



Supervised Agricultural Experience

Supervised Agricultural Experience Fact Sheet

History of SAE

The implementation of a formal supervised agricultural experience component in agricultural education goes back to the early 1900s when experiential learning consisted of farming-related activities for boys. All agricultural students came from farms and ranches and had “home projects,” typically consisting of production enterprises such as livestock, poultry or crops.¹ Around this same time, there was a nationwide school gardening movement to study agriculture. Gardens were used as a teaching tool for elementary students and also to beautify school grounds. However, it could be said that using applied activities in agricultural education first occurred in the 1600s when Native Americans taught the Pilgrims how to fish and plant corn. In the 1730s this concept was expanded when the Georgia colony became the first to employ a planned system of agricultural education for the colonists. This included an experimental farm, instruction, special training and an apprentice system.² These early methods of applied learning continue to be used in present day SAE programs.

The passage of influential federal legislation created the framework for U.S. agricultural education as we know it today. The Morrill Act of 1862 established land-grant colleges in each state for teaching agriculture among other subjects. This was followed in 1887 by the Hatch Act which established agricultural experiment stations and worked as a catalyst for agricultural education being taught in public schools.³ Eventually, these events led to the historic **Smith-Hughes Vocational Act of 1917**. As the nation’s first vocational education legislation, Smith-Hughes recognized and funded vocational agriculture courses in secondary schools. This is the reason SAE is a required, integral element of agricultural education. Section 10 of the Smith-Hughes Act reads, “*that such schools shall provide for directed or supervised practice in agriculture, either on a farm provided for by the school or other farm, for at least six months per year.*”

Since then, a supervised agricultural experience has grown from production-based “home projects” to also include agribusiness endeavors, agriscience research, ag service-learning opportunities and agricultural placement programs. As demands of the industry marketplace have evolved, so have SAEs to prepare students for the challenging and abundant career opportunities of 21st Century American agriculture.

1 The National Council for Agricultural Education in cooperation with The National FFA Foundation. *Experiencing Agriculture: A Handbook on Supervised Agricultural Experience*. 1992: pg 1.

2 Moore, Gary E. “The Status of Agricultural Education Prior to the Smith-Hughes Act.” *The Agricultural Education Magazine*. Feb. 1997. <http://www.cals.ncsu.edu/agexed/aee501/moore.html> (10 Feb. 2005).

3 Moore, Gary E. “The Involvement of Experiment Stations in Secondary Agricultural Education, 1887-1917.” *Agricultural History*. Spring 1988. <http://www.cals.ncsu.edu/agexed/aee501/stations.html> (10 Feb. 2005).