



FFA Advisor and Agriculture Teacher Assistant for Nelson County Middle School



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Introduction

I spent around 200 hours from May 16th - June 30th working with agriculture students and teachers at Nelson County Middle School and High School. I had the opportunity to work with almost 100 different students ranging from 6th grade to graduated seniors all with different levels of learning abilities. I also got to work alongside three different agriculture teachers who offered different views and advice.

Nelson County is my home county, so I was excited when I was given the opportunity to return home to lend a hand in an organization that has made me who I am today. I had the opportunity to work with students who I went to school with, and I loved seeing how much they have grown as individuals and members of the agriculture community since I graduated two years ago.

I started my summer teaching sixth and seventh grade students about animal identification. I was able to learn how to properly make lesson plans and execute these plans as well as learn what does and doesn't work when teaching younger students. I enjoyed being able to work with students I didn't know prior to this project and being able to see a spark of interest in agriculture in several of them.

For the second part of summer, I coached a junior and senior level agronomy team who competed at the Virginia FFA State Convention. It was my job to make sure students came to practice and were well prepared come time to compete. Working with students' schedules and getting everyone there at the same time was a challenge.

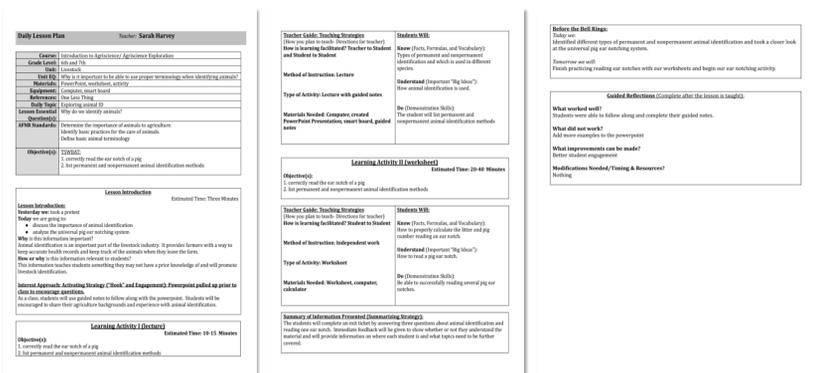
This project gave me experience and insight to the world of agricultural education. This opportunity has been able to help me in making an important decision about my future career.

Objectives

- Write lesson plans that are effective in teaching students animal identification
- Develop an effective plan to coach students in the Agronomy Career Development Event
- Assisting FFA Advisor/agriculture teacher with the overall chapter FFA program:
 - Planning fundraisers
 - Chaperoning State Convention
 - Planning practice schedules

Animal Identification lesson plans

The first part of my internship was researching, planning, and teaching a lesson of my choice. After talking with Bethany Grooms, the agriculture teacher at Nelson Middle School and my on site supervisor for this project, I decided I wanted to teach 6th and 7th grade students about animal identification. This was a topic she had not yet had the chance to cover and due to covid seventh grade students hadn't been exposed to this information yet either. I found a lesson online we both really liked, and I tweaked the lesson to fit our timeline and what I wanted to cover. I wrote out lesson plans for each activity and day that I taught. This was probably the most difficult part of my project. There are many parts to a good lesson plan and before this experience I had never even seen a proper lesson plan. The most difficult part was the new terminology. Thankfully, my on site supervisor was able to teach me a few things and help keep me on track. Upon graduation, I want to teach middle school agriculture so now knowing how to properly make lesson plans is a huge sigh of relief.



Lesson plans (above) that were used to teach the first day of animal identification.

Teaching my Animal Identification Lesson

On the first day, I covered a PowerPoint that had guided notes for the students to follow. I made sure to further explain what wasn't understood and answer any questions the students had. Once finished with the PowerPoint, students had a basic understanding of animal identification therefore I was able to then move on to a worksheet to build on this knowledge by teaching students how to use the Universal Pig Ear Notching System. After completing the worksheet, students were given paper pigs to cut out, color, and correctly ear notch. The classes decided that they wanted to have a contest between the classes for the best-looking pig. First and second places were given to each class as well as an overall Grand Champion and Reserve Grand Champion. I found that making this activity slightly competitive made students more interested in the topic. To wrap up my lesson, I was able to have a live pig brought to the school for students to see, touch, and feed. For most of the students, this was their first time touching or even being close to a live pig. There were some students who were hesitant at first, but it only took one brave student for the entire livestock trailer to be full of students in awe at being able to be that close to the pig. I was able to further incorporate bringing the pig into my lesson by testing students' knowledge of reading the pigs ear notch.



