

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF E.M. TIFFANY AND THE FFA CREED TO LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE FFA

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Abstract

The FFA Creed by E.M. Tiffany has influenced the lives of countless FFA members. However, the creed has received little attention in terms of its origin. A creed is a foundational component for many organizations. It serves to establish collective vision and goals with the intent of providing purpose and direction to the individual as well as the organization. This historical research study investigated the origins of the FFA Creed, the motivations of its author E.M. Tiffany, how it has been modified over its history, and its use as a leadership development tool through creed speaking events. The FFA Creed was written by E.M. Tiffany in 1928 and officially adopted by the National FFA Organization in 1930. The creed was revised twice to form the current version. A new FFA Creed was proposed in 1990 and overwhelmingly rejected by a committee of delegates to the national FFA convention. The impact of the creed on leadership development has been substantial. Local, state, and national career development events have been created to enhance this leadership development opportunity. The creed has evidenced a resilience through the last 80 years and continues to provide leadership, direction and value to current and former FFA members.

Introduction

One of the first activities for new FFA members has been to memorize the *FFA Creed* written by E.M. Tiffany. This short, five-paragraph creed has transformed many a shaking, nervous freshman into a confident and articulate FFA member. During this transformation, the philosophical tenets of the FFA, grounded in a belief in agriculture, have been forever seared into the minds of countless youth. The creed has served to focus young FFA members on the benefits of agriculture, its rich heritage, and their role in the future of agriculture. This simple document has provided a vision and purpose to so many young agriculture students, aiding in their development as leaders. While the *FFA Creed* is known to millions of current and former members, the history of the document itself has largely been neglected. More attention should be given to understanding the historical background of this important document.

While the establishment of a members' creed was one of the first decisions of the young FFA organization, it was not a simple one. Several different creeds were proposed and even published before a final decision was made by the voting delegates. Since the Future Farmers of America was established in 1928, FFA members have been memorizing and reciting an FFA creed as part of their initiation ritual. Young 9th grade boys who enrolled in vocational agriculture had to learn and recite the creed as one of the requirements for the Greenhand degree (Future Farmers of America, 1950).

How did the young Future Farmers of America organization select a creed? What inspired the author of the official *FFA Creed* to pen such an eloquent document, and how has the creed changed over the past 80 years? While the FFA creed remains one of the most recognized and cherished symbols of the FFA, its origin and history are relatively obscure and worthy of historical examination.

Theoretical Framework

A creed is defined as a set of fundamental beliefs or a guiding principle. The word comes from the Latin word "credo" which means to believe or entrust (Merriam-Webster, 1993). Just about every major religion has established a creed, including the Christian *Apostle's Creed* (n.d.), The Jewish *Shema* (n.d.), and the *Muslim Creed* (n.d.). There is even an *American's Creed* (Page, 1917), which is the official Creed of the United States adopted by the U.S. House of Representatives in 1918. Recitation of creeds even appeared in popular culture. *My Rifle*, which is also known as *The Creed of the United States Marine* (Rupertus, 1942), was recited by recruits in the 1987 Vietnam film *Full Metal Jacket* (Kubrick, 1987) and the 2005 Persian Gulf war film *Jarhead* (Mendes, 2005). Noted educational philosopher John Dewey even wrote a document titled *My Pedagogic Creed* which includes five articles: What education is, What school is, The subject-matter of education, The nature of method, and The school and social progress. Almost every paragraph in Dewey's creed begins with "I believe" (Dewey, 1897).

Many youth and adult organizations have developed and followed an established creed. In many organizations, new members are required to recite the full creed as a prerequisite for membership. The two creeds for agriculture students that pre-dated the *FFA Creed* were *The Country Girl's Creed* (Shambaugh, n.d.) and *The Country Boy's Creed* (Grover, n.d.). *The Country Boy's Creed* below was a requirement for earning the Virginia Planter degree within the Future Farmers of Virginia (FFV) (Groseclose, 1926).

The Country Boy's Creed

Edwin Osgood Grover (n.d.)

