

MARKETING YOUR AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

Sharing the positive things happening in your program is one of the best ways to create a group of stakeholders who will support the growth of your program and your students. This section will help you identify target audiences and create systems to strategically and consistently share the successes of your students and your program.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

1. Identify your stakeholders
2. List the purposes for marketing your program/ chapter.
3. Develop marketing strategies target toward each of your different audiences.
4. Establish norms for your program/chapter's online presence.
5. Utilize existing resources to assist you in marketing your program/chapter.

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PURPOSES OF MARKETING

Agriculture teachers need to market their programs and chapters for many reasons. One key point to remember is the purpose you are marketing. This most often will depend on your audience. Agriculture programs and FFA chapters have two main groups of “customers” each with their own subgroups: internal and external stakeholders.

INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

These are individuals within your schools who have a direct interest in your program and/or chapter. You market to each of these groups for different purposes.

- **Administration Team (Principal, CTE Director, Assistant Superintendent, Superintendent, School Board).**

School and district administrators have a lot of power over what happens in our agriculture programs. They can be great partners for securing program funding, getting approval for trips and ultimately ensuring the survival of our programs.

- **Guidance Staff**

Obtaining the support of your school's guidance counselors can make or break your program. These individuals register students for your classes and if they do not know much about what your program does, they cannot do an adequate job of ensuring the right students find you and your program.

- **Teacher Colleagues**

Commonly, your teaching colleagues on campus lack an understanding of your program and the variety of responsibilities that agriculture teachers shoulder on a daily basis. They often innocently fail to recognize the value that agricultural programs bring to the table be it through team building activities, developing responsibility through campus livestock or horticultural activities, or developing student confidence and public speaking abilities through CDEs, etc. A monthly newsletter that provides an

overview of program and chapter activities that took place during the month will go a long way. This can help your colleagues understand the activities and value that our programs bring to the table.

With any luck this may open up opportunities for fostering collaborative opportunities between your program and that of other disciplines on campus.

- **Students and Parents/Guardians**

This may seem obvious but keeping students and their parents/guardians up to date on what is happening in your program/chapter is essential to sustaining and growing your program. Marketing to current and potential students and their parents/guardians will keep your enrollment and engagement up and ensures your program enjoys longevity in your community.

PURPOSES OF MARKETING

EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

These are individuals and groups outside of our schools in our communities who have a vested interest in our program for one reason or another.

■ **Community Groups**

There are many agricultural, philanthropic, and government groups in our communities that love to support local schools. These groups may provide support in many ways once they know what is happening in your program. Some examples of these groups include:

- local Cattlemen's club
- county Farm Bureau
- local gardening clubs
- Master Gardeners
- Chamber of Commerce
- Rotary Club
- Soil & Water Conservation districts
- Cooperative Extension Service
- Parks & Recreation
- food banks

■ **Local Businesses**

Businesses in your community may provide many opportunities such as partnerships, job opportunities for students, and fundraising for your chapter or donations. Examples of these businesses could include:

- Farm Credit
- local feed stores
- implement dealerships
- nurseries
- florists
- CSA-focused producers
- landscapers
- farm-to-table restaurants
- grocery stores
- real-estate agents

DEVELOPING YOUR MARKETING STRATEGY

Just as there are different purposes for marketing to different groups, you also must consider different marketing strategies to use for each of those groups. It is vitally important that you keep in mind your audience when deciding how you are going to market to a particular group because some tools work better for specific groups than others. We will explain some of those different strategies below.

Experienced agriculture instructors have recommended the following activities/practices for spreading the word about your program to the following groups:

INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS:

Administrative Team

- Meet face-to-face with administrators about your goals, expectations, and vision for the program; get their input.
- Involve your administration team in your activities and classes on a regular basis. Have them present an award at your chapter banquet.
- Keep them up-to-date on what is going on with your program and chapter through regular email correspondence.
- Invite them to chaperone an FFA activity, above the chapter level with you and your students.
- Regularly attend meetings with students to update them on your chapter.

Guidance Staff

- Present to guidance staff yearly to give a program overview and class highlights.
- Provide current course description fliers for the guidance office.
- Have students talk about their experiences in your program with them

Teacher Colleagues

- Send regular emails to the entire faculty detailing student successes
- Invite content experts to collaborate on lessons and activities with you:
 - Have the English department work with your public speakers
 - Have the Math department work with your agricultural mechanics students
- Get out of your classroom or building and build relationships with the other teachers on campus. Eat lunch in a common area, converse in the copy room, etc.
- Have the FFA chapter provide giveaways to teachers during Teacher Appreciation Week.

