Shaping Future Agriculturalists: Does Agricultural Literacy and Demographic Background Influence Student Views about Farm Policy?

Kyle A. Laqua
Sam Houston State University
P.O. Box 2088
Huntsville, Texas 77341
(936) 294-1218
kal030@shsu.edu

Shyam S. Nair, Ph.D.
Sam Houston State University
P.O. Box 2088
Huntsville, Texas 77341
(936) 294-1193
shyam.nair@shsu.edu

Foy D. Mills, Jr., Ph.D.
Sam Houston State University
P.O. Box 2088
Huntsville, Texas 77341
(936) 294-1207
foymills@shsu.edu

Selected Poster prepared for presentation at the Southern Agricultural Economics Association (SAEA) Annual Meeting, San Antonio, Texas, February 6-9, 2016

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Shaping Future Agriculturalists: Does Agricultural Literacy and Demographic Background Influence Student Views about Farm Policy?
Kyle A. Laqua, Shyam S. Nair, Ph.D. and Foy D. Mills, Jr., Ph.D.
Sam Houston State University
Department of Agricultural Sciences and Engineering Technology

Abstract
US food and agricultural policy can be a sensitive subject among numerous constituencies. Since university agricultural students may eventually become a part of these groups, does the level of agricultural literacy and personal backgrounds influence students’ views of agricultural policy? The Food and Fiber System Literacy instrument and the Consumer Preferences for Farm Policy and the USDA Budget survey were administered to students enrolled in Introduction to Professional Leadership Skills (Intro) and in Agriculture and Government Programs (Policy) at Sam Houston State University (SHSU). A student’s one-tailed t-test variances compared agricultural literacy between students in the two courses. Results indicated students enrolled in Policy were significantly more agriculturally literate than students enrolled in Intro (p<0.001). Subsequently, students’ level of agricultural literacy and demographic background were regressed on a series of seven Likert-type scale questions related to farm policy. Select demographic characteristics were significantly different on three of the seven questions. Based on the findings from the policy questions posed, students’ academic experience, enrolled course, level of agricultural literacy, age, political affiliation and being raised around a family farm influenced their views regarding programs to ensure food supply, programs to preserve rural landscape and government interference in markets.
INTRODUCTION

US food and agricultural policy can be a sensitive subject among numerous constituencies. Since university agricultural students may eventually become a part of these groups, does the level of their agricultural literacy and students’ personal backgrounds influence their views of agricultural policy?

METHODS & PROCEDURES

The Food and Fiber System Literacy instrument, and the Consumer Preferences for Farm Policy – USDA Budget Survey were administered to students enrolled in AGRI 1131: Introduction to Professional Leadership Skills (Intro) and AGBU 4386: Agriculture and Government Programs (Policy) at Sam Houston State University. Data was collected over multiple semesters, multiple years (n = 282).

A one-tailed student t-test assuming unequal variances was used to statistically compare agriculturally literacy between Intro and Policy.

A series of student t-tests compared Intro and Policy views on the primary role of USDA.

Select demographic characteristics were compared.

Students’ agricultural literacy and demographic backgrounds were regressed on a series of seven Likert-type scale statements related to farm policy.

RESULTS & IMPLICATIONS

- Students enrolled in Policy possessed higher agricultural literacy than students enrolled in Intro (p<0.001) implying instructional effectiveness.
- Figure 1 illustrates that irrespective of differences in agricultural literacy between students in Intro and Policy, given the choice, they would allocate USDA’s budget in a similar manner (i.e., no statistical difference).
- Demographically, Policy students identify as Republicans more than their Intro counterparts (Figure 2).
- Three of the seven Likert-type scale statements were significantly influenced by at least one of the explanatory variables. Regression results for these three questions are presented in Table 1.

Women, political Independents, and students from family farms strongly support the statement that farm programs ensure food security for US citizens.

- Students in Intro, older students, students identifying as Republicans, and those from family farms believe farm programs ensure the beauty of rural landscapes.
- Male students and those students reporting themselves as Republicans prefer less government interference in markets.
- Interestingly, greater agricultural literacy among the students in this study had no impact statistically on their views related to farm programs.

REFERENCES


We express our thanks to Dr. Brenda Ellison (Univ. of Illinois) and Dr. Jayson Lusk (Oklahoma State Univ.) for allowing us to use the Consumer Preferences for Farm Policy – USDA Budget Survey.