



NORTH GEORGIA
TECHNICAL COLLEGE

**Guide to Recruiting
Agriculture Programs
Students**

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PREFACE

This guide was developed for a project supported by the National Science Foundation under grant number DUE #2000444. (See **Acknowledgement** for further information.) The project is being implemented in rural Appalachian Northeast Georgia: Fannin, Franklin, Habersham, Rabun, Stephens, Towns, Union, and White counties. A premise of the project is that effective strategies for recruiting college students from Appalachia should address the area's economic status as well as values held by the people of Appalachia.

Historically marked by widespread poverty, the Appalachian Region has made economic gains in the past 50 years. Still, some counties remain in economic distress. At the time of proposal submission in 2019, Franklin and Towns counties were at risk of economic distress, meaning they rank between the worst 10% and 25% of the nation's counties.¹ The other six are transitioning out of economic distress.²

Many families in the project's eight counties experience generational poverty. Unlike situational poverty which occurs when there is a lack of resources due to a specific event such as death, chronic illness or divorce, generational poverty occurs when poverty within a family extends at least two generations or when the family lives with others who are from generational poverty.³ Of the 138,492 Northeast Georgia Appalachians aged 25 and over, 51.8% have no college education.⁴ The lack of postsecondary education perpetuates the poverty cycle and keeps individuals and families at entry-level jobs without an opportunity for advancement. Furthermore, for many decades higher education institutions burdened the Appalachian families' already limited resources by requiring them to visit campus to explore college options. To address these issues, this project uses strategies relevant to the poverty population and the people of Appalachia.

1. Payne argues an effective strategy is to bring the necessary resources to the poverty population. Thus, this project aims to recruit college-potential students in their home communities and schools. (See **Chapter III** for strategies.) This strategy is valuable for families who are strapped for time and resources, especially during periods of high fuel prices in 2022.
2. A value held by many people of Appalachia that often weighs in college decision-making is “family-ism” -- maintenance of strong family ties.⁵ To address this value, the project’s stakeholders include family-oriented agricultural organizations, such as FFA (Future Farmers of America) and Young Farmers & Ranchers. Most counties in the project area have such organizations. Instructors can attend these organizations’ events to provide their members with information about the value of a college education, the variety of agricultural careers and NGTC’s Agriculture Programs. (See **Chapter VII** and **XI**.)
3. Payne also identifies relationships to bridge social capital (i.e., people who are different from you) as a factor in helping one move out of poverty. Relationship-building also addresses the Appalachian values of “localism” (sense of belonging and of being a part of the land or place) and “historicism” (sense of understanding one’s place in history within the family and region).⁶ Instructors play a critical role in guiding students in building relationships with the college’s faculty and staff to acquire the resources they need to enroll and persist, with their classmates, with local employers, and with the community. (See **Chapters I, III** and **IV**). Most importantly, instructors are role models – students are always watching us, and our actions influence them. We are the bridge that students need to succeed as lifelong learners and 21st century citizens.

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- ¹ Appalachian Regional Commission. [2019]. County Economic Status and Distressed Areas in Appalachian Georgia, Fiscal Year 2020. Retrieved from https://www.arc.gov/images/appregion/economic_statusFY2020/CountyEconomicStatusandDistressAreasFY2020Georgia.pdf
- ² According to the Appalachian Regional Commission, Towns County has achieved Transitional Status for Federal Fiscal Year 2023.
- ³ Payne, R. K. (2013). *A Framework for Understanding Poverty : A Cognitive Approach*. Highlands, Tex: aha! Process, Inc.
- ⁴ StatsAmerica (2019, March). *Measuring Distress*. [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://www.statsamerica.org/distress/distress.aspx>
- ⁵ Chenoweth, E., & Galliher, R. V. (2004). Factors influencing college aspirations of rural West Virginia high school students. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 19(2), 1–14.
- ⁶ Chenoweth & Galliher. (2004).

I. Why Recruit?

Recruitment and retention involve attitude as much as activities.

A. To successfully recruit and retain quality students, you must believe these areas are important and translate that belief into action.

