Lesson 3: Designing an SAE

When choosing a Supervised Agricultural Experience, students should find one that meets their needs and is compatible with their current situation and resources. There are six factors that should be considered when selecting an SAE.

SAE Selection

Experiences and educational background – It is important for the student to have sufficient background knowledge in the program area. Each program requires certain skills and knowledge in order to be successful. Previous experiences with the program area or a compatible one can help determine what skills and competencies will be needed for the SAE. For example, a student whose family has a beef cattle farm may choose to have a beef production SAE program. Classroom instruction can also be a source for acquiring the background skills and knowledge needed to have a successful SAE program.

Personal interest – The student must have a personal interest and desire to set goals in the area of the SAE. It is essential for the student to be interested in the program area because SAE programs are frequently demanding and labor intensive. Lack of interest can have negative effects on the success of the SAE program.

Financing – The next factor to consider is the availability of financing for the SAE program. Some SAE programs can be very expensive to start and maintain. Preparing a budget will help students assess the start-up cost and maintenance and incidental expenses for the program and can give students a clear view of the financial needs and expectations.

Career interest – The project should pertain to the student's career interests and help develop the competencies he or she needs. Some students find that SAE programs can lead to careers. For example, a student working for a greenhouse may pursue a career in plant science.

Encouragement and support – A support system is crucial for an SAE program. A parent or guardian may be responsible for transporting the student to his or her employment or may help with the breaking of livestock for showing purposes. Parents/guardians need to be consulted in selecting the program area. If a parent/guardian cannot assist with the SAE program, the agricultural instructor may be able to help the student locate a mentor or alternative support person for the SAE program.

Availability of resources – Adequate financing is not the only resource needed to have a successful SAE program. Other resources are needed as well. Necessary resources will vary from one program to another. Resources can include such things as space, equipment and materials, and access to potential employers or customers. The availability of resources can broaden or limit the type of program a student may develop. For example, a student living in the city may not have the resources to operate a goat project, and a student living in the country may not have the resources to obtain employment in the city.

It is important to consider all these factors before starting an SAE program. Take the time to discuss them with a parent/guardian, the agricultural education instructor, employer, and any other individuals involved in the SAE. This will help ensure that the SAE program is an appropriate choice.

Setting Goals

After selecting an SAE program, students must determine the direction of their SAE. This is done by setting goals. A goal is something an individual wants to achieve. Setting goals helps to lay out a future for the program and provide a basis for making decisions. Goals also help produce desired outcomes for the SAE program by assisting in the planning and expanding of the program.

There are two types of goals that are set for SAE programs, short-term and long-term goals. Short-term goals are set and accomplished within one year or less, while long-term goals are set and accomplished within three years. In addition, there are four areas for which goals must be set. Students must set financial, educational, personal, and scope/project goals for their SAE program.

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Financial goals are set for the monetary aspects of the SAE. Financial goals are determined for the amount of money the student would like to earn, where financing will be obtained, and how borrowed money will be repaid. An example of a financial goal would be "I will pay off my $500 loan to the bank in two years."

Educational goals are set for the tasks to be performed and skills and competencies to be acquired during the SAE program. A goal in this area could be "I will enter my agriscience research project at the Missouri State Fair."

Personal goals are set for self-improvement, recognition, and satisfaction received from working on the SAE. A personal goal set by many FFA members is "I will receive the American FFA Degree."

Scope/project goals are used to expand the SAE in terms of production, hours worked, or the scale of the program. A sample scope/project goal is "I will double my production of honey next year."

SMART Goals

All goals, regardless of their area or whether they are short- or long-term goals, should follow the SMART goal model. SMART goals are
- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Realistic
- Time-bound

Specific – Goals must be precise. If goals are not specific, it is impossible to judge whether they have been reached or not.
Vague goal: "I will exercise more."
Specific goal: "I will exercise 20 minutes every day."

Measurable – There must be a way to measure or assess the goal. Measurable goals will help you evaluate your progress.
Immeasurable goal: "I will meet new people."
Measurable goal: "I will attend four activities a month and meet one new person at each one."

Achievable – Goals should be attainable. Setting goals that cannot be met is not beneficial to the person setting the goals. Unachievable goals can cause the person to become discouraged and not reach his or her potential.
Unachievable goal: "I will run 100 miles today."
Achievable goal: "I will run 1 mile today."

Realistic – Goals should be based on the person's actual situation and resources. Setting realistic goals helps the person follow through.
Unrealistic goal: "I will run a marathon next week with no training."
Realistic goal: "I will be ready to run a marathon next week because I have had six months of training."

Time-bound – Goals need to communicate the time required to achieve them. Setting and meeting deadlines will help you reach your goals.
Indefinite goal: "I will walk my pig."
Time-bound goal: "I will walk my pig every night."

Remember that setting goals is just the first step. No goals can be achieved without working on them.

SAE Planning

Once goals have been decided upon, a plan is needed for reaching the goals. There are four steps in planning an SAE.

Prioritize SMART goals. When goals are set, a student should not assume all goals will be met at the same time. By prioritizing goals, students can meet goals that are more crucial to the success of the program.

Identify resources required to achieve goals. By identifying what resources are needed, students will have a better understanding of the involvement and planning needed for the SAE.

Create a written plan. This allows students to further assess the resources needed and determine how they would like to see the SAE grow. The written plan should involve everyone concerned with the

project to establish their responsibilities, the resources needed, and the goals of the SAE. Students should use the written plan as the basis for their SAE.

Evaluate the SAE. It is beneficial for the student to take a step back and evaluate the work that has been done. This gives the student the opportunity to view the progress made and assess future goals. After the evaluation, the student can adjust the written plan to fit his or her new needs.

Recognition and Rewards

There are many ways for students to receive rewards and recognition for their SAE program. The first comes from the student's own feeling of accomplishment. Turning SAE goals and plans into a reality can provide a great sense of personal satisfaction. Another way is by applying for awards and degrees given by the National FFA Organization.

FFA Proficiency Awards recognize students' SAEs in different areas of agriculture. Proficiency Awards are given at the chapter, area, state, and national levels. The National FFA also presents degrees to members who meet qualifications set by the organization. Each degree specifies certain SAE program requirements that must be met in order to receive the degree. There are also financial incentives for developing a successful SAE program. Each year, the National FFA Organization awards over $2,000,000 in scholarships to FFA members. For more information on these awards, go to the National FFA Web site at www.ffa.org.

Summary

When selecting an SAE, students should look for one that is compatible with their current situation and resources. The key factors to consider are experiences and educational background, personal interest, financing, career interest, encouragement and support, and availability of resources. Setting SMART goals allows for evaluation of the SAE and promotes progress, but only if students work toward reaching their goals. For students who design their SAE carefully and follow through on their plans, there are many opportunities to receive awards and recognition for a successful SAE program.

Credits

Garton, B., ed. *Agricultural Education Program Planning Handbook for Missouri Schools*. 5th ed. University of Missouri-Columbia Department of Agricultural Education. Accessed June 18, 2007, from http://ssu.agri.missouri.edu/aged/resources/handbook/.

SAE Central. North Carolina State University Department of Agricultural and Extension Education. Accessed June 28, 2007, from http://www.cals.ncsu.edu/agexed/sae/toolbox/.

SAE: Supervised Agricultural Experience. National FFA Organization. Accessed June 18, 2007, from http://www.ffa.org/index.cfm?method=c_programs.SAE.

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