



## A Study on the Historical Development of Career and Technical Student Organization: Taking “Future Farmers of America” as Example

LUO Mijia<sup>[a],\*</sup>; XIE Changfa<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>Ph.D., Candidate, Faculty of Education, Southwest University, Chongqing, China.

<sup>[b]</sup>Professor, Doctoral Supervisor, Faculty of Education, Southwest University, Chongqing, China.

\*Corresponding author.

Received 25 September 2015; accepted 18 November 2015  
 Published online 26 December 2015

### Abstract

Future Farmers of America, for short, FFA, is an important part of Career and technical student organizations (CTSOs).<sup>1</sup> As the first founded CTSOs, FFA finds its origin at early 20 century. It was once an organization to assist practice instruction of agriculture school. As was influenced by the development of social economy, the modification of industry structure and revolution of vocational education, FFA became an integral part of vocational agriculture education. Through analysis, it is found that FFA went through a process of sprouting, system organizing and connotation expanding.

**Key words:** FFA; Career and technical education; Historical development; Personnel cultivation

Luo, M. J., & Xie, C. F. (2015). A Study on the Historical Development of Career and Technical Student Organization: Taking “Future Farmers of America” as Example. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 11(12), 21-25. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ccc/article/view/8049> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/8049>

### INTRODUCTION

FFA is a part of CTSOs, a Non-profit organization aimed

at secondary and post-secondary vocational students. FFA is divided at three levels which are national, state and district. The organizational purpose of FFA is to promote and support agricultural education, most importantly, to cultivate students’ leadership, vocational skills, career competence, academic ability, civic sensitivity as well as community service ability. Based on those purposes, FFA exploited 4 categories programs, they respectively are vocational competition, career counsel and instruction, career development and community service. Since youth club (the predecessor of FFA) emerged, it has a history more than 100 years and exert a prominent influence on students’ academic achievements, working skills, civic responsibility as well as leadership.

### 1. THE SPROUT OF FUTURE FARMERS OF AMERICA ( LATE IN 19 CENTURY-20S 20<sup>TH</sup> )

#### 1.1 The Emergence of Boys’ Corn Clubs

After the civil war, American industrial revolution began. According to national condition survey in 1890, the output of manufacture has jumped to the top of industry (Anonymous, 1981, p.275). The convenience of infrastructure and abundant entertainment brought by the industrial revolution greatly attracted farmers’ attention. Gradually, they lost interest toward agricultural life. Will B. Otwell, a Farm Institute president from Illinois found that few farmers interested in attending local meetings, and then he decides to host a corn-growing competition for farm youth. Boys who attend the competition will be given corn seed and the best yield of corn will be offered one-dollar premium. The competition popularized quickly and agricultural teachers are inspired. They decided to set up an organization for students and thought that through hosting competitions, students’ interest for agricultural learning will be aroused. Besides, the efficiency of

<sup>1</sup> The full name of CTSOs is career and technical student organizations. It is an integral part of American career and technical education which is a substitute for vocational and technical education in “Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 2006”.

agricultural education's practice instruction will be promoted. Therefore, the first club for farm boys was established. It was called "Boys' Corn Clubs" and was the original form of CTSOs, paving the way for appearance of similar organizations.

### **1.2 The Confirmation of Youth Clubs' Purpose and Content**

After the emergence of Boys' Corn Clubs, an organization named Girls' Canning Clubs to unite and educate farm girls was formed. They successfully aroused farm youth's interest toward agriculture study and life. This was followed by tomato, cotton and potato clubs, and clubs for raising pigs and poultry (Leake, 1915). They are called by a joint name—"youth club", referring to those organizations aiming at youth will age between 12-18 years old and will engage in agriculture in the future. Although they had different names, they formed unified purpose and activity model.

First, the purposes of youth clubs were prominently divided into three aspects. a) to provide easy-operating instructional method to teacher, b) to deepen youth's recognition toward the earth and to learn methods of planting, animal breeding and agricultural product proceeding, c) to help farm youth forming a thrift habit and unique temperament. Second, youth clubs' activities contained daily activities and agricultural competition. According to Core's description, in daily life, farm boys in youth club learned to rotate crops, test seeds, hybridize animals as well as pave the road. Besides, boys should beautify schoolyard and plough up the garden. Girls would learn sewing, cooking and food preservation (Gore, 1988). In agricultural competition, taking corn-planting as example, members should obey instruction guidance from agriculture governments and then, independently grow one acre corn. When the corn harvests, members would be awarded. In awarding, 30 points were scored for the greatest yield, 20 points for the best written account, and 30 points for the best showing of profit on the investment, making a total of 100 points (Marble, 1912, p.122).

