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Advisory Councils in Tennessee School-Based Agricultural Education Programs

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Abstract

Advisory councils are essential to successful, working relationships among school-based agricultural education programs and the surrounding community. The purpose of this study was to describe how school-based agricultural education programs implement and utilize advisory councils in Tennessee and to determine agricultural education teachers' perceptions of program advisory councils. We found 76.5% of program respondents had an active advisory council. Respondents perceived advisory councils positively; however, most teachers felt they could better utilize their advisory council. The belief that the agricultural education teacher is the leader of the program's advisory council was also implied. Future research is needed to further strengthen methods to enhance the use of an advisory council. In addition, professional development programs focused on how to best establish and utilize an advisory council is recommended.

Keywords: Advisory councils; agricultural education; Tennessee

Introduction

The benefits of advisory councils are well documented in many different contexts (Heylman, 2011), including formal educational settings (Clark & Clark, 2005; Greenlee, 2010). The involvement of people through advisory councils to influence the operation and organization of programs is common in the United States (Boyle, 1981). Many state departments of education have utilized advisory councils as part of their improvement plans, and on the school level, advisory councils strengthen community support by giving stakeholders input into school-level issues (Greenlee, 2010). The benefit of developing advisory councils or relationships among schools, the community, and parents is improved student achievement (Clark & Clark, 2005; Greenlee, 2010). Students are more likely to achieve academically when parents are aware and expectations are

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concentrated on student success (Clark & Clark, 2005). Community members, parents, teachers, and other school faculty should work together to establish strong working partnerships to benefit students (Clark & Clark, 2005). To establish strong working partnerships, advisory council members must understand how the organization operates (Heylman, 2011). Furthermore, the Association for Career and Technical Education (CTE) recognizes advisory councils as a critical component of successful career and technical education programs (Baxter, 2011).

Advisory councils began to surface in technical and agricultural education in the 1920s and 1930s (Phipps, Edward, Dyer, & Ball, 2008). These early advisory councils supported the teacher with "curriculum questions, provided materials and resources for the program, and provided input toward the general guidance of the agricultural education program" (Phipps et al., 2008, p. 82). During this era, many adult-centered programs existed, leading to the formation of adult-led councils that evolved into today's modern advisory councils (Phipps, et. al, 2008).

Advisory councils were first officially established in technical education during the Vocational Education Act of 1963 (Hayward & Benson, 1993). During the revision process, the Education Amendments of 1977 recognized the term advisory councils in school-based agricultural education and required an advisory committee in order for school districts to receive federal funding (Barbour, 2010). In 1984, the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act (revised in 1998 and 2006) reiterated the importance of advisory councils for individual states to assess their local programs (Barbour, 2010).

To that end, the primary functions of school-based agricultural education advisory councils are to: "(1) assist in the planning decisions of agricultural education programs and (2) oversee the evaluation of agricultural education programs to ensure that the program's goals are achieved" (Phipps et al., 2008, p. 83). Masser, Falk, and Foster (2014) purported community involvement within the local school-based agricultural education program is essential. The belief that community support and interaction between the local school-based agricultural education programs is vital to the success of a program is shared among a large scope of agricultural educators (Masser, et. al., 2014). The community and the school-based agricultural education program can work together through an advisory council, and the council can assist the local agricultural education program by studying needs, evaluating current program, developing objectives and methods to evaluate proposed objectives, suggesting which national and/or state standards should apply to the local program, reviewing facilities needed, supporting public relations efforts, providing input into the courses offered locally, and ways of improving Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) programs, and the local FFA chapter (Phipps et al., 2008).

However, there is an incomplete picture of the scope and use of advisory councils in Tennessee school-based agricultural education programs. This is a concern given community support is a major factor in program quality and teacher effectiveness (Talbert, Vaughn, Croom, & Lee, 2007; Roberts & Dyer, 2004). Also, systematic program planning is important to school-based agricultural education programs (Wilson, Camp, & Balschweid, 2006), and advisory councils are an essential element of program planning (American Association for Agricultural Education, 2001). Decker and Decker (2003) stated "a potential problem is that while the community's cooperation and collaboration are needed, they may not be easy to get" (p. 27). Although, this statement was in reference to all school and community partnerships, there is evidence that has identified community collaboration with school-based agricultural education as an area in need of improvement (Masser, et. al., 2014). Furthermore, many obstacles exist in the development and usability of advisory councils (Barbour, 2010). This study sought to describe the scope and use of advisory councils in Tennessee.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Masser et al.'s (2014) adapted model of Caffarella's (2002) Interactive Model of Program Planning served as the conceptual framework of this study (See Figure 1). The model is "interactive and comprehensive; people and places are acknowledged as important in the planning process; differences among cultures are taken into account in the planning process; and practitioners find the model useful and therefore a practical tool" (Caffarella, 2002, p. 20). Educational program planning where the community is involved is a dual process where stakeholders are "involved as participants, not merely as audiences, in discussions and actions on behalf of school improvement, increased student achievement, and strengthened families" (Decker & Decker, 2003, p.105).

Congruently, the process of program planning in agricultural education is complex and involves input from a variety of sources including, agriculture industry members, school administration, community groups and organizations, businesses, parents and family of students, students, and teachers and staff (Masser, et al., 2014; Decker & Decker, 2003; Layfield & Dobbins, 2002). However, the individuals involved should be representative of the community (Decker & Decker, 2003). Masser et al.'s adapted model has no real beginnings or ends and is meant to capture the nonlinear approach often taken in program planning when stakeholders and community members are involved. Pragmatically, "instead of addressing one item at a time, program planners often work with a number of components of the model at the same time and in no particular order" (Masser et al., 2014, p. 118) and when determining which components of the model to use, there is no real method; it is up to the stakeholders (Caffarella, 2002). This flexibility allows the model to be used by local schools and communities as they see fit to represent their unique context or situation (Masser et al., 2014).