I believe that the Country which God made is more beautiful than the City which man made; that life out-of-doors and in touch with the earth is the natural life of man. I believe that work is work, wherever we find it, but that work with Nature is more inspiring than work with the most intricate machinery. I believe that the dignity of labor depends not on

what you do, but on how you do it; that opportunity comes to a boy on the farm as often as to a boy in the city, that life is larger and freer and happier on the farm than in the town, that my success depends not upon my location, but upon myself - not upon my dreams, but upon what I actually do, not upon luck, but upon pluck. I believe in working when you work - and in playing when you play and in giving and demanding a square deal in every act of life.

Just as the FFV was the forerunner of the FFA, the New Farmers of Virginia preceded the New Farmers of America (NFA; National FFA Organization, 2003). The second edition of the *NFA. Guide for New Farmers of America* (1940) included a six-paragraph *Creed of The New Farmers of America*. The beliefs outlined in the NFA. creed included the dignity of work, learning to produce crops and livestock, belief in rural organizations, a life of service, the practice of cooperation in agriculture, and responsibility in developing one's talents to ensure happiness and contentment.

A creed that outlines what members believe has been an important component of many organizations since their inception. Creeds are commonly recited by new and current members of organizations as part of official ceremonies, conventions, or leadership activities. The history of the *FFA Creed* is an important piece of the historical puzzle in the development of the National FFA organization.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to document the contributions of E.M. Tiffany and the *FFA Creed* that he authored to leadership development within members of the FFA organization. The following objectives guided this study:

1. Determine the factors that contributed to the development of the *FFA Creed* by E.M. Tiffany.
2. Describe the various revisions to and editions of the *FFA Creed* over its 79 year history.

3. Describe the development and use of the National FFA Creed Speaking Career Development Event for leadership development within FFA members.

Methods/Procedures

Historical research methods were used in this study. Borg and Gall (1983) stated that, "historical research involves the systematic search for documents and other sources that contain facts relating to the historian's questions about the past" (p. 800). Data was gathered from *The Agricultural Education Magazine*, the *Journal of Agricultural Education*, regional and national research proceedings, doctoral dissertations, and on-line resources from the National FFA Organization and land-grant universities. The researchers also conducted research at the National FFA Archives at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. Personal communications with officials from the National FFA Organization also added to the information gathered from other sources.

Whenever possible, the researchers utilized primary sources of information. Primary sources used in this study included proceedings of the National FFA Convention, minutes of FFA Board of Directors meetings, articles in *The Agricultural Education Magazine*, and personal communications with eyewitnesses. Secondary sources included FFA history books, historical articles in *The Agricultural Education Magazine*, and historical research papers.

The researchers exposed all documents to internal and external criticism. The researchers externally criticized each document by reviewing it to determine its authorship, originality, and authenticity. In an effort to address the objectives of the study, the documents were exposed to internal criticism. This allowed the researchers to evaluate the accuracy and value of the statements. Trustworthiness of the results were established following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria. Multiple sources of information were used to triangulate the data and establish credibility of the results. Transferability of

the results was established by providing the readers with a detailed description of the data sources used to determine the results and draw conclusions for the research study. Dependability of the results was determined by following the methodology used by the researchers. The researchers kept detailed records including photocopies of all documents, books, and articles that were identified and used in this study. Confirmability of the results was addressed by the inclusion of quotations from books, articles, and meeting minutes as they related to the development of the *FFA Creed*.

Results/Findings

The history of the *FFA Creed* begins prior to the establishment of the FFA in 1928. During the early decades of the 1900s, numerous boys' and girls' agriculture clubs were established throughout the country. A foundational component of these clubs was the development and recitation of a members' creed. *The Country Girls' Creed*, written by Jessie Field Shambaugh, was used by organizations for farm girls in the early part of the 20th century. *The Country Girl's Creed* included five paragraphs, which was remarkably similar to the *Creed of a Future Farmer* written by E.M. Tiffany (1929). The first paragraph states, "I am glad that I live in the country. I love its beauty and its spirit. I rejoice in the things I can do as a country girl for my home and my neighborhood" (Shambaugh, n.d.)

