

**The History of the Gettysburg, South Dakota Agricultural Education and FFA Program
(1917- 2022)**

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Abstract

Throughout the century, Gettysburg FFA has held a strong tradition of vocational agriculture. Starting in 1924 and continuing today, the program has been through many advisors, traditions and students but has held strong as a pillar in the small community. The FFA program was chartered in May of 1930 and has started many traditions including: the pig project, crop plot, national proficiency awards and career development event winners. This paper is an overview of the program changes throughout the past 98 years.

The History of Gettysburg, South Dakota Agricultural Education and FFA Program

When I started teaching at the Gettysburg School District in Fall of 2018, I had no idea of the rich history and traditions that had come before me. The program has been around for over 90 years, chartering in May of 1930. This paper is a recollection of the history of the agriculture education and FFA program in Gettysburg, South Dakota.

1910s

The United States 64th Congress passed and approved the Smith-Hughes Act on February 23, 1917, (Urton) this legislation set the direction for the agriculture education that we know today. During the 15th Session of the South Dakota Legislature, January 2, 1917 through March 2, 1917, passed the congressional act relative to vocational education (Urton). This act was the acceptance of the Smith-Hughes Act which was passed to help students in vocational education.

1920s

In his report for the year 1924-1925, State Supervisor, Mr. Sharp called it the best year for agriculture education ever in the State of South Dakota. The enrollment in agriculture education programs increased to 424 students and 26 schools. This is the year that Gettysburg became an approved vocational agriculture program. During this time boys were encouraged to have more than one project in operation. “We are really attempting to prepare these boys for farming”, Mr. Sharp said, (Urton). Between 1917 and 1925, there was general agriculture courses taught at the Gettysburg High School. In 1926 “we built the finest wooden shop building, Mr. Cass was the instructor during this period and they offered only two years of agriculture (Polich).

In 1928, the National FFA Organization was created in Kansas City, Missouri at the America Royal. There were 33 delegates in attendance from 18 states. Delegates from South Dakota were not at the first meeting (FFA History, 2022).

Before 1929, some efforts had been made at the state level to create an organization for boys enrolled in vocational education however, no formal organization was adopted. However, the vocational agriculture judging contests were being held in May of 1929, State Supervisor, Mr. W. P. Beard called a meeting of the instructors within the state to discuss the possibility of creating an organization (Urton). The charter was officially granted for the State Association, Future Farmers of South Dakota, in the October of 1929. Fifteen schools received charters at the first annual meeting of the South Dakota chapter of the Future Farmers of America. Also during this time plans were made to create a course of student for agriculture education by a committee of three farm organizations, The Farm Bureau, Farmer's Union and the Grange (Urton).

The Gettysburg FFA Chapter was organized in Fall of 1929 in the local agriculture education department. The FFA chapter replaced the older agriculture club that had been present in the community for years beforehand. The officers of the organization were Alvin Mann, President; Harry Boyer, Vice President; Glen White, Secretary and Walter Paulson, Reporter. When the organization was organized meetings were planned to be held month or every two weeks. Special programs will be worked out by committees. In the article found in the Potter County News the author stated, "It is the hope that this organization will catch and hold the interest of all, that it will be a step toward better agriculture in this community," (Future Farmers of Gettysburg Organized, 1929).

At the state level in 1929, special efforts were made to improve the record keeping that the boys were made to improve records and encourage greater accuracy and more complete records (Urton).

1930s

The charter of the Gettysburg FFA Chapter was issued on February 22, 1930 and the Future Farmers of Gettysburg was created. There were 23 names on the charter when it was signed. The officers were, Alivin Mann, President; Harry Boyer, Vice President; Ted Fawcett, Secretary; Glen White, Treasurer' and Walter Paulson Recorder (Polich). In 1930, there were 20 chapters of Future Farmers of South Dakota with 405 members across the state (Urton).

In early May 1930, Mr. Guy McDonald took eight students to the Smith-Hughes Stock and Meat Contest. The classes offered at the time of the charter were Ag 1, Ag 2, and Ag 3 (Polich). The contest was held at Brookings and is sponsored by the state college. Students involved in the judging contests were Ervin Johnson, Leland Lay, Ernest Nagel, Frank Von Wald, Merle Von Wald, Boyd Voorhes, Keith Woitte and Robert Worth (Agriculture Team, 1930).