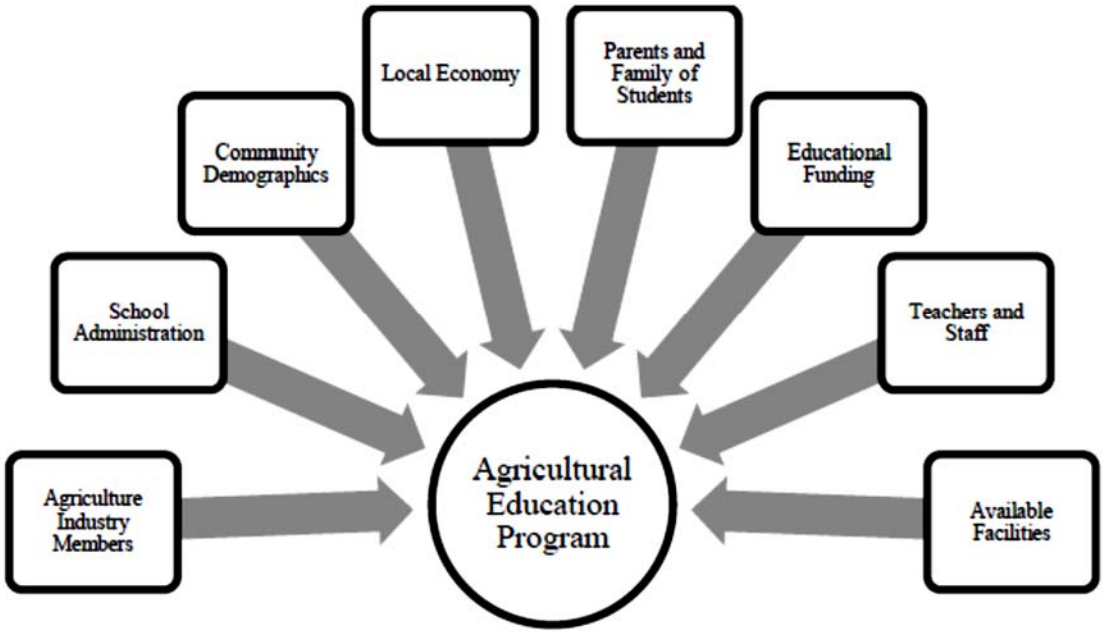

Figure 1. Interactive model of program planning as it relates to school-based agricultural education programs (Masser et al., 2014, p. 118).

School-Based Agricultural Education Program Design

School-based agricultural education is comprised of three instructional components (see Figure 2): (a) classroom/laboratory, (b) FFA, and (c) SAE. These instructional components highlight the importance of formal instruction, leadership and character education, and experiential, service, and/or work-based learning (CASE, 2012; National FFA Organization, 2015). They are also highly valued and incorporated into the educational experiences students receive while enrolled in an agricultural education program (Phipps et. al, 2008). Classroom instruction is the platform where students and teachers can discuss and study problems relevant to a specific area of study (Phipps et. al., 2008). The classroom involvement prepares students for application and problem solving in the laboratory or the field (Phipps et. al., 2008). Laboratories offer a vast array of learning opportunities as they can vary in settings, skill requirements, and problem solving (Phipps et. al., 2008). The main avenue for leadership and character development within a school-based agricultural education program is the National FFA Organization, which "strives to develop premier leadership, personal growth, and career success in its members and is an intra-curricular (within the curriculum) element of agricultural education in the public schools" (Phipps et. al, 2008, pp. 7-8). During FFA participation, students are provided with challenging experiences designed to develop a variety of 21st century skills needed to be successful at home, at school, and in the workplace (Phipps et. al., 2008). SAE programs offer students a chance to practice skills learned in the classroom and apply knowledge to a real-life scenario (Phipps et al. 2008). Although, the teacher supervises the SAE program, the student is independent in completing this component of agricultural education instruction (Phipps, et. al., 2008).

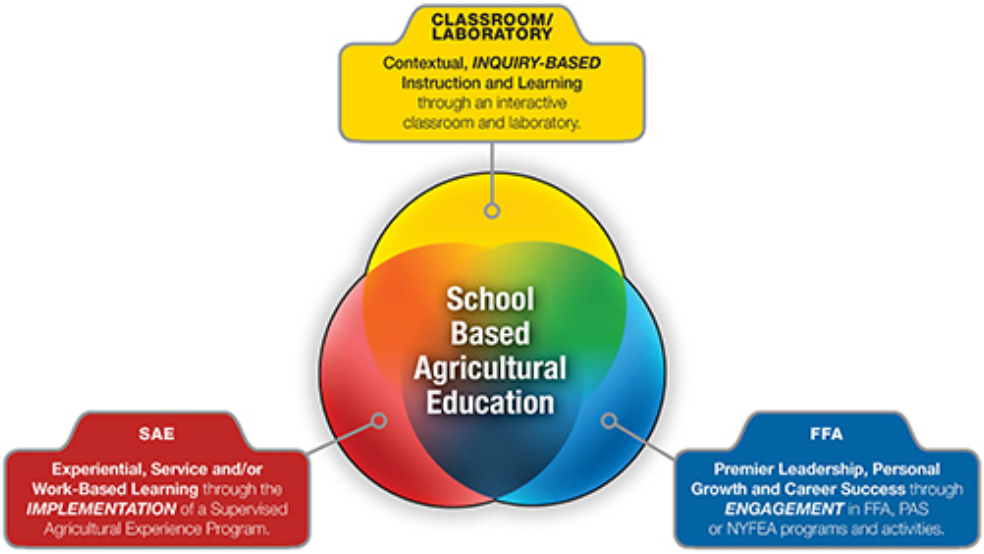

Figure 2. The three-component model (National FFA Organization, 2015, The Agricultural Education Mission Section).

