

Farmers For America Documentary Screening

A Senior Project
presented to
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Bachelor of Science

by

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Introduction

The agriculture industry is seeing a decrease in the number of beginning farms, operations that have been in existence for 10 years or less, across the United States. According to the most current Census of Agriculture by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), beginning farms make up approximately a quarter of the 2.1 million total farms across the country. This is a 20 percent drop between the 2007 and the 2012 censuses (2012 Census Highlights, Beginning Farmers, 2017). At the same time, the average age of the U.S. farmer is increasing and is now at 58 (Williamson, J. & Williams, R., 2017). In order to ensure food security in the future, the younger generation needs to step into the production agriculture industry. However, young farmers face many challenges with costs of farming on the rise. 61 percent of U.S. farmers work some days off the farm, and 52.2 percent have a primary occupation other than farming (2012 Census Highlights, Farm Demographics, 2017). One of the reasons for the decline in beginning farmers is that farming alone cannot generate a substantial enough income to sustain the life of farmers and their families.

If the next generation is going to enter production agriculture, they need to be supported in a variety of ways. The goal of this project was to assist in the first steps of supporting young farmers by organizing a screening of the documentary *Farmers For America*, which showcases several farmers and discusses issues the agriculture industry is facing today. By hosting the screening on campus at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly), the *Farmers For America* screening can raise awareness, educate, and inspire the younger generation of agriculturalists.

Background

The *Farmers For America* documentary addresses the connection between producers and consumers, changing market demands, and challenges that young farmers face through telling the stories of innovative young farmers (Farmers For America, 2018). *Farmers For America* was written, directed, and produced by Graham Meriwether, the founder of Leave It Better Media. Through Leave It Better Media, Meriwether shares stories of spiritual, economic, and environmental healing. The film was narrated by Mike Rowe, an actor, television host, narrator, and CEO of the nonprofit, mikeroweWORKS Foundation (Farmers For America, 2018).

The author partnered with Cal Poly's Brock Center for Agricultural Communication for this project so together, they could use this opportunity to raise awareness about the Brock Center's resources. The Brock Center's mission is to "create a bridge of communication between the agricultural industry, the media and the public" (Brock Center for Agricultural Communication, 2018).

Methodology

In order to accomplish this project, the author first planned the logistics of the event. A date, time, and location were all set through Cal Poly's University Scheduling and Office of the Registrar. The event would be held on Cal Poly's campus in order to best accommodate students and faculty, the target audience. Next, the author began contacting potential sponsors for the documentary screening. The goal was to have the majority of the refreshments for the event donated because tickets to the screening would be free. To encourage attendance and promote ticket reservations, the author chose to include a giveaway for the first 50 people to register

online. After researching and contacting several companies and individuals, the author received donations of:

- (60) 12 oz milks from Alexandre Family EcoDairy Farms to be used for the giveaway
- Popcorn from Scott Brownell for all attendees
- Kombucha from Mike Durighello at Whalebird Kombucha for all attendees

In addition to these items, the Agricultural Education & Communication Department provided cookies, plates, napkins, cups, and decorations.

The next step in planning the documentary screening was setting up ticket reservations and advertising. The author selected Eventbrite, a website that allows users to set up events and sell tickets. Although attendees were not charged for this event, the author set up ticket reservations in order to keep track of approximate attendance to expect, which assisted in planning refreshments. Additionally, the gathered reservation emails were added to the Brock Center's e-newsletter list for future events, activities, and agricultural education opportunities.

To advertise, the author designed a flier that was printed out and hung throughout the Agricultural Education & Communication building (building 10) at Cal Poly. The flier was also sent to the Journalism Department and distributed to their staff, students, and faculty. The College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences (CAFES) Dean's office administration sent the flier to all CAFES students, staff, and faculty. The students who work at the Brock Center helped with promoting the documentary screening as well to agriculture and journalism classes.

The last steps to planning the event included outlining the day-of event schedule, setting up and cleaning up, thanking sponsors, sending out a survey after the event to get feedback from attendees, and writing a blog post about the screening for the Brock Center.

Results

Although 168 people registered online and reserved tickets, a total of 82 people actually attended the *Farmers For America* documentary screening. This was one of the most significant challenges faced with planning this event because it skewed the number of people needing refreshments and event space. The free ticket reservation meant that signing up came with low investment, so there were no repercussions for those who reserved a spot and then decided not to attend.

Survey results included the following:

- 97% of survey respondents said they were likely to attend a similar event in the future
- 21 of 31 survey respondents would have liked to see a film representative present for a discussion
- "It was so eye opening to realize that there are big issues present and alive in the farming world and really the solution to many of those issues was coming together as a community and being conscientious about the decisions we make." -Cal Poly Career Counselor
- "The best message from this event is there is room for everyone in agriculture." – Agricultural Education faculty member

- “This film really put a face and purpose to the science I am learning,” -Wine and Viticulture Freshman

Many positive comments about the event were shared in the post event survey. The author and the Brock Center surpassed initial attendance goals of 50 people for the event.

Recommendations & Conclusion

Overall, the *Farmers For America* documentary screening ran very smoothly. Future planning of similar events can benefit from the author’s experience. First, reach out to the director of the documentary, Graham Meriwether, and attempt to have him come to the screening and host a discussion following the film or have him video call in. Adding this to the event may come at a cost, so consider charging \$5-10 for tickets. This would also help to correct the challenge faced with people reserving tickets and then not attending the event, because they would have more invested in attending. In addition, the author recommends setting up a photo booth in the lobby and creating a hashtag that attendees could use on social media to promote the event further and gain excitement. This would be a fairly inexpensive way to add to the pre-screening component of the event. Despite these changes, the author and the Brock Center staff were more than pleased with how the event unfolded and the author was glad to see so many people inspired by this film about the future of agriculture.

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