

Trends and Impact of FFA Affiliation on National FFA Organization Student Membership: A Secondary Analysis of Existing Data

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Abstract

FFA, School-Based Agricultural Education's student leadership organization, has experienced significant membership growth in recent years. From 1990-2010, FFA membership increased 31%, yet has experienced a similar increase (28%) in just the last eight years, the same time affiliation became a membership option. The purpose of this study was to examine recent FFA membership trends based on current membership options: optional dues-based membership and mandatory affiliation membership. A secondary analysis of FFA chapter membership roster records and annual state reports during the previous four complete academic years beginning in 2013-2014, was completed following the steps of Knowledge Discovery in Databases (KDD). As of 2017, over two-thirds (70.57%) of chapters are still dues-paying chapters. However, when analyzing membership type by FFA members, over half (51.54%) of all FFA members are members through affiliation. When looking at members within each region, the majority of members from the Central, Eastern, and Southern region are dues paying members while the majority of members in the Western region are affiliated members. Additionally, a stronger relationship may exist between national recognition and FFA affiliated chapters than for FFA dues; there may be a relative advantage in national award programs for affiliated chapters.

Keywords: FFA affiliation; mandatory student organization membership programs; FFA membership trends

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Introduction

The National FFA Organization, School-Based Agricultural Education's student leadership organization, experienced significant membership growth in recent years between 2010 and 2018. While FFA makes general milestone data on FFA membership available online (National FFA Organization, 2017), historical data on FFA membership over time are not easily available in the literature, and more particularly, the recent trends in FFA membership have not been examined

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in agricultural education research.

In 2010, the National FFA Organization approved a new membership model known as FFA affiliation, which was followed by a substantive membership increase of nearly 150,000 student members in an eight-year period. Dramatic shifts in membership have an impact on educational programming, including attendance and participation in FFA's youth leadership development conferences and conventions, engagement in Career Development Events (CDE), experiential learning projects that contribute economically to the community, and even the supply and demand for teachers and state and national level staff working in School-Based Agricultural Education (SBAE). As FFA affiliation can be considered an innovation, it is important to examine data on the program, synthesize trends in FFA membership, and make recommendations for future research related to its adoption.

Review of Literature

The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 formalized the linkage between the classroom instruction and supervised experience (i.e., Supervised Agricultural Experience, SAE) components of what is known today as School-Based Agricultural Education (National FFA Organization, 2017). The third component, leadership development, was accomplished by formalizing agricultural clubs in schools into what is now the National FFA Organization (FFA). The national coordination of SBAE that resulted from the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act "made it convenient for the development of an organization for rural youth that encouraged best practices in agricultural production and provided an outlet for personal growth and development" (Croom, 2008, p. 114). In 1928, 33 student delegates from 18 states met in Kansas City, MO and formed FFA "to encourage social development and agricultural skill development" (Croom, 2008, p. 114). The following year, 35 states affiliated with the national organization, including 30,000 members from 1,500 chapters (National FFA Organization, 2017). FFA received a Congressional charter in 1950 and is recognized by the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education of the U.S. Department of Education as a Career and Technical Organization (CTSO) (National FFA Organization, 2017). As such, FFA is a co-curricular organization that requires enrollment in a SBAE course. However, FFA membership is not a co-requisite of enrollment in a SBAE course.

Trends in FFA Membership

For many years following its formation, and after receiving the Congressional charter, FFA experienced considerable membership growth. The organization first achieved 100,000 members in 1935 (see Figure 1). Membership fell briefly during the 1940s when the United States was engaged in World War II (Wolf & Connors, 2009). During this time, FFA's national engagement and activities were reduced. National Conventions were "streamlined" to support war efforts; only "[state] delegates and award winners attend[ed]" (National FFA Organization, 2017, p. 1). In 1942, a year after the United States entered World War II, "just 217 people attended the [National Convention]" (National FFA Organization, 2017, p. 1; Wolf & Connors, 2009). Following World War II, membership began to grow again, expanding to 260,300 in 1948 and 363,369 members in 1953 (National FFA Organization, 2015a, 2015b, 2017). The organization achieved 509,735 members in 8,148 chapters in 1977 (National FFA Organization, 2015a). That year, 73.10% of the 697,499 students enrolled in SBAE programs were FFA members (Rossetti & McCaslin, 1992; Rossetti, Padilla, & McCaslin, 1994).

