

A Parent's Guide to Agricultural Education and FFA

Congratulations!

If you are reading this, either you or your child is interested in agricultural education and that's great news! Whether your child is already enrolled in an agricultural education course or still trying to decide if they will, this document serves as a guide to answering some of the most frequently asked questions about this new adventure. Let the journey begin!

Where do I begin?

If you're new to agricultural education and FFA, getting started can be a bit overwhelming. So take a deep breath, and let's dive in!

Open your Handbook to page 1 and take a look at the three-circle diagram at the top. Imagine a box around the diagram. *That* is agricultural education. Inside the box are three circles which are exactly the same size and which overlap one another perfectly. None of them fully exist without the other two.

What about the agricultural education classroom?

The classroom is the first of the three components of agricultural education. Agriculture instructors must have a degree in Agricultural Education from a university or college. You can get a good idea of classes offered by looking at the diagram on page 5 of the Handbook. Some schools even accept agriculture classes as science credit! Often, students learn everything they would learn in a "normal" science room. The difference is that the content is applied through hands-on experiences. Ideally, your student will select a pathway and take classes that will help them build skills in one pathway for a future career. Students must take an agricultural education course to be involved in FFA. And the best part is that FFA is *intra-curricular*, so on occasion, students will work on applicable FFA events during their classes, so it makes most sense for students to join FFA if they plan to take agriculture classes.

What is SAE?

Supervised Agricultural Experience. An adult (you, the ag teacher and/or a student's "boss") monitor the activities and work of your student in an agriculture-related field. Think broadly when you think of the definition of "agriculture." The industry is *anything* that deals with the science, business, technology and production of agriculture, food and natural resources. There are over 300 agricultural careers that exist today, and each year, we fall short of filling open agriculture career positions by 5,000 qualified graduates. To be involved in FFA, a student must have a working SAE. A student's SAE program is ideally based around a career area of interest. Students may own and operate their own business, work for others, conduct research or explore a multitude of agricultural career options. Some SAE programs are

paid, while others are completely volunteer. For a thorough list of SAE ideas, visit <https://www.ffa.org/about/howeare/sae/Pages/SAEResources.aspx#>. This is a great time to encourage the entrepreneurial spirit of your child!

I hear lots about FFA!

FFA is the most visible segment of agricultural education, and usually the part that students enjoy most! You'll learn as your child has the opportunities to participate in new experiences, but here is a little information that may be helpful:

- **Career Development Events (CDEs):** Competitive events that build students' skills in specific agricultural career areas. Examples include soil evaluation, floral design, welding, landscaping, livestock evaluation, ag sales, and many, many more. These happen all throughout the year at different locations and your student may qualify to compete at the state or national level.
- **Leadership Skills Events (LSEs):** Competitive events that build skills students will use no matter what career they have. Examples include parliamentary procedure, public speaking, agricultural demonstration and many more! These generally happen on one date and your student can also qualify to compete at the state or national level.
- **Volunteer Activities:** Each chapter (local high school program) has its own Program of Activities, which often includes school and community volunteer activities. These happen all throughout the year and often align with other celebratory weeks such as Farm Safety and Health Week (September) or National FFA Week (February).
- **Leadership Conferences:** Nebraska State FFA Association often hosts leadership workshops and/or conferences at various locations throughout the state. Some of these require an over-night stay if students choose to participate.
- **Proficiency Awards:** Students can fill out award applications for their SAE. Proficiency awards measure student aptitude in skills and knowledge of growing their program. There are district, state and national competitions for these applications.
- **Degrees:** Your student may already have an FFA degree, or you might soon hear something about the Greenhand Degree, which is offered to first year members who meet certain requirements.
- **Sponsorship:** The Nebraska FFA Foundation exists as a non-profit organization which raises funding for FFA events, awards and activities.

Of course there are more questions to be answered, but hopefully this provides you with a solid start! Work with your local agriculture instructor and FFA advisor to get more information about your local program. And visit Nebraska Agriculture Education and Nebraska FFA Foundation at their web sites listed on the back of the Handbook for more information.