

# Aristotle, the Golden Mean and the FFA

By Gary Moore

Most people know that Aristotle was a Greek philosopher, but what does this have to do with the FFA? Aristotle developed the philosophical principle known as the "Golden Mean." It would benefit agriculture teachers to examine the Golden Mean and consider its implications to the FFA and agricultural education.

Simply stated, Aristotle's Golden Mean asserts there must be a balance between two extremes. Much of Aristotle's writing about the Golden Mean had to do with moral virtue. For example, if one were to look at the idea of Fear and Confidence, "Cowardice" would be one extreme and "Rashness" the other. "Courage", the desirable virtue, would be the Golden Mean.

In my 30+ years in agricultural education I have observed wide extremes in how agricultural education teachers regard the FFA. I believe there is a middle ground, a Golden Mean, we must embrace. In this article we will analyze and critique several positions taken by agriculture teachers regarding FFA and Agricultural Education.

## The FFA Continuum

The diagram below (Figure 1) represents four observable positions in regards to the FFA embraced by agriculture teachers.

No FFA – While it may be hard to believe, there are some agricultural education programs where there is no FFA. This is unconscionable. Students are being cheated out of valuable opportunities to participate in FFA opportunities. Since the FFA is considered to be an integral part of the agricultural education program by statute and practice, a teacher who willfully does not have a FFA is guilty of professional malpractice. There is even a legal term to describe this – nonfeasance (failure to perform, or complete neglect of, a required legal or contractual duty).

When I was in graduate school one of my professors told of a court case in Texas where a student had moved from one school district to another. The second school district had agricultural education but no FFA. Since the student planned to pursue advanced FFA degrees, and this opportunity was no longer available, he sued the school district and won.

Since the FFA can be a valuable motivational tool and reinforces student learning, it would be educationally stupid to not have a FFA. It is also expected from an ethical and legal standpoint.

Minimalist–Next on the continuum is the Minimalist. There is a FFA chapter and students pay dues but there is a lack of activity. In 2000, Zane Vaughn conducted a study of FFA program quality in North

Carolina. The results were rather shocking. A large number of FFA chapters did not have an annual banquet or even regular FFA meetings. There just wasn't much going on in many of the chapters. While the teachers could claim there is a FFA chapter, it is primarily in name only.

Recently an agriculture teacher in one of my graduate classes complained that preparing a FFA team for a Career Development Event was just taking too much of his valuable time. This teacher, out of industry, would rather spend the time preparing to teach the state mandated end-of-course test. While there is a lot of pressure in many school districts to do well on the end-of-the course test, research tells us that participation in the FFA has greater payback for the student in the long run.

In Revelation 3:15-16 the scriptures state, "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth." This is a pretty accurate description of the minimalist FFA chapter. These lukewarm FFA chapters need to become hot.

Moderate –Aristotle would like to see a moderate FFA chapter. This is a FFA chapter that has capable officers and a challenging Program

