

Reflections on Reform: A Historical Narrative of the Relocation of the Louisiana FFA Office

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Abstract

Formal agricultural education first appeared in Louisiana in 1909 under the supervision of the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE). The LDOE and Louisiana State University (LSU) jointly employed the first state director of agricultural education. Then, by the late 20th Century, the evolving philosophy of vocational education and state budget cuts led to the end of career and technical student organization supervision within the LDOE. Needing a new home, Louisiana's agricultural education leaders employed their personal and political influence to secure office space at the LSU AgCenter. This move came with challenges and struggles as the nature of FFA supervision and the relationship between agriscience teachers, the LDOE, and the LSU AgCenter evolved into its current arrangement. Louisiana is now one of 16 states and territories to have no LDOE employees directly supervising the FFA or agricultural education programs. The experiences of those involved in this historical narrative and the lessons learned provide valuable knowledge for current and future state agricultural education leadership in adapting to political and cultural changes that influence career and technical education.

Keywords: agricultural education; educational reform; FFA history; state supervision

Introduction and Review of Literature

This historical narrative analyzed a reform effort that occurred in Louisiana agricultural education in the late 1990s, which dramatically altered state leaders' administrative authority, duties, and reporting structure. As such, it is critical to situate this investigation by outlining the seminal actors, forces, and events that presaged this historic shift. To begin, it is essential to recognize that secondary agricultural education can be found in all 50 U.S. states and two territories (Phipps et al., 2008). Although each state and territory has a unique approach to the delivery of agricultural education, they also have fundamental commonalities. For example, each is guided by agricultural education's comprehensive, three-circle model and some level of state supervision (Kotrlik & Lelle, 1986).

This delivery model began in the early 20th Century and evolved as vocational agriculture education courses gained prominence in U.S. secondary schools (Stimson & Lathrop, 1942). Then, with the passage of the *Smith-Hughes Act of 1917*, formal instruction in vocational agriculture became formalized (Phipps et al., 2008). Further, the law also required students to complete a home project that allowed them to have experiential learning opportunities in agriculture (Phipps et al., 2008). Later, as secondary vocational agriculture evolved, these rich learning experiences were rebranded as supervised agricultural experiences (SAEs) and became an integral component of agricultural education (Phipps et al., 2008). The establishment of the Future Farmers of America (FFA) in 1928 and the subsequent passage of the National FFA Organization's federal charter in 1950, *Public Law 81-740*, now known as *Public Law 116-7*, completed the development of agricultural education's comprehensive, three-circle model (National FFA Organization's Federal Charter Amendments Act, 2019). Although each

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of the three components of the model emerged at a different point in history, they provided programmatic guidance for agricultural education across many decades (Croom, 2008).

However, before the enactment of these policies, vocational agriculture courses emerged in seven Louisiana high schools as early as 1909 (Mitchell, 1959). During this time, the programs operated under the supervision of the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE), and in 1914, P.L. Gilbeau became the first State Director of Agricultural Education. The LDOE and Louisiana State University (LSU), the state’s 1862 land-grant institution (Mitchell, 1959), jointly employed him. Then, following the adoption of the *Smith-Hughes Act*, additional supervisory staff was appointed to administer the agricultural education program (Simson & Lathrop, 1954). One of the assistant supervisors, J.W. Bateman, served as the first State Advisor when the Louisiana FFA Association was chartered in 1930. By the 1940s, agricultural education staff had increased to seven men, including a state supervisor and six area supervisors, with one of them serving as the Louisiana FFA Executive Secretary (Mitchell, 1959). By the 1980s, a shift in the perceived role of agricultural education occurred as a result of the *Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act* (1984). Through this change, the U.S. government began to provide funds to “. . . strengthe[n] the academic foundations of vocational education courses by applying mathematics and science principles in vocational education” (Phipps et al., 2008, p. 31). Thereafter, the priority was reauthorized in the *Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act* (1990). And, as a result, several state FFA associations found themselves facing budget cuts, staff reductions, and lost office space (G. Moore, personal communication, September 7, 2018). In particular, this change prompted Louisiana agricultural education to begin to grapple with federal shifts due to budget cuts and reallocation of Perkins funds in the mid-1990s.

Then, by the early 2000s, the state supervisory staff within the LDOE had disappeared, and the Louisiana FFA Office found itself in need of a new home. Since agricultural education had historically been closely associated with the land-grant universities (Herren & Hillison, 1996), discussions increased about whether housing the program at LSU would better serve the state’s needs. Through a series of political events and the efforts of numerous actors across agriculture and education, the LSU Agricultural Center (LSU AgCenter) became the home agency for FFA in Louisiana, an arrangement that continues today. Louisiana is not unique in lacking state leadership positions housed under the LDOE. In fact, 32 states and territories do not administer FFA from their LDOE. Further, 22 states and territories do not have a state supervisor of agricultural education. And, 16 states and territories have no agricultural education or FFA staff in their LDOE. Table 1 provides an overview of these trends.

Table 1
U.S. States with Non-Traditional Agricultural Education and FFA State Supervision Models

Executive Secretary not Affiliated with LDOE	No Supervisor in the LDOE	No Staff in the LDOE
Alaska	Alaska	Alaska
Colorado	Colorado	Colorado
Connecticut	Indiana	Louisiana
Delaware	Kentucky	Maryland
Florida	Louisiana	Massachusetts
Idaho	Maryland	New Hampshire
Illinois	Massachusetts	New Jersey
Indiana	Montana	New Mexico
Iowa	New Hampshire	New York
Louisiana	New Jersey	North Carolina
Maine	New Mexico	Pennsylvania
Maryland	New York	Rhode Island
Massachusetts	North Carolina	South Carolina

Michigan	Oklahoma	Vermont
Montana	Pennsylvania	Virgin Islands
Nevada	Rhode Island	Wyoming
New Hampshire	South Carolina	
New Jersey	South Dakota	
New York	Texas	
North Carolina	Vermont	
Ohio	Virgin Islands	
Oregon	Wyoming	
Pennsylvania		
Rhode Island		
South Carolina		
Texas		
Vermont		
Virgin Islands		
Virginia		
Wyoming		

Note. Data supplied by the *National FFA Organization* in 2019.

