



*Students enjoyed touring COBA/Select Sires and seeing where millions of units of semen are stored.*

## 2019 NCR-SARE Youth Educator Project Report

# Youth Cooperative Leadership Experience

### Project Information

#### Summary:

The Ohio State University (OSU) College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences (CFAES) Center for Cooperatives conducted the Youth Cooperative Leadership Experience, an educational program for high school students in the Appalachian region to learn about cooperative business and careers in agriculture, and develop leadership abilities in young ag leaders. This project was funded by an NCR-SARE Youth Educator Grant, formally titled Cooperative Student Leadership Experience Pilot. During the development of the project, the program was renamed Youth Cooperative Leadership Experience.

The inaugural Youth Cooperative Leadership Experience on October 7 and 8, 2019 engaged 16 students at the Ohio Valley Career and Technical Center (OVCTC) in Adams County, Ohio. During an immersive two-day experience, students visited The Ohio State University and agricultural cooperative businesses in the region where they experienced college-style learning

opportunities, engaged in hands-on leadership and team-building activities, discovered educational and career paths in agriculture, and connected with cooperative leaders. Students learned about the cooperative as a sustainable marketing and management model for agricultural enterprises.

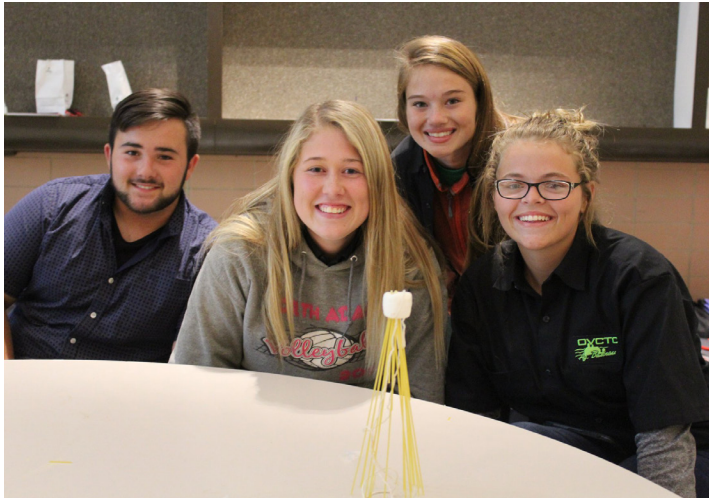
The educational approach involved sessions and tours with leaders from the Ohio State University CFAES Center for Cooperatives, USDA Rural Development, and cooperatives such as Nationwide Insurance, COBA/Select Sires, and the Ohio Apple Growers Marketing Program, through which students learned about the cooperative business model as a sustainable marketing and management model for agricultural enterprises, including farms and agribusinesses. Students participated in classroom and lab activities with OSU CFAES faculty and staff in the areas of meat science and agricultural communications. Students had the opportunity to tour OSU's CFAES campus and have lunch with CFAES student ambassadors, along with a student discussion panel.



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*Students participated in a tower building competition during the leadership and cooperation building session.*

Through these interactions, tours, and class sessions with college faculty and staff, the students were introduced to a many career possibilities in agriculture and in cooperative business. The college-style learning experiences helped students to become more comfortable with classrooms and labs on a college campus, and the campus tour and session with college ambassadors helped to increase their overall comfort level with higher education.

Students participated in cooperative leadership and teambuilding activities, including developing an elevator pitch for their school's Agriculture Business Management Program and school farm, as well as a "marshmallow challenge" cooperative teambuilding activity, and an agricultural careers activity/game. On day two, the group toured a member farm and market which is owned by a member of the Ohio Apple Growers Marketing Program, a commodity marketing cooperative, as well as COBA/Select Sires, a farmer-owned cooperative for cattle semen.

At the conclusion of the two-day Experience, all students evaluated the program using a written evaluation form. The evaluation results showed 87.5% of the participants rated the overall Experience as "extremely good." The survey responses showed the favorite activities were the tours of cooperative businesses, the meat science session, and the leadership and team-building activities.

In a follow-up visit by staff to the school three days after the Experience, students and staff wrote thank-you notes to the presenters, panelists, and tour hosts to show gratitude for their contributions the Experience. A student reporter was selected from the participants and worked with a Center for Cooperatives staff member to develop a news release about the Cooperative Student Leadership Experience, which was submitted to local newspapers, Farm and Dairy, Ohio Cooperative Living, and appeared in Ohio's Country Journal.