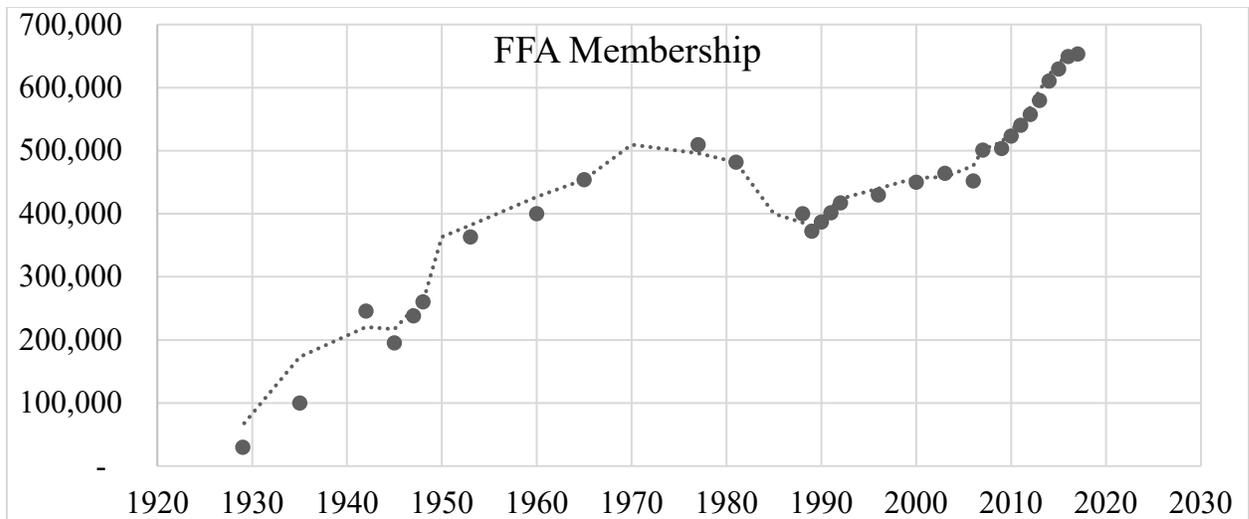


Figure 1. National FFA Organization Membership from 1928 to 2018.

However, in the years following the national membership high, at the time, in 1977 of 509,735 students, the organization experienced declines in membership. During the 1980s, the United States experienced the “worst economic downturn since the Great Depression,” decimating the industry of agriculture (1980s Farm Crisis, 2018, “Lasting Impact of the Farm Crisis,” para. 2). Vast numbers of Americans moved out of rural agricultural areas in search of work. The rapid decrease in rural populations resulted in “abandoned [farms], diminished government services and widespread school consolidations” (1980s Farm Crisis, 2018, “The Decline of The Rural Community,” para. 2). During the same period as the Farm Crisis, accompanied by decreases in rural population and school consolidation, membership in FFA fell to some of the lowest levels since the organization’s early years, just 387,143 members in 1990 (Rossetti & McCaslin, 1992; Rossetti et al., 1994).

In 1988, in an effort to increase membership, FFA permitted grade seven and eight students to become members and changed its name from the Future Farmers of America to the National FFA Organization, citing its recognition to reflect the “growing diversity of agriculture” (National FFA Organization, 2017, p. 2). Despite such changes, recovery was slow for FFA: membership in 1990 was 387,143 (Rossetti & McCaslin, 1992) and approximately 450,000 in 2000 (Talbert & Balschweid, 2004). It took the organization until 2010 to reach the previous membership high of 509,735 (i.e. membership in 1977; National FFA Organization, 2010). FFA grew by approximately 31% over a twenty-year period between 1990 and 2010.

