The Importance of Diversity and Inclusion in New Mexico Agricultural Education[1]

Abstract

In 2021, the National FFA Organization established and distributed value statements to strengthen diversity and inclusion policies in school-based agricultural education (SBAE) programs. Since these statements replace a previous effort, more research is needed on how they impact agricultural education. Comparatively, the demographics of New Mexico's agricultural education students do not reflect racial minority-majority status. Research on sex/gender, sexuality, and special needs/exceptions is limited in New Mexico. Although there is previous research on diversity and inclusion in agricultural education, updated studies are needed to gauge population demographic information. We studied how agricultural educators and students apply the National FFA Value Statements to agricultural education programs. We designed a questionnaire targeted toward agricultural educators to score statements on diversity and inclusion and National FFA Value Statements. Based on agreement levels, agricultural instructors understand and practice diversity and inclusion more than students. However, they report limited sexuality and gender awareness. We developed solutions and suggestions for incorporating diversity and inclusion in New Mexico agricultural education, emphasizing additional professional development opportunities.

Introduction/Literature Review

The *Agricultural Education for All* initiative, published in 2020, offers detailed objectives for implementing diversity and inclusion in the National FFA Organization (National FFA Organization, 2020). Diversity and inclusion, as outlined throughout this study, is a standard that embraces all individuals by actively engaging them in agricultural education programs regardless of race, gender, sexuality, or exceptionality (LaVergne et al., 2011). Prior endeavors on diversity and inclusion by the National FFA Organization include affording membership to African American and women in 1965 and 1969, respectively, renaming the organization in 1988, the awarding of the H.O. Sargent Award to highlight local diversity and inclusion efforts, and celebrations for Hispanic and Native American membership at the National FFA Convention (National FFA Organization, 2021b). In response to comments on the *Agricultural Education for All* initiative, the National FFA Board of Directors, National FFA Officers, National FFA Staff, and stakeholders formed a task force to produce value statements to guide diversity and inclusion in the organization, which were adopted by student delegates at the 94th National FFA Convention and Expo in 2021:

1. We respect and embrace every individual's culture and experiences.

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2. We welcome every individual's contribution to advance our communities and the industry of agriculture.
3. We cultivate an environment that allows every individual to recognize and explore their differences.
4. We create leadership opportunities for every individual to enhance their personal and professional endeavors. (Helmer, 2022, p. 1)

However, there is no direction on how agricultural educators might incorporate these value statements into their courses or classroom. Further, available data on the *Agricultural Education for All* initiative, and the lack of research on the value statements, do not address the effects of diversity and inclusion activities at the state and local levels or how agricultural education and FFA programs are reflective of demographics and cultures in each state, such as ethnic practices and generational histories and traditions.

A historical relationship between agricultural education and racial inequalities has existed, leading to stereotypes of minority students being developed. Phelps et al. (2012) claimed that stereotypes lead people to conclude that FFA is solely for "farmers" (p. 81). This stereotype is often associated with White populations (Suarez et al., 2020). Using inclusive recruiting strategies to promote agricultural education and FFA may help remove stereotypes, such as combating stereotypes through marketing and promoting the broad scope of agricultural education programming (Phelps et al., 2012). Many believe agricultural education programs should engage and recognize students' cultural experiences to boost student interest and FFA achievement (Martin & Kitchel, 2015). Students of White populations represent 60.85% of agricultural education enrollment, whereas African American, Asian American, and Native-American populations represent only 9.46% (National FFA Organization, 2021a). While most FFA and agricultural education programs are primarily White, racial diversity increases in urban and larger communities (Lawrence et al., 2013).

In this study, sex is used as a classification term for reproductive organs, often male or female. Gender, on the other hand, is used for self-identification as male or female based on social conventions (Mazure, 2021). As gender concepts shift, classroom discussions about gender expression may be valuable but polarizing. In the context of gender identity, individuals have the option of identifying with a gender that best describes them and how they express those identities, whether that be cisgender (gender identity assigned at birth), gender nonconforming (gender other than traditional male or female), transgender (gender identity different from birth), non-binary (neither male nor female), or intersex (ambiguous biological sex; Mazure, 2021). In New Mexico, 39% of transgender students say they cannot use their preferred name or pronoun in school due to policies (GLSEN, 2019). Furthermore, 63% of students have reported hearing negative remarks regarding transgender people, while 77% have heard negative remarks on gender expression (GLSEN, 2019). As a result, identity and self-image may be affected by not using preferred pronouns (Hickman & Vincent, 2021).

