Agricultural Education Research Summary Report

Public Perceptions of the Future of Agricultural Education in Illinois

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Introduction

The purpose of the research summary report is to provide an overview of a research project to investigate the public perceptions of the future of Agricultural Education programs in Illinois. This research project was designed to determine the future issues and concerns, research priorities, proposed impacts, ongoing limitations, major accomplishments and future competency area for Agricultural Education programs in Illinois.

This research project was supported by a grant developed by the Facilitating Coordination in Agricultural Education project staff. This project was funded by the Illinois State Board of Education and supported by the Agricultural Experiment Station of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The expected outcome of this research project injunction with other projects being researched is to establish a cooperative university agricultural education research plan for Illinois over the next five years.

Objectives

The overall goal of this research project was to ascertain public perceptions of the future of Agricultural Education programs in Illinois. The research objectives of this research project were to determine:

1. What are public perceptions of future issues and concerns facing Agricultural Education in Illinois?

2. What should be the future research priorities for Agricultural Education in Illinois?

3. What impacts should Agricultural Education Programs have on students the agricultural industry, and communities in Illinois?

4. What are the ongoing limitations that have kept Illinois Agricultural Education programs from meeting the needs of students, the agricultural industry, and communities?

5. What does the public perceive as being the major significant accomplishments achieved through Illinois Agricultural Education programs the past ten years?

6. What future competency areas should be researched in order for Illinois Agricultural Education programs to provide for instruction in the food, fiber, environmental and natural resource system?

Methods

The primary method of data collection for this investigation was the use of focus groups. Three focus groups were conducted in Illinois during the spring of the year 2000. They were located in Marissa, Monticello, and Springfield. The respective sizes of the focus groups were 15, 27, and 13, for a total of 55 participants.

Participants were asked to participate. Strategies were used to invite people who would represent current students and alumni of agricultural education programs, parents, teachers, including local agricultural education teachers, agricultural producers, agribusiness, school administration, college faculty and agricultural education leadership.

The questions used for the focus group sessions were developed by a committee of ten research advisors selected for this project. The committee members were selected based upon their experiences in Illinois agricultural education. Each of the six questions developed were presented to the focus groups by the research project leader. Notes were taken of each contribution on large flipchart sheets for the focus groups to see and respond to.

The collective notes from each of the three focus groups were compiled into a composite listing. The findings of this study are the result of the composite listings.

Findings

The first research question was to determine the public perceptions of future issues and concerns facing Agricultural Education in Illinois. Listed below in table 1 are the composite findings of the focus groups when asked to describe the future issues or concerns facing Agricultural Education in Illinois. Those issues or concerns listed as multiple responses are indicated by the number of related responses.

Table 1. **Public perceptions of future issues and concerns facing Agricultural Education in Illinois.**

Identified Issues and Concerns	Number of Responses
Transfer of Technology, including high costs training, and marketing (need a focus)	4
Qualified/Quality & Enthused Teachers	3
Funding for Agricultural Education	2
Resources for Agricultural Education	2
Recruitment/Retention	2
Statewide politics related in agriculture	2
International competitiveness	1
Completing Programs	1
Understanding Partners, including image and communication.	1
Improvements for Agricultural Education programs.	1
Information Management	1
Agricultural Education from Elementary to Adult	1
Student Activities and Assignments	1
Accountability	1
Professional Training and re-training farmers	1
GMO (foreign markets)	1
Consumer education	1
Changing state demographics	1
Understanding consumer concerns and meeting their needs.	1
Food safety	1
Environmental concerns.	1
Less of an agricultural base for young people.	1
Lack of focus towards urban areas	1
Keep up with new priorities.	1
Local communities without agriculture programs.	1
Changing enrollments.	1
College entrance requirements.	1

The second research question asked “What should be the future research priorities for Agricultural Education in Illinois?” The composite listings of the public responses are listed in table 2.

Table 2. **Public perceptions of the future research priorities for Agricultural Education in Illinois.**

Identified future research priorities	Number of Responses
General Perception of "Agriculture"	2
What interests students?	2
What it takes to be successful in agriculture careers.	2
Current data on careers.	2
Effective Methods of Technology Transfer	2
Utilization of Technology	2
Effective Ways of Reaching Age Groups	1
Effective Ways of Reaching Various Populations	1
Validity of Ag. Science Courses – Student Performance	1
Determining how other curriculums can use agriculture.	1
How to get agricultural education into "non-ag" schools?	1
How do summer ag-institutes meet learning standards?	1
With increased education will farmer income increase?	1
How can teachers reach students?	1
The diversity of students.	1
How can we teach consumers?	1
How to incorporate agriculture into the curriculum.	1
Agriculture literacy.	1
New BSAA/PSAA curriculum effects.	1

The third research question was to ascertain public perceptions of impacts should Agricultural Education Programs have on students, the agricultural industry, and communities in Illinois in Illinois. Listed below in table 3 are the composite findings of the focus groups when asked to describe the impacts agricultural education should have in Illinois. Those perceived impacts that were listed as multiple responses are indicated by the number of related responses.

