated as well.

"It was one of the greatest lessons of my life. I was thankful for the opportunity to serve and really proud of our students."

Epler continues, "The experience also made me rethink how we approach service. I think we need to be much more focused on locating specific needs that we can fill in our local communities."



New Civic Engagement Initiative

The Arkansas City FFA Chapter's effort exemplifies the spirit of the National FFA Organization's new Living to Serve initiative, which is focused on civic engagement.

Civic engagement is defined as the engagement of persons to collectively identify a problem within their community, create and implement solutions to address the problem and, therefore, create and sustain their interest in the community. Civic engagement can take many forms including volunteerism and involvement in local civic and nonprofit organizations, as well as election participation.

Civic engagement provides a meaningful way of applying the leadership skills FFA members learn in the classroom in their local communities. Civic engagement can motivate young people to become more connected to their communities by working with caring and committed adults to address specific needs. Further, civic engagement can enrich the lives of local communities by capitalizing on involving youth in the decision-making process.

The Living to Serve initiative was launched during 2006 National FFA Week, and includes several different ways to get involved.

National Day of Service (NDS)

The National FFA Organization is planning a National Day of Service in conjunction



Arkansas City, Kan., FFA members spent their spring break helping Hurricane Katrina victims clean up debris and restore their homes.

with the 2006 National FFA Convention in Indianapolis. FFA members and advisors will participate in hands-on activities and debriefings that demonstrate the civic engagement process and that will provide a real world context for applying their leadership skills. Members and advisors will return to their communities energized to implement similar projects.

Partners

The National FFA Organization is building a network of national partners that have local networks or a means to assist in the local civic engagement project planning process. Partners are being identified in the following areas:

- Hunger
- Conservation
- Accessibility
- Science literacy
- Economic capital/capacity building
- Healthy lifestyles and communities

Chapters will be encouraged to develop their own local partnerships and share this information with national FFA.

Promising Practices Database

A searchable database of project ideas is being created and will be housed on the FFA portal. This database will serve as a type of clearinghouse that will collect locally-developed successful civic engagement projects. Chapters will be encouraged to submit their civic

engagement projects so that the ideas can be shared broadly with others.

One-Million-Hour Challenge

Realizing that service learning projects and community development projects take place throughout the year, a challenge was launched during this year's National FFA Week. FFA chapters are being challenged to conduct service projects and document the number of service hours they take part in from November 1, 2005, to October 1, 2006. The goal is to document one million hours of service, which will have a \$17,550,000 impact on the U.S. economy.

"FFA chapters have long been known for their community service activities," says Joe Martinez, an education specialist with the National FFA Organization who is managing the Living to Serve effort. "Service is a part of our culture, of who we are and what we do. This initiative is designed to build on that existing legacy of service and to document FFA members' work so that we can share the extent of the work with others."

The Living to Serve initiative is funded through a Rural Youth Development grant administered through the U.S. Department of Agriculture by the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service.



Enhanced Advisors' WLC Program Debuts

Since the program's inception in the early 1970s, FFA members have flocked to Washington Leadership Conferences each summer and been rewarded with a challenging, thought-provoking week. This year will mark the debut of a new advisor program that is designed to be every bit as robust as the student program.

"Our primary objective is making the advisor's program as positive for teachers as the student program is for the members," says Larry Gossen, LPS specialist

A is the enhanced program and will include lodging, an upgraded meal plan, all tours, CEU points, a letter verifying hours of participation and a \$100 gift certificate for items in *The Core* catalog. Option B includes room, student buffet meal plan and tours. Option C includes one rooming accommodation based on availability of single or double rooms.

For those choosing Option A, Wednesday's focus will be on science and technology.

"We're working with DuPont to provide teachers with hands-on, interactive lab

that are important to them. "Those who choose to participate will go home with skills that will be useful in working with local school boards and state legislatures, as well as in their professional organizations like ACTE and NAAE," Gossen says. The afternoon will conclude with a special behind-the-scenes tour of the National Zoo.