A common predecessor to Future Farmers chapters and 4-H clubs were corn clubs established to promote the growing of corn by rural boys with an interest in production agriculture. Before the FFV was established in 1925, the Boys' Corn Clubs of Virginia existed. Edwin Osgood Grover (n.d.) wrote a creed titled *The Country Boy's Creed* and dedicated it to the Boys' Corn Clubs of Virginia (Hillison, 1993). It was this creed that Henry Groseclose adopted for the FFV and made a requirement for earning the Virginia Planter degree, the highest of the three degrees in the FFV (Groseclose, 1926). Although *The Country Boy's Creed* was much shorter than E.M. Tiffany's (1929) *Creed of a Future Farmer*, it did include

many similar themes such as work and the dignity of labor, success not depending on a person's location but on their self worth and what they do, and giving and demanding a square deal in every act of life (Hillison).

As the young Future Farmers of America came into existence in 1928, there were actually two unofficial creeds. The first FFA manual (Future Farmers of America, 1929) included a short, four-paragraph creed that was very similar to *The Country Boys' Creed* that preceded it and the NFA creed that succeeded it. The author of this first FFA Creed is not listed in the manual. The first unofficial FFA creed reads as follows:

The Future Farmers Creed
Author Unknown

I believe in the beauty of God's open country; that life out of doors and in touch with the earth is the natural life of man.

I believe that work is work wherever we find it, but that work with nature is most inspiring, and challenging.

I believe that the dignity of labor depends not on what you do, but how you do it; that opportunity comes to a boy on the farm as often as to a boy in the city, that life on the farm may be full, happy, and free, and that a prosperous agriculture is essential to our national welfare, that my success depends not upon my location, but upon myself, not upon my dreams, but what I actually do, not upon luck but upon pluck.

I believe in working when I work and in playing when I play; in giving and demanding a square deal in every act of life.

Confusion ensued among FFA members and officials as to the creed for the new organization. Within the first few years of the new organization, two different creeds had appeared in print. During the summer of 1928, a teacher-trainer in agriculture at the University of Wisconsin, Erwin Milton Tiffany (1929), wrote a creed he called *Creed of a Future Farmer*. It initially became the *Wisconsin FFA Creed* and was displayed in 1928 as part of the Wisconsin FFA exhibit for the first National FFA Convention (James, 1948; National FFA

Organization, 1956, 2003; Tenney, 1977). Following the convention, Tiffany's creed appeared in the February 1929 issue of *The Agricultural Education Magazine* (Tiffany, 1929).

The original *Future Farmers Creed*, published in the first few issues of the FFA Manual, and Tiffany's *Creed of a Future Farmer*, displayed at the first National FFA Convention and published in *The Agricultural Education Magazine*, created confusion among FFA members. Which was the "official" FFA Creed? The delegates at the 3rd Annual Congress of Future Farmers of America in 1930 (Future Farmers of America, 1930) clarified the dilemma; the minutes of the meeting state,

The president then asked the Executive-Secretary [Henry C. Groseclose] to explain the situation regarding the Creed of the F.F.A. The facts given proved that no creed had ever been officially adopted by the F.F.A., although two had been used semi-officially. Both creeds were then read for the delegates and by a vote of 39 to 16 the original creed first suggested as the F.F.A. creed in 1928 was adopted as official (p. 4).

While this record refers to "the original creed first suggested as the FFA creed in 1928" it was not referring to the first creed published, it was referring to the creed written by E.M. Tiffany and displayed at the first National FFA Convention in 1928.

The author of what was now the official *FFA Creed* lived a storied life. Erwin Milton Tiffany was born in Kansas in 1883. He completed a B.S. degree at Kansas State and a M.S. degree in agricultural education from the University of Wisconsin. He served as director of the Texas State College of Industrial Arts, was an instructor at Kansas State College, a school principal in Bend, Oregon, an itinerant teacher-trainer, and an Assistant and Associate Professor of agricultural education at the University of Wisconsin. Prior to his tenure in education, he also served in the United States Armed Forces during World War I. In addition to the *FFA Creed*, Tiffany also authored *The Song of a Future Farmer* in 1929 and a poem titled *The Soil*, which was read at his

funeral in 1949 (National FFA Archives, 2006).

