

# GROWING TOMORROW'S TEACHERS AND LEADERS THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

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Remember learning how to drive a car? Or how to cook, or even play a sport? Imagine how difficult those tasks would have been if you had not had the chance to practice—to learn by doing. In life, our experiences contribute enormously to our learning, and make us unique individuals with varying perspectives and talents that make the world better, and infinitely more interesting!

In the Agricultural Education Program at the University of Illinois, we strive to help our students learn outside the classroom, and that allows them to create an educational journey that is both personal and unique. Experiential learning is essential in preparing our students for responsibilities that include:

- Teaching the next generation of agricultural students,
- Navigating team dynamics,
- Managing organizational change, and
- Collaboratively addressing challenges in our world's food supply.

We are working to meet the critical need for agriculture education teachers and for students who will become leaders in their companies and communities. A future is envisioned in which additional resources are available to directly broaden opportunities for students to engage in high-impact internships, research, study abroad, and professional development activities. The result of those student experiences will be better-prepared graduates who enter the classroom and workforce with unique and distinguishing perspectives, ready to achieve their goals and progress in their careers.



## **OPPORTUNITY:**

The University of Illinois Agricultural Education Program is nationally competitive, and graduates enjoy extraordinary placement rates in schools, corporations, and communities, often emerging into organizational leadership roles soon after they leave campus. Experiential learning opportunities are essential, but funding often determines the number and quality of experiences available, and can limit involvement to only those students who can afford it.

### **What are the opportunities for which support is needed?**

- Professional development activities, including conferences, FFA events, and trips to high school agricultural programs, as well as trips to interact with companies and community leaders
- Internships, including networking events involving students and professionals, as well as funding to offset the costs of relocation that often limit students' decisions to accept an internship
- International experiences, which greatly expand students' global understanding of agricultural systems—students who attain a global perspective of agriculture will contribute more fully to the success of agriculture companies and organizations, and first-hand global experiences enrich the experiences for future teachers who can transfer the knowledge to their own classrooms

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- Research projects, in which students engage with real organizations facing real issues—Ag Ed students are conducting groundbreaking research on leadership development from a global perspective. They are exploring mentorship and its role in leadership, as well as how varied cultural groups define and practice leadership.

*A college student's involvement in experiential learning often becomes a defining feature in their undergraduate education.*

The Agricultural Education Program is striving to expand the number of enrolled students to address the critical shortage of graduates, and we know the number of people influenced by a teacher (or the students of that teacher) is potentially enormous and long-lasting. Additional support for experiential learning will attract more high-potential students to learn with us and become the inspiration for the next generation.

## RESOURCES REQUIRED:

Funding allows us to offer enhanced experiences that will enable the University of Illinois to continue to be the best destination for students interested in the Agricultural Education Program. We envision allocating funds for:

- professional development (trips and conferences)
- international experiences
- internship-related support
- a fund that students could access through a competitive application process to support research projects or other individual experiential learning activities



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