B. The most important job you do is teach.

1. The results of your teaching are only evident in the quality of students who go forth from your agricultural education program. The more students, the wider and more influential your results.

2. The task of maintaining and replenishing the supply of students who benefit from agricultural education programs falls directly on the instructor's shoulders. Although many others can assist, it is up to you to ensure that potential "customers" (i.e., students) and those who influence their "buying" decisions (i.e., administrators, counselors, parents, and others) realize the benefits of an agricultural education.

3. Selling your program to students, parents and the community doesn't just happen. It requires hard work and dedication.
 - a. Those who are most successful at student recruitment and retention make these matters a priority. They take ownership of recruitment and retention activities.
 - b. If you are committed to the future of agricultural education and your agricultural education program, you must be willing to invest time, money, and effort in recruitment. This guide is designed to help you prepare for, create, and carry out purposeful, ongoing recruitment and retention efforts.

II. Allowing Others to Help

While recruitment and retention are your responsibility, you don't have to tackle them alone.

- A. Local school systems and the community can help. (For more information, see **Sections III(H), IV, VII, VIII, and IX.**)

- B. **It is highly recommended that you invite your current Ag students to join your recruitment activities.**
 - 1. Current students often can create approaches to which their peers can relate more effectively than an instructor can.

 - 2. Students who join in recruitment activities expand their learning and leadership skills while serving the agricultural education program.

 - 3. Most of the materials in this guide can be used by current students to engage in recruitment and retention activities.

III. Job One: A Quality Program

A. The first step in preparing to “sell” your program to potential students is to ensure it is a high-quality, good-value product.

- Does it provide the benefits that today’s students need?
 - ✓ Relevant information?
 - ✓ Interesting learning activities?
 - ✓ Career readiness?
 - ✓ Preparation for further education?

- What “price” do students pay to pursue these benefits? In other words, do they have to forfeit work while attending college?

- A quality program attracts quality students.

B. Building Program Quality

What is quality in agricultural education? NGTC has identified the following components of a quality program:

1. Strong classroom and laboratory instruction

2. Strong community and school partnerships

3. Program marketing

4. Professional and program growth

C. Program planning is critical to each component and strategy.

1. They are keys to successful recruitment and retention.
2. Quality programs do not just happen. They cannot exist without a commitment from the instructor to develop the areas that are key to a quality agricultural education.

D. Instructor

The instructor is the key to a successful recruitment program as well as a quality instructional program.

1. Students relate, or fail to relate, to instructors based on several variables: instructional quality, personality, commitment, caring, innovativeness, etc.
2. It is important that you, as the instructor, commit to recruiting, and then retaining, students.

E. Curriculum

“If you build it, they will come.”

(paraphrased from “Field of Dreams”)

1. An innovative, science-based curriculum is the cornerstone to developing program quality.
2. Without a quality curriculum, you can recruit students but retaining them will be a challenge.

3. Update the curricula on a regular basis (every two to three years) with many activities incorporated into each unit of instruction.
4. Curricula must be challenging and interesting to students as well as applicable to their daily lives.

F. Support

1. Program support is essential if you are to attract and retain high-quality students.
2. Especially important is the support garnered from the local school systems' administrators and guidance counselors, the community, and funding sources.
 - a. For people to support your program, they must know about it.
 - b. They must also be able to take some ownership of it.

G. Program Planning

1. Develop a shared vision for your program.
2. Create action plans to fulfill your program's vision.
3. Implement your plan.

H. Instruction

1. Spend time planning at all levels, including the lesson, activity, and program levels.
2. Create an instructional program based on student interests and agricultural career opportunities.
3. Make “real-world” connections for learners.
4. Engage all students across all ability levels.
5. Care about students. Advocate their needs.
6. Recruit and include students with diverse ideas, abilities, backgrounds, and cultures.
 - ✓ They strengthen agricultural education as well as the agricultural workplace.
 - ✓ They bring additional perspectives and skills to the lessons and activities, to the identification of barriers that impede success, and to the problem-solving process. In other words, they look beyond the obvious, ask tough questions, and find good answers. This, in turn, fosters creativity and innovation among their classmates or co-workers.
7. Become part of your community on a personal level. Show a vested interest in the community.

