FFA Professional Development Needs of [State] Agricultural Educators

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Introduction

According to Phipps and Osborne (1988), a total secondary agricultural education program consists of three essential and interdependent components: classroom and laboratory instruction; independent experiential learning, commonly known as Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE); and participation in the student leadership organization, known as the National FFA Organization. With the continuing growth of agricultural education in [State] and the increased student participation in FFA Career Development Events (CDE) ([State] Department of Education, 2008), research was conducted to determine the professional development needs of [State] agricultural educators pertaining to FFA CDE teams. Researchers utilized a paper questionnaire, administered to [State] teachers at area agricultural education meetings, to conduct this descriptive census.

Theoretical Framework

Over the years, agricultural education programs have evolved from production oriented training to consumption based education focused on semester long curriculum and courses (Washburn & Dyer, 2006). The constant evolution of agricultural education programs and the addition of core subject content skills have required many teachers to seek professional development opportunities to meet the demands of the changing emphasis of their programs (Washburn & Dyer). To accomplish this goal, providers of professional development in-service education should monitor the needs of agriculture teachers over time and provide educational programs based upon their current needs (Birkenholz & Harbstreit, 1987). Garton and Chung (1995) concluded that "the in-service needs of agriculture teachers should be assessed and prioritized on a continual basis" (p. 78). Nine years have elapsed since the last comprehensive study of professional development in-service needs of [State] agricultural educators. In previous studies, researchers found in-service needs in the following areas: developing agribusiness management skills, electricity skills, training FFA contest teams, assisting students with SOEP records, completing reports for local and state administrators, etc. (Birkenholz & Harbstreit, 1987; Garton & Chung, 1996; King & Garton, 2000). Due to the length of time since those studies were conducted and the continual need for research regarding the professional development in-service needs of agricultural educators (Osborne, 2007), an assessment of current professional development needs of agriculture teachers was warranted.

Purpose and Research Objectives

The purpose of this study was to identify the professional development education needs of [State] agricultural educators. The following research questions were investigated to accomplish this purpose:

1. What are the personal and professional characteristics (years of teaching experience, agricultural education district, agricultural education area, sex, FFA membership, 4-H membership, type of teacher certification, major in bachelor's degree, minor in bachelor's degree) of school-based agricultural educators in [State]?

2. What are the professional development education needs of school-based agricultural educators in [State] related to educating [State] FFA Career Development Event (CDE) teams?

Methodology

The population for this study was all school-based agricultural education teachers in [State] (*N* = 467). Subjects were identified from the 2008-2009 [State] Agricultural Education Directory (2008) and confirmed by the agricultural education professional development staff of the [State Department of Education] [Name], personal communication, September 1, 2008). This study was extracted from a larger research project designed to assess the professional development needs of [State] agricultural educators. The data collection instrument, developed by Garton and Chung (1995), was modified for use with this study. Appropriate methods were used to determine the validity and reliability of the instrument including the use of a panel of experts (*n* = 9) and a pilot study (*n* = 20). Usable responses were received from 383 [State] secondary agricultural educators for an 85.68% response rate.

Results

[State] agriculture teachers had slightly more than 10 years of teaching experience. Nearly three-quarters (71.01%) of these teachers were men. The majority of the respondents taught at schools located within the Central agricultural education district and the Area 8 agricultural education area. Most of the respondents were FFA members (88.50%) and 4-H members (58.00%) as a youth. Overwhelmingly, almost 9 out of 10 (88.80%) of the respondents had a traditional agricultural teacher certification. Additionally, 76.50% of the teachers held a bachelor's degree in agricultural education. The respondents indicated that they had some need (Dairy Cattle Evaluation; *M* = 2.07 to Agricultural Sales; *M* = 2.49) for professional development education for all of the [State] career development events except for Parliamentary Procedures. For this CDE, [State] agricultural educators indicated that they had much need (*M* = 2.52) for professional development education.

Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

The typical school-based agricultural educator in [State] is male with 10 years of teaching experience. He teaches at a school located in the Central agricultural education district and the Area 8 agricultural education area. As a youth, he was a member of the National FFA Organization and 4-H. In addition, he holds a traditional teacher certification in agriculture and a bachelor's degree in agricultural education. The characteristics of the respondents along with factors such as: location, length of time, time of year, cost, graduate school credit, and use of distance education technology (synchronous and asynchronous) should be considered when developing professional development programs for agriculture teachers.

[State] agricultural educators have professional development education needs relevant to the [State] FFA Career Development Events. The continual need for professional development education (Osborne, 2007), the increasing [State] FFA membership ([State] department of education, 2008), and the changing demands of agricultural education programs (Washburn & Dyer, 2006), creates a need for relevant and timely professional development education programs for [State] agricultural educators. These professional development opportunities should be planned and implemented by [State] agricultural teacher educators and state professional

development staff and be delivered through summer and winter technical institutes. Future research should be conducted to determine the effectiveness of various types of workshops for diverse agricultural education topics and the effectiveness of pre-service teacher education in [State] for preparing teachers to educate FFA career development event teams.

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