

History of the National FFA Organization

ONE WAY to know where an organization is going is to see where it has been. The National FFA Organization has a rich history and has continually evolved with the changes in agriculture, education, and the needs of students.



Objective:



Identify important events in the National FFA Organization's history.

Key Terms:



Applegate, Leslie
Groseclose, Henry
Lane, C. H.
New Farmers of America
Smith-Hughes Act

FFA and Agricultural Education

Agricultural education has been a valuable part of school instruction since the early twentieth century. In 1917, the National Vocational Education Act, commonly called the **Smith-Hughes Act** after the two congressmen who sponsored the bill, established vocational agriculture. That law justified offering agriculture classes in high schools throughout the United States.

Students in agriculture classes wanted to participate in activities outside the school setting with others who shared their agricultural interests. In the early 1920s, Future Farmer Clubs were started in Virginia for boys who planned to farm. **Henry Groseclose**, an agriculture teacher from Blacksburg, started Future Farmers of Virginia and would become known as “the Father of FFA.”

The American Royal Livestock Show, in Kansas City, Missouri, invited agriculture students and Future Farmers groups to participate in livestock judging contests held in conjunction with its national livestock show in late November of each year. On November 20, 1928, thirty-three students from 18 states attended a meeting at the Baltimore Hotel in Kansas City to organize what would be known as Future Farmers of America, or FFA. National dues were set at 10¢ per member. **C. H. Lane** was the national advisor, and **Leslie Applegate**, from New Jersey, was the first national president.

In 1929, at the first annual convention, 64 delegates from 33 states were present. The organization's colors were selected to be national blue and corn gold. By 1934, every state then in the Union except Rhode Island had FFA chapters. In 1939, land formerly belonging to George Washington in Alexandria, Virginia, became the National FFA Camp. The camp was later converted to the National FFA Center, which remained there until 1998, when the center moved to Indianapolis, Indiana.

TABLE 1. Major Historical Events in the FFA

Year	Event
1928	Future Farmers of America was founded.
1939	National FFA Camp set up on land that formerly belonged to George Washington in Alexandria, Virginia. (The camp later became the National FFA Center.)
1944	National FFA Foundation was formed to use funds from business and industry to support FFA activities.
1950	Public Law 740 was passed by Congress granting the FFA a federal charter.
1952	<i>The National Future Farmer</i> magazine was started.
1965	Consolidation with the New Farmers of America (NFA) strengthened the FFA. (NFA was an organization similar to the FFA for African American students.)
1969	Female students were allowed to become members.
1971	National FFA Alumni Association was formed.
1988	Name of the organization was changed to National FFA Organization.
1989	Name of <i>The National Future Farmer</i> magazine was changed to <i>New Horizons</i> .
1999	National FFA Center moved from Alexandria, Virginia, to Indianapolis, Indiana.
1999	The National FFA Convention was moved to Louisville, Kentucky.
2006	The National FFA Convention is moved to Indianapolis, Indiana.

CHANGE AND ADAPTATION

The National FFA Organization has adapted to many changes over the years. In 1965, Future Farmers of America merged with **New Farmers of America**, an organization similar to FFA for African American students in segregated schools. In 1974, Fred McClure became the first African American national officer. The year 1969 saw the changing of the constitution



FURTHER EXPLORATION...

ONLINE CONNECTION: Prominent FFA Members

Since 1928, many important citizens have benefited by participating in the FFA organization. Presidents, members of congress, entertainers, sports stars, and business and agricultural leaders have developed their leadership skills as members of FFA. Visit the link below to see a few people you might be surprised to find were FFA members!

http://www.ffa.org/documents/about_prominentmembers.pdf

to allow female students to become members. Today, more than 35 percent of FFA members are female, with 47 percent of state leadership positions being held by young women. In 1988, one of the most significant changes in the history of the organization was made when the official name changed from Future Farmers of America to the National FFA Organization, or FFA. This change was made to portray that FFA is an organization for agricultural education students with career interests of all kinds. While the original purpose of Future Farmers of America was to form a group for boys who wanted to farm, the National FFA Organization has adapted, along with agricultural education, to address the career opportunities and modern realities of the agricultural industry.

FFA has also seen many other changes. Career development events (CDEs), proficiency awards, and agriscience award areas have been added that reflect the opportunities available in agriculture today.

Current events of FFA members are a little more crowded than in 1929. At the 2004 convention in Louisville, Kentucky, more than 50,000 members, parents, supporters, and guests attended. There is also a lot more to do than just livestock judging! National finals for all career development events, proficiency awards, and student and chapter award programs are held throughout the four-day convention.

Summary:



The National FFA Organization was started in 1928 as an organization for boys who wanted to farm. However, it has evolved into an inclusive student organization that develops students' potential for premier leadership, personal growth, and career success through agricultural education. The organization has an impressive history of growth and change that the agricultural industry has addressed.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. Why were the first Future Farmers of America meetings held in Kansas City, Missouri, in late November?
2. Who is known as “the Father of FFA”?
3. How much were the first national dues to be a member of FFA?

Expanding Your Knowledge:



What is the history of your local FFA chapter? By looking at old career development events or proficiency plaques, do you recognize any members of your community as former FFA members? Conduct a history exploration of your own by interviewing former FFA members from your local chapter to find out what agricultural education and FFA were like when these people were in school.

Web Links:



National FFA Archives

<http://www.ulib.iupui.edu/special/ffa/index.html>

National FFA History

http://www.ffa.org/index.cfm?method=c_about.history