In 2009, Roberts and Ball explored the role of agriculture in school-based agriculture education. They proposed the following question: "Is agriculture the content learned, or the context in which learning occurs?" (Roberts & Ball, 2009, p.81). In exploring this question, Roberts and Ball discussed three models for agricultural education: (a) content-based model for teaching agriculture, (b) context-based model for teaching agriculture, and (c) agricultural subject matter as a content and context for teaching. The content-centered aspect of instruction focuses on teaching specific skills for a job in the agricultural industry and is linked to the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 (Roberts & Ball, 2009). Figure 3 illustrates the process of designing and teaching agriculture as a content in school-based agricultural education, which begins with the agriculture industry

influencing curricula to be used in teacher and student preparation, thus resulting in a skilled agriculture worker (Roberts & Ball, 2009).

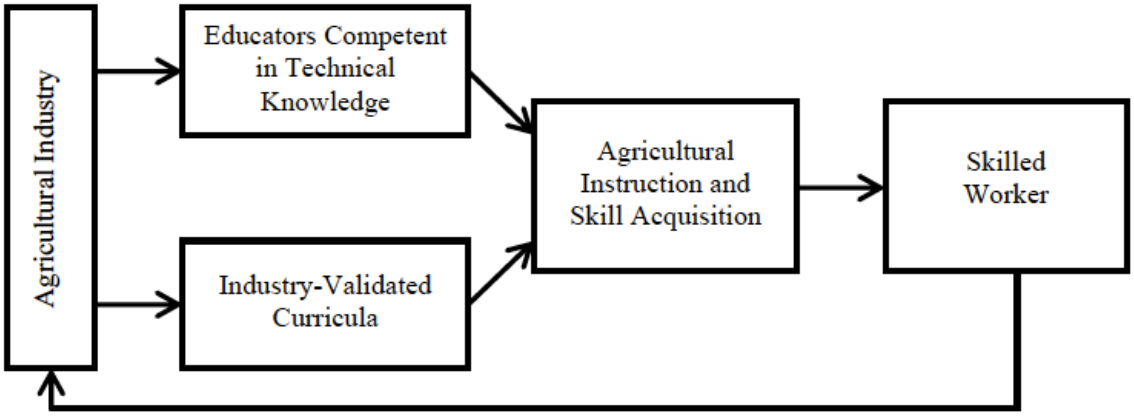

Figure 3. A content-based model for teaching agriculture (Roberts & Ball, 2009, p. 84).

Agriculture as a context for learning is related to educational paradigm shifts from the purposes of formal education being social efficiency or preparing individuals for employment in specific industries to developing lifelong learners who are broadly educated contributors of a democratic society (Roberts & Ball, 2009). The aforementioned three-component model of school-based agricultural education also supports agriculture as a context for learning (Roberts & Ball, 2009). Using agriculture as a context for learning also aligns with the epistemology of constructivism (Roberts & Ball, 2009), and the view that learning involves cognitive processes connected to physical and social contexts in which the learner is active and constructing knowledge for themselves (Shunk, 2012). Figure 4 illustrates the process of teaching agriculture as a context in school-based agricultural education (Roberts & Ball, 2009).

In this model, knowledge in and about agriculture, across traditional technical agriculture content areas or sciences and other traditional academic areas, guides but is also a construct of the interactions between and among the learners and the teacher. Teaching and learning is an interactive exchange in an authentic, experiential environment, and the outcomes of learning are a productive group of citizens equipped to think and solve problems as lifelong learners contributing holistically to the aims of a democratic society, in particular one comprised of agriculturally literate citizens. (Roberts & Ball, 2009, p. 86)

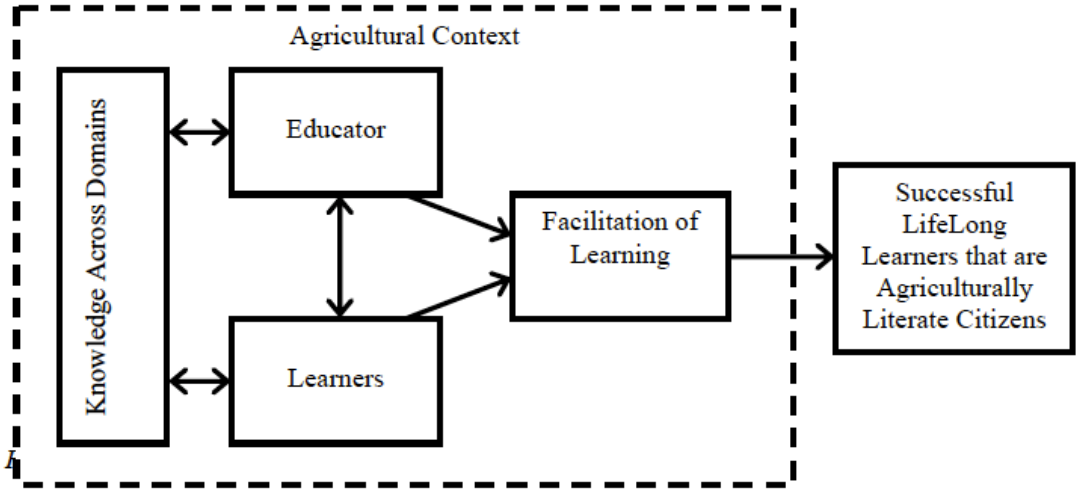

Figure 4. A context-based model for teaching agriculture (Roberts & Ball, 2009, p. 86).