Because of these shifts in supervision models, a need emerged to understand better the historical precedent for why a state, such as Louisiana, might undergo historic reform through an analysis of its collective memory. Salavorious and Foray (2015) explained that “. . . the past is society’s collective memory. Without that collective memory, society would be as rootless and adrift as an individual with amnesia...[i]ndividually and collectively what we are is the product of what we have been” (p. 6). Similarly, organizations and institutions cannot forget their collective memories. For an institution as storied as agricultural education in Louisiana, a cohesive history must be written and preserved to provide a context of past decisions and direction for the future. Two major historical studies were written about agricultural education in Louisiana in the 20th Century. The first was a brief history of Louisiana as part of Stimson’s and Lathrop’s (1942) work, *History of Agricultural Education of Less than College Grade in the United States*. The second study was Mitchell’s (1959) *Development of Vocational Agricultural Education in Louisiana*. Both works provided a chronological account of agricultural education and a glimpse of the people associated with significant events that made Louisiana FFA what it is today. Mitchell’s (1959) study, in particular, focused on describing the origins and development of the major components of agricultural education such as (a) its role in public schools, the implementation of the three-circle model, and the establishment and growth of FFA, (b) the development of teacher education, (c) and the role of state supervision of the program. Further, Mitchell (1959) reported that Louisiana’s agricultural education program was highly successful in its early decades, and FFA in the state was consistently ranked as one of the top associations in the nation.

In the decades after Mitchell’s (1959) work, the historical record of Louisiana’s agricultural education program was not compiled. Fragments of evidence can be found in artifacts housed in the current Louisiana FFA Office, in schools around the state, and in privately held collections. The historical memory of agricultural education in the state is now preserved in oral tradition among those who experienced it, but many of these individuals have now passed away. The stories told indicate major changes for Louisiana agricultural education in the time since Mitchell’s (1959) study, and a look at the current state and operation of the program quickly reveals differences as compared to the program that he described. Efforts are now being made to catalog and preserve artifacts as well as conduct interviews with witnesses to Louisiana’s agricultural education history.

Emergent Conceptual Framework

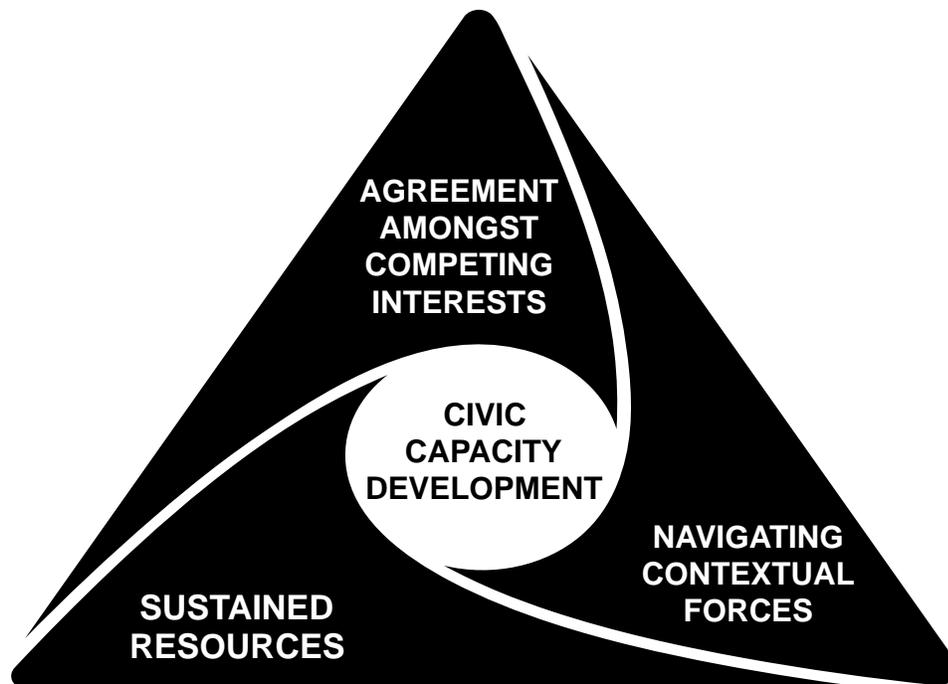
A proper understanding of this phenomenon requires understanding the competing interests and diverse stakeholders that have influenced Louisiana's past. Through our analysis of data, therefore, we chose to ground this study a posteriori in Stone's (2001) concept of civic capacity. In defining civic capacity, Stone (2001) explained:

...[c]ivic capacity concerns the extent to which different sectors of the community — business, parents, educators, state and local officeholders, nonprofits, and others — act in concert around a matter of community-wide import. It involves mobilization — that is, bringing different sectors together but also developing a shared plan of action. (p. 596)

Civic capacity was originally based on the study of urban school systems in Tennessee and the ability of citizens and stakeholders to solve complex problems (Stone, 2001). Since then, however, the concept has evolved to more broadly examine educational reforms. In this study, therefore, we used the lens of civic capacity to “show how political relationships among interest groups shape their ability to coalesce around a strategic plan for accomplishing a common set of goals...” (Glazer & Egan, 2018, p. 932). In particular, the concept of civic capacity argues that three key challenges affect an organization's ability to build civic capacity and ultimately enact reform: (1) sustaining resources over time, (2) agreement amongst competing interests regarding vision, goals, and measures of success, and (3) the collision of contextual factors – culture, history, and politics – on stakeholders' views of successful reform (Glazer & Egan, 2018). The challenges to build civic capacity (see Figure 1) were clearly evident as the reform transpired in the historical event under investigation.