Recently, however, between 2010 and 2018 FFA experienced substantial membership increases. In 2018, FFA reported membership included “653,359 student members in grades seven through 12 who belong to one of 8,568 local FFA chapters throughout the United States, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands” (National FFA Organization, 2018, para. 1). Between the 2009-2010 school year and 2018, FFA membership grew by 28%. Thus, the National FFA Organization grew by almost as much in the eight-year period between 2010 and 2018 as it did in the 20 years prior. One possible explanation for this difference is the implementation of the FFA affiliation membership model as a national option.

FFA Affiliation Membership

The FFA affiliation membership program originated in California as the Agriculture Incentive Grant of 1983, which funded and required of all students enrolled in SBAE to receive the benefits of and participate in youth agricultural leadership development (i.e., FFA) and experiential, technical skill development (i.e., SAE) learning programs (California Department of Education, 2003). Around 2005, the National FFA Organization's Board of Directors and the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE) began to explore alternative membership structures. After years of discussion, a yearlong pilot program adapted from California's Agriculture Incentive Grant was conducted in 2009-2010, including over 200 chapters in Arizona, Iowa, Florida, Massachusetts, and Texas (Case, 2010b). Chapters in the pilot experienced an average membership growth of "33% or ... 43 members per chapter" (Case, 2010b, "Reason for providing the option for an affiliation fee," para. 1). Following the pilot program, the National FFA Board of Directors voted to approve a new model of membership, based on California's model, to be known as FFA affiliation. Delegates at the 2009 National FFA Convention approved affiliation to be available nationally beginning with the 2010-2011 school year (Case, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c). Affiliation eliminated fees charged of student members and provided FFA to all students in a SBAE program. The Board described the primary benefits of the change including, but not limited to, no longer needing to "persuade students to join," elimination of dues, "[repositioning] FFA as an integral component of [SBAE]," and "[engaging] all students in the three-[component] model during all classes" (Case, 2010b, p. 1; National FFA Organization, 2016). In the affiliation program, all students are provided equal access to the opportunities and benefits of SBAE.

Theoretical Framework

FFA affiliation is an innovation in the sense that it is an "idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other units of adoption" (Rogers, 2010, p. 12). Rogers's Diffusion of Innovation theory can be used to examine and explain trends in the adoption of an innovation, in this case, the innovation of the affiliation membership program, and its impact and advantages. Diffusion is defined by Rogers (2010) as "the process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system" (p. 5). Specific perceived attributes of an innovation influence its diffusion and adoption, and how it is communicated among stakeholders and decision makers. For example, an innovation that is perceived to have relative advantages over the alternative available options will be adopted more quickly (Rogers, 2010). The compatibility of an innovation, or how easy it is to implement and the degree to which it is in line with existing organizational values, and the complexity of the innovation, or how easy it is to understand, also support or slow diffusion and adoption (Rogers, 2010). Finally, the degree of trialability and observability should be considered; the ability to see the results of its implementation from the outside, and to try it with less risk, allows an individual to consider its adoption with "less uncertainty" (Rogers, 2010, p. 16).

Once a critical mass of users has adopted an innovation, typically around 10-20% adoption, the innovation's adoption rates tend to "take-off" and become self-sustaining, though critical mass may vary from innovation to innovation (Rogers, 2010). Rogers (2010) added that "individual perceptions of the innovation can be shaped, for instance, by implying that adoption of it is inevitable, that it is very desirable, or that the critical mass has already occurred or will occur soon" (p. 361).

Even though FFA affiliation has been a national membership option since 2010 (Case, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c), and an option in California since 1983 (California Department of Education, 2003), the innovation is still likely considered new by many individuals in SBAE. There are limited information and data available on the program, including adoption rates. Affiliation is not designed to be high in trialability (Case, 2010b, 2010c). Little is known about the relative advantages of

affiliation due to limited data and lack of available research on the program, which contributes to limited observability of the results of the program to decision makers. Therefore, there is potential for the innovation to be viewed as complex and incompatible with existing SBAE program.