### **1.3 The Scale Expanding of Youth Clubs**

At the beginning of 20 century, communities in America established high school vigorously. More than that, agricultural instructional apartment was added to those schools. According to the figures, in 1906-1907 school year, public school with agricultural instructional apartment was less than 100, but in 1908-1909 school year, the number has reached to 259. In 1916, the amount of school that offered agricultural course has reached 2,675 (Bradley, 2001, p.39). The increase of agricultural institute leads to a heavier pressure of teachers. In order to unload the burden, teachers established youth clubs in succession, which pushes forward the further development of youth clubs (Ibid., p.35). The boom of agricultural education speed up the process of vocational

education systematization, resulting in the promulgation of "Vocational Educational Act of 1963". The act provided a financial guarantee for vocational education. In addition, youth club grasped a chance to develop.

Firstly, the publish of "Vocational Educational Act of 1963" lead to a larger scale of middle agricultural institutes, resulting in the increase of youth clubs.

Secondly, the emphasis on agriculture practice pushes forward the development of youth clubs. According to the law, students in secondary agricultural education should take part in programs in agriculture related enterprise after school. In addition, they should attend agriculture competition to compete with adult farmers. All the time, youth club was an important assistance to agricultural practice instruction because they played an active role in hosting agricultural education and developed a close relationship with agriculture related enterprises. Therefore, it was the most suitable body to lead students obeying regulations above, doing more agriculture practice. Consequently, the law pushed forward emergence of youth clubs to a large degree.

Thirdly, government's indirect subsidy regulated by the law was proved to be a deciding factor of its scale development. The law is regulated that grants given to education could be used to support agricultural teachers' activities. Obviously, initiating, managing youth clubs belong to "agricultural teacher activity". Therefore, those regulations not only provide a new fund source to youth clubs, but also lead to a larger scale of them.

Influenced by fast increase of Agricultural education institutions and "Vocational Educational Act of 1963", youth clubs grew rapidly. In 1920s, 28 states in US have constructed youth clubs. To sum up, the total member has achieved 150 thousands.

---

## **2. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FUTURE FARMERS OF AMERICA (1920S-1940S)**

---

### **2.1 The Occurrence of Virginia Vocational Student Organization**

By 1920s, youth clubs in Virginia grew vigorously and contain various types. However, due to its scattered distribution and narrowed member type, it was believed that a more integrated and inclusive organization should be constructed. Water S. Newman was the critical figure who was agriculture education supervision. He shared his idea with agricultural education staffs while on a return visit to the agricultural education department at Virginia in September 1925. On the second day of the conference of teacher trainers in October 1925, the name Future Farmers of Virginia were adopted as the official name. Then, a motion was passed to make up board, and Groseclose, an agricultural teacher trainer, was bestowed a mission to draft a constitution and by-laws. To assuring the

scientifically, one instructor from each supervisors district of the state to be appointed to assist Groseclose to draft the final copy of FFV constitution and by-laws. Since FFV established, Virginia agricultural and educational governments rev up publicity, introducing the experience of establishing a FFV chapter. Then, till 1926, 42 FFV chapters had established in Virginia (Bradley, 2001).

## 2.2 The Establishment and Development of Federal Agricultural Student Organization

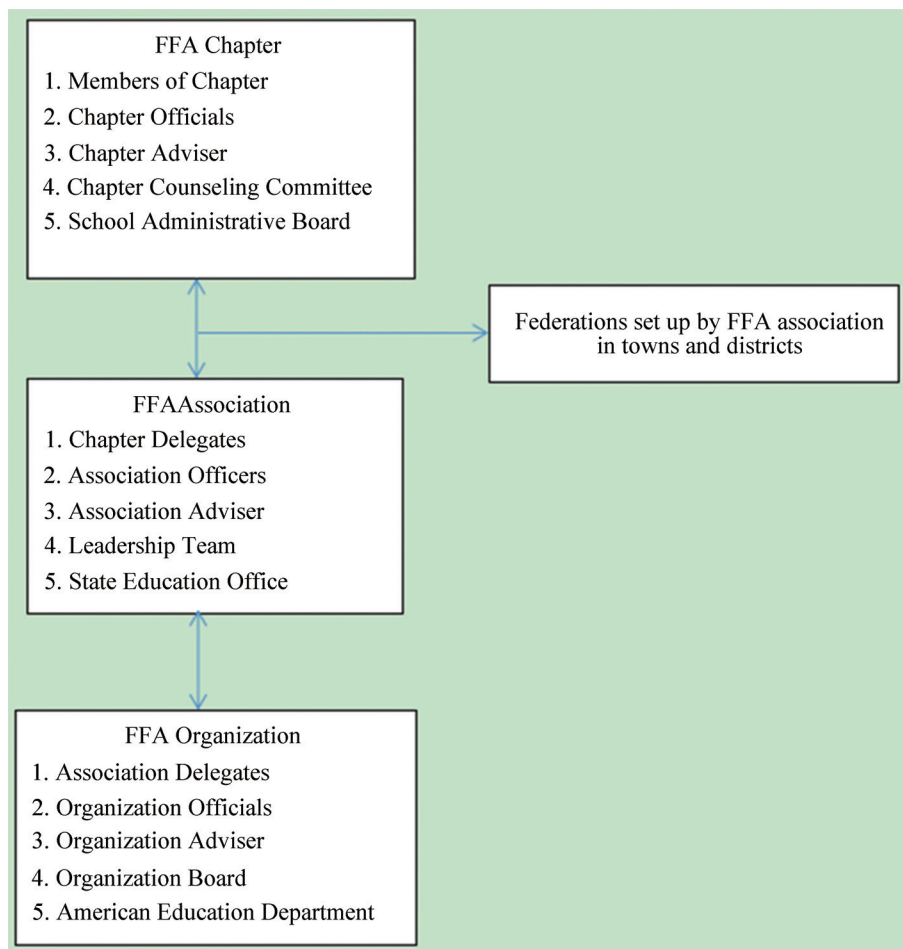
When the establishment of FFV spread over the United State, many education professors recognized that they should strike while the iron is hot, trying to construct a united agricultural vocational student organization based on FFV.