Figure 1

The Challenges Stone (2001) Outlined to Build Civic Capacity



Significance of the Study and Purpose Statement

This study’s purpose was to examine the actors, forces, and events that led to the relocation of the Louisiana FFA state office from the LDOE to the LSU AgCenter in 1999 and the subsequent impact of that movement on the administration of FFA programs in the state. This administrative arrangement was a departure from the state supervision described by Stimson and Lathrop (1942) and Mitchell (1959). Examination of this historical event, therefore, could provide context and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) for career and technical student organizations (CTSO) leaders who may face similar situations. As a result, this study aligns with three of the American Association for Agricultural Education’s *National Research Priorities*: (1) public and policymaker understanding of agriculture and natural resources, (2) new technologies, practices, and products adoption decisions, and (3) efficient and effective agricultural education programs (Roberts et al., 2016).

Methods and Procedures

In this investigation, we used a historical narrative approach (Salevouris & Furay, 2015). Historical research attempts to provide a storied account of how ideological and societal forces shape discourse on a phenomenon. As such, when using this approach, researchers assume that the historical record can be reconstructed through the analysis of contextually situated sources of data (Roberts & Edwards, 2015, 2018). To accomplish this, a variety of data sources can be used including: (a) artifacts, (b) documents, (c) interviews, (d) legislative policies, (e) visual artifacts, and (f) other relics from the past (Salevouris & Furay, 2015). Therefore, in this investigation, we collected various primary and secondary sources to triangulate findings (see Table 2). Before mobilizing each source of data, however, they were subjected to both internal and external criticism (McDowell, 2002).

Table 2
Primary and Secondary Sources Used in the Investigation

Type	Sources
Primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Congressional reports • Interviews with individuals who had personal experience with the historical event under investigation • Legislative acts • LATA executive committee agendas and meeting minutes • LATA conference agendas and meeting minutes • LATA membership surveys and data reports • Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Bulletin 741
Secondary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Books about the history of agricultural education • Peer-refereed journal articles • Doctoral dissertations • National FFA Organization website • State FFA Association websites

Description of Participants and Collection of Primary Data Sources

It should also be noted that one of the sources of primary data used in this investigation was collected through semi-structured interviews with seven participants. All participants were leaders in Louisiana agricultural education at the time leading up to and during the reform effort. They were selected because of the insights they could provide into the historical event. As such, we used a combination of purposeful and snowball-sampling procedures to select these individuals (Noy, 2008). For interviews, a standard semi-structured interview protocol was created and was shared before the interview. Interview sessions lasted approximately 60 minutes and were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Thereafter, we entered a member checking by which we shared the interview transcripts with participants to ensure accuracy. Of note, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Louisiana University authorized the use of participants' actual names and job titles to ensure that an accurate historical record could be persevered (Salavorious & Foray, 2015).

Participants included, (1) Dr. Michael Burnett, Department Head of Agricultural Education, Louisiana University since 1995; (2) Dr. Bill Richardson the Vice President and Dean for the College of Agriculture, Louisiana University as well as Chancellor of the LSU AgCenter; (3) Dr. Bradley Leger who was a former Louisiana FFA Association Executive Secretary, former agriscience teacher and past president, Louisiana Agriscience Teachers Association (LATA); (4) Dr. AnnaBeth Neason who was a Former State Director of Agricultural Education in the LDOE, former Louisiana FFA State Advisor for the LSU AgCenter, as well as a former Louisiana agriscience teacher; (5) Mr. Track Kavanaugh who is an Instructor of Agricultural Education at Louisiana Tech University, former Louisiana agriscience teacher, and past president and legislative committee member for LATA; and (6) Mrs. Kathy Conerly who was a former Louisiana FFA Association Executive Secretary/State FFA Advisor for LSU AgCenter, former Louisiana agriscience teacher, and past president of LATA.

In addition to these participants, several other primary and secondary sources of data were collected from the Louisiana FFA Office digital archive and storage files. The digital documents were accessed from the Louisiana FFA shared drive by searching for saved meeting agendas and minutes of executive committee meetings from 1998-2001. Stored archival documents from the LATA conferences were also retrieved. Further, we were also able to secure congressional reports, legislative acts, peer-referred journal articles, and FFA websites through internet-based searches.

Data Analysis

After the collection of the data, we then analyzed all sources of data using the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 2015). Saldaña (2013) described this technique as a process to evaluate data using successive coding cycles, which eventually leads to a description of the findings that are "rooted in the original data themselves" (p. 51). To facilitate the constant comparative method, we engaged in open coding. In particular, data were first coded *in vivo* to identify key phrases and words spoken by the interview participants. Next, we used *process* coding to discover the actions taken by the participants. Then, the codes were analyzed with *axial* coding to identify significant categories in the data. In this phase, we noted several discrepancies and incongruent categories. As such, we engaged in *theoretical* coding was employed to compare the data against a number of theoretical and conceptual lenses. We chose to interpret our emergent findings using Stone's (2001) conceptualization of civic capacity through additional analysis and negotiation of the study's codes and categories.

Reflexivity of the Researchers

Both researchers have been deeply involved with agricultural education and FFA since high school and served as secondary agriculture education teachers in their respective home states. Further,

the lead researcher was a four-year member of FFA in southwest Louisiana earning both the State and American FFA Degrees. He also served two years as a Louisiana FFA Officer and worked for two years as an undergraduate student worker in the Louisiana FFA Office. Upon earning his degree in agricultural education from LSU, he taught agriscience in the Baton Rouge metropolitan area for eight years. As a teacher, he also served in many volunteer roles for Louisiana FFA and for the National FFA Organization. Since July 2017, the lead researcher has also served as the Louisiana FFA Executive Secretary, employed by the LSU AgCenter. These experiences, could have introduced biases in evaluating data; therefore, multiple viewpoints were obtained. To minimize bias, we also used constructionism as a lens to analyze the data and focus on the processes that led to the reform detailed in this historical event under investigation.