The third model presented by Roberts and Ball (2009) views agriculture as a content and context for learning (see Figure 5). In this model, school-based agricultural education programs prepare students to be lifelong learners that are agriculturally literate and possess skills necessary for employment in the agriculture industry (Roberts & Ball, 2009). This approach draws from the prior two models and proposes a dual purpose for school-based agricultural education (Roberts & Ball, 2009).

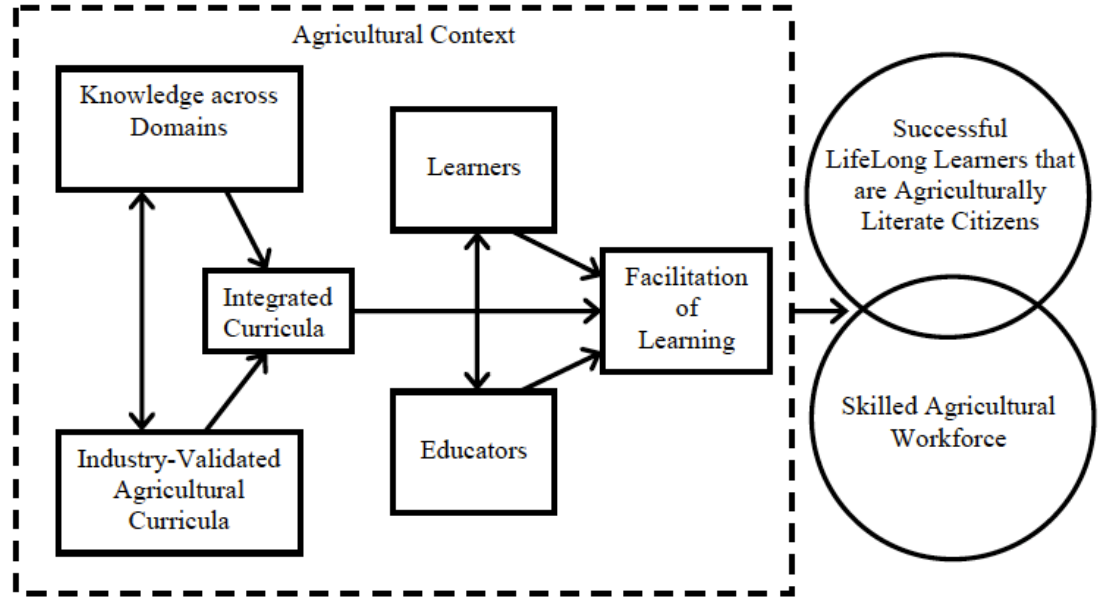

Figure 5. Conceptual model for agricultural subject matter as content and context for teaching (Roberts & Ball, 2009, p. 87).

In the context of this study, advisory councils, school administrators, and agricultural education teachers must grapple with the function of agriculture in the school-based agricultural education program and design, deliver, and evaluate programs on their chosen purpose at the local level. Roberts and Ball's (2009) models provide frameworks for viewing the purpose of agriculture on a local or community level.

Use and Views of Advisory Councils in School-Based Agricultural Education

Whaley and Sutphin (1987) reported 77% of California school-based agricultural education programs were operating with an advisory council, and those without advisory councils were not complying with state standards. Additionally, Whaley and Sutphin found a majority of California school-based agricultural education program advisory councils held two to four meetings annually, and were composed of five to ten members. Furthermore, they reported in most instances the agricultural education teacher nominated new members for the advisory council, recorded minutes of the meetings, and were the most common member on an advisory council. Whaley and Sutphin also reported approximately half of the advisory councils provided members with written descriptions of their responsibilities and did not use school funds.

Barbour (2010) investigated the perception and utilization of advisory councils in Texas and found of the 162 programs that responded, 43% reported they did use an advisory council. Of the participants who reported they did use an advisory council, 40% stated their council "is also considered a livestock booster club, parent support group, livestock show board or fundraising group." (Barbour, 2010, p. 53). Barbour reported the Texas teachers' top three perceived functions of the advisory councils were: (a) acting as a communication link to the community, (b) evaluating the agricultural education program, and (c) identifying facility modifications. The average number of members serving on the advisory council was 6.6 members and included the agricultural science teacher, parents or guardians, local business or industry representatives, school principal, career and technology directors, school board members, school superintendent, student representatives, assistant school principal, local elected officials, and university professors (Barbour, 2010). Barbour also found a majority of programs (68.6%) reported they received no funding for their advisory council, and the most common number of meetings was one per academic semester.

