

***Experiences of Recently Graduated Women
School Based Agricultural Education Students
in Arizona: A Critical Feminist Approach***
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School based agricultural education (SBAE) consists of three integrated components: classroom/laboratory instruction, Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) programs, and student leadership development through the National FFA Organization. SBAE prepares students for successful careers in global agriculture, fiber, food, and natural resources at the middle and secondary school levels. While research on the experiences of women SBAE teachers, graduate students, and undergraduate students is considerable, there is a paucity of current research on women SBAE students' experiences within the high school setting. While inequality and discrimination based on gender occurs in the agriculture industry, it is important to describe its presence and effects in high school level SBAE programs.

Key Findings:

- 1. Advisors Perpetuate the Culture of SBAE in Their Programs.** The participants' advisors (i.e., teachers) were the ones perpetuating the culture of SBAE in their programs. Sometimes this culture was positive in nature, but often it contained overt and covert gendered subtext. The advisor was the primary individual who shaped how the students interacted with one another and what the program as a whole valued.
- 2. Differing Expectations Exist Between Women and Men Students in SBAE.** Expectations set by their advisors, other students, and themselves were more stringent for women than their men peers in FFA



leadership activities, and in the classroom during non-production agriculture and non-mechanics content. Participants also shared that advisors and students alike held lower expectations for women students during production agriculture and mechanics content.

- 3. Enforcement of FFA Official Dress Disproportionately Affects Women Students.** Participants reported that enforcement of FFA official dress affected them to some degree, ranging from slight annoyance to lasting physical and emotional pain. Even though the rules for official dress were changed in 2019 allowing every student to wear what they preferred regardless of gender identity, many advisors still enforce gendered official dress. Participants did not feel comfortable or welcome to wear anything other than a skirt.
- 4. Gendered Interactions with Advisors, Peers, and the Community.** Gendered interactions occurred with advisors, peers, and community members through comments made to the participants, preferences to men students, and condescending behavior towards women students. Gendered interactions occurred between participants, their advisors, peers, and community members, with advisors involved in the largest number of gendered interactions.

5. **Women Not Seen in the Same Spaces as Men Within the Agriculture Industry.** Participants discussed a lack of women representation in the agriculture industry as a whole, but specifically a lack of women in production agriculture roles. The participants reported seeing women primarily in roles that kept them inside an office or at a desk rather than in the field. When the participants were able to have experiences with women involved in male dominated areas of agriculture it had a positive and encouraging impact on their time in SBAE.

Recommendations for State & National FFA

Staff:

- Fully embrace and encourage the updated FFA official dress rules
- Encourage all State and National FFA Officers to wear slacks or a skirt at any FFA event
- Set the standard for local SBAE programs that women participate and succeed in all sectors of the agriculture industry
- Highlight and expand their current diversity inclusion practices
- Do not tokenize diversity on social media platforms or at conferences

Recommendations for SBAE Advisors:

- Continually reevaluate personal biases and unexamined gender beliefs
- Assign roles equitably based on students' skills and interests

- Educate all individuals involved in officer selection of gendered trends in officer roles to ensure that gender does not affect officer assignments
- Carefully monitor their interactions with students, student to student interactions, and community member to student interactions to avoid gender biases
- Praise and criticism should be given based on the individual student's ability not based on what is expected for their gender
- Expectations of students should be set equitably based on students' skills not their gender
- Allow and welcome students to wear the components of official dress that make them most comfortable
- Do not place expectations on students' appearances beyond the rules of FFA official dress
- Express that all students have the opportunity to succeed in the agriculture industry
- Include women in production agriculture or mechanics images, videos, and examples when teaching
- Carefully choose community members to be involved in your program to ensure that gendered aspects of SBAE and the agriculture industry are not reinforced
- Make grassroots efforts in SBAE teacher communities and SBAE teacher associations to better educate SBAE teachers of issues