Students/Parents

- Host an informational session/open house at the beginning of the school year highlighting your program and chapter's opportunities for involvement.
- Get involved with local elementary/middle school programs
- Hold yearly recruitment booths/presentations in middle school classes/activities
- Invite parents to be a part of your alumni/booster group.

DEVELOPING YOUR MARKETING STRATEGY

EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS:

Community Groups

- Attend regular meetings of your local community groups, whenever possible ask for the opportunity to schedule a date to provide the groups with a presentation about your chapter/program. Consider having your FFA members conduct the actual presentations whenever possible as they are a product of your program and audiences show a natural affinity and increased interest towards students performing in a public speaking role.
- Partner with these groups by having your students volunteer at their events
- Send emails/newsletters when your program is doing something that may be of interest to these groups.

PROGRAM AND CHAPTER MARKETING RESOURCES

- [Alabama FFA Guide to Recruitment and Retention](#)
- [NAAE National Teach Ag Campaign](#)

SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLBOX

Social media is an excellent tool used for highlighting student achievement as well as chapter and program recruitment. We'll explain some of the different strategies below that can help.

COMMONLY USED ONLINE PLATFORMS:

- Chapter Website/Blog
- Facebook
- Instagram
- Twitter

SOME DO'S AND DON'TS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA

DO

- Post on a regular basis, not just when something big happens.
- Ensure you have parent/guardian permission to post names/photos of students. Include the permissions statement on your FFA membership form, requiring student and parent signatures for ease of record keeping.
- Share positive stories related to your program, chapter and agriculture in general.
- Post high quality video and photos along with text; keep in mind that videos garner higher audience views and interaction.
- Check spelling, punctuation and grammar on all posts.
- Comment back and interact with your social

media followers.

- Post different content across your different social media platforms.
- Limit the number of people who can post as your chapter/program to as few as possible.
- Check with your school/district for any social media policies they may have.

DON'T

- Post photos of poor quality.
- Use slang or unprofessional language.
- Post in all capitals - Your followers will take this as yelling.
- Purely post event reminders - followers will stop paying attention to your posts if they are not interesting.
- Post the same content across all platforms - why would we need to follow you on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram if it's the same post on all?
- Overpost - Limit your posts to the important and engaging content only.
- Set up social media pages before clearing it with your school/district leadership.

DEVELOPING A PROGRAM AND CHAPTER BRAND

Branding isn't just for businesses seeking profit. Through branding, we establish and convey program identity, image, and reputation. Ultimately, your brand is defined by your audience's experience when they interact with your program. Your brand encompasses your mission and vision statements, website and social media platforms, the way you and your students answer the classroom phone, and how you welcome stakeholders during program visits.

Great brands don't just happen... they are the result of a well thought out strategic plan. Here are some steps to help you think through shaping your program's brand.

Step 1: Establish what your brand represents.

Create a list of your program's core strengths, and refer to your program's mission, purpose, and vision statements as references to guide your brand development decisions.

Step 2: Create brand distinction, outline your program's qualities and benefits.

Keep in mind that you are competing with a multitude of student groups; both intra and extra-curricular, along with other non-profit community groups for support (monetary and other). You are looking to position your brand to gain top-of-mind awareness among your audience (stakeholders). Consider how your competition is branding themselves and then get creative with your branding efforts. Outline the key qualities and benefits of your program and compare them to those of your competition. Keep the differences in mind and use them as you create your own distinct brand and message.

Step 3: Determine who your target audiences are.

Keeping in mind that you cannot be everything to everybody; you still must identify the stakeholder groups you wish to market to. You will tailor your branding message and delivery mechanism to fit each of the stakeholder groups as part of your

marketing strategy. Refer back to the marketing section to assist you in identifying these audiences.

Step 4: Create your elevator pitch.

An elevator pitch is a brief persuasive speech that you employ to spark the interest of others, in your program. The value of an elevator pitch is that it allows for the sharing of an accurate and consistent message to stakeholders despite being delivered by separate individuals, in different venues, over a multitude of marketing platforms. The goal is to deliver a consistent message everywhere your brand is represented.

Consider how great it would be if all of your chapter officers were delivering the same message to stakeholders, the uniform experience your stakeholders have when they call your classroom/program phone on different days and times and yet they still are greeted the same by every individual who answers.

Step 5: Build out your brand.

1. Determine your brand's target audience
2. Establish a brand mission statement
3. Outline the key qualities and benefits your brand offers.
4. Form your brand voice
5. Build a brand message and elevator pitch