What's more, Barbour (2010) found the establishment of an advisory council was a concern to many beginning agricultural education teachers, and they lacked the skills necessary to organize an advisory council (Barbour, 2010). Similarly, Layfield and Dobbins (2002) found community support and advisory councils to be an area of concern for new and experienced teachers (Layfield & Dobbins, 2002). Moreover, Boone and Boone (2007) found a component of job satisfaction in school-based agricultural education is the support received from the community and perception the community has of the agricultural education program. Boone and Boone reported some agricultural education teachers felt they were missing a positive working relationship with their community. Many agricultural education programs suffer due to teacher attrition, and the lack of perceived support may be a contributing factor (Boone & Boone, 2007). In Boone and Boone's study, school-based agricultural education teachers, with productive relationships with the community through advisory councils, had greater job satisfaction.

Foster, Masser, and Sankey (2012) found approximately 90% of school-based agricultural education programs in Pennsylvania had an advisory council. These programs averaged 11 members composing their advisory councils, and two meetings were annually held (Foster, et. al., 2012). Similarly, Masser et al. (2014) reported 90% of Idaho programs had an advisory council (Masser et al., 2014). Masser et al. also reported the top three reasons for not having an advisory council were: "the instructor has not had time to establish an advisory council; the program is new and an advisory council has not yet been established; or another entity served the same purpose." (p. 120). In addition, they found Idaho agricultural education advisory councils consisted of both community and school representatives; half had officers; the agricultural education teacher most often recruited new members, presided over meetings recorded official minutes, and prepared the meeting agenda; most did not have school approval; and agricultural education teachers desired advisory councils to have more influence.

Purpose and Objectives

This study was a replication of Masser et al.'s (2014) work in Idaho. The purpose of this study was to describe how Tennessee school-based agricultural education programs implement and utilize advisory councils and to determine agricultural education teachers' perceptions of program advisory councils. The following objectives framed this study:

1. Determine the number of active advisory councils in school-based agricultural education programs.
2. Describe the composition of school-based agricultural education advisory councils.
3. Describe the utilization of school-based agricultural education advisory councils.
4. Describe school-based agricultural education teachers' perceptions of advisory council utilization, composition, and improvement.

Methods

Research Design, Population, and Sample

This study utilized a quantitative research approach. The research design was non-experimental descriptive research (Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson, & Walker, 2014). The target population for this study was all school-based agricultural education programs in Tennessee. One teacher from each of the 196 school-based agricultural education programs in Tennessee was selected to participate in this study based upon knowledge gained in prior research that shed light on which teacher at multiple teacher programs were more likely to respond. A teacher directory was obtained through the Tennessee FFA Foundation and was checked for accuracy by calling each program. After checking the directory and selecting one teacher from each program, the online survey software Qualtrics was used for participant notification and data collection. Dillman, Smyth, and Christian's (2009) web survey implementation procedures guided the multiple contacts made. Dillman et al. stated little research exists on the optimal combination of contacts and suggested additional contacts are not needed when responses per contact stalls. The participants received a prenotice email one week prior to the launch of the study. The following week, the participants were sent another email including the link to the questionnaire. Four reminder emails were sent to participants, and phone calls were made to nonrespondents after the third reminder. This resulted in completed questionnaires from 68 programs. In an attempt to increase response rate, mailed copies of the questionnaire were sent to nonrespondents, which yielded an additional 17 responses for a total of 85 programs or a 43.4% response rate. Since the primary purpose of this study was to describe advisory council usage and composition (program level data) and the fact the teacher to which the survey was emailed and/or mailed was not chosen randomly but based on prior knowledge of the population, efforts were not taken to account for nonresponse. To that end, the researchers determined comparing the sample to the only known demographic variable of gender for the agricultural education teachers was not logical, since the survey may not have been sent to a representative sample based on gender and the main purpose was to survey *programs* and not *individual* teachers. As a result, we recognize the generalizability of this study as a limitation and caution the reader in generalizing the results beyond the respondents. The responding programs averaged 1.8 (SD = 1.2) teachers with a mode of 1 and minimum and maximum values of 1 and 4, respectively. Furthermore, 86.8% of the programs had a teacher on a 12-month contract, 52.0% had an FFA alumni chapter, and 71.0% categorized their school/program as rural, 23.7% as suburban, and 5.3% as urban.

Instrumentation and Data Analysis

The questionnaire used in this study was modified from a previous study in Idaho (Masser, et. al., 2014) and was obtained by contacting the authors. The questionnaire consisted of 75 items and was divided into five sections: (a) introduction/presence of active advisory council (1 item), (b) council utilization and composition (52 items), (c) reasons for no advisory council (1 item), (d) perceptions (17 items), and (e) program information (4 items). Masser et al. (2014) reported an expert panel examined the questionnaire for content validity and cognitive interviews were conducted to ensure items were perceived in the correct manner. Masser et al. (2014) conducted a pilot study in Washington to ensure reliability and reported the following Cronbach's alpha coefficients: (a) .89 for the current level of advisory council influence on the program as perceived by the agriculture teacher, (b) .92 for the level of influence the advisory council should have on the program as perceived by the agriculture teacher, and (c) .70 for the agriculture teacher perceptions of agriculture education advisory councils.

Prior to distribution in Tennessee, slight wording changes were made to reflect school-based agricultural education in Tennessee and Likert-type items were changed from 0 = s*trongly disagree* or *no influence* to 100 = *strongly agree* or *extreme influence* rating scales to a 1 = s*trongly disagree* or *no influence* to 5 = *strongly agree* or *extreme influence* rating scales to reflect the ordinal nature of the data based on Boone and Boone (2012). The survey took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS version 23. Descriptive statistics (i.e., frequencies, percentages, and means) were used to describe the number of active advisory councils, composition and utilization of advisory councils, and teachers' perceptions of advisory council utilization, composition, and improvement. We combined *strongly disagree* and *disagree* response categories to obtain disagreement percentages and *agree* and *strongly agree* response categories to obtain agreement percentages. Also, to further describe the utilization of advisory councils, agricultural education teachers were asked to rate the influence the advisory council currently has versus influence the advisory council should have. Mean weighted discrepancy scores (MWDS; Borich, 1980) were used to describe this influence.