E.M. Tiffany was often asked about the creed he authored. In an article by James (1948), Tiffany stated:

The Future Farmers of America are required to memorize something we have called a creed. Ever since thinking, hopeful men have inhabited the earth, they have been jibbering creeds. If any good has come from it, the virtue is not in the creed or in the jibbering but in the nobility of mind which prompts men to ponder over their ideals.

If the Creed of the Future Farmers is an expression of faith worthy of so vigorous an organization, it must be more than a part of a prescribed ceremony; it must be an active force of thought working its way anew through the mind of everyone who makes its words his own. I hope the creed is virile enough to engender such a response.

In a personal letter to J.A. James, Tiffany (1948) gave most of the credit for the enduring success of his creed to the organization itself. Tiffany stated:

I have often said that it is the organization that has made the Creed what it is; and, it is the work of the members and the leaders that has made the organization what it is. Without these, the Creed itself would be meaningless. With them, it may, and I fervently hope that it does contribute vitally to the spirit which is essential to achievement.

Over the years, *The Future Farmer creed* became known as the *FFA Creed*. Minor wording changes were made on several occasions. Wording in the third paragraph was evidently changed without a record of when the edits were made. The original wording referred to “the ability of organized farmers to serve our own and the public interest in marketing the product of our toil.” The words “organized farmers” were amended to become “enlightened agriculture” and finally “progressive agriculture.” The change to the words

“progressive agriculture” was made along with the addition of “or to be engaged in other agriculture pursuit” (2) and the substitution of “agricultural life” for “farm life” (2). These revisions were officially accepted by the Committee on Ceremonies and Rituals at the 38th National FFA Convention in 1965 (Future Farmers of America, 1965).

The creed remained unchanged for the next 25 years. However, as vocational agriculture gave way to agricultural education in the late 1980s, a new call arose for revising E.M. Tiffany’s *FFA Creed*. At the January 1989 Board of Directors meeting “it was moved by Warren Boerger and seconded by Brad Chambliss to convene a committee to examine and make recommendations concerning all elements of the Official FFA manual (including ceremonies, creed, and other text, but excluding the Constitution and Bylaws) and to provide for comprehensive rewriting...” (National FFA Organization, 1989).

As a result of this action, a National FFA Manual Revision Committee was established in 1989. This committee moved forward with proposing revised ceremonies and a new *FFA Creed*. At its July 1990 meeting, the National FFA Board of Directors received the report of the Manual Revision Committee, including a proposed new creed. The board moved to approve the new creed and submit it to the delegates for approval at the 63rd National FFA Convention in 1990. In a summary of the Board’s action the following rationale was given,

The purpose of revising the Creed is to make it more nearly fit all students of vocational agriculture. After brief discussion, it was decided to refer the suggested revisions to the convention Committee on Ceremonies and Rituals, and then to the delegates for official action (National FFA Organization, 1990a).

Throughout 1990, the debate grew over adopting a new creed for the National FFA Organization. In competing articles in *The Agricultural Education Magazine*, Shirley Sokolosky (1990)

supported the new creed, while Clayton Pope (1990) opposed the revision. Sokolsky, a member of the Manual Revision Committee who wrote the proposed new creed, stated,

The creed approved in 1965 might be fine for your members if you live in an area where production agriculture is the only business. Ask yourself, what if a change should take place? And what about the multitude of chapters where production is the exception and not the rule? Should they be forced to recite the creed which effectively excludes them? (p. 14)

Clayton Pope (1990) responded by writing,

We should not change the Creed, it is one of the last testaments to what our organization truly stands for. According to our national organization, the letters "FFA" no longer stand for Future Farmers of America. Our name no longer represents the true purpose or philosophical base of our group. The Creed is our only reminder of what the underlying theme of our organization really is. The theme is AGRICULTURE. Do not change the Creed. If we do, we sacrifice all we stand for, and shirk our responsibility, not only to agriculture, but to the country itself.

