

SIXTEEN THEOREMS OF SUCCESSFUL RECRUITMENT ACTIVITIES  
FOR DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

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Many agricultural education departments are presently having difficulty graduating a sufficient number of individuals to fill the number of teaching vacancies in their states. Complaints about the shortage of teachers come from many quarters. Public school administrators wonder what is wrong. State supervisors find it difficult to maintain quality programs. When emergency measures are taken to fill teaching positions, professionally prepared classroom teachers often wonder about the ability of these selected.

For many agricultural teacher education departments, other concerns may surface. University administrators expect a certain minimum number of students in the program. If that minimum level is not achieved or maintained, problems can develop over the maintenance of the department and the current faculty number.

This article will describe a recruitment program which has been launched in the Agricultural Education Program Area at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. The recruitment effort emphasizes undergraduate students, but many of these same points could be used for graduate student recruitment.

The points are presented in the form of 16 theorems. A theorem is defined as "An idea that is demonstrably true or is assumed to be so." (American Heritage Dictionary). Empirical evidence has indicated that the following theorems can be effectively used for recruiting undergraduate students into a department of agricultural education.

### *Theorem 1 - Emphasize the People Aspect of Agricultural Education*

One of the strong points of agricultural education programs has been its preparation of people to work with people. Graduates of agricultural education are not just prepared to teach-- they are prepared to work with and motivate people. Graduates with this kind of background have greatly expanded career opportunities and can work with people in education, the extension service, agricultural businesses, and others. For some reason we have not effectively communicated that point to our prospective students. The "people" aspect of the recruitment effort should be its central focus.

### *Theorem 2 - Establish a Target Recruitment Age*

Establishing a target recruitment age permits recruiters to concentrate on a particular group of prospective students. Many departments make the error of emphasizing recruitment activities only for high school seniors, many of whom have already selected their major and university. Many have also enrolled in all of the high school mathematics, English and science classes they are going to take. If these academic courses do not meet college entrance requirements, there is a great deal that must be done to get the seniors enrolled.

A recent study (Hillison and Hagee, 1980) indicated that most agricultural education majors generally select their field of study by the age of 17 or 18. Logic indicates that the target recruitment age is just before the decision-making time, therefore the high school sophomore or junior should be the target recruitment audience.

### *Theorem 3 - Continuous Contact Should Be Maintained with Prospective Students*

Once a prospective student has been identified, contact should be maintained until the student has enrolled. This contact can be maintained through personal visits to high schools, vocational agriculture teachers' meetings, student visits to campus, telephone calls and written correspondence by various agricultural education representatives.

In order to maintain an organized and effective recruitment plan on each prospective student, records of all recruiting efforts must be established and kept up-to-date. Index cards, for example, which contain the student's name and personal information as well as a place for notations each time the prospective major is contacted can be used effectively.

#### *Theorem 4 - Have One Person in Charge of Recruitment Coordination*

In order to have strong effective leadership, one person should be designated as having the responsibility of being recruitment coordinator. This person should be a full time faculty member assisted by a graduate student. The recruitment coordinator should be respected by peers and should be enthusiastic about the recruitment process.

#### *Theorem 5 - All Departmental Staff Members are Recruiters*

It takes a great deal of team work to have a successful agricultural education department and the area of recruitment is no exception. Recruitment activities are not intended for graduate students and junior faculty members only. By involving all faculty members, efficiency can be enhanced by combining recruitment activities with student teacher supervision, first year teacher follow-up and other activities that involve travel to high schools and community colleges throughout the state.

#### *Theorem 6 - Public School Vocational Agriculture Teachers are Recruiters*

Teachers recruit every day of the school year through the quality of programs they conduct. In addition, an organized teaching unit which explains all phases of agricultural education should be taught by every teacher. Vocational agriculture teachers should include resource persons (parents, guidance counselors, former students, community colleges and universities which have programs in agricultural education) in their recruitment efforts.

Teachers should remember that they are role models and that their programs can guide more students into agricultural education than any other recruitment effort. Teachers who are effective recruiters should be regarded with recognition such as the "teacher of teachers" award.

#### *Theorem 7 - Alumni are Recruiters*

The university alumni represent the largest potential recruitment force with which agricultural educators have to work. They are located in every county and almost every city and are indirectly recruiting every time they talk about their alma mater. Great things can happen if they are organized effectively. A recruitment plan of action can be devised with each county or

geographical area being designated as a unit. Each unit should have a team leader who organizes representatives to be on the lookout for prospective agricultural education majors. Agriculture and agricultural education alumni are probably the best source for these team leaders. These team leaders can then alert the recruitment coordinator of potential students long before they enroll at the university.