Friday's schedule will take service learning to the next level. "We've partnered with Timberland to provide training focused on incorporating service learning at the local level," Gossen explains. "This element has become a favorite part of the student program, so we're adding a teacher component to take it to the next level." Friday's schedule will also include time for teachers to participate in an

idea exchange. Each teacher will be

asked to bring along both

electronic and

hard copies of

an idea to

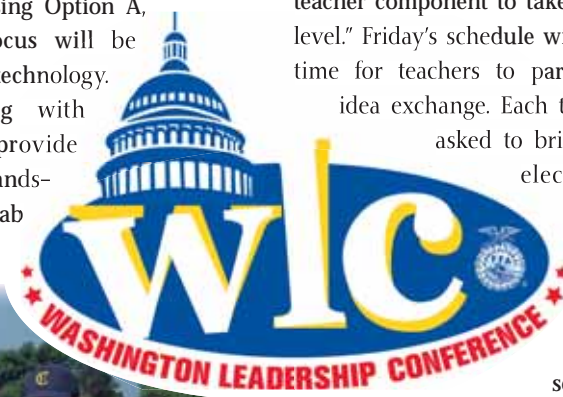
share with

the group

in one of the

seven areas of

Local Program Success.



As part of the service learning component, advisors and members will have the opportunity to apply their new skills. Last year, WLC participants helped glean fields for a local food bank.

with the National FFA Organization. "Teachers who participate will go home with some really exciting tools to apply in their local programs."

Daily Focus Areas

On Tuesday, teachers will register and have the chance to sign up for one of three different programs. Option

activities that they can take home and use in their programs," Gossen says. "We will also tour the USDA Agricultural Research Service in Beltsville, Md."

On Thursday, the group will focus on advocacy. The day will start with breakfast on Capitol Hill, then proceed into an advocacy workshop. Before leaving the Capitol area, the participants will meet with congressional staffers to discuss the issues

Team Ag Ed Approach

These new opportunities for teachers are all part of the national Team Ag Ed approach, with all the various groups that are a part of the team – students, teachers, sponsors and others – working together to provide a more meaningful, complete experience for participants.

WLC will be offered for seven weeks over the summer. The 2006 conference dates are June 6-11, June 13-18, June 20-25, June 27-July 2, July 11-16, July 18-23, and July 25-30.

Additional information about the WLC advisor programs, including costs and how to register, can be found at [\[www.ffa.org/programs/conferences/html/documents/wlc_advisorprogram.pdf\]](http://www.ffa.org/programs/conferences/html/documents/wlc_advisorprogram.pdf). Student WLC information can be found at [\[www.ffa.org/programs/conferences/html/conf_wlc.html\]](http://www.ffa.org/programs/conferences/html/conf_wlc.html).

LifeKnowledge Center Launched



he LifeKnowledge®

instructional materials,
which debuted in 2004,

have been creating positive change in agricultural education programs across the country. As teachers became more familiar and comfortable with the materials, they began seeing the results of this new approach and asking for additional tools to take it to the next level.

The National FFA Board of Directors responded by creating the LifeKnowledge® Center for Agricultural Education. The Center is the focal point for an innovative, new leadership education initiative designed to support the organization's core principles and its goal of establishing 10,000 quality agriculture science programs by 2015.

"The LifeKnowledge Center offers a unique approach to leadership education that is designed to help every student in every class develop 18 core life skills necessary for premier leadership, personal growth and career success," says Dennis Sargent, FFA Foundation division director. "LifeKnowledge also will bring a new dimension of competence to the workforce that will lead agriculture and a greater sense of commitment to the citizens who will serve as the backbone of our communities in the years to come."

Among the items being created by the LifeKnowledge Center staff is a new, web-based version of the LifeKnowledge

materials, which will be known as LifeKnowledge version 3.0. These materials will debut at the 2006 National FFA Convention.

Web-Based Tools

"3.0 will contain all the lessons, activities, PowerPoints and other elements that our teachers have come to rely on," says Kelly Horton, team leader of the LifeKnowledge Center. "In addition, because it will be web-based, we are able to add some additional features to better serve our teachers. These include a way for teachers to communicate with their peers and share best practices. Another new element will be an electronic coaching guide to help teachers think through experiences, build on their strengths and shore up their weaknesses."

Teachers who subscribe to the new web-based service will also have access to an individualized assessment tool for students, which will send assessment results directly to the teacher.

E-Newsletter

In May, the LifeKnowledge Center staff will begin publishing a monthly electronic newsletter for teachers. Each issue will contain three, in-depth feature stories plus an "ask the expert" segment and a section that will delve into each of the LifeKnowledge precepts.