Above I am teaching a seventh-grade class about animal identification.

Below honey pig is used as a real-life example of animal identification; ear notching.



Agronomy Career Develop Event

As stated on the National FFA website, the Agronomy Career Development Event (CDE) challenges students to build and demonstrate knowledge in the wine field of agronomy. Participation grants students' exposure to many ways that science and technology collaborate to grow the world's major food crops.



The senior team (left) consisted of students ranging from upcoming sophomores to graduated seniors while the junior team (right) consisted of rising freshman and a rising seventh grader.



Agronomy Practices

Both the junior and senior level teams had the same practice schedule. These teams put in around fifteen hours a week into practice at school as well as countless hours preparing at home. During each practice, a student from the senior team, who had competed before, was paired with a student from the junior team. I believe teaching someone else helps you learn the material better as well, and this allowed me to be able to answer questions as needed and better use our time. A typical practice consisted of evaluating different classes of crops using charts, practicing being able to identify over 100 different crop and weed specimen (seed and plant), practicing being able to identify around 50 different types of machinery, as well as practicing being able to identify around 40 insects and knowing their economic impact, life cycle, and mouth parts. To help students with identifying crops and weeds, we put together samples of different seeds and brought in different plants to be able to see without looking at an online picture.

One of the challenges I faced while running these practices was being able to keep students of different levels of knowledge on the subject moving at the same pace or finding ways to keep them busy in their down time in order to prevent them from distracting other their teammates.



Students (right) are practicing seed identification by playing a game they designed to help them memorize seeds from the state identification list.

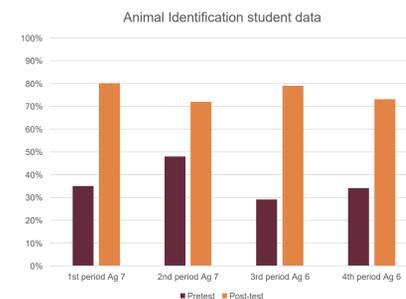
Virginia FFA State Convention

The Virginia FFA State Convention is held each year on Virginia Tech's campus (besides covid years of course). FFA members are given the opportunity to stay in two of Virginia Tech's dorm rooms and get a feel of what it's like to live like college students for the week. At State Convention, there are several CDEs and LDEs held as well as workshops and sessions. All of these events help students grow in many ways including premier leadership, personal growth, and career success.



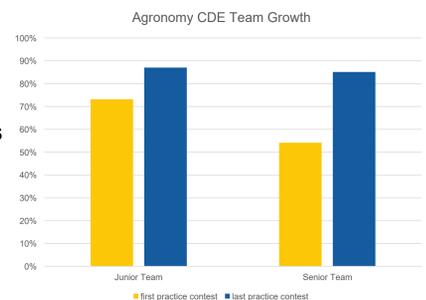
This year Nelson FFA had the opportunity to take more than 50 students to the Virginia FFA State Convention. For many students this was their first State Convention and first-time visiting Virginia Tech.

Overall results



The chart to the left compares class average scores pre and post lesson for animal identification. The maroon bars represent the pretest while the orange represents the post-test. As you would expect students showed growth from their pretest to their post-test. The class averages overall increased from a 37% to a 76%. This growth shows that the lessons were effective in teaching the students about animal identification.

The chart to the right compares team average scores pre and post summer agronomy practices. The yellow bars represent the pretest while the blue represents the post-test. The chart shows an expected increase in scores however the change wasn't as drastic as the animal identification lesson. This can be assumed to be the case because students who participated in the agronomy CDE had prior knowledge of the contest material.



Most team members had the opportunity to compete in this state level contest before although some things looked different due to Covid.

What I've learned:

- Effectively manage a classroom
- Prepare and execute lesson plans
- Organize a guest visit from "Honey Pig"
- Make Pre and post test
- Creating a practice schedule and sticking to it
- Chaperoning students on an over night field trip
- How to properly plan an effective fundraiser

Contact Information

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