Results

Objective One: Determine the Number of Active Advisory Councils in School-based Agricultural Education Programs

Of the 85 teachers that responded to the survey, 76.5% (n = 65) reported their program had an active advisory council. The remaining 20 respondents or 23.5% stated their program did not have an advisory council. The 20 respondents without advisory councils gave the following as barriers to having an advisory council: I have not had time to organize an advisory council (f = 8); other entities serve the same purpose (f = 7); other (f = 6) which included two teacher program and each teacher has different goals and perceptions of an advisory council, just one more thing to do and my plate is full, and non-active advisory council exist; prospective members are too busy to participate (f = 5); I do not understand how to organize an advisory council (f = 3); The agricultural program is new; an advisory council is not yet organized (f = 2); I do not understand the purpose of advisory councils (f = 1); An advisory council is not essential to the program (f = 1); and An advisory council is not approved by the school administration (f = 1).

Objective Two: Describe the Composition of School- based Agricultural Education Advisory Councils

Respondents who indicated they had an active advisory council were provided items regarding the composition or types of people who served on their councils. The minimum and maximum number of advisory council members were 2 and 40, respectively, resulting in an average council size of 7.89 (*SD* = 6.34) members with a mode of 5. All respondents indicated there was at least one representative from the community and school administration who regularly attended their advisory council meetings. The average number of types of community members and school administrators who regularly attended advisory council meetings was 4.37 (SD = 1.79) and 1.71 (*SD* = 1.1), respectively. The top five individuals or roles represented by community members who regularly attend advisory council meetings were (a) representatives of local agricultural industries (*f* = 56), (b) former students (*f* = 35), (c) representatives of local industries other than agriculture (*f* = 31), (d) FFA alumni members (*f* = 28), and (e) parents of current students (*f* = 25). A complete list of the individuals or roles represented by community members who regularly attend advisory council meetings is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Community Members Who Regularly Attend Advisory Council Meetings

Member	*f*
Representatives of local agricultural industries	56
Former students	35
Representatives of local industries other than agriculture	31
FFA Alumni members	28
Parents of current students	25
Parents of past students	21
School personnel	18
Current students	17
Local government members	14
University/college representatives	12
Other	1

In regard to school administration regularly attending advisory council meetings, the career and technical education director (*f* = 31) attended most frequently. A complete list of school administrators who regularly attend advisory council meetings is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

School Administrators Who Regularly Attend Advisory Council Meetings

Member	*f*
Career and Technical Education Director	31
School principal	12
School assistant principal	11
School board member(s)	9
Academic Department Head (Science, Math, etc)	4
School guidance counselor	3
School superintendent	3
Curriculum director	2
School assistant superintendent	1
Other	2

Leadership roles and advisory council officer structure was also addressed. Seventy-eight percent of respondents reported their program's advisory council did not have officers. Of the 22% with officers, president/chair (f = 13) and secretary (f = 12) were the most common. Other officers reported are found in Table 3.

Table 3

Advisory Council Officers

Officer Position	*f*
President/Chair	13
Secretary	12
Treasurer	9
Vice President/Vice Chair	8
President-Elect	2

Of the respondents with advisory councils, 51.7% reported the agricultural education teacher presided over advisory council meetings followed by career and technical education

director (22.4%), elected council president/chair (19.0%), and other (6.9%), which included business partner, alumni president, CTE department chair, and department chair. Also, no one reported a school administrator or other elected council member as presiding over advisory council meetings. When asked who was in charge of recording official minutes for the advisory council, the agricultural education teacher (f = 31) was reported to fulfil this role most frequently followed by a secretary on the council (f = 12). A complete list of individuals reported as keeping official minutes is presented in Table 4. The agricultural education teacher (f = 32) was also the most frequently cited individual in charge of preparing the agenda for the advisory council meetings, and a list of all individuals listed as preparing an agenda is presented in Table 5.

Table 4

Official Minutes During Meetings

Recorded minutes	*f*
The agricultural science instructor	32
A secretary on the council	12
Another advisory council member keeps minutes	6
School administrator(s) keep minutes	5
No records of meeting proceedings are kept	3

Table 5

Prepared Agenda for Meetings

Prepared Agenda	*f*
Agricultural science instructor	32
Elected advisory council secretary	8
School administration member	8
Elected advisory council president/chair	5
Professional-Technical Education (PTE) Director	5
No agenda is prepared	4

Most of the new members of an advisory council were recruited by being asked/invited to serve (f = 56) or membership was open for volunteer (f = 14). Other members were recruited by the agricultural education teacher (f = 51), existing council members (f = 19), career and technical education director (f = 19), principal (f = 3), school board member (f = 1), academy coach (f = 1), and teachers (f = 1). Respondents indicated 80.4% of new council members were appointed, 8.9%

were elected, and 10.7% chose other consisting of accepting invitation, invited, both elected and appointed, volunteer, and formal process through the district. A majority (83.9%) of advisory council members were not approved by school officials or boards. Also, a majority (91.2%) of advisory councils lack term length rules, and if terms had a set time period, 92.3% indicated council members could serve multiple terms. The most frequent term length was two years. The average term length was 2.3 years (*SD* = 1.0), and minimum and maximum term lengths were 1 and 4 years, respectively. When asked if it is good to have set term lengths for all advisory council members, 40.4% disagreed, 43.9% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 15.8% agreed with the statement.