In the 1930s under the direction of the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 which required adult education courses (Hanson, 2017), Gettysburg started implementing such courses and they were a success for farmers who came to the classes. During this time, there were ten departments, held evening schools and part time classes (Urton). Under the direction of the agriculture teacher, Guy McDonald, in 1934, he started his first part-time school for students. These students traveled an average distance of 11 miles to school. Their average age was 18, and one was a part owner for

the far, six were share renters, three had been in 4h clubs, three studied vocational ag and five dropped out before 8th grade. It was found that each of the students who attended would bring a returned value of \$174.10 through new or improved farm practices (Benton, 1935, p. 103). While there was great economic and agriculture hardship during this time, State Supervisor Mr. Beard, stated “There is an increased recognition of the fact that the future of the state rests upon the future of its farm people and therefore the schools should contribute to the training of these people, (Urton).

1940s

The early 1940s saw a significant decrease in vocational agricultural programs across the state of South Dakota due to the lack of qualified instructors and war



Gettysburg FFA members in 1941.

efforts. In the year 1942, it was necessary to discontinue 32 programs across the state. By 1945, there were only 24 programs across the state (Gronlund, 1954). Gettysburg was one of those programs that was able to stay open throughout the Great War.

As part of the war efforts, the Food Production and War Training Program was conducted throughout South Dakota with cooperation from the U.S. Office of Education and the State Board of Vocational Education. This program was inaugurated in 1940. The objective of this program as set by Public Law 146 was to “train farmers in methods of achieving production

goals of those farm commodities designated by the Secretary of Agriculture and to train farmers in the repair, operation, and construction of farm machinery and equipment,” (Gronlund, 1954). There were sixteen different types of courses that could be taught during the five-year period of 1940-1945. Gettysburg was one of the 64 schools across the state that offered one or more courses for adults. However, the program was not without its limitations and the program did not seem to have the hoped effect for adult education (Gronlund, 1954).

In the 1942, the FFA took a trip to Yellowstone National Park for a week of vacationing and fun. To pay for the trip students fundraised through hog raffles and several other methods of raising money. This is an annual trip that they take every summer (Gettysburg High School, 1942).

In the 1944, Gettysburg Annual Yearbook, the structure of course offerings were Ag One: Study of Crops and Soil; Ag Two: Study of Farm Animals; Ag Three: Study of Farm Motors and Machinery; Ag Four: Study of Farm Economics and Farm Sociology. During each of these courses students were given three hours per week to work in the shop. During this shop time, the boys were encouraged to bring in their own machinery. Along with working on fundamentals of carpentry, metals and machinery (Gettysburg High School, 1944).

In 1945, the “boys were helping with war effort by learning to be good farmers,” according to the Gettysburg Annual Yearbook. Some of the projects that were completed in class included shop projects, farm work and furniture repair (1945). During 1946, the organization held once a month meeting in conjunction with the Home Economics club. The boys played basketball and prizes were given for work done in the shop (Gettysburg High School, 1946).

1950s

The decline in vocational agriculture programs that was seen during the 1940s was overturned in the 1950s. By 1951, enrollment in program had reached an all-time high of 2517 boys throughout the state of South Dakota (Gronlund, 1954) and there was 61 boys enrolled in the agriculture program in Gettysburg (Polich).



First Row: L. Griese, D. Mann, A. Genzler, D. Crandall, G. Robbernolt, B. Stoner, C. Eliason, J. Wise, K. Neyhart, H. Miller, Second Row: E. Maroney, L. Becker, K. Bieber, D. Archer, M. Breitkreutz, M. Voeltz, H. Thompson, M. Polich, M. Hatlestad, C. Meier P. Geist, Mr. Polich. Third Row: R. Tennant, J. Phillips, J. Edwards, B. Klein, W. Barker, W. McGee, D. Cronin, J. Swanson, D. Sheldon, G. Archer, J. Ellis, R. Christensen. Fourth Row: D. Breitkreutz, O. Harris, D. Neyhart, E. Robbenolt, R. Fransen, J. Bieber, D. Smith, M. Swanson, L. Jost, R. Drew, B. Lehrkamp, D. Collins. Fifth Row: M. Crofutt, D. Bevers, A. Chilstrom, W. Fenger, G. Hagenlock, L. Langslet, J. Wager, L. Sanders, H. Nagel L. Nagel, T. Tobin, M. Anderson.

Gettysburg FFA members in 1954.

The FFA held a training on

November 14, 1959. The training topic was “Parliamentary Procedure of passing a motion,” There were eleven schools that attended including Letcher, Wessington Springs, Miller, Onida, Huron, Faulkton, Tulare, Wolsey, Redfield and Gettysburg (Training for FFA, 1959).

1960s

In Spring 1960, Mr. Polich took 11 students and attended the State Future Farmers of America contest in Brookings. At this event Polich, received an outstanding service award and Larry Nagel received the state farmer award. Dencel Simon also was given the state farmers award and he received \$80 for second place for his project (1960). In 1962, Dencel Simon went on to receive his American Farmer Degree in Kansas City, Missouri. This was a huge honor

because there was only two members from the state who were awarded the award. It is given to one degree out of every 100 members. He was also won a \$100 in prize money (Dencel Simon Receives American Degree, 1962).

