

This issue of *The Journal* presents another in the series of "debate the issues" articles authored by leaders in agricultural teacher education. The focus is on the kind of student organization for preservice teachers: Should it be Collegiate FFA or some other organization? The authors are Paul R. Vaughn, New Mexico State University, and Richard I. Carter, Iowa State University. The editor welcomes reactions from readers about this special feature. Suggestions for future debates will be welcomed.

THE ORGANIZATION FOR PRESERVICE STUDENTS IN
AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION SHOULD BE
THE COLLEGIATE FFA

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When first thinking about this article, I was somewhat hesitant to take the "pro" stand on this issue for I wasn't firmly convinced that the collegiate student organization for agricultural education majors *should* be the Collegiate FFA. However, after careful review of the factors involved, I find I can support no other position.

The position I am taking is a very strong one, so perhaps it would be in order to qualify some of my remarks before I continue. I believe that the Collegiate FFA should be the organization for Agricultural Education majors, but only if the following requirements are met:

1. *The organization must develop and conduct all its activities in accordance with the primary aim of the Collegiate FFA as established in the National FFA Constitution. The major aim of the Collegiate FFA is to assist prospective teachers of vocational agriculture to become good local FFA advisors. This should be the over-riding thrust of the organization and serve as the standard in selecting appropriate activities to be conducted.*

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2. *The activities of the organization must be collegiate in nature.* I have often heard people complain that the FFA is a high school organization and, therefore, is not appropriate for college students. That complaint is only legitimate if the activities of the organization are geared toward high school students. They do not have to be. Although the National FFA Constitution states that the activities of the Collegiate FFA must be in harmony with the ideals and principles of the FFA, it allows tremendous latitude in designing activities appropriate *only* for college students.

Having established these ground rules, let me state why I feel the Collegiate FFA is the best organization for agricultural education majors. Although there are many reasons, I have condensed them into four.

1. *Prior to teaching, the Collegiate FFA may be the only opportunity students have to become familiar with the FFA and its activities.* If recent articles in *The Agricultural Education Magazine* and *The Journal of the American Association of Teacher Educators in Agriculture* are indicative of trends across the nation (and I think they are), then it is apparent that an increasing number of students are enrolling in agricultural teacher education programs in colleges without previous experience in vocational agriculture or the FFA. Thus, a large number of students who have had no previous experience with the FFA are becoming FFA advisors. Unless the students receive course work on the FFA during their preservice program, which doesn't occur in many cases (Stewart, 1972), then the only method a student has to learn about the FFA is through participation in Collegiate FFA.

The Collegiate FFA offers a prospective teacher an insight into the FFA which is not available in another organization. Through their payment of dues, students receive the state and national FFA magazines which update them on the happenings of the FFA. Their names are included on the mailing list for materials which are sent out to individual FFA members and chapters across the country.

Collegiate FFA members are also exposed to the multitude of materials which have recently been developed for FFA advisors and FFA chapters. The vast amount of this new material is overwhelming to the beginning vocational agriculture teachers. By participating in the Collegiate FFA, the prospective teacher is familiarized with much of this literature before beginning to teach. Ceremonies, programs of activities, chapter banquets, and other activities are not foreign to the new teacher if he or she has participated in them as a Collegiate FFA member.

I can think of no better way to learn about an organization than by joining the organization. The argument is often used that it is difficult to understand the value of a professional organization until you belong to that organization. I think the same applies here. By participating in the FFA, prospective teachers can more readily relate the value of belonging to their students. Another important point--teachers who have not been former FFA members are often critical of the FFA. If they were able to participate in Collegiate FFA, that attitude might be changed. Or more importantly, they might be able to identify ways of making needed changes in the FFA organization. This would be difficult to do unless they had actually participated in the organization.

2. *The Collegiate FFA offers the former FFA member a different perspective of the FFA.* At some point in their college careers, prospective vocational agriculture teachers should have the opportunity to look at the FFA from a view that is different from what they might have seen in high school. One only has to begin teaching to realize that there is a tremendous difference between being a teacher and being a student. So it is with being an FFA member and an FFA advisor. A recent study in one state (Vaughn, 1976) indicated that there was no relationship between being a former FFA member and a successful FFA advisor. This would suggest that the experiences gained in a high school FFA program might be different from the experiences that are necessary to become a success as an FFA advisor. The same study showed that participation in a collegiate agricultural education student organization was positively related to the success of the FFA advisor. The Collegiate FFA offers students the opportunity to view FFA activities from the perspective of advisors at the same time they are actively participating as members.

3. *The Collegiate FFA serves as a means of recruiting students from other fields of study.* The Collegiate FFA is unique from most other agricultural education organizations in that it allows membership from other disciplines. I think this is extremely important, not only because it offers agricultural education students a widespread perspective to discuss issues, but also because it allows students outside the department the opportunity to see some of the opportunities that are offered by teaching agriculture.

I am constantly surprised at the misinformation that many college students get from their parents, former teachers, and guidance counselors. I have had several students enrolled in other agricultural curricula tell me (of all things) that they might have considered enrolling in agricultural education, but they weren't sure that they could get jobs! This erroneous concept can be corrected only through exposure to these students, and the Collegiate FFA offers the most ideal opportunity for this exposure.

Many of us with several years of experience in teaching vocational agriculture can vouch for the fact that a good FFA program helps to recruit good students. Collegiate FFA chapters can do the same by providing the opportunity for prospective agricultural education majors to join an organization where they are able to see what the agricultural education program has to offer. Although we are small enough at our university to know many of the students in agriculture outside our department, the only contact we may have with these students is through the Collegiate FFA organization. Needless to say, these students would be excluded from most agricultural education organizations. This, in effect, may mean excluding them from further contact with people in agricultural education.

4. *The Collegiate FFA provides for a close association between state FFA associations and college students.* The National FFA Constitution places the responsibility for chartering and maintaining each Collegiate FFA chapter under the authority of the respective state association. This responsibility establishes a relationship which cannot be found with other types of organizations. The state FFA association feels more obligated, as do the college students, to work closely together. Meetings with state FFA officers, executive secretaries, and state advisors all add to the experiences that a college student may gain through participation in the Collegiate FFA.

These experiences are further enriched by the sense of unity and belonging which is shared by members of a common organization. Yet, the difference in being a Collegiate FFA member and an active FFA member are heightened by the different activities in which they participate. The active FFA member is concerned with one aspect of a state FFA function while the Collegiate FFA member is concerned with another. Their working together makes both groups more familiar with the principles of the FFA organization and serves to accomplish one of the many objectives of Collegiate FFA membership.

References Cited

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