

# Chapter 23

## FFA

“To practice brotherhood, honor agricultural opportunities and responsibilities, and develop those qualities of leadership which an FFA member should possess” (National FFA Organization, 2004).

This excerpt from the official FFA Opening Ceremony describes what FFA members do when they get together to hold an official FFA chapter meeting. More important, it encapsulates the meaning of FFA to thousands of American youth enrolled in agricultural education. From the organization’s official beginning in 1928 to today, millions of young people have benefitted socially, emotionally, and professionally from their participation in the FFA experience.

FFA’s mission is to make a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth, and career success (National FFA Organization, 2004). This mission is manifested in the leadership programs, Career Development Events, scholarship programs, and community development programs offered to FFA members at the local, state and national levels.

**23-1.** Committee members of a local FFA chapter in Oregon are meeting to plan an activity.



## TERMS

American FFA Degree  
chapter development  
Chapter FFA Degree  
community development  
Discovery FFA Degree  
FFA Creed  
FFA emblem  
FFA Motto  
Greenhand FFA Degree  
Henry C. Groseclose  
C. H. Lane  
New Farmers of America  
Walter S. Newman  
program of activities  
Public Law 105-225  
State FFA Degree  
student development

## OBJECTIVES

This chapter provides background information on FFA and its role in agricultural education. It has the following objectives:

- 1 Discuss the history and purpose of FFA
- 2 Explain how FFA is structured as an organization
- 3 Discuss FFA basics that are important in a local chapter
- 4 Explain the FFA degree system
- 5 Explain how to develop an FFA program of activities
- 6 Identify best practices in managing an FFA chapter

## HISTORY AND PURPOSE OF FFA

Students of agricultural education should devote time to the study of the history of the FFA organization. By examining the roots of FFA, one can more clearly understand the mission and purpose of the organization and why FFA has existed for more than 75 years.

### THE BEGINNING

The movement to create the FFA organization started long before the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act in 1917 and the incorporation of FFA in 1928. Many states already had some type of system for providing training in the agricultural and mechanical arts to students below the college level. Clubs and organizations designed to encourage and support farm youth grew out of the agricultural education movement, but there was no national effort to coordinate the activities of the individual clubs.

### A Student Organization Emerges

With the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act, the national coordination of agricultural education made it convenient for a student organization to emerge with the goal of encouraging farm boys and their families to adopt the best practices

of agricultural production. Between 1917 and 1928, the agricultural education profession began the work to create a national organization.

One of the most notable efforts to begin an organization was in Virginia. **Walter S. Newman**, state supervisor for agricultural education in Virginia, was a pioneer in the development of FFA. He believed that the rural farm boys were not getting the same opportunities for personal growth and advancement as their city-bred counterparts. The isolation inherent to farm life made it difficult for farm youth to experience the cultural and social life so readily available to urban youth. This isolation bred discontent and stunted the development of a positive self-image in farm youth. Newman believed that some type of organization was necessary to provide opportunities for personal advancement and the growth of self-confidence in rural farm youth. In 1925, he joined with colleagues Henry C. Groseclose, Edmund Magill, and H. W. Sanders in developing the Future Farmers of Virginia.

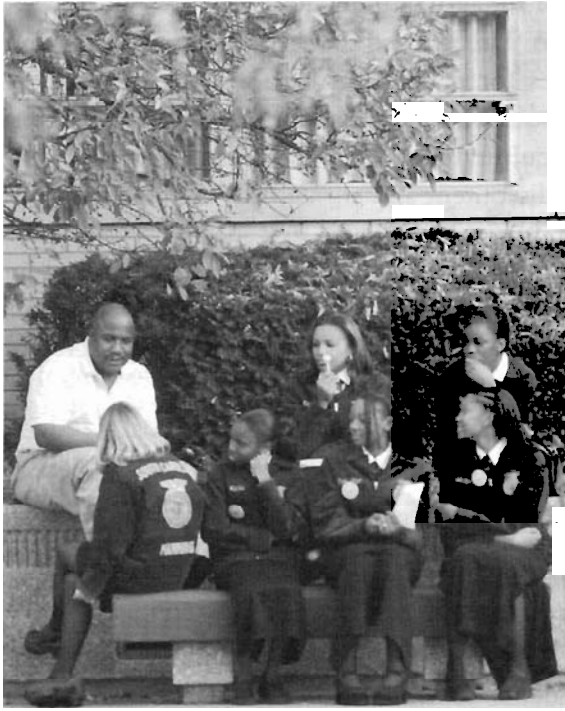
Before the creation of FFA, regional and national livestock and dairy judging activities provided opportunities for competition among agriculture students. In 1926, federal agricultural education officials reached an agreement with the American Royal Livestock Show to host a livestock judging contest in Kansas City, Missouri. Later that same year, the National Congress of Vocational Agriculture Students was also established in Kansas City, Missouri. This three-day convention included tours of local agricultural businesses, banquets, and meetings designed to encourage students to learn more about the agricultural industry.