In this study, sexual orientation refers to one's sexual and romantic attraction to someone of the same or different gender, whereas sexual identity refers to one's self-identification as a specific sexual orientation (e.g., gay, bisexual, lesbian, etc.; American Psychological Association, 2009). While prominent in diversity and inclusion, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer (LGBQ)

community are underrepresented in agricultural education (Murray et al., 2020). This topic has little research, with most focusing on Extension and 4-H rather than school-based agricultural education (SBAE). Murray et al. (2020) found that research in agricultural education rarely studies LGBQ populations, contributing to the perception that the LGBQ community is underrepresented (Austin, 2018). Most instructors cannot recognize the LGBQ presence in their programs, most likely due to low enrollment numbers, which may be unreliable because many students are unwilling to come out (Elliott, 2018).

Teachers are willing and able to include students with disabilities in their classes and agricultural education programs but often lack confidence in creating an inclusive environment (Giffing et al., 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Nineteen percent of agricultural education students in New Mexico have an Individual Education Plan (IEP), of which 70% are FFA members, and 30% have a Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE; Dormody et al., 2006). Physically disabled and emotionally and behaviorally challenged students are the hardest to engage in agriculture classes (Dormody et al., 2006). Disciplinary ambiguity, stigma, and access to curriculum and information can affect a teacher's effectiveness with disabled students (Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Marling, 2012). More experienced agricultural educators reported fewer issues engaging special education students with various accommodation plans, such as an IEP, 504 modifications, or English Language Learners (ELL) students, but less experienced educators reported substantial issues (Dormody et al., 2006). Further, Giffing et al. (2010) suggested that a traditional classroom is the best place for students with special needs to excel in agricultural education.

Diversity and inclusion are not restricted to a single topic. Nonetheless, because the National FFA Value Statements have been introduced, it is vital to establish whether they are implemented in agricultural education programs. Because New Mexico is a minority-majority state (World Population Review, 2021), race is at the forefront of research, with other hot topics such as sex/gender, sexuality, and special needs/exceptionalities also part of the changing landscape of educational diversity (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE], 2008). As a result, with new and emerging guidelines on how to best promote diversity and inclusion in agricultural education, more information is required to determine how educators, and sometimes agricultural education students, encourage the practice of diversity inclusion in various environments.

Conceptual Framework

Prior studies indicate diversity and inclusion's importance in agricultural education (LaVergne et al., 2011; Luft, 1996; Talbert & Larke, 1995; Warren & Alston, 2007). However, research must address the new National FFA Value Statements and *Agricultural Education for All* initiative. The lack of research on these initiatives, specifically in New Mexico, has made it necessary to evaluate the impact of diversity and inclusion in agricultural education, the relevance of the National FFA Value Statements, and the need to comprehend how these variables and concepts are being practiced in New Mexico, regardless of their accessibility or changing nature. The National FFA Value Statements connect agricultural education, diversity, and inclusiveness. While these statements are a national effort, little data indicates if they are being practiced in agricultural education and FFA programs at the local level. More specifically, there is

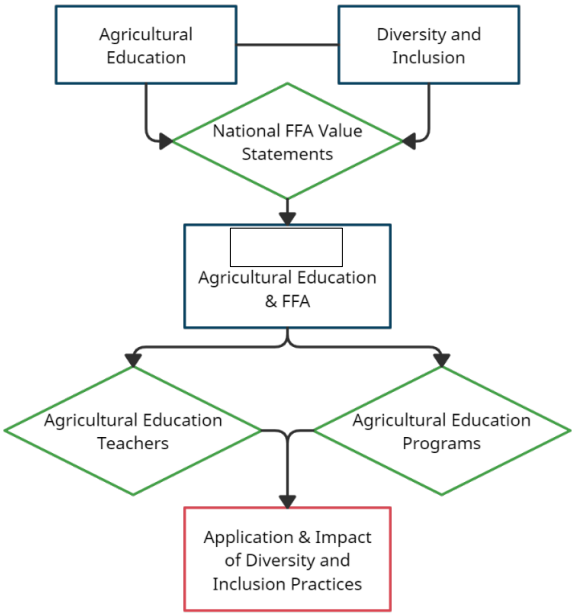
insufficient information about how New Mexico's agricultural education system reflects diversity and inclusion and the National FFA Value Statements. This study will examine the National FFA Value Statements to determine their role with New Mexico's agricultural education teachers and their relevancy to diversity and inclusion practices.

