

PEOPLE OF FUTURE AGRICULTURE: EDUCATING YOUTH WITH AGRICULTURE REALITY

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The number of new farmers was down 20 percent between the 2007 and 2012 according to the United States Census. Additionally, the average age of the principal operating increased from 57.1 to 58.3 years. For agriculture in the United States to remain an efficient and sustainable industry there must be strong support comprised of a capable work force.

Agricultural Reality was patterned after the Real World, Real Money (RMRW) program. Agricultural Reality has an education emphasis to provide youth with a realistic perspective of production agriculture. Agriculture Reality provides an experiential learning activity to eleventh grade vocational agriculture students from seven school districts in three Appalachian counties of Southern Ohio. These lessons and experiences help enhance the decision-making skills that can impact their financial well-being as well as career choices.

The primary educational objectives of this program are to increase the participant's awareness of the economic ideologies involved in operating a farm and to increase student's knowledge of agricultural careers. Prior to an all-day simulation, students are presented with information at their respective schools on the importance of proper recordkeeping, record keeping techniques and their importance in managing an agricultural enterprise. The simulation activity is an activity where students are assigned a 300-acre farm to manage, purchase equipment, livestock and chattels.

The students are awarded start-up capital based upon their grade point averages. During the simulation, students interact with local agricultural business representatives to help them better understand actual costs and what decisions are required to have a profitable operation. To make the simulation realistic and educational, students are able to interact with local business leaders such as: implement dealerships, stockyards, Soil and Water Conversation Districts, insurance companies, local banks, county Auditors, auto dealerships, seeds dealers, USDA/FSA, USDA/NRCS, Farm Credit Services Agencies, Southern Ohio Agricultural Community & Development Foundation, and Extension Educators from Adams, Brown, and Highland Counties.

Over 600 youth participated in Agricultural Reality since its inception in 2005. Evaluations are completed at the end of the simulation prior to student returning back to their respective schools. Evaluations indicate very favorable responses to the program. Results indicate that 96% of the respondents increased their knowledge of accepted agricultural business practices involved with production agriculture. In the most recent program, ninety-one percent of the respondents felt an increase in their knowledge relating to agricultural careers and 64% of the respondents felt they would be involved in agricultural production in the future based on their experience in Agricultural Reality. Students responding to the evaluation gave overall program a rating of 4.5 on a 5-point Likert scale (1= poor, 5 = excellent). Numerous positive comments were noted throughout the program and documented on the evaluation. The program is currently being updated to include modern production practices and economic situations so it can be expanded into additional counties.