Articles about the proposed new creed also appeared in the popular press around the country. In an Associated Press article, Wetzel (1990) wrote, "Learning the 258 words of the FFA creed was a high school ritual for thousands of North Dakotans, and a proposal to rewrite it is stirring some deep feelings" (p. A9). In an article published in *The Outlook*, the publication of the Oklahoma FFA Association (Fellers, n.d.), Shirley Sokolosky stated, "We need a broader base to build on. We believe in agriculture and that means aquaculture, horticulture, production, agribusiness, etc. It's not fair to exclude any group from the beliefs of the organization by stating production agriculture only." In the same article,

Oklahoma State FFA Executive Secretary Kent Boggs stated,

I think it's a great creed. It makes me feel good to read it. But, I was expecting a revision of the E.M. Tiffany version. I'm not sure if I want to completely wipe out the creed I learned and can still recite from memory today.

The proposed new creed was written by Shirley Sokolosky (National FFA Organization, 1990a) and brought before the Promotion and Information Committee at the 63rd national FFA convention in 1990 (National FFA Organization, 1990b). According to the proceedings of the convention,

The Promotion and Information Committee did not mention the Sokolosky creed or read it before the delegates. However, the committee did vote to change three words of the E.M. Tiffany creed which has been revised only once since its adoption in 1930. The vote changed the word "farming" in the first line to "agriculture." In the second paragraph, the word "pursuits" replaced "pursuit," and in the last paragraph, the phrase "rural America" became "American agriculture. (p. 15)

The decision of the delegates at the 1990 national FFA convention put to rest the issue of a proposed new FFA creed. No additional amendments have been suggested since 1990.

Perhaps the reason the delegates did not support a new creed was because they had a "sentimental attachment" to the creed written by E.M. Tiffany in 1928. They had learned the *FFA Creed* as new FFA members in agricultural education class and recited it as a requirement for earning their Greenhand degree. Many members who memorized the five paragraph creed as young 9th graders can still recite it long after their FFA years have passed. This use of the creed has enabled it to become an instrument for leadership development within the FFA organization.

Throughout the years, state FFA organizations created their own Creed

Speaking Contests. During the 1990s, pressure increased to start a national creed speaking event. In 1998, the National FFA Creed Speaking Career Development Event was demonstrated at National FFA Convention. The purpose of the Creed Speaking CDE is to “develop the public speaking abilities of 7th, 8th, and 9th grade FFA members as well as develop their self-confidence and contribute to their advancement in the FFA degree program” (National FFA Organization, 2006a, p. 99). The National FFA also describes the Creed Speaking event as “one way to boost self-confidence, earn recognition, and develop your ability to communicate in a powerful, organized, and professional manner” (National FFA Organization 2006b).

In 1999, the first official National FFA Creed Speaking CDE was held. Forty-four FFA members participated in the first Creed Speaking CDE which was won by Michael VanWinkle of Nettleton, Arkansas. All 50 state associations now certify a state winning creed speaker and 48 members participated in the 2006 event. The Creed Speaking event is the only national FFA career development event in which middle school FFA members are allowed to compete (Jim Armbruster, personal communication, October 28, 2006).

The *FFA Creed* by E.M. Tiffany also has been translated into Spanish for FFA members in Puerto Rico. The FFA manual, including the Creed, is now available from the National FFA Organization in a Spanish language version. The Puerto Rico Association of FFA offers both Spanish and English Creed Speaking career development events. The winner of the English creed speaking CDE is certified by the association and participates in the National FFA Creed Speaking CDE held at National FFA Convention (Jim Armbruster, personal communication, November 27, 2006).

The *FFA Creed* has been used as a tool to improve the self-confidence, public speaking, and leadership abilities of FFA members since 1930. Every 7th, 8th, or 9th grade FFA member now has the opportunity to participate in creed speaking events on the local, area, state, and

national levels. Allowing young FFA members to participate in the Creed Speaking CDE enables them to develop leadership skills for their future in the FFA organization and their professional careers.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Creeds are important documents for many organizations. From the very beginning of youth organizations in agriculture, creeds have been written and recited. Prior to the start of the Future Farmers of America, *The Country Boy's Creed* (Grover, n.d.) and *The Country Girl's Creed* (Shambaugh, n.d.) were important documents for boys and girls in agricultural clubs. It became evident that the new organization desired a creed that its members could believe, recite, and follow as they progressed in the FFA and agriculture.