FFA has experienced an unexplained phenomenon of rapid membership growth since 2010. At the same time, these membership increases coincided with the creation of FFA affiliation as a national membership option, which lead us to wonder if there was a potential relationship between membership trends and affiliation. Membership trends were not easily accessible in the literature and there was little information on affiliation available to the public. The FFA affiliation program has grown rapidly in participation, yet little was known about its benefits and advantage over the traditional dues-based model. Therefore, there was a need to explore and study this growth and to inform policy, programs, and future research.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study, conducted as part of a larger series of studies on FFA membership, was to examine recent FFA membership trends based on both current membership options: mandatory affiliation and dues paying-based membership. Additionally, this study examined the potential impact and relative advantages of affiliation, specifically related to national recognition programs. Objectives of this study were to:

1. Establish national baseline data on FFA's membership options, including the total number of members and chapters participating through affiliation and dues,
2. Examine chapter and membership trends in each of FFA's four regions, and
3. Examine participation and recognition in award programs at the national level for affiliated chapters as compared to dues-based programs.

Methods

To examine the innovation of FFA affiliation, we conducted a secondary analysis of FFA chapter membership data, including roster records and annual state reports collected by FFA Local Program Success national staff, following the steps of Knowledge Discovery in Databases (KDD) outlined by Fayyad, Piatetsky-Shapiro, and Smyth (1996). These data included membership numbers for chapters participating in the FFA affiliation program during four complete academic years beginning in 2013-2014. Fayyad et al. (1996) shared that "KDD refers to the overall process of discovering useful knowledge from data" (p. 39) and includes nine steps. KDD is more than simply mining data for useful information. The nine steps of KDD included (a) identifying the goal of the knowledge discovery process, (b) creating a target data set, (c) data cleaning and processing, (d) data reduction and projection, (e) matching the goals of KDD to a particular data-mining method, (f) exploratory analysis and model and hypothesis selection, (g) data-mining, (h) interpreting mined patterns, and returning to any of the previous steps for further iteration, and (i) acting on the discovered knowledge (Fayyad et al., 1996).

First, the target data set of original membership and participation information were copied from their Microsoft Excel spreadsheet files and organized in a new document to maintain the integrity of the original datasets. Data that were originally spread across dozens of documents and files were combined and organized into one comprehensive database. Data were then cleaned, preprocessed, and linked to chapter identification numbers (i.e., FFA chapter numbers; e.g. MN0217). Multiple entries for a chapter in a given year were combined, duplicates were reduced, and data were coded by variable. In a given year, the resulting population included between 575,000 to 650,000 student members in grades 7 through 12 in more than 8,500 secondary and middle

school chapters. We then analyzed the FFA membership census population data of states and regions, looking for trends. For the purposes of this study, we specified explored relationships between affiliation and overall membership type over time, and between affiliation and FFA national award recognition programs over time.

No individual names or identifying information were included. It should be noted, however, that data within the dataset were limited, resulting in some limitations of the study. Membership data were only available for affiliated chapters beginning in 2013, not for all chapters regardless of membership type. We used the National FFA Local Program Success state reports to determine the total number of chapters and members each year, and when compared to affiliation data, these data provided data for Dues chapters.

Data provided by FFA were assumed to be accurate and reliable, and therefore were a potential limitation of this study. During the 2014-2015 school year, there were discrepancies in FFA's data for both the number of chapters and members for Alabama (Southern region), Montana (Central region), New Hampshire (Eastern region), Oklahoma (Central region), and Pennsylvania (Eastern region). State data for this year were an outlier compared to other years, suggesting almost all affiliated programs in those states returned to dues, and then switched back again the following year. There was an additional discrepancy for Pennsylvania in 2015-2016.

Results

The first objective of this research was to establish national baseline data on FFA's membership options, including the total number of FFA members and chapters participating through affiliation and as dues-paying members. Table 1 shows the number of FFA chapters by membership type for the four years of available data. Overall, the number of FFA chapters participating as affiliated chapters has increased in 2016-2017, as compared to 2013-2014.

It should be noted that membership numbers by membership type and participation type decreased in 2014-2015 from the previous year. Prior to 2014, FFA chapters that chose to participate in the FFA affiliation program were generally locked into the model (Case, 2010b, 2010c); there was no communicated or formal option to change back to the traditional dues structure from affiliation (N. Crutchfield, personal communication, February 28, 2018). While the program was still designed to be ongoing, FFA changed its procedures in 2014 to formally allow schools to leave the program, with clarification that "if an affiliated chapter chooses to leave the program, that chapter can no longer participate in the affiliation program [again] unless the whole state adopts 100% affiliation membership" (National FFA Organization, 2016). This procedural change in the program aligns with a decrease in affiliation membership in 2014-2015.