Findings

As a result of our analysis, three themes emerged: (1) *The Challenge of Survival*, (2) *The New Landscape*, and (3) *A Reimagined Reality*. These themes were often expressed concurrently and not necessarily in distinct, chronological stages. These themes provided critical context into this historical event, and also reveal the underlying feelings and motivations of stakeholders as they sought to build the civic capacity needed to ensure the reform was a success.

Theme 1: The Challenge of Survival

The beginning of this reform effort in Louisiana can be traced to the 1970s. From its beginnings, agricultural education in the state had a traditional supervisory system. Until the 1980s, several full-time positions within the LDOE served to oversee the state's program. Mr. Kavanaugh was an agriscience teacher at that time and explained, "we had like six or seven people in the state that took care of everything...your area supervisors to the meats labs to the food processing centers." During this era, however, the philosophy of agricultural education supervision in other states was changing. Hillison (1999) noted:

The peak of the formal influence for the agricultural education supervisor appears to have occurred in the 1960s. As with most extremes, regression set in and the powerful supervisor of so many decades became the much weaker consultant of the 1970s. Responsibilities became more generic and across-the-board. Local administrators, often in the form of vocational directors or area administrators, assumed more responsibility... this trend started to occur in the 1970s. (p. 61)

Even more immediately threatening was the sudden loss of resources meant to sustain the agricultural education program. By the 1980s, the state's economy was in a nosedive due to falling oil revenues. As reported by Maraniss (1990), Louisiana lost 9% of its workforce in the 1980s and "hit bottom May 12, 1988, when the state had an accumulated deficit of \$1.3 billion and failed to meet its payroll." In response, Governor Edwin Edwards began slashing the state budget. These budget cuts were wide-ranging, and neither secondary nor higher education was exempt. A 1987 legislative bulletin issued by the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana (PARCS) noted that elementary and secondary education received a 4.5% cut in state funding for fiscal year 1986-1987 (PARCS, 1987). The same report noted that the state was struggling to fund vocational and technical education. In reference to how LSU handled the budget cuts, Dr. Burnett clarified, "[I]t was in 1985...LSU was going through some rather dramatic...budget cuts..." Additionally, the budget for secondary agricultural education was in jeopardy. Mr. Kavanaugh stated that "they just kept dwindling it and dwindling it and dwindling it, and finally got to the point...they said we [are] going to do away with all this [the state office]...and when they did...we only had three people in the [LDOE]."

The lack of funding also impacted human resources, namely the agriscience teachers. Because of these budget cuts, the 12-month contract status of Louisiana agriscience teachers was threatened, so the teachers formed a legislative committee through the Louisiana Agriscience Teachers Association (LATA), then known as the Louisiana Vocational Agriculture Teachers Association. Mr. Kavanaugh reflected on a meeting with agriscience teacher leaders and Governor Edwards to discuss the impending cuts, a meeting that was organized through the LATA legislative committee. The meeting with the Governor did not go well, and the agriscience teachers began a grassroots effort to campaign for an opposition gubernatorial candidate. Mr. Kavanaugh stated, “We elected [the opposition candidate] because when we left that office that day we were so pissed off at Governor Edwards, it was unbelievable because we had been good supporters of [him] and of course, things were shifting.”

Initially, agricultural education leaders were successful in maintaining the status quo of the program in the state. The changing landscape of career and technical education, however, presented new challenges in the 1990s. During the 1998 special session of the Louisiana Legislature, the new Louisiana Community and Technical College System (SCTCS) was created to replace the vocational and technical schools (Act 151). Soon thereafter, an inter-agency battle over federal Perkins funds in Louisiana erupted between the fledgling community and technical college system and the LDOE. The two significant stakeholders delivering career and technical education in the state could not come to a satisfactory agreement concerning funding allocation and each other’s role in the space. Dr. Richardson explained, “the things that started triggering the changes...fairly dramatically...was when the Louisiana Community and Technical College System was created.” The SCTCS sought the use of Perkins dollars to fund its activities and ultimately succeeded in securing a large portion of the allocation. According to Dr. Richardson “the money...went with the Community and Technical College system, the Perkins money as I recall.” Dr. Neason, who was then serving in the LDOE as the State Director for Agricultural Education, said that she “had been warning the teachers” that something was happening but did not know what the extent of the change would be. She revealed:

I had picked up rumors and rumblings in the [LDOE] that something was going on with the Carl Perkins grant in Louisiana...I found out that Cecil Picard, the state superintendent [of education], and...the head of the technical colleges at the time, were in a...contest on who was gonna (sic) control Carl Perkins [funding].

Attempting to be proactive in anticipation of an historic change to the program, the state’s agriscience teachers took steps in 1998 to ensure the survival of some form of state agricultural education supervision. Dr. Leger, an agriscience teacher who served in multiple LATA leadership roles at the time, reported that a major theme of that summer’s LATA conference was how to run student organizations independently. A survey was shared with all agriscience teachers at the three leadership camps to gauge their feelings on: (1) should a special fund be created to hire state staff outside of the LDOE, (2) how would this fund be generated, and (3) who would select and supervise this staff. The LATA legislative committee that year also recommended that the group work through its lobbyist to maintain the salaries and budget for the state staff or look for assistance in other state departments or agencies. Mrs. Conerly, an agriscience teacher and LATA officer in the mid-1990s recalled that “those of us who were...proponents of the move, we thought that the LDOE at that time was stifling...the growth of ag education, specifically FFA.” Dr. Leger said that there was “no way you could run the FFA Association on a volunteer basis,” so while a group of agriscience teachers met in the Old Forestry Building at LSU, it was suggested that the LATA approach the LSU AgCenter for help. Dr. Richardson had served as the Chancellor of the LSU AgCenter since January 1997. The LSU AgCenter is an independent campus of the LSU System that administers the research and extension arms of the land-grant mission of LSU and is administered separately from the LSU College of Agriculture. Dr. Richardson was a former agriscience teacher from Missouri and had spent his early years at LSU as the Vocational Education Department Head and then as Dean of the College of Agriculture. The state’s

agriscience teachers had a relationship with him going back to his time in these latter two roles, and he agreed to meet with them immediately.