"Our goal is to make this newsletter's content so relevant to teachers that they

will forward it to their administrators and teaching colleagues," Horton says.

Teachers will have the opportunity to subscribe to this newsletter via the FFA website. Additionally, all of the articles will be archived on the FFA website so that teachers may easily access them at any time. Watch future issues of *FFA Advisors Making a Difference* for further details on how to subscribe.

Corporate Support

Creating the LifeKnowledge Center required the efforts and financial contributions of many. "This rewarding task would not have been possible without the input, collaborative support and substantial financial contributions of longtime benefactors of the National FFA Organization," Sargent says.

The Center's Founding Partners are Cargill, Chevrolet, John Deere, Monsanto and the National Pork Board, which each contributed \$500,000. In addition, Deere and Monsanto provided strategic input during program development from the perspective of future employers of agriculture students.

"Cargill is proud to be a Founding Partner of LifeKnowledge," says Jerry Rose, corporate vice president of Cargill. "We see LifeKnowledge as a unique vehicle to bring training and tools to equip our youth with the leadership skills that are necessary for the future: critical thinking, creativity and a sense of strong ethics."

Watch the FFA website and this publication for continuing information regarding tools and resources being made available to teachers by the LifeKnowledge Center.



On hand for the launch of the LifeKnowledge Center for Agricultural Education held in Anaheim, Calif., during the 2006 Commodity Classic were, left to right: Kris Elliott, agriculture instructor, Hanford High School, Hanford, Calif.; Michelle Spoelstra, Hanford FFA; Dennis Sargent, FFA Foundation Director; Suzanne McCarty, Community Relations Director, Cargill; Mitchell King, Hanford FFA; Gary Claudio, Truck Marketing Manager, Chevrolet; Julie Doane, U.S. Customer Relations Director, Monsanto; Haley Hanse, Hanford FFA; Hugh Dorminy, Past President, National Pork Board; and Brian Medeiros, Hanford FFA. Founding Partners Monsanto, John Deere, National Pork Board, Chevrolet and Cargill were recognized for each contributing \$500,000 for the creation of the LifeKnowledge Center.



Professional Growth

Leadership Skills Learned in the Ag Classroom? You Bet!

Leadership Quiz for Ag Teachers

1. Which is an example of situational leadership?

- A. When my principal caught FFA officers filling water balloons behind the greenhouse... that was a bad situation.
- B. When my banquet committee chair became a “telling” leader a week before because others had failed to complete responsibilities.

2. What is a proven method to develop leadership skills?

- A. Provide a title and a certificate.
- B. Provide opportunities to be a mentor and to receive mentoring.

3. What skills do agriculture industry professionals most look for in future employees?

- A. How to turn on and use the latest cool gadget that attaches to your belt.
- B. Leadership, teamwork and problem solving.



By Seth Derner,
Education Specialist
National FFA Organization

your skills and give you examples to use in teaching your students.

2. Learn from others

The past 20 years has produced great research and materials about leadership. Take a class from a university offering leadership courses. Find local workshops and seminars. Go to the library or bookstore and look for books on leadership. Attend Delta Conference offered by FFA. Spend time studying the topic during the summer. To teach your students about leadership, you need to know the common theories, definitions and concepts used in the field of study.

3. Access quality instructional materials

This is where LifeKnowledge can play a huge role. Your peers developed these instructional materials, each with a keen interest and understanding of leadership and personal development. Using great materials like this creates engaging learning opportunities for your students. There are other materials available, too. Look around and ask your colleagues what they are using. Agriculture teachers are the best “borrowers” of great ideas! Use that talent to find materials that work for you and your students.

Provide all of your students the leadership skills they really need to succeed by becoming a leadership professional and practicing what you promote!

Leadership might be one of the most over-used terms in society, but this tongue-in-cheek quiz demonstrates an important point: students in our programs – all of them, not just the FFA officers – need leadership skills.

Where do they get them? Probably not from the math, science or English teachers – they’re a bit busy with core academic standards.

“Wait a minute. So am I!” you say. And no doubt you are. But the two elements that make agricultural education unique – experiential learning in a relevant context and development of leadership skills – are features that continue to attract parents, students and administrators to your program.

So, back to the question: where do our students develop their leadership skills?