Table 1

FFA Chapters by Membership Type During the 2013-14 to 2016-17 School Years

	2013-2014		2014-2015		2015-2016		2016-2017	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Affiliated	1,930	25.18	1,420	18.31	2,110	26.03	2,503	29.43
Dues	5,735	74.82	6,337	81.69	5,996	73.97	6,001	70.57
Total	7,665	100.00	7,757	100.00	8,106	100.00	8,504	100.00

Table 2 shows the number of FFA members by membership type for the four years of available data. On average, the majority of members (i.e., 56.67%) were dues-paying members.

The 2016-2017 year was the only school year in which more FFA members participated as affiliated members ($n = 337,300$, 51.25%) than as dues paying members ($n = 320,812$, 48.75%).

Table 2

FFA Members by Participation Type During the 2013-2014 to 2016-2017 School Years

	2013-2014		2014-2015		2015-2016		2016-2017	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Affiliated	242,668	39.77	225,796	35.88	300,637	45.46	337,300	51.25
Dues	367,552	60.23	403,571	64.12	360,682	54.54	320,812	48.75
Total	610,240	100.00	629,367	100.00	661,319	100.00	658,112	100.00

The second objective of this research was to examine chapter and membership trends in each of the FFA's four regions: Central, Eastern, Southern, and Western. Table 3 shows the number of affiliated and dues paying chapters within each FFA region. The majority of chapters within all four regions still use the dues paying membership option. However, there has been an overall decrease in dues membership across all of the regions and the Western region is approaching equal numbers of chapters participating through the affiliation option and the dues option.

Table 3

FFA Chapters by Region and Membership Type During the 2013-14 to 2016-17 School Years

	2013-2014		2014-2015		2015-2016 ^a		2016-2017	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Central^a								
Affiliated	688	33.61	283	13.68	746	35.02	789	35.46
Dues	1,359	66.39	1,786	86.32	1,384	64.98	1,436	64.54
Sub-Total	2,047	100.00	2,069	100.00	2,130	100.00	2,225	100.00
Eastern^a								
Affiliated	252	14.70	113	6.46	149	8.11	412	21.66
Dues	1,462	85.30	1,636	93.54	1,688	91.89	1,490	78.34
Sub-Total	1,714	100.00	1,749	100.00	1,837	100.00	1,902	100.00
Southern^a								
Affiliated	213	10.79	167	8.41	278	13.24	309	13.02
Dues	1,761	89.21	1,818	91.59	1,822	86.76	2,064	86.98
Sub-Total	1,974	100.00	1,985	100.00	2,100	100.00	2,373	100.00
Western								
Affiliated	777	40.26	857	43.86	937	45.95	993	49.55
Dues	1,153	59.74	1,097	56.14	1,102	54.05	1,011	50.45
Sub-Total	1,930	100.00	1,954	100.00	2,039	100.00	2,004	100.00

^aThere were discrepancies in the Affiliation number of chapters and members for this year.

Table 4 shows the number of affiliated and dues paying members within each FFA region. The majority of members within the Central, Eastern, and Southern regions are still participating as dues paying members, although the percentage of affiliated members is increasing. Within the Western region, the majority of members are members through affiliation.