No FFA

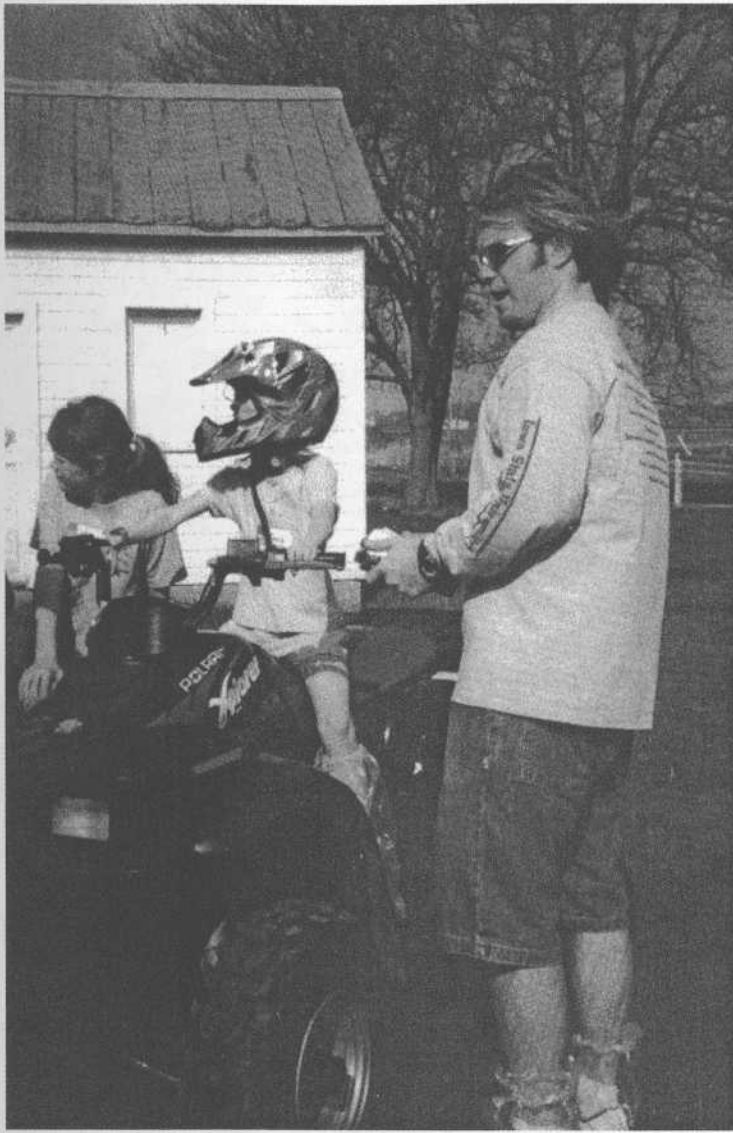
Minimalist

Moderate

Fanatic

Figure 1: Observable Positions in Regards to the FFA Embraced by Agriculture Teachers.

Moore states that agriculture teachers fit into one of four observable positions in regards to how they embrace the FFA. (Photo courtesy of Stacie Turnbull.)



of Activities. There is an annual banquet, regular meetings with some substance, and some fun activities. FFA proficiency awards are given at the local level. The chapter participates in many FFA activities, but not all of them. The teacher involves as many different students as possible in the FFA.

The chapter participates in FFA activities that make sense for the curriculum taught and community. Students are taught skills in class that will be needed to participate in Career Development Events (CDEs) but the actual training of teams and practices occur outside of class time. The agricultural teacher

doesn't spend every minute of every day immersed in the FFA.

**Fanatic** – On the end of the FFA-Agricultural Education continuum is the Fanatic. The teacher may be known as the FFA teacher instead of the agriculture teacher. The students participate in every conceivable FFA activity and are always on the go. The curriculum that is taught in the class is the FFA Career Development Events (CDE). When one competitive event is over, instruction starts for the next. Students participate in FFA CDEs that have no relation to the curriculum taught in the school. The same set of

students tend to be involved in every FFA activity. The teacher will bend the rules as far as possible and might even break one or two along the way. The motto is to win at all costs.

Some years ago I was teaching a traveling seminar and we were visiting a Super Star FFA chapter in Southern Illinois. One of the students in the class asked the teacher how so much could be accomplished in a one-teacher department. The teacher somewhat reluctantly told of the breakup of his marriage. When ever the FFA replaces a marriage, family, etc. there is a lack of balance. Aristotle would not approve.

With the teacher shortage in agricultural education, we don't need teachers leaving the profession. The Fanatic is a perfect candidate to burn out. It simply is not healthy to the individual or the profession to have FFA Fanatics.

### Conclusion

Agriculture teachers need to consider the Golden Mean when examining their agricultural education and FFA program. The old three circle diagram of agricultural education show that classroom instruction, SAE and the FFA are equal in size and overlap. The FFA circle is the one that needs to be examined. Is it equal in size in your program to instruction? It should not be much smaller nor should it be much larger than the instruction circle. When these circles are about equal in size, then you have achieved the Golden Mean. After all, I'm sure Aristotle had the FFA in mind when he chose one of the FFA colors in naming his philosophical principle.

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