8. Stay up to date on technology. Consider as class content the equipment you use in the classroom and the agricultural technology you teach.
9. Be a student of teaching. Keep learning **how** to teach, not just what to teach.

IV. Integrate Recruitment and Retention

Everything you and your students do tells someone about your program and, therefore, has recruitment and retention implications. The table below offers suggestions for strengthening your areas of influence that can affect recruitment and retention.

Areas of Influence	Recruitment/Retention	Ways to Strengthen Components
Program Offerings	Course titles are the first things that readers see	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer top quality programs • Use descriptive course titles and explanations
Instructional Effectiveness	Students are motivated when in a well-run, meaningful class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer hands-on experiences, when appropriate • Always look for opportunities to teach skills
Classroom Management Effectiveness	Instruction and student behavior should be guided by institutional procedures and policies	Use a variety of teaching styles to promote student interest and engagement while reducing behavioral issues
Interpersonal Skills	Students and their peers feel good being around people who care	Know that students are always watching you and that your actions influence them
Instructor's Leadership Role at School	What you do outside the classroom will create interest for what takes place in the classroom	Actively and positively participate in institutional and faculty activities
Instructor's Leadership Role in Community	Engaging in the community makes the community want to be a part of what you do	Get involved in community groups that meet your professional needs and fill leadership gaps in the community
Public Relations Efforts	Agriculture is often misrepresented.	Overcome misconceptions by providing "reality checks"

V. Recipe for Success

When planning a recruitment activity, be sure to address the following issues first:

A. Identify your audience.

1. Limit the activity to a specific group (e.g., 10th grade agriculture students or a 4-H horticulture club).
2. Consider the talents, interests, and preferences of your target audience.

B. Reflect on your program.

1. List the benefits of your program. How do they relate to the target audience?
2. Plan the recruitment activity to include only those items that relate directly to your target audience

C. Balance the educational aspect of the activity with fun ones.

- Include audience participation as much as possible to generate interest and excitement.

D. Peer recruitment

1. Invite your current Ag students and FFA (Future Farmers of America) chapter officers to promote your program.

2. The audience will be more receptive if the activity includes their peers.

E. Program literature

1. Provide each participant with a brochure, handout, or flyer with additional information.
2. Be sure to include your name and contact information.

VI. Sample Recruitment and Retention Messages

Here are some key messages and paragraphs about agricultural education that you might adapt for your recruitment and retention efforts:

Agricultural Careers are Hot

Are you looking for a challenging career that will broaden your horizons? Would you like to work in a dynamic, exciting industry? Today's food and fiber industry offers these benefits and more. Whether you are interested in business, computers, mechanics or communications, America's largest industry— agriculture – has a place for you.

Looking for an exciting career that pays well and keeps you motivated and challenged? Look into agriculture. Your talents and interests are bound to match with one of the 300+ exciting, diverse careers in agriculture. With more job openings available than there are qualified graduates to fill them, the agriculture industry offers countless opportunities for students.

National studies show that in the coming decade, companies and agencies of every size will be looking for people trained in agriculture. Agriculture needs people who can look beyond the obvious, ask tough questions, and find good answers.

Agriculture is More Than You Think

It is not just your grandparents' farm. Today's agricultural industry includes biotechnology, international marketing, genetics, engineering, food science, computers, horticulture, communications, finance, veterinary science, wildlife management, and much more.

Agriculture is our nation's largest employer. Today's agribusiness is high-tech. From biotechnology to GPS-guided machinery and computer-monitored livestock, agriculture is on the cutting edge. So, yes – the agricultural industry needs computer nerds!

A Complete Education

The leadership, self-image, communication skills and the citizenship values that you develop in agricultural education are important lessons that you can carry forward for any future. Agriculture students can choose to enter the workforce directly or continue to the next level of education. The world of tomorrow comes from choices you make today. Agriculture classes help you develop leadership skills for a

lifetime that you always can use to make better choices. A reason that companies want people with an agricultural education background is because they are generally more responsible, trainable, and able to work. Agriculture students find innovative ways of using science and information in agriculture. You learn to think analytically, using real-life examples. What a fun life you'll have in agriculture!