Table 4

FFA Members by Region and Membership Type During the 2013-14 to 2016-17 School Years

	2013-2014		2014-2015		2015-2016		2016-2017	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Central ^a								
Affiliated	49,421	37.23	24,049	17.60	59,289	41.71	62,625	44.53
Dues	83,317	62.77	112,617	82.40	82,842	58.29	78,006	55.47
Sub-Total	132,738	100.00	136,666	100.00	142,131	100.00	140,631	100.00
Eastern ^a								
Affiliated	23,817	19.94	10,924	9.02	16,137	12.65	37,261	30.07
Dues	95,629	80.06	110,241	90.98	111,398	87.35	86,648	69.93
Sub-Total	119,446	100.00	121,165	100.00	127,535	100.00	123,909	100.00
Southern ^a								
Affiliated	30,480	21.79	26,821	18.76	42,139	28.44	44,579	31.48
Dues	109,413	78.21	116,148	81.24	106,040	71.56	97,010	68.52
Sub-Total	139,893	100.00	142,969	100.00	148,179	100.00	141,589	100.00
Western								
Affiliated	138,970	63.70	164,002	71.75	183,072	75.19	192,835	76.53
Dues	79,193	36.30	64,565	28.25	60,402	24.81	59,148	23.47
Sub-Total	218,163	100.00	228,567	100.00	243,474	100.00	251,983	100.00

^aThere were discrepancies in the affiliation number of chapters and members for this year.

Table 5 shows the number of FFA chapters by membership type who were nationally recognized or awarded with at least one participant for the two most recent years of the four years of available data. Data reported were not a count of total number of participants in a given category, it is a count of chapters. A chapter with more than one American degree recipient was only reported once.

Affiliated chapters represent 25-30% of FFA chapters (e.g., in 2016-2017, affiliated *N* = 2,503, dues *N* = 6,001). The number of dues-based chapters who participated in each award program was greater than the number of affiliated chapters. However, the proportion of possible affiliated to be recognized is consistently greater than the proportion of possible dues-based chapters across all four years of data. In 2016-2017, 5.87% (*n* = 352) of the 6,001 dues-based chapters were recognized in the National FFA Organization’s National Chapter Award program, while 10.03% (*n* = 251) of the 2,503 affiliated chapters were awarded. On average, affiliated chapters were recognized about twice as often as dues-based chapters when examining possible chapters.

Table 5

Nationally Recognized FFA Chapters for the Academic Years 2013/14 to 2016/17

	2013-2014				2014-2015			
	Dues		Affiliated		Dues		Affiliated	
	<i>N</i> = 5735		<i>N</i> = 1930		<i>N</i> = 6337		<i>N</i> = 1420	
	<i>N</i>	% of <i>N</i>						
National Chapter	345	6.02%	252	13.06%	344	5.43%	275	19.37%
American Degree	1032	17.99%	673	34.87%	958	15.12%	672	47.32%

Table 5

Nationally Recognized FFA Chapters for the Academic Years 2013/14 to 2016/17

Proficiency Finalist	85	1.48%	68	3.52%	83	1.31%	74	5.21%
SAE Grant	242	4.22%	182	9.43%	196	3.09%	152	10.70%
Service Grant	105	1.83%	74	3.83%	110	1.74%	86	6.06%
National Chapter	348	5.80%	273	12.94%	352	5.87%	251	10.03%
American Degree	1019	16.99%	690	32.70%	1076	17.93%	749	29.92%
Proficiency Finalist	88	1.47%	66	3.13%	76	1.27%	71	2.84%
SAE Grant	355	5.92%	255	12.09%	396	6.60%	266	10.63%
Service Grant	163	2.72%	92	4.36%	104	1.73%	60	2.40%

Conclusions, Recommendations, and Implications

Between 1928 and the 1970s, with the exception of a period of time in the 1940s due to World War II, membership in the National FFA Organization has consistently increased, reaching a national membership high, at the time, of 509,735 student members in 1977 (National FFA Organization, 2015a; Wolf & Connors, 2009). In the 1980s, when American agriculture was experiencing the Farm Crisis, FFA membership dramatically decreased, falling 24% to 387,143 members in 1990 (Rossetti & McCaslin, 1992; Rossetti et al., 1994). It was not until 2010 that FFA recovered to its membership numbers of the late 1970s (i.e., 31% growth; National FFA Organization, 2010). FFA affiliation became a national membership option in 2010; between 2010 and 2018, membership in FFA grew by 28%, achieving 653,359 students in 8,568 chapters (National FFA Organization, 2018).