## Future Farmers of America Formed

By 1928, the movement for a national agricultural youth organization had grown so strong that the Federal Board for Vocational Education was asked to assist in the development of the youth organization, its governance structure, and its bylaws. The National Congress of Vocational Agriculture Students and the American Royal Rodeo and Livestock Show also included a special convention held for the purposes of establishing the Future Farmers of America.

On November 20, 1928, 33 delegates from 18 states officially adopted the constitution and bylaws of the new organization and elected Leslie Applegate of New Jersey as the national president. **C. H. Lane** was chosen to serve as the National FFA Advisor, and **Henry C. Groseclose** was elected to serve as the Executive Secretary / Treasurer. The old Baltimore Hotel where the organization was founded is no longer standing, but a monument erected by the citizens of Kansas City, Missouri, to honor the establishment of FFA in that city exists on the site of the hotel. Until 1999, the National FFA Convention was held in Kansas City, Missouri.

**23–2.** FFA represents opportunity for students to travel, learn, and develop important personal skills. (Courtesy, National FFA Organization)



## Expansion of FFA

As the National FFA Organization grew, it became necessary to develop more effective business practices to keep pace with the needs of a growing number of members. Delegates to the 1938 National FFA Convention set aside funding to establish an FFA camp. In the process of doing this, they also created a Board of Trustees to oversee the construction and development of this camp and subsequent properties. In 1939, these funds were used to purchase 25.5 acres of land in Alexandria, Virginia, for the national FFA camp. This property, once owned by George Washington, was to serve as the headquarters of FFA for 59 years. The National FFA Foundation, Inc., was established in 1944 to support the activities, programs, and services of the National FFA Organization. In 1948, the National FFA Supply Service opened its doors on the Alexandria property, providing official FFA jackets and other paraphernalia for FFA members and chapters.

In 1952, the *National Future Farmer Magazine* began publication and was sent to all FFA members as part of the membership benefits. In 1953, FFA was honored with a special commemorative postage stamp issued by the U.S. Post Office. In 1959, a new headquarters building was constructed on the site of the old national FFA camp.

By the 1960s, FFA was maturing as an organization. Many new programs and services were being offered to its members, but the social climate of America had progressed to the point where it was impossible for FFA to continue to limit its membership to farm boys. In 1965, FFA and New Farmers of America (NFA) merged to become one organization. In 1969, girls were officially admitted to FFA membership, even though they had been unofficial members for years. One method by which FFA advisors were able to secure FFA membership for girls before 1969 was to list only their first initials and last names on the official FFA roster. The National FFA Organization was none the wiser that a certain “G. Bradley” of a local FFA chapter in North Carolina was actually Genie Bradley. Numerous such cases exist in the history of the FFA organization.

In 1971, the National FFA Alumni Association was established to encourage friends of FFA to continue their support of FFA through their time and resources.

The 1980s and 1990s were a period of rapid change for the National FFA Organization. In 1988, delegates at the National FFA Convention, in an effort to reflect the diverse nature of FFA members, changed the name of the Future

Farmers of America to the National FFA Organization. In 1989, the *National Future Farmer* became *FFA New Horizons*, and in 1996, the National FFA Board of Directors voted to move the National FFA Convention to Louisville, Kentucky, in 1999 and the National FFA Center to Indianapolis, Indiana, in 1998. In 1998, Public Law 81-740 was replaced by provisions in Public Law 105-225 to meet more accurately the future needs of the National FFA Organization. The convention moves to Indianapolis in 2007.