VII. Target Feeder School Audiences

- A. A key target audience will be each year’s “new crop” of students coming into your school for the first time.**

They might be elementary students moving into the middle grades, middle grade students entering high school, or high school students selecting a magnet or technical school.

In all cases, early contact with them and their positive impressions of your program are keys to recruitment and retention success.

- B.** Recruitment of students in feeder schools begins with your public relations program and FFA program of activities. Often, these students already have formed an impression of you and your program through school visits and community involvement.
- C.** Use the following strategies to ensure that you tap into feeder school audiences:
1. Include feeder school administrators, guidance counselors, and teachers in your continuous efforts to build program support.
 2. Develop working relationships with some of the premier teachers in feeder schools.

- Ask the principals or guidance counselors at your feeder schools for a comprehensive list of students.
3. Call or visit your key teacher contacts. Ask for an “unofficial” rating of each student on the comprehensive list.
 - a. Ask them to base the rating on the characteristics of successful students.
 - Examples of such characteristics may include:
 - Leadership involvement,
 - Hands-on learning preferences
 - Academic abilities.
 - Here’s an example of a four-point scale for the rating:
 - 1 = Below Average
 - 2 = Average
 - 3 = Good
 - 4 = Must Recruit
 - b. Provide general information about your agricultural education program to students in all rating groups.
 4. Ask the feeder schools’ administration for the opportunity to meet with at least the two top-rated tiers of students.
 5. Invite your current students who are outstanding and charismatic to join you in presenting a recruitment program to the targeted students.

6. During the presentation, focus on the quality of education, leadership, career opportunities and recognition that your program offers.
 - Remember: the targeted students must perceive your courses to be fun yet educational.
7. Ask the targeted students to make a commitment to enroll in your program.
 - a. Ask them fill out a “Reservation Request” to “hold” a place in your courses.
 - b. Be sure the forms include their names, addresses and telephone numbers, and email addresses.
8. Within a week, follow up with a letter, email, or call with the students who completed the form.
9. Prior to the actual course registration period, schedule a one-on-one visit or meeting with these students.
10. Follow up with a thank-you letter to those who facilitated the recruitment effort: the feeder-school administrators, guidance counselors, and/or teachers.

VIII. Recruitment and Retention Timeline

Spring Semester
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Complete and disseminate recruitment and retention plan
<p>Potential students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Develop multimedia and print materials ❑ Select and train current NGTC students and other faculty and staff as recruiters for the Agriculture Programs ❑ Meet with high school guidance counselors to discuss program benefits and provide program materials ❑ Conduct recruitment activities in advance of course sign-up for the next academic year
<p>Returning students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Conduct retention activities for returning students in advance of course sign-up for next school year ❑ Establish and maintain face-to-face contact with current students who are taking core academic courses (or otherwise not actively taking Agriculture classes) this semester
Summer Semester
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Plan and prepare for program advisement (e.g., scheduling or program changes, etc.)
<p>Potential students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Follow up with those who have expressed interest ❑ Hold a special event (e.g., evening event like fire pit chats, etc.) for students who have expressed an interest in the program to retain their interest ❑ Conduct recruitment and public relations activities at community events ❑ Refine multimedia and print recruitment materials for use in the fall
<p>Newly-enrolled students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Follow up to ensure they have access to the resources they need to start in the program
<p>Returning students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Hold a special event (e.g., evening event like fire pit chats, etc.) for returning students who are taking core academic courses (or otherwise

<p>not actively taking Agriculture classes) this semester to retain their interest in the program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Send “welcome back” letters to returning students who are taking core academic courses (or otherwise not actively taking Agriculture classes) this semester
<p>Fall Semester</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Continue activities that influence recruitment and retention ❑ Provide program advisement (e.g., scheduling or program changes, etc.)
<p>Potential students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Conduct recruitment events for potential students interested in attending in the Spring or Summer semesters ❑ Survey students about recruitment strategies
<p>Newly-enrolled students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Survey students about recruitment and retention strategies