### *Theorem 8 - State FFA Officers are Recruiters*

State FFA officers greatly influence high school FFA members and are potentially excellent recruiters. Because of their high school experience and their visits to local FFA chapters each year, it logically follows that these officers can positively influence FFA members in the state.

Properly prepared officers can easily incorporate points about agricultural education and its opportunities into each chapter visit. The responsibility for preparing FFA officers to recruit should be accepted by the university agricultural education coordinator. If properly prepared, the state officer team can be a dependable part of the overall recruitment program.

### *Theorem 9 - Undergraduates are Recruiters*

Undergraduates can be especially effective recruiters at state and national conventions, career shows, and other meetings in the state. These same students usually have the opportunity to make recruitment visits to their home high schools during university vacations. Such visits, when combined with organized presentations, promote agricultural education and provide practical experience for future teachers of vocational agriculture. Undergraduates, because of the closeness of age, can relate well to high school students about recent personal experiences and answer questions about college life. While they are promoting agricultural education, the undergraduates reinforce their own belief in their chosen profession.

### *Theorem 10 - A Scholarship Program Should be Established for Agricultural Education Students*

There can be a great deal of favorable publicity garnered from a scholarship program established exclusively for students majoring in agricultural education. The availability of departmental scholarships should be emphasized during recruitment visits and in all appropriate mass media sources.

If the department does not currently have a scholarship program for its students, one should be initiated. Financial supporters of such a program are also recruiters for the program because of their likelihood of bringing it to the attention of future students.

### *Theorem 11 - Use Mass Media to Reach the General Public*

Mass media such as television, radio, brochures, and newspapers has a great potential for informing people about agricultural education. When using media sources one must plan to make the best advantage of the source to reach the public desired. Across the nation, departments are enrolling more non-traditional agricultural education students, including females and individuals with non-farm backgrounds. To best use mass media, more is going to be needed than the 6:00 a.m. farm radio show!

### *Theorem 12 - Use Recruitment Booths to Reach Target Audiences*

A recruitment booth is effective at many functions including the National FFA Agricultural Career Show, the state FFA convention, the state fair, school career shows and campus activities. It must be prepared for an intended target audience, and operated by an agricultural education representative.

To enhance the effectiveness of the booth, attention-getters should be used to attract an audience. One which has proved to be successful is the awarding of door prizes, which can be inexpensive and a real crowd pleaser. In addition, registration for door prizes is an effective way to obtain names of prospective students and can be used for follow-up purposes.

### *Theorem 13 - Have Prospective Students Visit Campus as Often as Possible*

The more prospective students visit a university campus, the more familiar that campus will become to them. Numerous opportunities exist for having prospective students on campus. Among these opportunities are field trips, state FFA contests, state FFA conventions, football and basketball weekends and sponsored activities of undergraduate student organizations. While visiting campus, students should have the opportunity to participate in a university class and to meet faculty members, students in the program, departmental classrooms and facilities. Effective recruitment efforts bring prospective majors to campus as often as possible.

### *Theorem 14 - Recruit Through Student Organizations*

Student organizations such as Collegiate FFA, agricultural education clubs and professional societies such as Alpha Tau Alpha can be used effectively in recruitment efforts. They can, for example, sponsor invitational contests and visitation week-ends for high school FFA chapters and members. Another way is to recruit students already at the university to become internal transfers by permitting them to participate in agricultural education student organization activities. Initially, such activities may be purely social in nature, but becoming acquainted with other undergraduate majors and the organization's sponsors may well prove to be an effective recruitment device.

It is also possible for both agricultural education students and faculty members to volunteer to present programs at other student organization meetings on topics related to career opportunities in agricultural education.

### *Theorem 15 - Recruit Through Community Colleges*

The community college system contains a wealth of potential agricultural education students. Typically, time spent at a community college allows students to mature and settle down while working for an AA degree. As with high school students, community college students need to be recruited early in their program. Students should be informed of career opportunities and transfer requirements in agricultural education so they can effectively plan for their future.

### *Theorem 16 - Keep Present Students Happy*

It does little good to recruit students into the program only to have them become displeased and change their major. Taking care of the needs of current students will not only keep them happy, but will also create a cadre of recruiters many times as large as the departmental faculty. Students who are pleased with the departmental program will be evangelists. Many times such students will bring prospective students to faculty members for further explanation of the department's program. Not only can happy undergraduate students assist with recruitment but they are more likely to return as graduate students in the future.

(Continued on page 63)