We applied the National FFA Value Statements and other diversity and inclusion principles to two variables in this study—agricultural education teachers and agricultural education programs—which will serve as the primary focus of the study. When offering these principles to agricultural educators, it is necessary to gauge their confidence in promoting a diverse and inclusive program and if they will embrace and incorporate specific principles into their programs. Attitudes, arbitrary standards, and perceived behavioral control centered on diversity and inclusion may affect agricultural educators' intentions and behaviors (Ajzen, 1991). An outside influence creates other attitudes toward diversity and inclusion practices, including the National FFA Value Statements, because characteristics related to diversity and inclusion link to the behaviors of educators and students and are viewed negatively or positively (Ajzen, 1991).

The conceptual framework used in this study (see Figure 1) outlined the factors examined, their connection to one another, and the expected implications. This framework guided determining to what degree (a) diversity and inclusion practices are implemented in New Mexico agricultural education, (b) whether the National FFA Value Statements are understood and practiced in New Mexico agricultural education, and (c) whether further diversity and inclusion practices are needed to be established in local programs in New Mexico agricultural education.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework Guiding Problem Investigation Adapted from Mor Barak (2013)



Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to determine (a) whether the National FFA Value Statements impact local programming in New Mexico, (b) whether diversity and inclusion practices are present in FFA and SBAE programs, and (c) whether there is a need for additional actions to promote diversity and inclusion in the state. The objectives of this study were to:

1. Describe the willingness of agricultural educators in New Mexico to apply the National FFA Value Statements in local programs.
2. Describe the impact of the National FFA Value Statements on SBAE in New Mexico.
3. Describe agricultural educators' perceptions of diversity and inclusion.
4. Determine the need to increase diversity and inclusion in SBAE in New Mexico.

Method

From the standpoint of agricultural educators, this study and data-gathering method focused on secondary-level SBAE and FFA programs in New Mexico. We conducted this study in person using a quantitative questionnaire. The study used a deliberate selection of participants who are active professionals engaged in agricultural education in New Mexico. This demographic is widespread over the state and is diverse in terms of race, level of education, gender, age, and experience. We did not collect demographic data on the population relating to sexuality and special needs/exceptionalities.

We designed the study's instrument using a cross-sectional study method (Mann, 2003), in which Qualtrics was used to create a questionnaire distributed using Lavrakas's (2008) computer-assisted self-interviewing (CASI) techniques. The primary researcher created the questionnaire/instrument, which contained several questions and constructs based on the National FFA Value Statements (Helmer, 2022) and the specific diversity and inclusion topics pertinent to this study (i.e., race, sex/gender, sexuality, special needs/exceptionalities). We implemented a questionnaire using principles and methods described by Dillman et al. (2014). To promote self-completion of the research using CASI guidance, we considered the questions' language and the questionnaire's structure (Lavrakas, 2008).

The participants were instructors of agricultural education in New Mexico's high schools and middle schools who attended a mid-year conference held with the annual state-level FFA leadership conference ($N = 59$). Participants came from the list of agricultural teachers for 2021–2022, available on the New Mexico Agricultural Education and FFA Association (2023) website, and from those who attended the mid-year conference. The study eliminated conference attendees who were not already teaching, CTE specialists, and post-secondary agricultural education educators at post-secondary institutions in New Mexico.

