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Engaging Educational Professionals and Students on the Viability of AFNR Careers

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Overview:
39% more available AFNR jobs than AFNR graduates

• Establishing a sufficient scientific and professional workforce that addresses the challenges of the 21st century is a major research priority for the American Association for Agricultural Education (Roberts, Harder, & Brashears, 2016).

• Many educational professionals (e.g., guidance counselors, career technology education directors, work-based learning coordinators, teachers, school and district administrators)—all of which are influential in students’ career decisions—are not aware of new and vibrant AFNR career opportunities (Thompson & Russell, 1993).

• By educating teachers and other education professionals on AFNR careers, the gap between qualified AFNR graduates and AFNR jobs can be eliminated.

AFNR = Agriculture, Food, & Natural Resources

How It Works: Explore → Learn

• Teachers and other educational professionals are exposed to various career opportunities within AFNR through a series of workshops.

• Workshops are held in two stages: Explore and Learn.

• Explore workshops focus on exploring various career opportunities within AFNR and take place in the form of a statewide career day.
  - Surveys are conducted and analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the Explore workshop and to determine specific AFNR areas for Learn workshops.

• Learn workshops provide educational professionals with an opportunity for hands-on experiential learning in the determined AFNR areas of interest.
  - Curriculum and resources (e.g., lesson plans for teachers, brochures and other promotional/informational materials for guidance counselors, etc.) are developed and provided to educational professionals about AFNR careers.

Results to Date

Participants* in the Explore workshop indicated the highest needs for professional development in the following areas:
1. Biotechnology in Agriculture
2. UAVs in Agriculture
3. Urban Agriculture

*Participants at the Explore workshop included high school youth and education professionals.

Poster at a Glance

• A large shortage of qualified individuals going into agriculture, food, and natural resource (AFNR) careers.

• Two stages of workshops—Explore & Learn workshops—students and educational professionals are exposed to AFNR Careers.

• Needs are identified in Explore workshops.

• Educational professionals are provided with the curriculum and resources they need to promote and educate students on AFNR careers through a series of Learn workshops.

Future Implications

• Deliver at least three Learn workshops over the next three years.

• Deliver workshops in conjunction with other professional development conferences already in place to maximize participation, help promote continued growth in AFNR career areas, and potentially expand the Learn workshops beyond the three funded by the grant.

• Curriculum and resources will continue to be developed and shared with educational professionals to promote and educate students on AFNR careers.

Costs & Resources

• Funding for this project was supported by a USDA-NIFA grant.

• Grant funds support two university educator faculty salaries for about two weeks each; travel for administrative faculty involved in the project (four total); one undergraduate and one graduate student assistant for assessment, planning, and development of workshops and curriculum for one year each; and travel stipends for participants.

• Partnership with university faculty and extension, businesses, and other individuals directly involved in AFNR careers.