Objective Three: Describe the Utilization of School-based Agricultural Education Advisory Councils

Respondents who indicated an advisory council was present answered questions that were pertinent in addressing objective three. Respondents were asked how often their advisory council met each calendar year. The average was 3.29 (*SD* = 2.87) with a mode of two and minimum and maximum values of one and 12, respectively. In describing the guiding structure of the advisory council, 29.5% reported having a written constitution or bylaws directing their council. The remaining 70.5% indicated they were functioning without a constitution or bylaws. A majority of programs with advisory councils (54.4%) reported not having a document that outlined goals and objectives of the council (i.e., program of work, program of activities), and 33.3% reported the advisory council also served as the FFA Alumni, parent support group, livestock show board, fundraising group or other entity.

In further describing the utilization of advisory councils, agricultural education teachers were asked to rate the influence the advisory council currently has versus influence the advisory council should have. Mean weighted discrepancy scores (MWDS; Borich, 1980) were used to describe this influence, and the following items had a MWDS greater than 2.5: (a) identifying the facility needs (*MWDS* = 2.88), (b) assisting with FFA chapter activities (*MWDS* =2.57), (c) hiring new instructors or teachers (*MWDS* =2.55), (d) providing recommendations to the local governing school board (*MWDS* =2.55), and (e) reviewing courses of study for content relevance and accuracy (*MWDS* = 2.51). Table 6 provides a complete list of items examined and the MWDS.

Table 6

Perception Discrepancies Between the Influence that Should be Present and Influence Currently Present by the Advisory Council

Rank	Program Areas	Level of Influence Council CURRENTLY Has		Level of Influence Council SHOULD Have		*MWDS*
		M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	
1	Identifying the facility needs	2.71	1.14	3.61	1.05	2.88
2	Assisting with FFA Chapter activities	3.25	1.25	3.96	0.97	2.57
3	Hiring new instructors or teachers	1.52	0.81	2.55	1.15	2.55
4	Providing recommendations to the local governing school board	2.82	1.18	3.63	1.01	2.55
5	Reviewing courses of study for content relevance and accuracy	2.16	1.17	3.00	1.20	2.51
6	Approving courses of study	1.71	1.02	2.67	1.16	2.48
7	Assisting with Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) program activities (i.e. Placement, supervision, etc.)	3.20	1.21	3.87	1.05	2.15
8	Acting as a communication link between the general public and the program	3.32	1.16	3.98	1.02	2.14
9	Reviewing instructional materials	2.14	1.09	2.91	1.14	1.99
10	Identifying the equipment, tools, and supplies needed for the program	3.24	1.09	3.72	0.98	1.59
11	Evaluating the agricultural program	2.77	1.16	3.33	1.05	1.54
12	Determining courses to be offered	2.28	1.05	2.89	0.98	1.37
13	Approval of working, travel, or other budget funds	1.41	0.80	2.07	1.05	1.32
14	Determining the objectives of the agriculture program	2.82	1.03	2.95	1.01	0.21

Note. The items are ranked from highest discrepancy score to the lowest.

The final utilization items asked where the advisory council receives funds to conduct activities. No funds are received by the advisory council was selected by 59.2% of respondents. Other responses were the school district provided funding through the general budget (11.1%), the advisory council was funded through the FFA chapter (9.3%), the advisory council raises funds on its own (9.3%), and other sources (11.1%), which included grants, donations, Perkins funds, fundraisers, general contributions, funded by the agriculture instructor, auctions, CTE budget, tractor pull, Boston butt sale, alumni, and ham booth.

Objective Four: Describe School-based Agricultural Education Teachers' Perceptions of Advisory Council Utilization, Composition, and Improvement

The top three items with the highest agreement percentage were: (a) The members of an agricultural education advisory council should represent the local industries found in the school district (93.3%), (b) Communication between the agricultural science instructor and the advisory council members is important (88.3%), and (c) I could use my advisory council more than I do currently (84.0%). The lowest agreement was found with advisory councils are not helpful in conducting a successful agricultural education program (9.5%). A complete list of teacher perceptions is presented in Table 7. Lastly, respondents were asked if Tennessee agricultural education teachers would benefit from professional development on advisory councils. A majority (82.7%) agreed with the statement, 10.7% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 6.6% disagreed.

Table 7

Teacher Perceptions of Advisory Council Characteristics

Item	Agree %	Neither Agree or Disagree %	Disagree %
The members of an agricultural education advisory council should represent the local industries found in the school district	93.3	6.8	0.0
Communication between the agricultural science instructor(s) and the advisory council members is important	88.3	10.8	5.4
I could use my advisory council more than I do currently	84.0	14.7	1.3
I have a positive perception of agricultural education advisory councils	78.7	17.3	4.0
An advisory council adds stability that protects the agricultural program during school and administration changes	70.7	17.3	12.0
A written set of goals and objectives is needed to guide the activities of the advisory councils	68.0	24.0	8.0

Table 7 (continued)