The study's dependent variables were applying and understanding diversity and inclusion practices. The independent variables observed in this study are the National FFA Value Statements and their application to agricultural educators in New Mexico and agricultural education programs in New Mexico. Levels of agreement on concepts of diversity and inclusion and the National FFA Value Statements, when applied to teachers practicing said concepts and

teacher observations of student practice, are indicators of successful diversity and inclusion implementation. Low scores may indicate a lack of awareness of the issues covered, depending on the school and program demographics, participant knowledge, and exposure to the topics discussed in this study.

Using tactics identical to Delk et al. (2017), we gave participants a small hand-held tablet provided by the lead researcher during the conference. After giving informed permission, we instructed participants to complete the instrument questionnaire using the CASI technique described by Lavrakas (2008). We used this approach to collect accurate data and enable participants to reply in a confidential environment because the instrument questionnaire involved potentially sensitive topics (Lavrakas, 2008).

Through Qualtrics programming, we collected the data from this instrument questionnaire and placed it into the Statistical Analysis System (SAS) for quick analysis in an electronic format. We expect a reliability analysis coefficient of > 0.7 for the two constructs the study focused on to confirm a suitable internal consistency level (Taber, 2018). The first construct that focused on program diversity and inclusion implementation garnered a coefficient of $\alpha = 0.87$, and the second construct that focused on teacher diversity and inclusion practices garnered a coefficient of $\alpha = 0.96$. Overall, the entire study garnered a coefficient of $\alpha = 0.93$, showing that the instrument has adequate internal consistency (Taber, 2018). We used a Likert scale of 1–5 (5: Strongly Agree, 4: Agree, 3: Undecided, 2: Disagree, 1: Strongly Disagree) to determine the frequency of specific replies and agreement for all questions in the instrument questionnaire.

Results

All agricultural educators in New Mexico who attended a mid-year agricultural educator conference conducted with a state-level student leadership conference comprised the population of this study. All identified population members were active teachers in a SBAE program with an active FFA chapter. As part of the data collection process, we collected demographic data for each participant ($n = 42$), including the self-reported dominant race of students in each program (see Table 1). This study's accessible population was 59 participants ($N = 59$), which yielded a 71.19% ($n = 42$) response rate.

Table 1

*Demographic Traits of Participants (*n *= 42)*

Category	*f*	*%*
Sex/Gender[a]		
Male	16	39.02
Female	25	60.98
Other (Short Answer Space)	0	0.00
Prefer Not to Answer	0	0.00
Race[a]		
White	32	78.05
African American	0	0.00
Latinx/Hispanic	8	19.51

Table 1 Continued

Category	*f*	%
Asian American/Alaska Native	0	0.00
Native American	0	0.00
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0	0.00
Two or More	1	2.44
Other/Unknown	0	0.00
Prefer Not to Answer	0	0.00
Completion of Multicultural Course/Training		
Yes	30	71.43
No	12	28.57
Familiarity with FFA Value Statements		
Yes	21	50.00
No	21	50.00
Dominant Race of Programs		
White	13	30.95
Latino/Hispanic	22	52.38
Native American	2	4.76
Mixed/Biracial	3	7.14
Other/Unknown	2	4.76

[a] 1 participant did not respond to the question.

Objective One: Willingness of Agricultural Educators to Apply the National FFA Value Statements in Local Programs

Each participant used a 5-point Likert scale to rate how much they agreed that the National FFA Value Statements are present and practiced. Ninety-seven percent ($f = 41$) of respondents strongly agreed or agreed when asked if they embrace the individual cultures and experiences of their students and have developed a welcoming attitude toward students within their program, whereas 2.38% ($f = 1$) strongly disagreed (see Table 2). Ninety percent ($f = 38$) of respondents strongly agreed or agreed when asked if they cultivate a welcoming and inclusive environment for students in their program and if they allow individuals to recognize and explore their differences in their program. In comparison, 7.14% ($f = 3$) were unclear if they practice these concepts, and 2.38% ($f = 1$) strongly disagreed that they practice these concepts.