Table 3. **Public perceptions of what impacts should Agricultural Education Program have on students, the agricultural industry, and communities in Illinois.**

Identified Issues and Concerns	Number of Responses
Critical thinking	3
Relative to technology	2
Career ideas/insight.	2
Need for mentors	2
Providing opportunities for local leadership.	2
Leadership skills, employment skills.	2
Attention of Students/Communities	2
Decision Making	2
Career Choice and Preparation	2
Lifelong Learning	1
Economic Impact of Students to Communities	1
Quality of Life	1
Setting goals/making progress	1
Build support for agriculture	1
Enthusiasm	1
Better quality	1
Experience	1
Cooperation with business partners	1
Knowledgeable consumers	1
Instill a work ethic	1
Appreciate agriculture education/importance of agriculture	1
Rural community on youth	1
Safety of Agriculture technologies (chemicals)	1
Students interests	1
Understanding of the world food supply	1

The fourth research question was to determine the public perceptions of the ongoing limitations that have kept Illinois Agricultural Education programs from meeting the needs of students, the agricultural industry, and communities. Listed below in table 4 are the composite findings of the focus groups when asked to describe the ongoing limitations of Agricultural Education in Illinois. Those perceived limitations listed as multiple responses are indicated by the number of related responses.

Table 4. **Public perceptions the ongoing limitations that have kept Illinois Agricultural Education programs from meeting the needs of students, the agricultural industry, and communities.**

Identified limitations	Number of Responses
Misconceptions about agricultural education.	3
Funding	3
Image and Appearance of Local Agricultural Department	2
Facilities	2
Lack of knowledge	2
Support within agricultural field (production farming)	2
Lack of impact data to support agriculture education.	2
Misguided student counseling.	1
Getting Into Schools (both rural & urban)	1
Making the teachers see “why” – have means and reason.	1
Shrinking Agriculture Population.	1
Time	1
Negativity	1
Lack of leadership/understanding problems/not acting	1
Qualified teachers/lack of experience	1
Chances for professional development	1
Lack of diversity.	1
Teaches lack of “real world” experiences.	1
Administration	1
Scheduling	1
Politics in agriculture	1
Limited hands on instruction.	1
Limited by the broad area in agriculture.	1
Traditional thinking	1

The fifth research question was to determine the public perceptions of major significant accomplishments achieved through Illinois Agricultural Education programs the past ten years. Listed below in table 5 are the composite findings of the focus groups when asked to describe the significant accomplishments of Agricultural Education in Illinois. Those accomplishments that were listed as multiple responses are indicated by the number of related responses.

Table 5. **Public perceptions of the major significant accomplishments achieved through Illinois Agricultural Education programs the past ten years.**

Identified Accomplishments	Number of Responses
Academic Credit for Agricultural Courses	2
Increased Enrollment.	2
Improved Curriculum/Materials.	2
Improved funding.	2
Integration of Technology	1
Increased Broadened Staff.	1
Additional Resources	1
Improved Attitude	1
Better/Broadening Partnerships	1
National Recognition	1
Changed Image of Agricultural Education.	1
New programs/Methods.	1
Focus Improvements of Agricultural Education/FFA/SAE.	1
Science Fair Projects.	1
Network	1
Expanding scope of agriculture	1
New curriculum	1
In-service accomplishments	1
Leadership positions	1
Mentors	1
Community based involvement	1
Gender	1
Marketing materials	1
Quality youth development	1
Increasing media awareness	1
Changing with “the times”	1

The sixth research question was to determine the public perceptions of future competency areas should be researched in order for Illinois Agricultural Education programs to provide for instruction in the food, fiber, environmental and natural resource system. Listed below in table 6 are the composite findings of the focus groups when asked to describe the future competency areas for Agricultural Education in Illinois. Those competency areas listed as multiple responses are indicated by the number of related responses.

Table 6. **Public perceptions of future competency areas should be researched in order for Illinois Agricultural Education programs to provide for instruction in the food, fiber, environmental and natural resource system.**

Identified future competency areas	Number of Responses
New technologies (e-commerce, GPS, internet)	2
Communication/Skills Education	2
Critical thinking and problem solving.	2
Career Awareness in Secondary & Younger Areas	2
Training in Computers as well as Agriculture.	1
Science based.	1
Business base.	1
Communications.	1
Politics.	1
Teaching Diversity in agriculture.	1
Dealing with change.	1
Changing jobs and careers.	1
Society concerns for environmental issues.	1
Urbanization.	1
Environmental Science Education.	1
Ag. Activity Kits for Elementary	1
Compete on a world market.	1

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based upon the findings of the research project the following research priorities for Agricultural education in Illinois were derived. These priorities were developed by a subcommittee of the research planning committee that designed the original nature and scope of this research project.

FY01 Research Project Priorities

1. Determine the effects of BSAA & PSAA on student achievement in other lab courses, success in college, etc. and major universities accepting these classes for lab science entrance credit university wide.

2. Assess the impact of curriculum changes including the expansion of secondary Agricultural Education programs inclusion of horticultural and non-traditional subjects to the curriculum and their impact on the changing of the agricultural industry.

3. Determine the impacts of teacher in-service activities, including teacher retention, teaching quality, and Agricultural Education program quality in Illinois.

4. Determine the impact of the Secondary Incentive Funding grants from the Illinois Agricultural Education line item over the past twelve years on the quality of the local Agricultural Education programs in Illinois.

5. Determine the impact of Agricultural Literacy efforts on the secondary agricultural education enrollment in Illinois over the past twelve years.

6. Assess the impacts of Agricultural Literacy programs in Illinois at the elementary/junior high levels on the perception children have toward the agricultural industry.

7. Determine the impacts of the Illinois Agricultural Education infrastructure including, ILCAE, ICAE, ISBE, & FCAE on educational initiatives in Illinois.