Also, annually analyze recruitment and retention efforts and adjust recruitment plan based on the following:

1. Number of face-to-face, telephone, and written contacts
2. Number of expressions of interest and/or intent to enroll:
 - a. Percentage of eligible current students who re-enroll
 - b. Total program enrollment
 - c. Feedback from targeted audiences
3. Evaluation of recruitment and retention activities (quantitative and qualitative)

IX. Make It Worth the Price

Just as in the consumer marketplace, potential students and their families must perceive your agricultural education program as a product worth its cost.

- A. For students, the cost of taking an agriculture course often will be forfeiting other attractive, worthwhile, meaningful courses.
 1. Agriculture classes must provide more benefits than cooperative jobs and a multitude of other choices.
 2. What is the most important step in stacking up agriculture education against other choices available to potential students and their demands? **Ensure your program offers as many high-value benefits as possible.** These benefits should include:
 - ✓ Opportunities for scholarships
 - ✓ Personal development
 - ✓ Attractive career options
 - ✓ Pathway to four-year institution: transferrable courses (e.g., appropriate science courses), content, and credits required for bachelor's degree

B. Agriculture's Image:

1. The images most people have about agricultural careers focus strictly on production agriculture.
2. To attract and retain students, your challenge is to expand their vision to include the wide range of exciting, meaningful and rewarding careers across the entire scope of the agricultural industry.
3. You have the responsibility of helping people appreciate the broad spectrum of today's agricultural careers. Emphasize the following:
 - Nearly 20% of all Americans work in the agricultural industry.
 - Less than 2% of these workers are involved in production agriculture.
 - That leaves a huge selection of agricultural-related careers, such as marketing, processing, communications, research, education, horticulture, natural resources, forestry, agribusiness, and more.

X. Sample Radio Public Service Announcement (PSA)

[:20] From biotechnology to GPS-guided machinery and computer-monitored livestock, agriculture is on the cutting edge. An agricultural education prepares today's young people to lead tomorrow's agriculture, community and world. Find out more at North Georgia Technical College's agriculture department.

[:30] Today's agriculture includes biotechnology, international marketing, genetics, food science, engineering, computers, horticulture, communications, finance, veterinary science, wildlife management, and much more. Do you want to make a difference in our community, nation, and world? Consider a career in the high-tech, growing industry of agriculture. To find out more, stop by North Georgia Technical College and pick up a brochure about our agricultural education program.

[:30] Education should prepare young people for life. At North Georgia Technical College, the agricultural education program does just that. Agriculture students learn to think analytically and use real-life examples in class as they prepare for more than 300 agricultural careers ...and an almost-endless variety of other agricultural-related careers. Find out more at North Georgia Technical College.

[:20] Did you know that agriculture is our nation's largest industry? Twenty percent of Americans work in a career related to agriculture. Eighteen percent is employed in a variety of related industries, like engineering, food technology, environmental science and communications. There are at least 300 different agricultural careers, and there are shortages of qualified employees. Young people looking for challenging, high-tech careers can find out more in the agriculture department at North Georgia Technical College.

XI. Checklist for NGTC Agriculture Department's Recruitment Plan

- Establish relationships with Agriculture Education teachers at all high schools in NGTC's service area.
- Develop and maintain a list of CTAE (Career, Technical, and Agriculture Education) Directors at all school systems in the service area. Contact them with information about NGTC's Agriculture Programs.
- Collaborate with all the school systems to set up a schedule to give a presentation to all the FFA chapters in the service area and/or to individual classes.
- Speak at events hosted by community-based agricultural-related organizations (e.g., FFA Alumni, Young Farmers & Ranchers Association, Georgia Cattlemen, etc.) to present information about agriculture education. Emphasize the development of communication skills, analytical thinking processes, proactive leadership, and community service.
- Annually evaluate NGTC course offerings for Agribusiness diploma and degree programs to ensure they align with industry and community needs.

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