Table 2

*Perceived Implementation of National FFA Value Statements by Educators (*n = *42)*

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
I respect the individual cultures and experiences of students.	38	90.48	2	2.38	1	2.38	0	0.00	1	2.38
I embrace the individual cultures and experiences of students.	35	83.33	6	14.29	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	2.38

Table 2 Continued

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
I have developed a welcoming attitude toward students.	39	92.86	2	4.76	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	2.38
I have accepted all students' contributions to the advancement of the program.	36	85.71	5	11.90	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	2.38
I have cultivated a welcoming and inclusive environment for students.	31	73.81	7	16.67	3	7.14	0	0.00	1	2.38
I have allowed everyone to recognize and explore their differences.	29	69.05	9	21.43	3	7.14	0	0.00	1	2.38

Fourteen percent (*f* = 3) of respondents said they learned about the National FFA Value Statements from social media, personal research, or online searches. Fifty-seven percent (*f* = 12) of participants claimed they were aware of the National FFA Value Statements, and 50% (*f* = 21) answered that they learned about them via discussions with other agricultural educators or emails from the National FFA Organization.

Objective Two: Impact of the National FFA Value Statements in SBAE in New Mexico

On a 5-point Likert scale, participants indicate how much they agreed with statements on how students in their program practice the National FFA Value Statements and how often they discuss diversity and inclusion in their relationships with their peers. Eighty-six percent (*f* = 36) of respondents strongly agreed or agreed when asked if students in their program respect the cultures and experiences of their peers, 11.90% (*f* = 5) were unsure, and 2.38% (*f* = 1) disagreed (see Table 3). Seventy-one percent (*f* = 30) of respondents strongly agreed or agreed when asked if students in their program allow everyone to recognize and explore their differences, 21.43% (*f* = 9) were unsure, and 7.14% (*f* = 3) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Table 3

*National FFA Value Statements Practiced by Students as Perceived by Teachers (*n = *42)*

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Students respect the cultures and experiences of their peers.	19	45.24	17	40.48	5	11.90	1	2.38	0	0.00
Students embrace the cultures and experiences of their peers.	12	28.57	19	45.24	8	19.05	2	4.76	1	2.38

Table 3 Continued

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Students have a welcoming attitude toward their peers.	13	30.95	21	50.00	8	19.05	0	0.00	0	0.00
Students have accepted their peer's contributions to the advancement of the program.	12	28.57	20	47.62	10	23.81	0	0.00	0	0.00
Students have cultivated a welcoming and inclusive environment.	12	28.57	19	45.24	10	23.81	0	0.00	1	2.38
Students allow everyone to recognize and explore their differences.	9	21.43	21	50.00	9	21.43	2	4.76	1	2.38

Objective Three: Agricultural Educators' Perceptions of Diversity and Inclusion

On a 5-point Likert scale, participants indicated how strongly they agreed on if specific diversity and inclusion strategies were present in their agricultural education programs. Ninety-seven percent ($f = 41$) of respondents strongly agreed or agreed when asked whether they encourage students of diverse races, students of different sex/genders, and students with special needs/exceptionalities to participate in their program, whereas 2.38% ($f = 1$) strongly disagreed (see Table 4). Ninety percent ($f = 38$) of respondents strongly agree or agreed when asked whether they encourage students who identify as members of the LGBQ community to participate in their program, whereas 7.14% ($f = 3$) were undecided and 2.38% ($f = 1$) disagreed. Eighty-eight percent ($f = 37$) of respondents strongly agreed or agreed when asked if they have the resources and tools to understand and implement diversity and inclusion.

Table 4

*Perceived Implementation of Diversity and Inclusion Efforts by Teachers (*n = *42)*

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
I encourage students from different races to participate.	38	90.48	3	7.14	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	2.38
I encourage students of different genders to participate.	39	92.86	2	4.76	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	2.38
I encourage students who identify as members of the LGBQ community to participate.	29	69.05	9	21.43	3	7.14	0	0.00	1	2.38

Table 4 Continued

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
I encourage students with special needs and exceptionalities to participate.	32	76.19	9	21.43	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	2.38
I have been given the tools and resources needed to understand and practice diversity and inclusion.	26	61.90	11	26.19	2	4.76	2	4.76	1	2.38

On a 5-point Likert scale, participants self-reported demographic information about how diverse they perceived their programs to be. Sixty-five percent ($f = 26$) of respondents strongly agreed or agreed when asked if their program is diverse based on race, 17.50% ($f = 7$) were undecided, and 17.50% ($f = 7$) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Sixteen percent ($f = 5$) of respondents said their program is diverse in sexuality, whereas 32.26% ($f = 10$) were unsure, and 51.61% ($f = 16$) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

We asked participants to list the aspects of diversity and inclusion they still needed to learn more about and incorporate into their programs. Eighteen percent ($f = 16$) of respondents and 59.26% ($f = 16$) of respondents stated they wanted more information on themes related to special needs/exceptionalities and race. Eleven percent ($f = 3$) of participants stated they needed more information on gender identity topics, while 11.11% ($f = 3$) said they needed more details on sexual identity topics.