As of the 2016-2017 school year, dues-paying membership is still the most prevalent membership option for FFA chapters. Although the percentage has decreased since 2013, over two-thirds (i.e., 70.57%) of FFA chapters still use the dues-paying membership option. When examining FFA membership for individual students rather than the membership structure of FFA chapters themselves, over half (i.e., 51.54%) of FFA members in 2017 were members under the affiliation membership option. In essence, while the majority of chapters continue to utilize a dues structure, affiliation is the most common membership type for students.

When analyzed by FFA region, the Western region is now almost equally split based on membership option. However, chapters within the other three regions are still more predominately using the dues-paying option, specifically in the Southern region. Similar trends can be found when exploring membership options for members within the regions. The majority of Western region members are affiliated, while the majority of members from the other regions are dues members, especially in the Eastern and Southern regions.

The final objective of this study was to examine the relationship between recognition and affiliation, which was exploratory in nature. Based on the findings of this study, dues-based programs were recognized more frequently overall, but typically comprised 70-75% of chapters, while affiliation represented 25-30% of programs (e.g., in 2016-2017, affiliated $N = 2,503$, dues $N = 6,001$). When analyzed by chapter type (i.e. dues-paying and affiliated), a higher percentage of affiliated chapters, of the total possible affiliated chapters, were recognized nationally than dues-based chapters, of the total possible dues-based chapters, across all five award areas, averaged over four years. Affiliated chapters were more likely to be recognized within their group, relative to total possible affiliated chapters, than dues-based chapters were relative to total possible dues chapters.

A relationship may exist between national success and FFA affiliation. The purpose of this study was not to determine correlation or directionality, only to explore possible advantages. For example, as cause and effect were not examined, affiliated chapters may have been more successful at national level award programs or successful chapters may have been more likely to adopt the affiliation membership option.

Based on the findings of this study, a stronger relationship may exist between national recognition and FFA affiliated chapters than between national recognition and FFA dues. There may be potential relative advantages in national award programs for affiliated chapters compared to dues-based programs, which would have an impact on diffusion and adoption of the innovation. The percent of affiliated chapters that are recognized, of the total possible affiliated chapters, is on average twice that of dues chapters, of the total possible dues-based chapters, in all five award programs areas. Possible relative advantages are coupled with the fact that affiliated programs now represent 30% of all chapters, which is greater than the 10-20% that Rogers (2010) proposed is necessary to achieve a critical mass of innovation. The innovation of affiliation reaching critical mass could suggest adoption may soon “take off” as teachers perceive adoption to be inevitable. As information about the innovation of FFA affiliation was not well known, the program was not conducive to trialability, and its desirability and perceived advantages compared to the alternative practice of dues were not publicly researched and reported, the rate of adoption was likely to have been previously slowed.

As the intent of SBAE programs is to include all three components (i.e., classroom and laboratory instruction, SAE, and FFA) and affiliation provides FFA membership to all students enrolled in SBAE courses, coupled with conclusions now known from recent FFA membership trends, the question must be asked, if and when should affiliation be the standard, or perhaps even only, membership option?

Therefore, it is recommended that additional research be conducted on the adoption of the FFA affiliation program including characteristics of the program as an innovation and barriers and strategies related to its adoption. If affiliation has achieved critical mass at 30% of FFA chapters adopting affiliation, and adoption may soon “take off”, then the membership growth between 2010-2018 may soon be experienced at a much larger scale. National FFA membership trends should be further examined to more accurately predict the future growth of the organization. FFA membership data and trends, specifically data from the LPS reports, should be explored to study the impact of the socially constructed concepts of race, gender, and class upon FFA membership, trends within agriculture program course pathways and program completers, teacher retention and recruitment, and other relevant relationships in the data. This study only examined what possible relative advantages of FFA affiliation may exist; it is recommended future studies explore the correlation between success and affiliation. Additional research should qualitatively examine the perceived advantages and opinions of teachers, teacher-educators, and state staff on the complexity and compatibility of the program. The National FFA Organization and FFA state associations should conduct strategic planning to explore and prepare for potential long-term opportunities and challenges of complete adoption, specifically the potential for continued drastic increases in student membership and participation in programming and activities. Additionally, differences between the culture of membership and its impact on success between FFA’s Western region and the Eastern and Southern regions should be explored.

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