

Agricultural Awareness and Appreciation Award

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Abstract:

Clemson University's roots started in agriculture, however as the University continues to grow, the focus has turned to business and engineering. In order to make sure students don't stray too far from their roots, a new program was developed, the 'Clemson Extension Meet & Greet'. The main objective is to introduce college students to the Clemson Cooperative Extension Service by providing an opportunity for the students to meet professionals in their perspective fields, and give them a chance first hand to see what Extension is. The students learn what programs Extension Agents are involved in, job and internship opportunities, and 4-H Volunteer opportunities. To date, this program has been offered twice, with 157 students participating, representing 17 different majors, and 4 colleges at Clemson University. Based off a post survey that was sent to participants at the 2017 event, 100% of the participants' knowledge and awareness of the Clemson Cooperative Extension Service increased or remained the same. 93% said that they benefited from attending the 'Clemson Extension Meet and Greet.' 73% indicated that they would be interested in becoming a 4-H Volunteer or interning for Clemson Extension in the future. This event has also resulted in the hire of a full-time Extension Agent. Because of its success, The 'Clemson Extension Meet and Greet' has now become an annual event, and is essential in promoting agriculture and Extension in South Carolina, and moving the Cooperative Extension Service forward.

County Situation:

Clemson University is located at the intersections of Pickens, Oconee, and Anderson Counties in the upstate of South Carolina, and serves as the primary land-grant university for South Carolina. Clemson University has around 24,000 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled from across South Carolina and the United States. While college is in session, the population of Clemson and the surrounding area almost doubles. One of the primary colleges at Clemson is the College of Agriculture, Forestry, and Life Sciences. Clemson University has a rich agricultural history, and started out as Clemson Agricultural College. Many undergraduate students stay in the "Lever" dorm, which is named after Frank Lever, who is responsible for the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 which created the Cooperative Extension Service and changed agriculture forever.

Although Clemson University's foundation may be in agriculture, the university's focus is now on business and engineering. However, agriculture is South Carolina's economical backbone. South Carolina has a 19.4 billion dollar forestry industry, and is second in the country for peach production. South Carolina ranks high in cantaloupe, peanuts, tobacco, and watermelon production as well. The poultry industry represents 40% of all agriculture in the state, and 80% of animal agriculture in South Carolina. Many students are unaware of Clemson University's agricultural history, and do not understand the importance of the Cooperative Extension Service and agriculture, which will be forever tied with Clemson University and South Carolina.

Public Relations Objective:

The vast majority of extension programs fall into three age spectrums: retirees, adults who are well established into their careers, and youth who fall within the 4-H age range. However, there is a huge generational gap that current Extension programs fail to meet: Millennials. This generation includes the young professionals and the college-aged students, who represent the future of agriculture and hold the future of Extension in their hands. Clemson Extension Agents, Mallory Dailey who is based in Oconee County, and Charly McConnell based on Clemson University's main campus, in Pickens County, decided to address this need, and created the 'Clemson Extension Meet and Greet' event. Both Mallory and Charly are Clemson University alumna, recognized a need to create a program designed for college students to provide them with an opportunity to interact with Clemson Extension Agents from across the state, and to allow them to see first hand, what Clemson Extension is. The overall objectives of the 'Clemson Extension Meet and Greet' are to increase awareness of the Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service, increase participation in Extension events from millennials, and increase internship, job recruitment, and 4-H volunteer recruitment.