The article appeared in the Ohio State University South Centers Connections, and was featured on the front page of the OSU CFAES website. Highlights of the Experience were shared widely by the CFAES Center for Cooperatives through Facebook and Twitter, and on the Center's blog page, Collaboration Nation. The Center's Facebook post highlighting the Experience was shared 11 times, reached 664 people, generated had 245 engagements, and had more than 130 additional comments and reactions to the posts that were shared by others.

By participating in the Cooperative Student Leadership Experience, students learned about cooperative principles, different types of cooperatives, member roles and responsibilities, and the benefits of cooperatives for agriculture. Students engaged with cooperative leaders, Ohio State University faculty, staff and students, gaining insight about higher education and future internship and career opportunities in agriculture and in cooperatives. Students were engaged in all the activities and all of them took turns asking thoughtful questions of our speakers and panelists. They were especially interested in finding out what types of career and internship opportunities existed in each of the areas they learned about. The students especially seemed to enjoy the leadership, teambuilding, and agricultural careers activities led by Center for Cooperatives staff members. The students cooperated as teams to draft an elevator speech about the OVCTC ag business program and/or school farm, and then stood up and gave their 30-second speeches. The students were supportive and encouraging of each other throughout the activity. During the marshmallow challenge teambuilding and the agricultural careers guessing game activities, the students worked well together and were very competitive with their teams, while they had fun, developed some collaboration skills, and learned about some agricultural careers they might have not even heard of previously. The activities were very positive and a great way to end the first day of the Experience.



*YCLE participants had the opportunity to experience college-style learning when Dr. Lyda Garcia of the Ohio State University Department of Animal Sciences invited them into her classroom and meat laboratory.*



## Project Cooperators/Speakers/Panelists

### **Deborah Rausch**

Business Program Specialist  
USDA Rural Development  
Columbus, OH

### **Dr. Lyda Garcia**

Asst. Professor - Meat Science/  
Meat Extension Specialist  
The Ohio State University  
Columbus, OH

### **Dr. Emily Buck**

Professor, Agricultural Communication  
The Ohio State University  
Columbus, OH

### **Emily Wickham**

Communication and Undergraduate  
Program Manager  
The Ohio State University  
Columbus, OH

### **Adam Specht**

Director of Youth Programs  
Ohio's Electric Cooperatives  
Columbus, OH

### **Josh Zehentbauer**

Field Representative  
Dairy Farmers of America, Mideast  
Medina, OH

### **Tom Worley**

Assoc. Professor & Director,  
OSU South Centers  
The Ohio State University  
Piketon, OH

### **Dan Durheim**

Vice President, Sponsor Relations  
Nationwide Insurance  
Columbus, OH

### **Andy Lynd**

Owner/Operator  
Lynd Fruit Farm  
Pataskala, OH

### **Julie Ziegler**

Administrative Director  
COBA/Select Sires  
Columbus, OH

Throughout the tours and time on campus, staff members shared information with the students about the University and what they could expect if they would attend OSU. They explained to them that Ohio State University is a Land Grant College, and that even if an applicant may not be admitted to the Columbus Campus, where admission is highly selective, that they could still enroll at one of Ohio State's regional campuses, including the Agricultural Technical Institute at Wooster.

Both the students and their instructor expressed that the Cooperative Student Leadership Experience was a valuable experience. From the participant evaluations, the tours of the cooperative businesses where they could learn from cooperative leaders was the most valuable part of the Cooperative Student Leadership Experience.

### **Project Objectives**

- Educate students on the cooperative business model as a sustainable marketing and management model for agricultural enterprises, including farms and agribusinesses.
- Introduce students to a variety of agricultural careers by engaging with college students, faculty/staff, and cooperative leaders as well as through cooperative site tours.
- Expose students to college-style learning experiences to increase their comfort level with higher education.
- Provide students with information about higher education opportunities in agriculture.
- Share the Experience as a model for youth education through a conference presentation and articles in cooperative and/or agricultural publications.

### **Educational & Outreach Activities**

2 Published press articles and newsletters  
3 Tours  
1 Webinars / talks / presentations

### **Participation Summary**

16 Youth  
1 Educator

### **Education and Outreach**

**Published press articles, newsletters:** An article written by one of the student participants was featured in the Ohio State University South Centers Connections Newsletter and was a featured article on the main page of the Ohio State University College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences web page, as well as Ohio's Country Journal.