Mostly, from you.

Yes, thousands of FFA members attend state and national leadership conferences, but that’s still a small percentage of all the students in your classrooms day after day. Further, research shows that leadership development cannot be seen as a one-time event – it must be a continual process.

And who can provide that? You can.

From the very beginning, agricultural education was designed to teach the whole student – personal and leadership skills with academic and career development. FFA provides great activities for students to enhance and practice their leadership skills, but the most effective model is delivered when leadership is a part of the whole program.

Can anyone really be qualified to teach leadership? That’s a great question. Think of it this way: pretend your program has decided to add floral design to the curriculum. Nearly everyone has received or given flowers, but that doesn’t necessarily qualify them to teach floral design, does it? To offer floral design, you’d need someone who could practice it, has learned from others and has access to quality instructional materials. The same is true for leadership development.

1. Practice It

Find opportunities to practice your own leadership skills. Take a leadership position in your local education organization or your state agriculture teacher’s association. Volunteer for boards and committees in your community. Lead civic improvement efforts. These experiences hone

Leadership In The Classroom Of Life

Leaders arrive constantly in each of our classrooms on a daily basis. Where do they originate? Do we recognize these individuals and understand what makes them leaders? Can you identify the mixture used to develop leaders? Can you assist in developing leaders who don't know they are (leaders) yet?

Leader Recognition would be a great pre-service teacher course. One could anticipate the description of the new group of leaders. The descriptors might include:

Level Headed

A person who has common sense and applies it in "common practice." It has been my significant pleasure to work with a person who has a wealth of common sense. It has become a habit of mine to ask advice from this individual. I recommend you seek advice from people who can lead you in a wise direction; make it common practice. Concrete leadership is mixed with the cement of sound advice. Level headed leaders listen effectively.

Excited and Enthusiastic

Either way, the individual can look at a difficult situation, be optimistic and follow through solving said situation while enjoying the experience. As teachers, we have students, fellow teachers and neighboring educators who must approach daily-living hurdles. In my opinion, we can lead a person or group over their hurdles by first letting them know we care about them.

Show them that you care everyday; live by modeling a good example. Model behavior demonstrating the "right way" of living, recognizing that at each day's end, you leave a legacy. You are creating a legacy as a teacher; I challenge you to create a leadership legacy.

Attitude

A positive attitude is best; an outlook that enables a person a "can do and will do" approach; smiling helps here, too. What works effectively for me? Being a well-grounded person and showing others that a "can do" attitude is best. Avoid perpetuating an "in the can" bad attitude.

Lead by example – a positive one! When advocating for your agricultural education program, it is important to showcase the UP side! Promote agricultural education as a valuable career choice – it's the best thing I've done with my life! Graduates have returned to share their appreciation; that is powerful.

Dependable

You know the ones that live to "Git 'R Done," and will complete each commitment. My observations reveal that a disciplined person possesses a key component to becoming a leader. In my early years of teaching, a teacher-leader in Minnesota sent my students and me a letter of commendation on successes we had achieved. Wow, that was a neat experience. And receiving mail... inspiring!

Today, I practice complimenting a job well done. Demonstrate that you sincerely care, and encourage the recipient to reach ever higher. That's what leaders do – encourage others to reach their potential. Leadership is



By Brad J. Schloesser,
President, National
Council For Agricultural
Education

built in the furrow. It takes work: work like plowing from headland to headland. Become a dependable leadership advocate.

Energetic

This person shares positive energy with you and keeps the "teacher in you" motivated. I love to read; I always ask people for good books to read, and when I find one, I share the resource with others. It is interesting to find out what others use as resources to learn.

Here is a good read in my bag of lessons: *The Seven Levels of Intimacy*, by Matthew Kelly. He writes, "Your essential purpose is to become the best version of yourself. Place it at the center of your life. The meaning and purpose of a relationship is to help, challenge, encourage and inspire each other to become the best version of yourselves."

Responsible

This is a student you are pleased to have baby-sit your children or drive your personal vehicle; the kind that brings a tear of joy to your eye when they do a good job.

You know, "The best way to learn something is to teach it." By mentoring at the University of Minnesota, undergraduates in agricultural education and I have had the privilege of working with each other. They are awesome, responsible young people. We help each other learn about leadership. I know they are our future leaders; if some care and attention on my part helps them, all the better for them and the life they will lead.