When asked about moving the state office under the purview of LSU, Dr. Leger revealed that Dr. Richardson “didn’t blink. He didn’t hesitate. He says yes, we’ll do it. Of course, we need to talk about issues of funding.” Mr. Kavanaugh was also in attendance at the meeting, and he explained that Dr. Richardson “listened to us very attentively. He took notes. He was just super, and he said yes, we got to do something.” To this point, Dr. Richardson revealed that he received pressure from stakeholders other than agriscience teachers. He recalled that a state senator contacted him and said, “Solve the problem for us...they [legislators] were getting lobbied hard back home. And the LDOE didn’t seem to be interested. And the community college system, they had a separate mission.” And ultimately, the LSU AgCenter agreed to the merger. Mr. Kavanaugh said that the FFA program “would have gone to hell-in-a-handbasket if it hadn’t been for what [the AgCenter] did for us. Now, was it super? Is it as good as it is now? Absolutely not...”

Eventually, the LDOE could no longer support the salaries of a number of CTE supervisory positions, including those in the agricultural education office. Dr. Neason recalled being told in the late spring of 1999 that the CTE supervisory positions would be eliminated by July 1 of that year. Although the AgCenter had promised office space, funding was still the major obstacle. The agriscience teachers again utilized their relationships to reach an agreement with the Louisiana Commissioner of Agriculture and Forestry. Dr. Leger recalled that “[Commissioner Bob Odom] said we’ll do it, but we had to find the money. He would be the go-through, so we had to work with the legislature.” With the help of the Commissioner, the agriscience teachers secured yearly funding from the legislature as an appropriation to his office. This funding was then sent as a grant to the AgCenter, which acted as the fiscal agent. Dr. Richardson said that the AgCenter was “kind of like a subcontractor to a certain extent...we did the hiring and the firing and so forth.” This financial arrangement, however, would not come into fruition until January 1, 2000.

On July 1, 1999, Dr. Neason and the other state CTE supervisors lost their positions. Resulting from the conflict with the SCTCS, the state superintendent of education, Cecil Picard, wanted to fire the CTE staff from the department. The Louisiana Civil Service Commission, however, required that the employees be reassigned to other positions. Dr. Neason said the commission “basically informed [the superintendent] you can get rid of positions, but these people have tenure, and you must find other positions for them. And so we were moved here, there, and yonder.” For example, Dr. Neason was reassigned as a school food service supervisor as well as a compliance officer for the department’s school lunch programs around the state. She was allowed to conduct the scheduled three weeks of FFA leadership camp in July because the department was “gonna catch a lot of grief” from agriscience teachers. Therefore, the 69-year relationship between FFA and the LDOE had officially ended.

By the start of the 1999-2000 school year, Louisiana FFA had office space in the Old Forestry Building at LSU, but no adult staff had been hired. The funding and human resources process through the AgCenter had not yet been completed, and so another major challenge surfaced – how was the state FFA office to function until January 2000? In response, two LSU agricultural education students were assigned to work in the office, an undergraduate student and a graduate student. During this period, Dr. Neason was still employed with the LDOE in food services. She said, “I’d work at the [LDOE] all day, and I would go to LSU as soon as I got off work...either through communication or notes, [the students] kept the office running.” Mrs. Conerly recalled the long hours put in by Dr. Neason saying, “She was doing it on the weekends and her own time...she’d call me sometimes at 8:00 p.m. still at work, working on FFA stuff because she couldn’t during the day.” This arrangement was maintained through January to keep FFA functioning until permanent staff members were hired. It was a taxing

endeavor on both Dr. Neason, her student workers, and the agriscience teachers. Describing the roles that other agriscience teachers played, Dr. Neason said without them:

[I]t would have all fallen apart. Teachers stepped up. I have no clue how we had forestry contests that year. I'm guessing some people like probably Tommy [Peters] and some of the others who were big into forestry did the leg work on that... We were just barely trying to hang in there that that semester.

Interviews finally took place in the fall of 1999. Dr. Neason was hired as the program manager and State FFA Advisor. Dr. Ronald Mayeux, a former agriscience teacher who served as the superintendent of the Avoyelles Parish School System, was hired as the State FFA Executive Secretary. A full-time secretary, Shelly Leach, was also brought onto the staff. And on January 1, 2000, the Louisiana FFA Office officially became administered by the LSU AgCenter.

Theme 2: *The New Landscape*

The new millennium opened with great possibilities. The challenge of access to resources appeared to be resolved, and state agricultural education leaders had successfully navigated the political waters to maintain the program. Commenting on the benefits of being housed in the LSU AgCenter, Dr. Leger explained, "it was a very exciting time because now we had a home...[with]...so much less restrictions. We didn't have to deal with that kind of bureaucracy. We were in a home with other agriculture people here." Mrs. Conerly added, "here you have people supervising you and there's accountability, but you also have the freedom to explore and to start new programs and do new things that you didn't have...in the [LDOE]." The program's survival seemed to be assured as state leaders learned to navigate the new landscape.

Not all stakeholders were convinced, though, that this new administrative arrangement was the best fit. Competing interests within the agriscience teacher group almost immediately became apparent. With a large number of the state's agriscience teachers not being LSU alumni, there was a level of uncertainty and mistrust. Mr. Kavanaugh recalled, "The selection process for the executive director's job, sometimes it frustrated a bunch of us because it seemed...that LSU had...more control over it than did the ag teachers or the executive committee of the LATA." He further remembered "it basically came out of us folks from Louisiana Tech crowd that LSU was going to take over our state FFA program and run it." Others sensed this frustration, with Mrs. Conerly saying, "not all parties were especially receptive at the get-go." Furthermore, cultural differences between north and south Louisiana were evident during the transition. Dr. Leger said, "the southern part of the state...[t]hat's where most of the resources were, and the biggest voice is heard in the legislature...you have to...make sure all voices are heard, and not let people think that they're being disenfranchised."

