



THE GOLDEN SLATE

The official newsletter of the California
Agricultural Teachers' Association

The Cost and Benefits of Colleges Providing Field Days to FFA Chapters

By Kevin Woodard, Instructor, Reedley College

Colleges with agriculture programs have a long-standing tradition of hosting FFA field days. These events provide valuable learning experiences for high school students while offering numerous benefits to both the colleges and participating FFA chapters. However, organizing such events also comes with financial and logistical challenges. This article examines the costs and benefits associated with colleges providing FFA field days.

A Personal Perspective

In 2015, after completing my seventeenth year as a high school agriculture teacher, I made the decision to take a position at the community college level. The excitement of a fresh start, coupled with the challenges of learning a new system, gave me the opportunity to view agricultural education with a fresh perspective. I began to realize how fortunate we are to work within a collaborative system focused on fostering student growth and development at all grade levels. After years of training teams to compete at various FFA field days to prepare my students for their state finals competition, I was now tasked with training my college students to plan and execute our own FFA field days and events. Through this experience, I've gained some valuable insights.

FFA Field Days: An Investment in the Future of Agriculture

FFA field days offer significant benefits for students, colleges, and the broader agriculture community. These events not only provide students with hands-on learning experiences but also foster connections between educational institutions and industry professionals. By participating in FFA field days, students gain essential skills and insights that prepare them for successful careers in agriculture and beyond.

- **Enhancing Career and Leadership Development:** FFA field days serve as platforms for students to participate in career and leadership development events. These activities focus on public speaking, teamwork, critical thinking, and technical skills that are essential in the agriculture industry. Exposure to these competitive events helps students refine their abilities and prepare for future careers.

CALIFORNIA AGRICULTURAL TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

CALAGTEACHERS.ORG



- **Encouraging Higher Education Enrollment:** Research indicates that students who visit college campuses during educational events are more likely to pursue post-secondary education. By participating in FFA field days, high school students gain firsthand experience of college life, making them more inclined to continue their education in agriculture or related fields.
- **Professional Development for College Students:** Colleges benefit from hosting field days by providing leadership and organizational experience to their own students. College students engage in planning, coordinating, and executing events, strengthening their teamwork and professional skills. They also gain experience in grading contest materials, leading activities, and interacting with industry professionals.
- **Recruiting Future Students:** FFA field days serve as a recruitment tool for colleges, helping them identify talented and passionate students who may be interested in their agriculture programs. By showcasing their facilities, faculty, and academic offerings, colleges can attract prospective students from across the state and country.
- **Industry Collaboration and Community Engagement:** Colleges collaborate with industry professionals who serve as judges and officials for competitive events. This partnership strengthens relationships between academic institutions and the agricultural industry, creating opportunities for networking, internships, and future employment for students.

Costs and Challenges of Hosting FFA Field Days

As a high school agriculture teacher, I remember other teachers thinking that the colleges charged registration fees as a way to raise funds for their own programs. I have to admit that I too questioned the validity of such charges. It wasn't until putting on a comprehensive field day event that I realized what it takes.

- **Financial Burden on Colleges:** Organizing a field day requires significant financial investment. Colleges must provide contest materials, awards, and incentives for students, as well as refreshments for judges and student workers. In many cases, the fees collected from participating FFA chapters do not fully cover these costs.
- **Material and Equipment Costs:** Certain contest rules require colleges to purchase specific materials and consumables that may only be used on the day of the event. Additionally, rental equipment such as livestock pens, tractors, and judging supplies adds to the overall expense.
- **Administrative and Staffing Costs:** Planning and executing a field day requires extensive time and effort from college faculty and staff, often without additional compensation. Some colleges must also cover costs for additional campus personnel, including security and maintenance staff, to oversee the event.
- **Technology and Data Processing Expenses:** Colleges must invest in scanning equipment and scan sheets for contest results tabulation, which cost \$1 per contestant. Additionally, the use of the Judging Card system for registration and to process results incurs a fee, typically around 10% of the total contest fees collected.



- **Facility and Catering Costs:** Some colleges face restrictions on providing outside food and beverages, requiring them to use campus dining services, which can add an additional \$8 to \$10 per contestant. Some institutions must pay for the use of campus facilities and services, further increasing expenses.

While hosting FFA field days presents financial and logistical challenges, the long-term benefits for students, colleges, and the agricultural industry outweigh the costs. These events play a critical role in fostering career development, promoting higher education, and strengthening industry connections. Colleges must continue to explore funding opportunities, sponsorships, and cost-effective strategies to sustain these valuable learning experiences for future generations of agriculture professionals.

- **Technology and Data Processing Expenses:** Colleges must invest in scanning equipment and scan sheets for contest results tabulation, which cost \$1 per contestant. Additionally, the use of the Judging Card system for registration and to process results incurs a fee, typically around 10% of the total contest fees collected.