Teacher Perceptions of Advisory Council Characteristics

Item	Agree %	Neither Agree or Disagree %	Disagree %
Advisory councils are important to the overall success of agricultural programs.	67.5	24.3	8.1
Every program should have an advisory council	62.7	28.0	9.3
An FFA chapter will constantly improve because of the work done by an agricultural education advisory council	58.7	29.3	12.0
An SAE program will constantly improve because of the work done by an agricultural education advisory council	49.4	37.3	13.3
It is the agricultural science teacher's responsibility to ensure that the advisory council meets regularly.	46.8	25.7	27.1
The recommendations made by the advisory council should result in changes to the agricultural program	41.4	44.0	14.6
It is the advisory council's obligation to present recommendations for the agricultural education program to the school board.	28.4	36.5	47.3
Advisory councils should be used to determine curriculum decisions.	24.3	36.5	39.2
Changes to the agricultural education program originate from advisory council recommendations.	23.2	39.7	37.0
Advisory councils are not helpful in conducting a successful agricultural education program.	9.5	13.5	77.0

Conclusions and Recommendations

Consistent with recent studies in Idaho (Masser et al., 2014) and Pennsylvania (Foster et al., 2012) a majority of responding school-based agricultural education programs reported an active advisory council was in place, and common barriers to having an advisory council were agricultural education teacher time and other entities serving the same purpose. However, this result is

inconsistent with Barbour's (2010) findings in Texas. Barbour reported 57% of Texas programs did not utilize an advisory council.

Due to the response rate, we cannot postulate a majority of school-based agricultural education programs in Tennessee have active advisory councils; however, the results of this study indicate a number of programs in Tennessee do have advisory councils. Future research is needed to further investigate the number of programs with active advisory councils in Tennessee to continue to build a depiction of the scope of Tennessee school-based agricultural education advisory councils. Also, research is needed to determine the most appropriate means for overcoming barriers and assisting programs in establishing advisory councils; this is important given advisory councils benefit the school-based agricultural education program (Masser et al. 2014; Phipps et al., 2008).

The composition of existing advisory councils reported on in this study are similar to those in Masser et al. (2014). On average eight members comprise the school-based agricultural education advisory councils. Representatives of local agricultural industries, former students, representatives of local industries other than agriculture, Career and Technical Education Director, FFA alumni members, and parents of current students were the most common members. Advisory councils of responding programs were comprised of different types of individuals, and the diversity of members on the advisory councils coincide with Masser et al. (2014) and Caffarella's (2002) program planning models, which indicated a variety of stakeholders influence program planning. This diversity should positively influence school-based agricultural education programs. On the other hand, a majority of respondents indicated their advisory council did not have officers, and the agricultural education teacher assumed most of the leadership roles such as presiding over meetings, recording and maintaining a record of minutes, preparing the agenda, and recruiting new members. This is consistent with Masser et al. (2014) and may partially explain why teachers who did not have an advisory council reported time as a barrier. Additionally, a majority of advisory councils were not approved by school officials or boards, lacked term length rules, and did not have a document that outlined goals and objectives, and these findings could negatively impact school-based agricultural education programs.

When the agricultural education teachers were asked to rate the influence the advisory council currently has versus influence the advisory council should have, all items were rated with the agricultural education teachers desiring the advisory council to have more influence. This indicates school-based agricultural education teachers, in this study, have a desire for advisory councils to have more of an impact on the total agricultural education program (classroom/laboratory instruction, FFA, and SAE). This finding is similar to Masser et al. (2014), in which, agricultural education teachers desired more influence on 12 of 14 items. The lack of officers and term lengths, recognition by school officials or boards, not having a document that outlines goals and objectives, and the agricultural education teachers assuming numerous roles may be hindering the advisory council from reaching its full potential and influence. Advisory councils should offer suggestions to school officials or board and influence program planning (Decker & Decker, 2003) but may lack significant influence if they are not approved by school officials or board. As a result of not being approved, these advisory councils could be viewed as a booster organization and not an advisory group to the local school or school board (Masser, et. al., 2014). A lack of influence may also be a result of a lack of understanding by the agricultural education teacher on how to organize and lead adults in facilitating change or simply a lack of funding to conduct advisory council activities. Additional research is needed to identify obstacles that prevent advisory councils from having influence and being utilized to their potential.

In regards to school-based agricultural education teachers' perceptions of advisory council characteristics, a majority of teachers believed advisory councils are needed, should represent the local industries, adds stability and protection to program, should be guided by written goals and objectives, and contribute to program success. This is similar to Foster et al. (2012) and Masser et al. (2014). In addition, more than 80% of school-based agricultural education teachers believed they would benefit from professional development on advisory councils. What is more, a majority of teachers indicated they could use their advisory councils more than they currently utilize them. Therefore, there appears to be a need for professional development on establishing, governing, and having advisory councils with influence on program planning, evaluation, maintenance, classroom/laboratory instruction, FFA, and SAEs. We recommend professional development be provided in Tennessee on these topics. Potential venues for this professional development are the Tennessee Institute for Career and Technical Education, Tennessee State FFA Convention, and the Tennessee Association for Agricultural Educators' summer and mid-year conferences. Online modules or webinars could also be used to provide this professional development. We also recommend the five teacher education programs in Tennessee incorporate instruction on establishing and leading advisory councils if this is not being taught to their preservice teachers.

In summary, the results of this study indicate the school-based agricultural education programs in this study are not utilizing their advisory councils as to their full potential and may not be bridging the gap between the community, school, and local agricultural education program (Masser et al., 2014). To that end, it is crucial that community and school representatives be involved in the local agricultural education program to ensure educational quality and teacher effectiveness (Talbert et al., 2007; Roberts & Dyer, 2004). Future research is needed to understand the dynamics of this relationship and discover effective ways to educate teachers, school officials, and the community on the importance, function, and positive influences school-based agricultural education advisory councils can have on programs and student success.

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