1970s

If there is one FFA Advisor who made a significant impact on the early history of the Gettysburg FFA program it was Mr. S.M. Polich. Mr. Polich retired from the Gettysburg School District after teaching at the high school as the agriculture education teacher starting in 1938. He taught in the program for 28 years before moving to the school's guidance counselor (Steve Polich Retiring; Taught 40 Years Here, 1975). In 1977, the crop plot was replanted after not being used for 5 years. The seniors at the time along with Mr. Polich were in charge of deciding what to plant and when to harvest (Crop planted after 5 years, 1977).



LeAnn Simon retires as State FFA reporter at State FFA Convention in May 1978.

1980s

In 1984, it was the first time winning the livestock judging contest.

The team members were Joan Nold, Deb Griese, and Kelly Kirby, they represented National Convention in Kansas City. FFA week activities included calf weight



Gettysburg FFA Members in 1982

contest, faculty swine judging contest and a faculty pie and ice cream feed. Another big step that happened in the organization is “girls are no longer a rarity,” and there were two female members that served as chapter officers, Joan Nold and Deb Griese. The FFA Advisor, Mr. Brian Boomgaarden commented, “we accomplished much this year through the outstanding efforts of many individuals in the chapter. I hope to have continued success in the years to come (FFA Sets Precedents, 1985).

1990s

The 1990s brought on another successful decade for the Gettysburg FFA.. Students competed in local contest, members earned state degrees and class were changed. Gerri Ann Nagel was elected State Vice President in 1989-1990. In 1994, the coursework in Gettysburg was changed to add word working, parliamentary procedure and mechanics. There were also many awards handed out



Gettysburg FFA Members in 1992

during that year's state convention including; Brandon Nagel winning STAR in Agribusiness, Dawn Nagel was elected State FFA President and the range team placing first at the state contest (FFA.. Agriculture's Leading Edge, 1994).

2000s/2010s

The 2000s were full of many accomplishments for Gettysburg FFA. "Building strong agricultural leaders in our high school will help our local community in the long run" stated Mr. Bill Lehman in the 2001 school yearbook (Gettysburg High School, 2001). One

of the most memorable things that was done during this era was the building of derby cars during the agriculture

mechanics courses (Gettysburg High School, 2009). The Floriculture team won state four different South Dakota State FFA CDEs and won the national contest in 2010 (Gettysburg High School, 2010). Gettysburg also hosted the Gettysburg Land and Range Schools for a number of years during this decade. Alison Simon also was elected South Dakota State FFA President in 2016 (Gettysburg High School, 2016). Throughout the 2010s, there has been numerous transitions for the chapter to create a new tradition for this chapter.



Gettysburg FFA had four state winning Floriculture teams and won the national contest in 2010.

2020s

The Gettysburg FFA has continued to have numerous traditions that have played a role in the progression of the program, including the pig project, crop plot and Ag Olympics during FFA Week. We have continued to uphold the standard of the Gettysburg FFA despite the pandemic in 2020. Hunter Eide won National Agriscience in Fall of 2020 and elected State Treasurer and then ran as a National Officer Candidate in 2021 (Eide seeks national FFA office, 2021).



Gettysburg FFA Officer Team 2020-2021.

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Appendix 1:

Past State Officers of the Gettysburg FFA Chapter:

1936-1937- Treasurer-Francis Griffith

1952-1953 Sentinel- Larry Schutterle

1969-1970-Reporter Dewayne Siebrasse

1977-1978 Reporter- LeAnn Simon

1986-1987- Reporter- Joan Nold

1989-1990- Vice President- Gerri Ann Nagel

1994-1995- President- Dawn Nagel5

2016-2017- President- Alison Simon

2020-2021- Secretary- Hunter Eide

Appendix II

Teachers of Vocational Agriculture at Gettysburg High School:

Dan Cass

Guy McDonald (1929-1934)

Wm. Bryant (1937-1937)

Stephen Crawford (1937-1938)

Steve Polich (1938-1966)

Richard Larson (1966-1972)

Bob Vanorny (1972-1973)

Robert Sougstad (1973-1974)

Glenn Umicker (1974-1975)

Brent Defibaugh (1976-1977)

Millard Jones (1977-1978)

William Lehman (1979-1984)

Brian Boomgaarden (1985-1989)

William Lehman (1990-2012)

Tylee Norman (2013-2014)

Bradley Chiak (2014-2016)

Luke Eide (2017-2018)

Mercedes (2018-Current)