In the first place, to expand FFA state association and district chapters. Construction of national FFA accelerated the expansion of its branches. Depending on states and local government’s propaganda, FFA set up 35 state associations and 1500 district chapters. Next, to establish an external image. In order to form a characterized image, national blue and corn gold were adopted as FFA official colors. Besides, FFA unified the form and color of its

official uniform. From then on, boys wearing dark blue T-shirt, blue and white short pants, blue jackets with the FFA emblem on the back, with a blue cap on the head and a yellow tie became the typical figure of FFA. Thirdly, to perfect internal system. To reach a virtuous operation, FFA strengthen the constructing of system. Based on FFV membership system, FFA’s five-level member evaluating mechanism was formed. In addition,an official manual was published in 1933, which contains FFA history, ceremony, program,reward system, regulations and so on. Finally, to promote hardware strength. During the process of national conference in 1937, the construction of FFA base embarked on. Then, a school to cultivate leadership of FFA members was established and in 1939, FFA headquarter was set up in Alexandria (*FFA History*, 2015).

## 2.3 The Confirmation of “Federal-State-District” System

Since FFA formally established, it enlarged effect, forming three levels. Respectively, they are federal organization, state association and district chapter. FFA positively perfected inner system, confirming “Federal-State-District” system. The structure is shown as Figure 1.



**Figure 1**  
 The Figure of FFA “Federal-State-District” System (*FFA Structure*, 2015)

In general, national FFA plays a role as program exploitation, policy making, development planning as well as image popularizing. State FFA should try hard to assist the operation of district chapters. Besides, FFA state association should be in charge of agricultural teacher training, the planning and implementing of programs related to secondary agricultural course as well as undertaking a guarantee of subsidy to FFA chapters. As refer to chapters, they take a responsibility of organization's daily activities (Alisha, 2008). The two-way arrows represent the relationship between three levels of FFA, that are message upload releasing. In other words, FFA state association is located in a core place, and it should collect information of chapters from uniting association while reporting periodically the developing condition of FFA to national FFA. From the three-level system, we can see a clear, cooperative relationship among and inside FFA. System speeds up FFA Connotation development process.

### 3. THE CONNOTATION DEVELOPMENT OF FUTURE FARMERS OF AMERICA (FROM 40S 20<sup>TH</sup> TO 21 CENTURY)

#### 3.1 The Internationalization of FFA

After middle 20 century, movement about school revolutionary movement was raised by the United state government. In order to make middle school more effective, congress passes Public Law 81-740 (1950). The act mentioned that, FFA is an integral part of secondary agricultural instructional program and the national government should provide subsidy to activities of FFA. Besides, staff of the education department could be engaged in FFA. It is obvious that the supports from "81-740" built a bridge to connect vocational education and FFA. FFA started to rethink its role and decide to develop a more connotative way.

In 1949, FFA developed a transnational communication program with youth farmer clubs in United Kingdom, the program was a curtain raiser to the international development of FFA. Till now, FFA exploit 10 types of transnational program.

a) Work Experience Abroad-it is an educational program providing a practical working experience in another country.

b) Development Projects-it aimed to provide educational materials, seeds, or livestock to youth in developing countries.

c) FFA Study Seminars-it is a two to three week program that is arranged primarily for state associations to Europe or other countries.

d) CARE, INC.- it is about direct queries or contributions to CARE, Inc..

e) Walks for Development-it is a unique program designed to raise funds needed for development projects at home and abroad.

f) Agricultural Seminars-they are short courses, fairs, and exhibitions-each year a variety if activities of short duration for teachers or students take place overseas.

g) Heifer Project-it is to provide livestock and technical know-how to other countries.

h) CROP-it is a program about presenting information available on how your chapter can help by writing.

i) World neighbors- it is about the assistance to developing countries

j) Meals for Millions- the program is devoted to improve the diets of undernourished people in Latin America, and other area (*FFA International Programs*, 1974, p.3).