As a result, concrete steps were taken early in the process to ensure that all parts of the state were represented to ease these concerns. Since moving to the AgCenter, some state staff occasionally have been housed at AgCenter offices outside of Alexandria closer to central Louisiana. As funding was reallocated to the LDOE, nominal agricultural education supervisors were hired on and off between 2000 and 2013, the last being Dr. Paul Theriot who left in February 2013. State events were regularly held in different parts of the state, including at LSU, Louisiana Tech, and McNeese State University. Additionally, the State FFA Convention has been hosted in Monroe and Alexandria since 2000. Ultimately, Mrs. Conerly believed that the new administrative arrangement became successful when agriscience teachers "saw that it was working." Mr. Kavanaugh said that over time it became clear that "LSU has not...tried to force themselves on the state FFA."

An enduring challenge unique to FFA programs that are not housed in the LDOE is the question of authority. According to Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Bulletin 741, the

LDOE is still the ultimate governing authority of agricultural education and FFA in the state (Title 28, Part CXV, Bulletin 741, 2019). Without sustained, permanent agricultural education and FFA staff in the department, oversight remained difficult. It was also undetermined who was responsible for developing vision, goals, and measures of success for the program. Dr. Burnett explained, “I think the major challenge is...the authority.” From the perspective of the LSU AgCenter, authority over agricultural education is something that its leadership has never desired. Dr. Richardson said, “we don't have an interest in owning the program. We're here to try to make it successful as we possibly can.” Because the program continued to be a part of CTE, a disconnect emerged between the intracurricular relationship between agricultural education and FFA. The majority of agriscience teacher professional development began to be held at the State FFA Convention, leadership camp, and LATA conference without the direct oversight of the LDOE. As a consequence, Bulletin 741 compliance became a responsibility of local school districts rather than state supervisors.

To help bridge this gap, a new state Agriculture Education Commission was established by the legislature in 2014 (Act 450, p. 3). As provided in the statute, the commission is to “assist the state superintendent of education in the ongoing evaluation of agricultural education programs in elementary and secondary schools.” Members of the commission include representatives, among others, from the LDOE, the Louisiana Workforce Investment Council, the LSU AgCenter, the Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation, and the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry. Importantly, the State FFA Advisor and State FFA President also serve on the commission. Without having an agricultural education specialist in the LDOE, this commission fills gaps between providing quality administration of FFA programs and developing enforceable standards for school districts to follow.

Becoming part of the LSU AgCenter gave FFA an opportunity to interact with another student organization, 4-H, and its parent, the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, a part of the LSU AgCenter. In July 2017, Dr. Richardson instructed Dr. Eric Smith and the lead investigator to “work with 4-H.” 4-H pre-dates FFA in Louisiana by more than 15 years and has been administered by the AgCenter since its inception. FFA and 4-H have cooperated for years in Louisiana, mainly with joint livestock shows, and within the public schools. As a result, the organizations share many of the same students. When conversations arose about the possibility of FFA moving to the AgCenter, many people had reservations. Dr. Neason said, “One of the arguments...I kept hearing over and over with it was that 4-H would take over FFA if we were in the AgCenter.” Dr. Leger served as FFA Executive Secretary for most of FFA's early time at LSU. He said, “I remember Dr. Richardson...said we were going to make this all work. This was not [a] competition with 4-H. This was a partnership.” Mrs. Conerly remembered, “we were on campus, but...[w]e didn't have all of the availability of resources that 4-H had, but...everybody was just so excited that we could have FFA...back in our programs.”

Several key individuals worked to develop the relationship between FFA, 4-H, and the LSU AgCenter. Dr. Leger recalled that the former head of cooperative extension, Dr. Paul Coreil, “had an FFA banner in his office along with 4-H. And they all realized the importance of all of this thriving.” Dr. Leger further remembered, “within the AgCenter, we had to let people know who we were.” The agriscience teachers, according to Mrs. Conerly, had to “[establish] good relationships with people on campus, and that was the hard thing...establishing relationships with the right people who had an open mind.” She also said that Dr. Burnett “was instrumental...in smoothing [things] over...sometimes when people, especially in the AgCenter, didn't want FFA to come in and take over any funds or any kind of...resources that 4-H had.” She recalled that Dr. Richardson “took...a little while, I think to warm up to us, but eventually, he did. And I know Dr. Burnett had a lot to do with that.”

Although the move of FFA to LSU was set in motion by funding challenges, it was people, their relationships, and their interactions that made it happen and influenced its course. Dr. Leger recalled that it was the vision of agriscience teachers that ensured the survival of the program. He said,

“if it would not be for the vision of the ag teachers and universities who have ag programs...and of course [the] LSU AgCenter all pushing, we wouldn't be having this conversation today. We would have disappeared.” According to Dr. Leger, the LATA leadership in the late 1990s created a think tank of teachers to discuss ways of saving the program. He remembered a few of the agriscience teachers composing this group included, among others, leaders from north and south Louisiana to ensure inclusion of diverse viewpoints. In September 2001, after the FFA office had been established at LSU, Dr. Leger traveled with the group to North Carolina State University. The North Carolina FFA Association had been housed at the state's land-grant institution since 1996 (North Carolina FFA, 2009), so the Louisiana delegation went to learn more about how they successfully implemented their model.

