

A Brief History of the National FFA Organization



The passage of the Smith-Hughes Vocational Education Act in 1917 not only provided federal funds to states for high school courses in vocational education (agriculture, family and consumer sciences, and trades and industries) – but it also led to the idea for an organization that is known today as the National FFA Organization.

In the early 1920s, just a few years after the Smith-Hughes Act was enacted, Virginia formed a Future Farmers of Virginia club for boys in agriculture classes. Other states soon followed Virginia's lead and formed their own Future Farmers organizations. The next logical next step was to create a national organization to bring together all of the state organizations.

In 1928, a group of vocational agriculture students were in Kansas City, Mo., for the third annual National Congress of Vocational Agriculture Students, which was held during the American Royal Livestock and Horse Show. On Nov. 20, 33 of those students from 18 states met at the Baltimore Hotel in Kansas City and formed the Future Farmers of America (FFA).

FFA was for young men who were studying vocational agriculture in public secondary schools, and the new organization was designed to develop agricultural leadership, character, thrift, scholarship, cooperation, citizenship and patriotism.

The organization was structured on three levels – local, state and national – with students starting their FFA experience by joining a local chapter at their school, where the agriculture teacher serves as the chapter advisor. As part of the larger program that is now called agricultural education, FFA members are encouraged to participate in all three components of the program: (1) classroom/laboratory work (through enrollment in agriculture classes); (2) membership in FFA; and (3) hands-on work experience through the supervised agricultural experience (SAE) program.

Each FFA chapter develops and follows an annual program of activities, and all members share in planning the program and participate in its execution. Through their participation, members learn how to take part in meetings, follow parliamentary procedure, speak in public and cooperate with their fellow students.

Student officers are elected on each level to lead the organization's activities, and FFA members receive recognition for their achievements through competition and award programs. The annual national convention offers FFA members an opportunity to come together from across the country and celebrate their accomplishments over the past year.

By 1935, FFA membership had topped 100,000 with more than 3,900 chapters in 47 states, Hawaii and Puerto Rico. That same year, the New Farmers of America was established to provide leadership opportunities to African-American students enrolled in vocational education classes.

Land was purchased in Alexandria, Va., for the National FFA Headquarters in 1939, and in 1944, the National FFA Foundation was created to raise funds from business and industry to help support the many new programs being developed for the growing FFA membership. In 1950, Public Law 740 was

passed by the U.S. Congress, granting FFA a federal charter and requiring that a U.S. Department of Education staff member be the national FFA advisor.

FFA membership took a leap in 1965 when 58,000 members of the New Farmers of America merged with the Future Farmers of America. This followed an act of Congress that prohibited segregation in public schools. Four years later, delegates at the 1969 National FFA Convention voted to allow women to be members of the FFA.

In 1976, Alaska became the 50th state to obtain a state charter. An all-time membership high was recorded in 1977, with 509,735 members in 8,148 chapters in all 50 states, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

By the 1980s, the Future Farmers of America had become more than an organization for rural farm students. In 1988, the delegates at the 61st National FFA Convention voted to change the organization's official name from Future Farmers of America to the National FFA Organization. This change was made to recognize that FFA is not only for those interested in farming, but it is also for those with more diverse interests in the industry of agriculture, encompassing science, business and technology in addition to production farming.

The late 1990s marked a period of location changes for the National FFA Organization. The National FFA Center was moved from Alexandria, Va., to Indianapolis, Ind., where a new building was dedicated on July 20, 1998. And after 70 years in the same city, the national FFA convention was held for the last time in Kansas City, Mo., in 1998. The 72nd National FFA Convention in 1999 moved to Louisville, Ky., where it remained for seven years; in 2006, the national FFA convention moved to Indianapolis. Attendance at the national convention reached an all-time high in 2008 when 54,731 FFA members, advisors and supporters came to Indianapolis for the 81st National FFA Convention.

Over the years, FFA has shown the value it places on service to country and community. This was never more evident than in 2005. Following Hurricane Katrina, the National FFA Organization raised more than \$835,000 through their Seeds of Hope campaign to help FFA members, chapters and agricultural education facilities affected by the hurricane.

Today, the National FFA Organization is a premier youth leadership organization with 507,753 members in 7,439 chapters in all 50 states, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. The FFA mission is to make a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education.

For more information about the history of the National FFA Organization, please visit the website of the [National FFA Archives](#) at Indiana University - Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI):

[Blue Jackets, Gold Standards: 75 years of living the legacy](#) – a book about FFA history-- is available at [Shop FFA](#), the online store for the National FFA Organization.