

Change in Self-Perceived Student Knowledge as a Result of Participation in The National FFA Organization's New Century Farmer Program

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Introduction

The National FFA Organization's New Century Farmer Program (NCF) is designed to develop young agricultural enthusiasts who are committed to pursuing a career in production agriculture (The National FFA Organization, 2006). This program provides educational opportunities through a series of workshops and sessions that allow participants to learn from industry experts, as well as one another. Popular program topics typically include farm financing, risk management, demographic trends, and the global market place. Student participants also focus on the risks and rewards associated with production agriculture along with leadership and team building exercises.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of the 2006 NCF Program upon student satisfaction and change in knowledge. As a means of accomplishing this purpose the following research objectives were created to: 1) describe demographic characteristics of program participants, 2) identify satisfaction levels of program participants, and 3) determine change in self-perceived knowledge levels of participants.

Methodology

The population for this evaluation was the 40 student participants selected into the 2006 program. The method of data collection was a post-then-pre instrument, which also recorded demographic information and student satisfaction levels. The measurement of self perceived knowledge constituted the post-then-pre evaluation portion of the research instrument (Stevens & Lodl, 1999). Students were asked to report their perceived knowledge level "before" NCF and "after" NCF on 68 items that covered the 15 learning sessions. A Likert-type scale was utilized with one representing a "low" knowledge level and six representing a "high" knowledge level. This researcher designed instrument was distributed on the fifth and final day of the 2006 NCF. Face and content validity for this instrument were established by facilitators for the 2006 event and reliability coefficients ranged from 0.92 to 0.97.

Findings

Twenty two states were represented by the nine female and 31 male NCF participants in 2006. The average age of participants was 21.14 with 32 of these students being enrolled in college and eight having already graduated. All 40 respondents indicated being involved in a

production operation with family and also indicated plans to return to the family farm permanently after college. Thirty-six program participants reported taking agriculture related classes in high school with 37 of the participants being involved in FFA, and 33 holding an FFA office at some level.

Student satisfaction was identified in research objective two. Reaction of the participants indicated considerably high satisfaction with their experience in NCF with a mean of 5.43 (SD=.25) on the six point Likert-type scale. The highest satisfaction level was indicated from the outcome of student comfort in encouraging others to attend NCF (M=5.86).

In regard to research objective three, overall mean differences and standard deviations for change in knowledge level “before” and “after” the NCF Program were calculated for the fifteen separate sessions. The three highest and lowest mean differences of the fifteen sessions are given in Table 1.

Table 1
Change in Knowledge Levels Before and After NCF

Rank	Session Title & Number	Mean Difference	SD
1	My Ag in a Bag (3)	1.97	0.12
2	Global Agriculture (14)	1.43	0.09
3	Vision Writing & Presentation (13)	1.40	0.23
13	Marketing & Risk Management (9)	1.13	0.14
14	Panel of Farmers and NCF Alumni (6)	1.11	0.25
15	Adventure Learning Center (1)	0.71	0.24

Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of this study indicate that NCF is effective and does make an impact upon the knowledge level of student participants. Participants indicated an increase in their knowledge level for all 15 learning sessions. Cooperative learning opportunities provided in My Ag in a Bag were perceived as most beneficial to participants. Results from this session and Global Agriculture show that NCF participants appreciated opportunities to share experiences and network with fellow participants. Also, results from the Adventure Learning Center session may indicate students were not as interested in the NCF Program including team building exercises.

Future recommendations for NCF are to look at ways to enhance the volume of time spent on My Ag in Bag and to explore possible asynchronous methods for students to network with one another after the program’s conclusion. Also, possibilities of increasing the number of participants selected to the program should be looked at, along with ways of adding diversity to the group such as more minority students, more students from urban areas, and students not already part of a family farming operation.

References

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