#### 3.2 The Distillation of FFA Community Service

"Community service" is a program developed to serve the community to which FFA chapters belong. It is prominently aimed at helping vulnerable group and to maintain a good environment for the community. After 1970s, towns in America were on a path toward integrative development. Towns those who dependent on traditional agriculture gradually declined. As an important leadership in the village and town, FFA initiated to exploit new programs to change those towns lag behind. Among those programs, BOAC is the most typical one. BOAC was founded by FFA foundation, aiming at changing country life style. Compared with FFA former "community service", BOAC presented many new features. Firstly, as refer to serve a purpose, former one is aimed at protecting the community environment or strengthening hardware infrastructure constructions, but BOAC hoped to change community people's life style, concerning with their spiritual core for the first time. Secondly, as refer to serve mode, in former community service program, FFA is arbitrary. In other words, it judged the need of the community and decided the project dependently. However in BOAC, FFA took a more democratic attitude. When there was a need to evaluate community's condition or to choose serving project, FFA would consult and cooperate with other agents. Thirdly, as refer to serve a period, in consideration of its permanent goal, BOAC would last for years, but former program sustained less than one year (Block, 1985). Therefore, BOAC symbolized a deep revolution of FFA community service.

#### 3.3 The Adjustment of FFA's Professional Program

In 21 century, It was widely believed that vocational students not only be trained to gain post skills, but also be cultivated with comprehensive competence that are helpful to their development at work and in life. Therefore, a revolution name "From School to Career" took place in vocational education. Aiming at changing

a stereotype concept that vocational education is to achieve “employment realization”, the revolution emphasizes on students’ long lasting development. Facing the change, FFA modified itself from two aspects. First, FFA enriched organization goals. Second, FFA exploited a new program to promote career development for students.

The boom of career education lead to a critic from society toward the job skills training of vocational education. It was widely believed that vocational students should be taught with broad competences based on occupational group and profound academic theories. Consequently, by converging similar occupation type, adult and vocational education office in American education department replaced the traditional occupation type with 16 occupational clusters. Facing the change, FFA not only adopt occupational cluster-American Food and Resources’ standard and content of members’ career development activities, but also input the standard into FFA reward mechanism (*National FFA Career Development Events*, 2015). Hence, FFA went on the track of connotation development.

Through historical analysis of FFA, we can find that the development of FFA is a process from spontaneity to consciousness. After completing three levels system-construction, FFA found out rule to develop itself. On the one hand, FFA set long-term goals, playing an increasingly role on personnel cultivation of Career and Technical Education. More than that, FFA attached more emphasis on members’ self realization. On the other hand, FFA got a strong initiative in the changing world. In order

to coordinate with the adjustment of industrial structure as well as transforms in vocational education, it adjusted organization objects and exploits new programs. All in all, becoming an integral part of CTE, FFA set up a platform to combine theory and practice for CTE students.

---

## REFERENCES

---

- Alisha, D. H. (2008). *CTSOs a reference guide*. Association for Career and Technical Education.
- Anonymous. (1981). *State bureau of labor administration. vocational and technical education in five countries* (p.275). Beijing: Labor Press.
- Block, J. R. (1985). *Building our American communities*. Department of Education, Washington, DC.; Reynolds (R. J.) Industries, Inc., Winston-Salem, NC.
- Bradley W. B. (2001). *History of the Virginia FFA association*. Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.
- FFA History*. (2015, September 2). Retrieved from [http://www.ffa.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/about\\_ffahistory.pdf](http://www.ffa.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/about_ffahistory.pdf)
- FFA International Programs*. (1974). Institution Future Farmers of America, Washington, D.C.
- FFA Structure*. (2015, September 6). Retrieved from <http://www.ffa.org/about/what-is-ffa/ffa-structure>
- Gore, D. (Ed.). (1988). *4-H and Iowa*. Iowa State Historical Department.
- Marble, C. (1912). *Country life and the country school* (p.122). Chicago: Row, Peterson and Company.
- National FFA Career Development Events*. (2015, September 16). Retrieve from [http://www.ffa.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/cde\\_livestock\\_2012.pdf#search=career%20cluster](http://www.ffa.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/cde_livestock_2012.pdf#search=career%20cluster)