Objective Four: Need to Increase Diversity and Inclusion in SBAE in New Mexico

On a 5-point Likert scale, participants indicated how strongly they agreed or disagreed that students use various diversity and inclusion strategies in their agricultural education programs. When asked if students encouraged their classmates from other races to engage in the program, 90.47% ($f = 38$) strongly agreed or agreed, and 9.52% ($f = 4$) were undecided. When asked if students encourage their classmates who identify as LGBTQ+ to participate in the program, 65.14% ($f = 27$) strongly agreed or agreed, 23.81% ($f = 10$) were undecided, and 11.90% ($f = 5$) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

The participants highlighted topics they would want further knowledge to include in their programs through professional development opportunities. Fifty-six percent ($f = 15$) of respondents would welcome additional knowledge on themes relating to special needs and exceptionalities (see Table 5). Thirty-two percent ($f = 8$) of respondents expressed a need for more understanding of racial and sexual identity-related topics. However, only 12.00% ($f = 3$) of respondents would welcome more information on gender-related subjects.

Table 5

*Teacher Needs for Additional Information (*n = *25)*

Category	*f*	*%*
Race	4	16.00
Sex/Gender	3	12.00
Sexuality	4	16.00
Special Needs/Exceptionalities	14	56.00

Note. Data collected in this table displays only completed responses to the question and does not reflect the entire population (*n* = 42). Sex/Gender refers to gender identity, while Sexuality refers to sexual orientation/identity.

Conclusions and Implications

While diversity and inclusion in agricultural education have been hot topics for various demographics, we need additional efforts to promote and include these subjects in agricultural education programs. In this study, we discovered that agricultural instructors practiced diversity and inclusion more than their students but needed stronger perceptions of how students implement these value statements in their programs. Gender and sexuality are two themes that educators felt more uncomfortable with. Based on these findings, we recommend additional training to implement diversity and inclusion in agricultural education programs.

In this study, instructors reported implementing the National FFA Value Statements in their programs. Most participants said they appreciated and valued their students' cultures and experiences. This finding supports Elliott and Lambert's (2018) argument on the importance of diversity and inclusion to the future of agricultural education. Most participants stated they have adopted a welcoming attitude for students to recognize and explore their differences. The capacity of an agricultural educator to promote and build a diverse and inclusive culture can be an advantage or a hindrance to implementing diversity inclusion (Warren & Alston, 2007). Acknowledging student diversity and allowing them to explore their identities can help foster a sense of belonging in agricultural education (Talbert et al., 2014).

Most participants believed their students apply National FFA Value Statements themes. Most participants reported that their students respected and embraced their classmates' cultures and experiences, formed a welcoming attitude, and cultivated a comparable educational atmosphere. Despite this, Martin and Kitchel (2015) warned that minority-based students prefer to repress their identities to fit in with their majority counterparts. Fortunately, most participants stated that students in their program allowed each other to recognize and explore their differences.

While most participants believed they could include students of diverse races, a small percentage stated they require more knowledge on this subject. Further success in agricultural education and careers relates to instructors' varied races compared to students, as seen by the decreased enrolment of minority students (Talbert & Larke, 1995). More than 54% of participants reported having a gender-diverse program, even though participants strongly agreed with their capacity to incorporate students of all genders. Further, in some situations, gender identification might prohibit kids from engaging in educational programs (GLSEN, 2019). Additionally, few

participants claimed their programs vary in sexual identity and orientation, which leads to question if sexuality is infrequently discussed in agricultural education. Toombs et al. (2021) found that pre-service agricultural educators expressed being uncomfortable educating students in the LGBTQ+ community. However, 90.48% of participants agreed that encouraging students in the LGBTQ+ community to participate in their program was a good idea.