Program Execution:

4-H Agent, Mallory Dailey, and Water Resources Agent, Charly McConnell, collaborated together to create the first annual 'Clemson Extension, Meet and Greet' event, which was held close to the Clemson University campus in October of 2016. Mallory and Charly, reached out to various agents across South Carolina representing the main program team areas within Clemson Extension (4-H & Youth Development, Livestock & Forages, Natural Resources-Wildlife, Water Resources, Forestry, Agronomy,

Horticulture, and Food Safety and Nutrition). Charly and Mallory then went around to speak to the various campus clubs primarily in the College of Agriculture, Forestry, and Life Sciences at Clemson University to invite the members to the event. These clubs included the Forestry Club, the Wildlife Society, the Collegiate FFA, The Agricultural and Mechanisation Club, and Horticulture Club. Along with the campus clubs, Mallory and Charly approached an Agricultural Education Professor, who taught the Adult Education and Extension Course, which is a senior and graduate level course at Clemson University, to incorporate the event within the course syllabus to fulfill the Extension Service component of the course. Mallory and Charly, worked as team to invite Clemson Extension Agents and Clemson University students, and to organize the structure of the event.

Based off the positive response from the 2016 event, Charly and Mallory decided to make the event an annual event. The planning and organization of the event was the same as the previous year, however this year we invited the the Clemson University Block and Bridle Club, a student-run organization, to cook the sponsored meal so that there would be more student involvement. The team also reached out to the Clemson University Agricultural Alumni Board to sponsor the event. The Agricultural Education, Adult Education and Extension course was also in attendance. Clemson Extension has an on-campus student-run Extension office, which is the only student-run office in the country. The students interning with this office helped to organize and market the 2017 Meet and Greet Event.

Results and Evaluation:

The 'Clemson Extension, Meet and Greet,' which was the first ever of its kind for Clemson Extension, had 12 Extension Agents, the Director of Clemson Extension, 3 Clemson University professors, and 75 students in attendance at the 2016 event. The vast majority of the students belonged to majors in the College of Agriculture, Forestry, and Life Sciences (CAFLS), however a few students belonged to the College of Business, and Engineering. 91% of the students had never attended a Clemson Extension program before.

The 2017 event was equally as successful, and had 12 Agents, the Director of Clemson Extension, 2 Clemson University Professors, Clemson Agriculture Alumni Board Members, and 56 students in attendance, 88% of these individuals had never attended a Clemson Extension Program before. There were 17 majors represented at the event. Not only did the event raise awareness about Extension in the College of Agriculture, but it also reached 4 out of the 7 colleges at Clemson University. A post survey was

sent out that had a 27% response rate. Based off the survey, 100% of the participants' knowledge and awareness of Clemson Cooperative Extension Service increased or remained the same. 93% said that they benefited from attending the 'Clemson Extension Meet and Greet.' 73% indicated that they would be interested in becoming an 4-H Volunteer or interning for Clemson Extension in the future.

Because of the 'Clemson Extension Meet and Greet' event, an individual in attendance at the 2016 event decided to apply for an internship with Clemson Extension. This individual interned with the Oconee County Extension Office during the summer of 2017, and requested to continue his internship through the Fall and Spring semesters of the 2017-2018 school year. He also attended the 2017 'Clemson Extension Meet and Greet' event, and based off his internship experiences and the event, he has decided to pursue his masters degree in Agricultural Education with a focus in Extension at Clemson University.

Not only has this event led to an increase in knowledge, awareness, and interest regarding internships with Clemson Extension, but it has also led to the hiring of a full time Clemson Extension Agent. As a result of the 'Clemson Extension Meet and Greet,' a senior who was graduating in May of 2017 in Wildlife and Fisheries Biology, applied and interviewed for a Clemson Extension Natural Resources Agent position in Dorchester County, South Carolina. This individual was hired to the position in the summer of 2017. Before he attended the event, this individual had never heard of Clemson Extension, and did not realize that there were positions available in the Wildlife and Natural Resources field. The newly hired agent, was able to attend the 2017 'Clemson Extension Meet and Greet' event and speak to the students in attendance, emphasising how he was sitting in their exact seats last year. Without the event, this individual would have never applied to the position, and now is fully employed by Clemson Extension. This agent was able to provide the event with the ultimate success story. Events like the Clemson Extension Meet and Greet are essential in promoting agriculture and extension to younger generations and millennials, and moving the Cooperative Extension Service forward.