Two creeds appeared within the first few years of the FFA organization. The first FFA manual included a creed titled the *Future Farmers Creed* (Future Farmers of America, 1929). At the first National FFA Convention, a different creed written by E.M. Tiffany of Wisconsin was included in a display by the Wisconsin FFA Association. Shortly after the first National FFA Convention, E.M. Tiffany's creed was published in the second issue (Volume 1, Issue 2) of *The Agricultural Education Magazine* in February 1929 (Tiffany, 1929). The researchers have concluded that it was probably the combination of being displayed at National FFA Convention and being published in *The Agricultural Education Magazine* that gave E.M. Tiffany's creed the advantage in being selected as the “official” creed of the FFA organization in 1930.

Minor wording changes were made over the next five decades. In 1990, the National FFA organization's Manual Revision Committee proposed an entirely new creed for the organization. This proposal was met with overwhelming opposition from current and former FFA members alike, so much that the proposed new creed was not even read to the delegates at the 1990 National FFA Convention. Again, minor edits were made to make the creed written by E.M.

Tiffany more applicable for the new members of the FFA organization. Based on this historical study, it appears evident that FFA members were reluctant to make major changes in the *FFA Creed* that was written by E.M. Tiffany in 1928 and officially adopted in 1930.

From the 1930s to the 1990s, new members were required to memorize the creed in order to earn their first degree of membership, the Greenhand degree. Members learned to recite the five paragraph creed in front of small agriculture classes or large banquets and conventions.

Finally in 1999, 71 years after it was written by E.M. Tiffany and 69 years after it became the official creed of the Future Farmers of America, a national creed speaking event was established.

As one of the new career development events added in the late 1990s, the creed speaking event has experienced overwhelming success. Large audiences regularly attend the finals of the creed speaking CDE to witness young FFA members recite E.M. Tiffany's *FFA Creed* and answer oral questions from distinguished judges. The recitation of the *FFA Creed* has become an important component in the leadership development of FFA members nationwide.

Based on its long history in the FFA organization, the creed written by E.M. Tiffany in 1928 holds a special place in the hearts of current and former FFA members. FFA members struggle to memorize all five paragraphs word-for-word in order to earn what may be their first real award in the FFA organization. Based on the findings of this study, it is apparent that FFA members guard the integrity of the creed from anyone who wishes to alter or retire E.M. Tiffany's *FFA Creed*.

The researchers would like to recommend that the history of the *FFA Creed* be given a more prominent place in the history of the FFA. The life of E.M. Tiffany should be researched and written into the historical record of the organization. Tiffany's *Song of the FFA*, poems and letters should be compiled and become required reading for all new FFA members. E.M. Tiffany should be given a place of prominence, along with Henry C.

Groseclose, as a true agricultural education leader who helped to make the FFA what it is today.

The National FFA Organization should create a webpage to document the unique history of the *FFA Creed*, its author E.M. Tiffany, and its use in the leadership development of FFA members. National FFA should promote the *FFA Creed* by encouraging every FFA chapter to display a framed copy in local agriculture classrooms. DVDs of the finals of each year's National FFA Creed Speaking CDE should be recorded and added to the historical record of the FFA. A handbook should be developed for FFA members, officers, and advisors to promote the use of the *FFA Creed* in leadership development. The handbook could include the history of the *FFA Creed*, information about E.M. Tiffany, lesson plans for teaching the creed to new members, and suggestions for training participants in FFA creed speaking events.

The *FFA Creed* written by E.M. Tiffany is one of the premier documents in the history of the FFA. It embodies what every FFA member believes about the future of agriculture in this country. The history of this exceptional document is a story that every FFA member should know and value. The *FFA Creed* is cherished by all FFA members and should be celebrated in the long history of the National FFA Organization.

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