

Diversified Agriculture Program Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: November 7, 2024

Time: 6:00 PM

Location: RTCC AG Classroom

Present:

- Nicholas Bullock – Farm Credit East
 - Jesse Pacht – Long Wind Farm
 - Justin Poulin – Poulin and Daughter Farm
 - Ryan O'Malley – Instructor
-

1. Introductions

- **Purpose of the Meeting:** Ryan O'Malley welcomed new and returning members and outlined the purpose of the advisory committee, which includes ensuring the program is effective, relevant to industry needs, and supportive of students' career outcomes.
 - Each participant briefly introduced themselves and shared their background in agriculture and their role within the industry.
-

2. Review Responsibilities of the CTE Program Advisory Committee

- **Committee Role:** Ryan clarified the committee's role in advising on curriculum development, ensuring the program aligns with industry standards, helping maintain strong industry connections, and assessing program quality.
 - Committee members discussed how they would assist in improving program effectiveness and workforce readiness by advising on current trends and emerging needs.
-

3. Review Happenings in the Program

- **Program Updates:** Ryan provided an update on the program's recent accomplishments and challenges. Notable activities included:
 - **Cider Production and Sales:** Students successfully produced cider and participated in sales activities, providing hands-on experience in product development and marketing.

- **Harvest of Vegetables:** Students took part in the fall harvest of a variety of vegetables, gaining practical experience in crop management and harvesting techniques.
 - **New Class Schedule:** The program has implemented a new schedule to better align with industry demands and improve student engagement.
 - **Transportation Challenges:** As the program is the largest in the tech center, students face challenges with transportation when needing to travel for fieldwork or off-site activities. The size of the program makes it difficult to secure adequate transportation for all students at once.
 - **Largest Program in the Tech Center:** The committee acknowledged that the program's size is a point of pride but also creates logistical challenges, particularly for off-site trips.
 - **Community Visibility:** Ryan noted that the program has strong visibility within the local community, which has contributed to increased enrollment numbers and student interest.
-

4. Review Enrollment

- **Enrollment Numbers:** Ryan shared that the program has strong enrollment numbers, with 100% gender equity.
 - **Demographic Breakdown:** The student body is diverse in terms of age, background, and experience. No significant issues were identified in terms of student demographics.
 - **Recruitment Strategies:** The committee discussed ways to further increase program visibility, including outreach efforts to local high schools and promoting student achievements through various channels.
-

5. Discuss Current Trends in the Industry/Careers

- **Industry Trends:**
 - **The Family Dairy Farm as a Career Path:** Justin indicated that the traditional goal of owning a family dairy farm is no longer a feasible option for many young farmers unless they already come from a farming background. Nick Bullock said that from a financing perspective, even farmers' children face significant barriers in acquiring the farm from their parents. While they may receive a discount, the cost remains high and represents a major financial hurdle for new entrants into the industry.
 - **Skills and Hiring Needs in Agriculture:** Jesse Pacht emphasized the importance of hiring individuals with strong **problem-solving skills** and **farm mechanical knowledge** over those who may only have specialized crop knowledge (e.g., how to grow tomatoes). He explained that while crop-specific skills can be taught on the job, mechanical and problem-solving skills are far more critical to running a farm effectively. Jesse also noted the effectiveness of

non-domestic labor programs (EB-5) for his business, which has provided reliable labor solutions.

6. Industry-Recognized Credentials (IRCs) Discussion

- **Current IRCs:** Ryan provided an overview of the industry-recognized credentials (IRCs) currently offered in the program, including certifications in logging operation, pest management, and soil science.
 - **Value of IRCs:** The committee agreed that offering IRCs increases students' employability and ensures alignment with industry expectations.
 - **Potential New IRCs:** the plant science IRC seemed like a good fit for the program
 - **Member Feedback:** Members emphasized the importance of staying current with new industry certifications to ensure students remain competitive.
-

7. Review Current Curriculum and Advisory Advice

- **Curriculum Overview:** The committee reviewed the current curriculum, noting its balance of practical and theoretical knowledge.
 - **Recommendations for Improvement:**
 - Incorporate more **real-world problem-solving** exercises, particularly related to off site experiences.
 - Expand hands-on learning opportunities, particularly through internships and work-based learning experiences or field experiences
 - Integrate additional content on **sustainability practices** and **business management**.
 - **Committee Feedback:** The committee agreed that expanding multi-disciplinary skills would better prepare students for future agricultural careers.
-

8. Upcoming CTSO Competitions and Events

- **CTSO Events:** Ryan shared information about upcoming Career and Technical Student Organization (CTSO) FFA events and competitions, which focus on skills like sustainable farming, farm management, and technology integration.
- **Member Support:** Advisory members were encouraged to support student participation in these events, either through mentorship or by volunteering as judges.
- **Value of CTSO Events:** The committee recognized that CTSO events provide students with valuable hands-on experience, networking opportunities, and real-world applications of their skills.

9. Any Other Business (AOB)

- No additional topics or concerns were raised.
- **Action Items:**
 - Committee members to provide additional feedback on the current curriculum and potential improvements.
 - Plan additional outreach to high schools and local community organizations to further promote the program.

Meeting Adjourned: 7:05