Although special education students, including those with course modifications, IEPs, and 504 plans (U.S. Department of Education, 2020), enroll in agricultural education programs, it is uncertain if they received any modifications. Less than half of the participants said their program serves various special needs and exceptionalities. Although there are associated challenges, most participants stated they needed more knowledge of this subject to include it in their program, indicating their intention to incorporate more practices in their classroom (Ajzen, 1991). This idea was in line with the findings of Stair et al. (2010), who found that although instructors felt confident in their abilities, they are often not well-prepared to educate students with special needs or exceptionalities but expressed the desire to learn more.

Most participants stated they had the skills to include diversity and inclusion in their programs. This assertion was an improvement from research conducted by LaVergne et al. (2012), which reported that more than half of teachers got training outside the classroom and that less than three-quarters of instructors receive training during undergraduate courses. The results showed that agricultural educators think they grasped these topics and tried to involve all students in their programs regardless of their backgrounds and identities. According to concepts discussed in the conceptual framework, the National FFA Value Statements and the New Mexico agricultural education program must define diversity and inclusion topics for diversity and inclusion to be implemented in local agricultural education programs (Mor Barak, 2013).

Diversity-inclusive programs can be possible by encouraging students to be more accepting of the various ethnic and racial backgrounds of their classmates using the strategies covered in the conceptual framework of the research. Most participants claim their students encourage their peers from multiple demographic backgrounds to join the program, which aligns with the findings of Roberts et al. (2009) and the National FFA Organization (2021b).

Finally, more than half of the participants agreed that their students include other students who are members of the LGBQ community in their program. However, GLSEN (2019) reported that LGBQ students in New Mexico experience bullying at unprecedented levels in educational settings. Because educators noted reluctance and discomfort with working with LGBQ students in previous studies, the example set for students can correlate to the behaviors and attitudes modeled in these settings (Ajzen, 1991). In this study, participants suggested that they mostly agree that their students include students with LGBQ identities, with 64.15% of respondents making this claim. Conversely, 90.47% make a similar claim related to race, 90.24% to sex/gender, and 82.93% to special needs/exceptionalities. These findings aligned with the conclusions made by Austin (2018) and Toombs et al. (2021).

Recommendations

While the National FFA Value Statements (Helmer, 2022) are recent additions to agricultural education methods and programming, half of the participants reported they needed to learn about them. To enable agricultural educators to comprehend and implement these practices in their programs, we recommend the following recommendations:

1. Incorporate National FFA Value Statement themes into student leadership training materials, teacher preparation programs, and classroom programming resources by creating media-based examples and comprehensive definitions of important terminology.
2. Based on the lack of knowledge and awareness of diversity and inclusion, create a mentorship program for agricultural educators to work with agricultural and multicultural/diversity specialists to incorporate themes into the classroom and FFA programs to accommodate teachers' desire to learn more about the subject. Additionally, we recommend further advancing research to support these teachers' intention to learn.
3. Incorporate local culture into SBAE curriculum and FFA programming (Luft, 1996) through diverse print media, competitive activities, and leadership opportunities. This will further support local implementation efforts of the National FFA Value Statements.
4. Provide additional sensitivity training or workshops on sexual identity and gender identity at the pre-service and in-service levels to promote a welcoming learning environment for students (Toombs et al., 2021), and create anti-bullying/harassment policies and LGBQ informational materials for agricultural educators and students.
5. Provide additional support and resources for pre-service educators to work with students with special needs and exceptionalities (Andreasen et al., 2007; Stair et al., 2010).
6. Guided by Ajzen (1991) theory of planned behavior, we recommend supporting teachers' attitude to support diversity and inclusion efforts, intention to learn, and reinforcement of cultural norms by encouraging pre-service educators to take a multicultural education course as part of their post-secondary teacher training program.
7. Increase educational opportunities for students from underrepresented groups through activities, including a Spanish FFA Creed public speaking competition, with statewide promotion to help students feel included and encourage them to participate in agricultural education and FFA programming.
8.

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