The Center's Facebook post highlighting the Experience was shared 11 times, reached 664 people, generated had 245 engagements, and had more than 130 additional comments and reactions to the posts that were shared by others. The article and photos were submitted to USDA Rural Development as a quarterly highlight from the Ohio office of USDA Rural Development. The article was also submitted to Ohio Cooperative Living and Farm and Dairy, but unfortunately did not appear in these publications.

**Tours:** Participants learned about sustainable business management using the cooperative business model at tours of Lynd Fruit Farms, a member of the Ohio Apple Marketing Program marketing cooperative, and COBA/Select Sires, a successful farmer-owned cooperative for bull semen, as well as touring The Ohio State University College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences.

**Webinars, talks and presentations:** CFAES Center for Cooperatives staff, along with two student participants in the Cooperative Student Leadership Experience gave a presentation about the Experience during a session at the West Virginia Small Farm Conference on February 22, 2020. They shared how the project was developed and highlights of the experience to inform others about how they can partner with the Center to potentially conduct a similar cooperative education activity with students in other locations.



ABOVE: Playing a game of guessing careers in agriculture and in cooperative businesses.

LEFT: Hannah Scott, Program Manager for the Center for Cooperatives, explains to students that turf science is one of the many areas of study with the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences.



The students were interested in learning that Nationwide Insurance was formed by the Ohio Farm Bureau with a \$10,000 loan to start the cooperative business. They were surprised to learn that, to this day, the Nationwide Board of Directors is primarily made up of full-time farmers.

**Participants:** 16 students in grades 11 and 12 from the Ohio Valley Career and Technical Center Agriculture Business Management program participated in the Cooperative Student Leadership Experience, along with one educator, their instructor, Luke Rhonemus.

### Learning Outcomes

Youth reporting change in knowledge, attitudes, skills and/or awareness: 16

Key changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills and/or awareness:

- Cooperative business model
- Opportunities for post-secondary education
- Awareness of agricultural careers

### Results and discussion

By participating in the Cooperative Student Leadership Experience, students learned about cooperative principles, different types of cooperatives, member roles and responsibilities, and the benefits of cooperatives for agriculture. Students engaged with cooperative leaders, Ohio State University faculty, staff and students, gaining insight about higher education and future internship and career opportunities in agriculture and in cooperatives.

Students were engaged in all the activities and all of them took turns asking thoughtful questions of our speakers and panelists. They were especially encouraged to find out what types of career and internship opportunities existed in each of the areas they learned about.





*Andy Lynd, owner of Lynd's Fruit Farm, enjoyed talking with the students about marketing, showing them around their spacious farm market where they sell their apples, peaches, pumpkins, and cider, as well as other products that they partner with local producers to sell—such as honey, maple syrup, grass-fed beef, and bakery products. He shared quite a bit of wisdom about marketing and customer service.*

The students especially seemed to enjoy the leadership, team-building, and agricultural careers activities led by Center for Cooperatives staff members. In these activities, students cooperated as teams to draft an elevator speech about the OVCTC ag business program and/or school farm, and then practiced their 30-second speeches in front of their classmates. The students were supportive and encouraging of each other throughout the activity. During the marshmallow challenge and the agricultural careers guessing game, the students worked well together and were very competitive with their teams; the activities offered an opportunity for fun, developing collaboration skills, and learning about some agricultural careers that students might have not even have heard of previously. The activities were very positive and a great way to end the first day of the Experience.

The student participants were attentive and curious about internship and career opportunities with the various businesses. “The most surprising thing from Dan Durheim’s [Nationwide Insurance] presentation was that there are so many jobs to do in that one business,” said one student participant.

Students reported learning practical skills they can use in helping to manage the OVCTC school farm cooperative, such as a student who said, “The photography tips, such as making the subject at least one-third of the photo, can really help us in advertising.”

During her presentation, OSU Animal Science faculty member, Dr. Lyda Garcia talked about her background and upbringing in a poor, rural area of southwest Texas, with her father, a cowboy who only had a 3rd grade education, and her mother, a teacher. Dr. Garcia discussed her educational path, how she started out at a community college, and on through her educational journey to become a meat scientist and assistant professor at The Ohio State University. Dr. Garcia’s story of her childhood resonated with many of the Appalachian students and helped them to think that they too could be successful in college and go on to have fulfilling careers.

Students had multiple opportunities to interact with current CFAES students, and to learn about their paths to college, their studies, and their career goals. A current OSU student panel even included two recent graduates from the same high school program as the YCLE participants, showcasing that higher education is attainable for these students despite the challenges they face. One student participant said that neither of her parents have a college degree and that she has already been taking college classes through the College Credit Plus program. “I will be the first one in my family to have a college degree. It is exciting to be the first one,” she said.

