



# AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES OUTREACH PROGRAM

Maghan England & Sophie Johnston • Agricultural Education & Communication Department Senior Project

## PROGRAM PHASES

The authors initiated the first phase of their project by approaching the Dairy Science prospective student recruitment coordinators, Rich Silacci and David Vagnoni. The authors presented the idea and expressed the students' interest in partnering with the coordinators' current recruitment efforts.

The second phase included designing informational documents and a presentation geared to influence prospective students to apply for the Agricultural Communications, Agricultural Sciences, and Dairy Science programs offered at Cal Poly. They created handouts that depicted the countless job opportunities the students could pursue following graduation. The authors initially intended to visit high schools and their agriculture programs directly to recruit students. With hopes to expand their outreach, the students and their advisors put forth the plan to hold two large recruitment events instead. The students strategically chose locations for each event to maximize the amount of agriculture programs that could attend. The advisors directed the students to hold the first event for California's North Valley schools in Hilmar, California and the second event to be held in Tulare, California for California's South Valley schools.

The third phase began by confirming dates and event centers for the outreach programs scheduled. The authors then mailed hard copy invitations to the agriculture departments of each high school. Prior to each event the authors contacted the CAFES Special Events Coordinator, Donna Packard, for supplemental promotional items, displays, and CAFES informational documents (info sheets and magazines). Fellow Cal Poly students and recent alumni were asked to attend each event as representatives of the highlighted majors.

## DISCUSSION

The team recommends in-person invitations for future outreach events; as opposed to the mailed packages. By focusing solely on the agriculture teachers at target schools, the team will be able to explain the purpose of the outreach events and how attending will benefit their students. In-person invitations will also open a line of communication between teachers and the outreach event team prior to the event. The team also recommends utilizing social media platforms to better advertise. The use of engaging, inviting posts would excite students to attend the outreach events. By gaining a connection with each program's advisors, the team could request for the schools to share posts with their program's network sites. Lastly, the team understands the importance of informing parents of the upcoming recruitment events and believes this could best be accomplished through Facebook and Instagram posts.

## RESULTS

The event in Hilmar, California was attended by 40 students, family members, and advisors. Prospective students ranged from 9th to 12th grade and also included undergraduates from the Modesto Jr. College. After the conclusion of the presentation, the hosts allowed time for questions.

The event in Tulare, California was attended by eight students and parents which resulted in a conversational presentation style. The Tulare students were approaching graduation and had a driven interest in attending Cal Poly. With a smaller crowd, the team was able to individually meet with each family and address their concerns one on one.



## INTRODUCTION

The vision of the Agricultural Education and Communication Department is to develop future leaders, educators, and communicators to advance and advocate for the agricultural industry in a global economy (AGED, 2018). In order to maintain growing student numbers, the Agricultural Education and Communication Department, specifically, the Agricultural Science major needs revamped recruiting efforts and to discover new, innovative methods of attracting the next generation of Mustangs. By increasing Cal Poly's outreach to youth agricultural programs, the Agricultural Education and Communications Department could supply prospective students with more information and better display the opportunities available through the Agricultural Science major. This project will provide the AGED Department with ideas, methods and events to recruit students to apply and accept admission to the Agricultural Science major.

## BACKGROUND

The agriculture industry is experiencing a shortage of qualified graduates at a time that coincides with low enrollment in higher education of agriculturally based fields (Donnermeyer, 1994). In 2016, 123 students enrolled in Cal Poly's Animal Science major; however, the Agricultural Sciences major only received 20 enrollments into their program (Cal Poly, 2018).

To encourage new applicants for agricultural programs, campuses have begun individually reaching out to students. Informational publications, utilization of feeder schools, and consistent contact with high school Future Farmers of America (FFA) programs have been identified as being successful methods of recruitment. Lastly, ensuring the bond of a personal connection between students and faculty has proved successful in increasing application (Myers, 2003).

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