The influence of Dr. Richardson in helping to sustain FFA in Louisiana was decisive. He was the instrumental decision-maker who gave the approval for the move to occur, despite his feeling that “we got drug (sic) into the fray.” He was under pressure from many different stakeholder groups, and he felt that the agriscience teachers were being unnecessarily difficult. He said to the agriscience teachers:

[Y]ou're your own worst enemy. Nobody's going to help you until y'all (sic) get together as an organization and do what's best for the state and not worry about whether Louisiana Tech's got this, LSU's got that. I have no interest in playing that game.

For a time, Dr. Richardson felt that “the people we were trying to keep alive were fighting us.” Despite the challenges, his leadership in making the move a reality was discussed repeatedly by the participants of this study. Dr. Burnett, who has worked under Dr. Richardson since 1984, said, “[Dr. Richardson] has had a great commitment to ensure the survival of these programs...he has worked very hard to ensure that there is at least an adequate funding for the program function and operating.” Speaking of the AgCenter administration, Dr. Leger said, “[the] administrators were great. I'm very grateful to...Dr. Richardson and all of the people who really supported us, and here we are now...and it continues.” Mr. Kavanaugh also echoed these thoughts on Dr. Richardson's role saying, “I know that there were challenges in financing, and God bless Dr. Richardson...he worked them out because we had no other way of doing it... I was very proud of him.”

Perhaps the leader who sacrificed the most was Dr. Neason. With her career in jeopardy in 1999, she provided a level of stability for the program as its entire landscape shifted. Although her long, unpaid overtime hours have already been documented, the events took a personal toll on her. Dr. Mayeux left the Executive Secretary's position in June 2000 after state convention. This left Dr. Neason alone to conduct state officer summer training, three weeks of leadership camp, and professional development at the LATA conference. She decided to apply for the Executive Secretary position to maintain her work with FFA and the state officer team. Interviews were scheduled for the week after the LATA conference, and Dr. Neason recalled being “physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausted. I was absolutely wiped out, but then I had to do an interview.” She remembered feeling paranoid because although she was the state program leader, she “could tell decisions were being made [that] I was having no input on, and...no one seemed to care what I thought. And I had just given quite a few years to that program.” Dr. Leger was hired to the Executive Secretary's position, and Dr. Neason moved upstairs in Old Forestry Building as the program manager. She “felt absolutely and totally pushed out and worthless” as many of her old duties were absorbed by the FFA office. In January 2001, she decided to return to the classroom where she remained until her retirement. Dr. Burnett said “there's no way that the Louisiana high school ag science programs and Louisiana FFA can give [Dr. Neason] enough credit for the things that she did during that time.”

Theme 3: *A Reimagined Reality*

Since 2000, the look of the Louisiana FFA office and its functions have continued to evolve. At its peak from 2007 to 2010, four full-time personnel were employed by the LSU AgCenter to manage FFA and agricultural education programs. Two of those, including Dr. Leger, were assigned as program specialists charged with teacher development. The other two positions consisted of the State FFA Executive Secretary and an office administrative assistant. Funding for the two program specialists was lost in 2010, and from then until July 2017, only two full-time adults were ever employed by the AgCenter at any one time. Various numbers of undergraduate and graduate students have been assigned to the office since then, and these students have typically been tasked with substantial duties ranging from event planning and management to leadership development to foundation work. With the departure of Dr. Paul Theriot from the LDOE in February 2013, there were no longer any LDOE employees assigned to supervise agricultural education programs and curriculum directly. The State FFA Executive Secretary became the de-facto State FFA Advisor and assumed more duties.

At LSU, a renewed focus on agricultural education began in the mid-2010s. Retirements in the faculty allowed Dr. Burnett to bring in new people who have revitalized the department and helped to emphasize the need for a strong FFA program. Concurrently, however, the LDOE has placed a new focus on CTE. In 2014, the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education created Jump Start, Louisiana's attempt to increase accountability and decrease negative stigmas associated with CTE (Jump Start Program, Title 28, Part CLXIII, Bulletin 138, 2015). Jump Start created a tiered system by which schools earned points based on student achievement. If CTE students graduated with their cohort and earned industry-based credentials (IBCs), the school could improve its school performance score to which district funding is tied. Upon launch, there were no specific IBCs based on the agriculture curriculum.

That changed in the 2016-2017 school year with the adoption of the Louisiana Agritechnology credential (LDOE, 2016). Within Jump Start, the agricultural education curriculum was now recognized with a credential and with full funding under the program. Agriscience teachers could become certified to offer the credential, and the first students were tested at the end of the 2016-2017 school year. The ability to develop and implement IBCs in agricultural education was strengthened further with the creation of the Agriculture Education Commission in 2014. The commission now regularly considers the adoption of IBCs as the nature of the agricultural education program evolves to meet industry standards.

Stemming from this momentum, by 2017, it had become apparent that the model of one position responsible for total program supervision in agricultural education and FFA was not sustainable. Dr. Burnett recalled, "as long as it's just one person...all you are trying to do [is] just stay afloat, or you're trying to just do the things that you absolutely have to do." Agriscience teachers and LSU agricultural education faculty successfully requested additional funding from the AgCenter to expand the staff of the FFA office. In addition to the Executive Secretary, an Executive Director for Agricultural Education (the State FFA Advisor) was hired. Dr. Richardson said "I coughed up the money for that. We didn't get the support from the state on that. That's strictly something that we put together...here." A year-and-a-half later, the administrative assistant was promoted to a program specialist to more accurately reflect the responsibilities of that position. The AgCenter further approved funding for two more undergraduate students, increasing that number to five. This reimagined staff has been able to both effectively manage the day-to-day operations of FFA and serve as leadership for the program, filling the need that persisted since 2000 in developing clear a vision and measurable goals.