As leaders continue to arrive daily in life's classroom, help them help themselves. Share this message: Be a positive leader at home, in school, at work, in your marriage and in the community of life.

“
You are creating
a legacy as a
teacher; I challenge
you to create a
leadership legacy.
”

Embracing and Celebrating Diversity:

Essential to Accomplishing Goals

By Gary Briers, Professor, Agricultural and Extension Education, Texas A&M University

tennis shoes. Running shoes. Work boots. Cowboy boots. Sandals. Slippers. Clogs. Galoshes. Hiking boots. All kinds of footwear are necessary for living life to its fullest – to accomplish tasks, be comfortable and be prepared for the action.

The role of diversity in leadership is similar. Leadership might be defined as garnering resources to accomplish a purpose. If there are many tasks to accomplish, lots of leadership and lots of leaders are essential. Then, assuming that the tasks are varied and diverse – and they always are – diverse leaders and diverse leadership is essential to accomplish the tasks.

As the mission states, “The National FFA Organization is dedicated to making a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for **premier leadership, personal growth, and career success** through agricultural education.” How does FFA at the local level work to develop diversity in leadership?

Students in three San Antonio, Texas, agricultural education programs are involved in a project supported through the National FFA Foundation by Toyota Corporation. Burbank High School, Southside High School and Southwest High School are all reaching out to diverse students. The “positive difference” begins in local programs. And, it begins with personal growth.

Is the mission of FFA being accomplished in the three programs? Students in the programs wrote that they see

themselves as respectful and considerate of others. They viewed themselves as trustworthy, honest, loyal and reliable. Further, they reported that they were responsible, doing what they were supposed to do, self-disciplined, and accountable for their actions. Finally, they believed that they were caring, kind, helpful to others, fair, played by the rules, involved in community affairs, good neighbors and respect authority. Yes, the students/FFA members were growing personally as a result of their participation in agricultural education and FFA.

Almost half of the students involved in the program set a goal to improve their leadership and personal growth before or during the eighth grade, and another quarter set that goal during the ninth grade. Similarly, they have high educational aspirations. More than 70 percent of the students expect to go to college after high school. Judging by the responses of the students involved, students in agricultural education programs and members of these three FFA chapters are striving for personal growth. They see themselves as emerging leaders and are developing their potential for premier leadership.

Are the students “learning to do” and “doing to learn?” They reported that the agricultural education courses they have taken and are taking are valuable and

related directly or indirectly to their future plans and careers. Similarly, a large majority reported that the difficulty of their courses was about right. If they had it to do over, most would enroll in an agriculture course again.

We see that students believe they are learning; but what about doing? More than 90 student members participated in two separate FFA Made for Excellence workshops. Nine members had attended the Washington Leadership Conference. Twelve student members and their advisors, administrators and a school board member attended national FFA conventions in 2004 and 2005 – the first time in many years. All schools had local chapter recognition banquets. Yes, the students are “doing to learn” as well. Adults from each school are also involved; several attended the National FFA Alumni Leadership Conference in 2005, and many serve on a joint advisory committee to guide the project and to make a positive difference in the lives of the students. The teachers/FFA advisors attend regular inservice education sessions.

Are the students in these three programs typical of all FFA members? Probably not – at least in terms of ethnicity. About three-fourths of the student members are Hispanic. There are also African Americans, Filipinos and Caucasians. On the other hand, they probably are typical in terms of their expectations and aspirations. And, they represent the future of agricultural education and

FFA – a future that is more diverse, more tolerant, more accepting and more celebrative of the differences each of us brings to the tasks of accomplishing goals.




TeacherResources

New Core Catalog on Your Desk

Take time to look through the latest edition of *The Core*, a catalog packed full of resources and teaching tools for agriculture classrooms. Review the 14 new products, including revised editions of the *Official FFA Student Handbook* and *Official FFA Manual*. Other new resources you should check out include the Program of Activities Tool for planning and managing local POAs, and a Substitute Teacher Guide jam-packed with activity-based lesson plans and ideas for preparing for your next substitute.