### **Project Outcomes**

16 Youth considering a career in sustainable agriculture  
 1 Grant received that built upon this project  
 1 New working collaboration

### **Change in organizational support to explore and teach sustainable ag:**

Administrators at the Adams County Ohio Valley School District and the Ohio Valley Career and Technical Center were very pleased with the outcomes of this project and support the CFAES Center for Cooperatives in providing further sustainable agriculture and cooperative education to the OVCTC Agriculture Business Management Students. The CFAES Center for Cooperatives has been awarded a SARE Research and Education grant to conduct a three-year project with the OVCTC Agriculture Business Management program titled, “Sustainable production and marketing using the cooperative model for a student-managed school farm cooperative.” This new project began on November 1, 2019 and will provide education to 11th and 12 grade students in sustainable agriculture practices, marketing, and the cooperative business model.

Additionally, since the completion of the inaugural Youth Cooperative Leadership Experience, the CFAES Center for Cooperatives, in collaboration with Hocking County Farm Bureau, applied for and received funding from the Ohio Farm Bureau Foundation for a Youth Pathways to Careers in Agriculture Grant to conduct a Youth Cooperative Leadership Experience program in 2020 and 2021. The future YCLE programs will be expanded and engage more students through this additional funding.

### Success stories

Throughout the tours and time on campus, staff members shared information with the students about the University and what they could expect if they would attend OSU. They explained to them that Ohio State University is a Land Grant College, and that even if an applicant may not be admitted to the Columbus Campus, where admission is highly selective, that they could still enroll at one of Ohio State's regional campuses, including the Agricultural Technical Institute at Wooster. This was not known by many of the students, including an 11th grade student, who said he was surprised that he "can get into Ohio State even if I get denied somewhere else." Another student added, "It somewhat gave me the idea I would like to go to Ohio State with all the opportunities available, I'm only unsure about being in the city which is why I gave the other campus sites some thought."

Both the student participants and their instructor expressed that the Cooperative Student Leadership Experience was a valuable experience. OVCTC Agriculture Business Management Instructor, Luke Rhonemus, said the following:

*"This activity has allowed my students to see that there is opportunity outside of Adams County and that a college degree is attainable. These students have gained valuable insight on how cooperatives function. These experiences have created opportunities and avenues for students to make connections for future careers in agriculture as well. We were very fortunate to have representatives from COBA/Select Sire, Lynd Apple Orchard, and Nationwide Insurance meet our students and challenge them to be successful."*

### Recommendations:

After completing this small-scale, pilot version of the Cooperative Student Leadership Experience and having a project team review meeting, there are several modifications identified that can be made to improve future programs. First, the program budget should be increased to allow for more participants. The OSU bus will hold 56 passengers, so theoretically, there could be about 50 participants, plus teachers and program staff to fill the bus. Additional budget dollars in the areas of meals and snacks, bus rental, and educational supplies are recommended. Additionally, there could potentially be expenses for room rental or speaker fees.



Students engaged with cooperative leaders, Ohio State University faculty, staff and students, gaining insight about higher education and future internship and career opportunities in agriculture and in cooperatives. Students took turns asking thoughtful questions of the speakers and panelists.



The pilot project budget did not include any educational supplies or supplies for games and activities. In planning for a future iteration of this project, the project team will include about \$1,400 for that line-item, to cover costs of hands-on educational programming and materials, such as teaching students how to graft a pawpaw tree or purchasing some type of workbook that the students can take home with them. Additionally, sponsors are potentially interested in purchasing branded polo shirts for the participants, so they can have a unified, professional appearance when meeting with University faculty and cooperative professionals.

Next, instead of having the cooperative business education session during the two-day trip, the program team plans to have that session taught to students in their classroom at the school about two weeks prior to the trip when staff are at the school to present an overview of the program and distribute participant permission packets. Doing this session pre-Experience would give the students a background in cooperative business prior to going on the trip and meeting with cooperative leaders. At the same time, staff would conduct the session about elevator speeches that was conducted during the evening session of Day 1. Doing these two sessions ahead of the trip would free up some of the time during the trip, and also, students would have time to prepare and practice their elevator speeches so they could use them during the trip when hosts and presenters ask the students about themselves or their high school agriculture education program.



*RIGHT and BELOW: Students said one of the highlights of the day, and an unexpected surprise, was going to Ohio Stadium, home of the Buckeyes.*





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