The increase in resources and relationships has allowed Louisiana FFA to experience sustained growth and historic success over the past five years. Thirteen new FFA chapters have been created, and

two dormant ones reactivated (National FFA Organization, 2020). Forty-four chapters (21.5% of total) have become membership-affiliated with the National FFA Organization and now comprise nearly 50% of the state's membership. For the first time in history, Louisiana FFA won national championships in team Career Development Events (i.e., Agronomy in 2016 and 2018 and Conduct of Chapter Meetings in 2018). In 2018, Louisiana had its first National FFA Officer elected since 1988, and she was also the first female in Louisiana history to become a national officer. Following the 2018 National FFA Convention, Louisiana FFA was ranked the 15th best FFA association in the country by the National Association of Supervisors of Agricultural Education (Parker, 2018). Then, in 2019, the state recorded its first-ever national win in the Agriscience Fair. Working with the Agriculture Education Commission, the State FFA Advisor was able to secure the creation of two new IBCs for the agriculture pathway in forestry and drone operations. Finally, LATA leadership worked with the legislature to secure an increase in funding for secondary agricultural education students in Louisiana for the 2019-2020 school year.

Conclusions, Recommendations, and Discussion

As the nature and philosophy of agricultural education and state supervision continue to evolve, three points of emphasis emerge. The first is the need for advocacy through professional organizations. In this investigation, it was the effort of agriscience teachers – individually and collectively – that proved decisive in ensuring the survival of FFA in Louisiana. For example, participants described the reform as a grassroots effort from the beginning. Time and again, agriscience teachers and the LATA were called on to defend the need for the program and to assert its value to those in leadership positions who controlled key resources – a concept Stone (2001) described as a challenge to *sustain resources* in the development of civic capacity. Sustaining these resources required agriscience teacher leaders to actively engage with the state's political process and be willing to be the *boots on the ground* in that effort. The establishment of the LATA legislative committee was critical in accomplishing that goal. Still, the combined civic engagement of agriscience teachers in all corners of the state provided the strong lobbying effort necessary to effect change. The value of a robust professional agriscience teacher organization cannot be overstated, as evidenced in this investigation. The agriscience teachers maintaining that statewide visibility and influence with lawmakers and state agency and university leadership will be crucial to the continued support of the program.

The ability of agriscience teachers to advocate for program resources is not enough, however (Roberts & Montgomery, 2017). The challenge of competing interests in civic capacity referred to by Stone (2001), could have derailed the reform efforts in the early stages. Agriscience teachers had to come together for the common purpose of saving the program, but once that goal was achieved, shared purpose had to be determined to maintain the program. Regional differences had to be confronted and addressed for other stakeholders to support the reform and to take the requests of the agriscience teachers seriously. It should not be taken for granted that the culture of agricultural education is homogenous and without internal variation. That diversity is useful for creating an adaptable program across the wide-ranging geography of the state. Still, it should not be allowed to stand as a barrier to overall program survival. Furthermore, agricultural education must maintain a clear set of goals and communicate its value and purpose to the community to preserve its place and relevance within the overall education system.

Agricultural education in Louisiana must also learn to navigate cultural, historical, and social trends that threaten its survival – a challenge Stone (2001) referred to as learning to navigate complex contextual challenges. As an illustration, in 2020, 44% of the legislature is made up of first-time lawmakers (Ballard, 2019), and several legislators who were key FFA supporters have retired or been defeated from office. Additionally, 44.7% of current agriscience teachers in the state will become retirement-eligible in less than 10 years (National FFA Organization, 2020). Those who were present

during the critical events of this historical event have either moved on or soon will, leaving a younger generation of agriscience teachers to take up the leadership mantle. Only 73% of the state's 273 agriscience teachers are current LATA members, leaving much room for growth and the need for a conversation regarding the role that agriscience teachers should play in supporting their own profession through advocacy efforts.

As the aging agriscience teacher population begins to retire, new teachers will fill the ranks. In Louisiana, 47% of agriscience teachers are alternatively certified (National FFA Organization, 2020) and likely did not receive preservice instruction in program support. Compounding this issue is the question of whether or not preservice teachers in the state's three agricultural education degree-granting institutions are receiving adequate training on how to promote their programs (Roberts et al., 2020). As the Louisiana Team AgEd group becomes more organized, it is imperative that coordination takes place among the state's universities to ensure quality time is spent with preservice teachers concerning program advocacy (Glazer & Egan, 2018). Louisiana, and other states, should also continue to utilize resources such as the National Association of Agricultural Educator's State Teach Ag Results (STAR) program to create professional development opportunities for alternatively certified and young agriscience teachers in advocacy and lobbying (NAAE, 2020).

Finally, the persistent challenge of program oversight, compliance, and quality assurance will exist when no formal leadership is present within the state DOE. In these cases, state leadership must utilize personal relationships and work closely with other stakeholder groups to develop clear goals and concrete outcomes for agricultural education programs. Agricultural education leadership teams in each state and territory should meet for strategic planning purposes (Graham & Edwards, 2018). This strategic planning should result in a clear vision for these goals and outcomes, and the vision should be regularly evaluated to determine delivery success and program impact (Alston et al., 2019, 2020). Building incentives through award programs and offering grants and other funding opportunities for programs meeting certain standards could create high expectations and establish minimum standards. Working with groups such as the Louisiana Agriculture Education Commission could also produce innovative program requirements and compliance protocols that could support local school districts without the direct oversight of the state LDOE. Moving forward, teacher leadership will remain critical to influencing legislative action and LDOE policy in ensuring the continued existence of agricultural education and FFA programs.

Although not necessarily unique among the states and territories, Louisiana's model of agricultural education supervision remains uncommon. Even so, it has proven to be effective at program administration, and, with appropriate levels of institutional and financial support, has been successful. As the nature of agricultural education and career and technical education evolve, states and territories must begin to explore alternative approaches to program supervision (Graham & Edwards, 2018). Land-grant institutions exist in all U.S. states and Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Louisiana's model could be implemented if conditions necessitated a change in other areas. It would be wise for leadership, therefore, to develop solid working relationships with agricultural education stakeholders to ensure viable options for program survival.

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