Ford Driving Skills for Life Program



Ford Motor Company is continuing its commitment to safety by assisting young drivers through its Driving Skills for Life program. Vehicle crashes are the number one killer of teenagers in America. Nearly 6,000 teens die annually in such accidents. However, studies demonstrate that crash rates decline considerably as young drivers gain experience. Driving Skills for Life helps young drivers improve their skills in four key areas that are critical factors in more than 60 percent of teen vehicle crashes:

- Hazard recognition
- Vehicle handling
- Space management
- Speed management

The program, coordinated by the Ford Motor Company Fund, provides excellent learning tools, including an interactive website, [www.drivingskillsforlife.com], and in-depth CD video and brochures. There is no charge for the materials, which not only can be used by young drivers, but also by educators and parents in school or community settings. Teens can test their knowledge and earn prizes by participating online. New for 2006 is a 30-minute documentary on Driving Skills

for Life, to be broadcast this spring on public television stations, including PBS. Also new in 2006 is the addition to a summer camp in the Detroit area and enhanced curriculum on the website, notably the importance of ecodriving to personal safety and the environment.

2006 AgrowKnowledge Faculty Development Workshops

Teachers can register online for the four new 2006 AgrowKnowledge Faculty Development Workshops. For details on the workshops, including how to register, visit [<http://www.agrowknow.org/faculty-development/2006/>].

The four workshops this year include:

- Expanding your Instructional Skills through Flash, May 24 - 26, Hawkeye Community College, Waterloo, Iowa
- Bio-Link National Fellows Program: AgrowKnowledge Track, June 3 - 8, University of California, Berkeley, Calif.
- GIS for Agriculture Decision Making, June 14-16, Kirkwood Community College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa
- Math & Science: Investigating Plants and Soils, June 28-30, Ohio State University ATI, Wooster, Ohio

Save your spot for the workshops by registering early! Travel and lodging stipends are available for qualified instructors, and registration for participants includes tour, class materials, most meals and other benefits. Carefully read the full descriptions for each workshop.


Nursery Instruction Grant Opportunity

NAAE is pleased to announce the continuation of the American Nursery and Landscape Association's "Enhancing Nursery and Landscape Instruction" Grant Program. The objective of this grant program is to build outstanding instructional programs that prepare students to enter nursery and landscape-related careers and/or higher education in areas related to nursery/landscape.

NAAE will accept NAAE/ANLA Enhancing Nursery and Landscape Instruction Grant proposals from teachers/instructors at any secondary school and two-year postsecondary institution who are active members or active life members of NAAE. The postmark deadline for submitting applications to the NAAE office is May 15. Application details can be downloaded from the NAAE website at [www.naae.org/awards/applications/index.html]. Please feel free to contact the NAAE office at 859-257-2224 if you have any questions.

Alternative Fuel Teaching Resources

This summer, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) will be promoting efforts in alternative, renewable fuels research and development. Mostly, this will mean highlighting the use of biofuels such as ethanol (E10 and E85 blends with gasoline), as well as biodiesel. However, this is also an opportunity for teachers to show the connections between our nation's farms and our energy portfolio. With the expansion of biofuels, our farms will play a greater role in America's energy framework.



DOE has materials suitable for classroom use available at [www1.eere.energy.gov/education]. Parents and students will be guided to: [www1.eere.energy.gov/education/report_resources.html]. Much of the information on this site will lay the foundation for understanding the complexities of the science of biomass and help students understand what issues are critical today and in the research arena. Teachers are also invited to visit a website of DOE's premier National Renewable Energy Laboratory [www.nrel.gov/learning/student_resources.html]. This site is rich with biomass information and also introduces students to many programs and activities that support energy efficiency and renewable energy.

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The Agriscience Student Scholarship and Recognition Program is sponsored by Monsanto as a special project of the National FFA Foundation.

First Edition Advisor's Convention Planning Guide

The guide was mailed to all FFA advisors in mid-April. It includes a mini CD-ROM with logos, pictures and a six-minute video

on the importance and excitement of the national FFA convention. As you think of ways to share and utilize your convention video, please consider taking it to your school principal or administrator.

The video showcases several teachers, administrators and state FFA staff discussing the convention's relevance to academics, networking and achievement in the context of agricultural science education. The convention video also includes a brief introduction to the city of Indianapolis, the convention venues, tour sites and entertainment attractions. It makes a terrific brief overview of the convention for parents, school board members, administrators and supporter groups. And, of course, your students will enjoy getting a preview of all the convention has in store for them!

Chapter Officer Newsletter Coming Soon

Chapter officers serve a vital role in FFA. By taking a major leadership role in their chapter, students grow from the experience and benefit their chapter, school and community. An exciting new resource to further develop these important leaders will soon be released by the National FFA Organization.

The chapter officer newsletter will include insightful articles, helpful hints and promising practices to help chapter officers effectively lead their chapter. This newsletter will be published four times a year as an insert in *FFA Advisors Making a Difference*. Look for the first edition coming soon!

National FFA Convention Housing and Pre-Registration Available Online

A click of the mouse makes it easy for you to register for the national FFA convention and housing in Indianapolis this fall!

Pre-registration for the annual national FFA convention is always your best bet to ensure your chapter obtains opening session tickets, concert tickets and entertainment options. This year, pre-registering will be easier than ever before, thanks to online convention registration. Advisors nationwide will have the option to register online, seeing real-time availability of tour, National Day of Service, concert and rodeo tickets. You'll be able to print out a confirmation of your registration online, and, best of all, you'll receive FREE shipping and handling on your convention tickets and registration packet. Pre-registration begins August 15 on www.ffa.org

Two-Tier Registration Fee Set

Registration for 2006 will be \$40/person for all persons not registered through the housing block. If you are staying in hotels that are part of the FFA Convention Housing block, then your registration will be reduced to \$30. The lower fee is available for five people/reserved room. This two-tiered fee structure will ensure that the cost of the convention facilities – which include Conesco Fieldhouse, the RCA Dome, the Indianapolis Convention Center and the

Indiana State Fairgrounds – is shared equally by all convention participants. If you have not already made hotel reservations, the housing block is accessible through www.ffa.org/indymove/index.htm.

Block Room Reservations

Did you reserve rooms for other chapters in addition to your own? If you listed the additional chapters on your chapter housing form, you should have received an e-mail message from Ellen Williams asking these questions. If you have not responded, please do so today. Her e-mail address is ewilliams@ffa.org or she may be reached via telephone at 317-802-4269. Williams needs to know if all the convention registrations will come from you, or if the individual chapters will be making their own. If each chapter is purchasing convention registration, please indicate the name of the chapter and the number of rooms allotted to each chapter. If a chapter does not have housing block rooms allocated to it at the time of their convention registration, they will pay the \$40/person fee mentioned above.

National Chapter Award Superintendent

The National FFA Organization is excited and proud to announce Florida state FFA advisor Belinda Chason has been duly selected and approved to serve as the National Chapter Award superintendent. Her appointment is a three-year term beginning in April 2006. Please join us in congratulating Ms. Chason and welcoming her as she begins this tremendous new opportunity! We look forward to her leadership and guidance as superintendent.



Serving as a Teacher Leader

Summer is coming. In most states, that means state teacher organizations will be conducting their annual meetings and electing a new slate of officers to serve during the coming year.



Larson encourages teachers to think about the perceptions they project about their program. "If I say I teach ag, people immediately have a mental picture that isn't necessarily accurate. If instead, I choose terms like horticulture and aquaculture, people have a more accurate image of what I really do," Larson says.

Will you be volunteering to add your name to the list of those willing to serve? Now is the time to consider taking that step. Many states require submitting an application, including a sign-off from your principal or other school official indicating they will support you should you be selected to fill a leadership role. You'll want to research those requirements before the end of the school term and get your paperwork in order so that when the time comes to raise your hand, you can do so without hesitation.

A little hesitant about approaching your principal? Paul Larson, who teaches agriculture in Freedom, Wis., and has served as a National Association of Agriculture Educators officer, says he found strong support within his administration. "My school board believes that if I'm out of school representing NAAE, I'm gaining skills and becoming a better teacher. They see it as getting advanced training for the cost of a substitute. That's what they're banking on."

Larson continues, "Our guidance counselor has mentioned how much growth they've seen in me, how much growth they've seen in the students and how the leadership course I teach has grown from 15 to 60 students. These are the dividends my school is reaping because of the investment made by supporting me in my effort to be a part of the leadership team for agricultural education."

 **Professional Growth**



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Making a Difference in May. It will
feature stories about Team Ag Ed,
as well as provide teaching resources
and FFA news.