



..... STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSES MOUTH

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We are nearing the end of National FFA Week. It has been fun to see former and present FFA members talking about their experiences in FFA on social media or even just face to face. I appreciated seeing so many Blue jackets in Kearney this past week at the Cattlemen's Classic Beef Show. The management created an FFA Day at the Classic that also involved a contest for students to participate in as well as to meet and listen to our Governor Pete Ricketts. It made this old heart feel good to see these young people walking through the barns and sitting in the bleachers taking in the activities of the day. Thank you Nebraska Cattlemen's Classic for giving them the opportunity! I think it will pay dividends well into the future.

Incidentally the first National FFA Week was celebrated in 1948, the year before this former FFA member from Wilcox was born. FFA Week always runs Saturday to Saturday and encompasses February 22, Washington's birthday. I am an FFA Alumnus and proud of my association with this great organization as a Chapter Member, Chapter Officer, State Farmer Degree Recipient, Honorary American Farmer Degree Recipient and as a former Ag Teacher and FFA Advisor. I salute the FFA in celebration of National FFA Week and all the young people who proudly wear the National Blue and Corn Gold!

It is hard to believe that the FFA is almost 90 years old this week. Yes, even older than I am! In addition to celebrating 89 years of FFA, I encourage us all to pause and reflect on the significance of February 23 in particular. What is so significant of that day in History? Well, exactly 100 years ago on that date President Woodrow Wilson signed the Smith-Hughes Act into law, establishing a nation-wide effort to teach agriculture, home economics and the trades in high schools. While vocational agriculture programs existed prior to 1917, they were sporadic and disconnected from one another. This act became a very important event in education and I think we can easily tie it to the History of FFA and we will explore that this week.

Feeling rather nostalgic this week I spent a couple of hours reading entries in Facebook, blogs on the internet and some emails concerning FFA Week and I discovered something I knew but completely forgot about until this week. I spent years teaching the History of Vocational Agriculture Education and the FFA and I am sure many students will remember something called the Smith Hughes Act. I am pretty sure there was a question or two on the Freshman Vo Ag test bank concerning that. I thought that this week it would behoove me to discuss the impact of that act on my life as well as millions of young people across this great country. So I will start by simply using material from the FFA Pulse. It is as follows:

"Imagine a world where no high school classes such as culinary science, industrial arts or agricultural education existed. Nearly 100 years ago, this was the case. Since the passing of the Smith-Hughes Act in 1917, thousands of students across the country have had their lives changed thanks to career and technical education. Including yours, if you are a past or current member of the FFA Organization. Without the Smith-Hughes Act, FFA would not exist. Here is a little history of the act."

After observing young people in the communities leave school at a young age because of a lack of "career options," Senator Hoke Smith and Representative Dudley Hughes of Georgia drafted federal legislation to "appropriate [money]...to respective states...for the purpose of paying the salaries [and preparation] of teachers, supervisors, and directors of agricultural subjects...trade, home economics, and industrial subjects" according to the original text of the act from 1917. The Smith Hughes Act is what makes FFA and its sister career and technical student organizations such as FCCLA and Skills USA possible, as it is still funded and administered through Congress today."

The Smith-Hughes Act is a landmark in the advance of federal centralization as well as in vocational education, created the Federal Board for Vocational Education for the promotion of training in agriculture, trades and industries, commerce, and home economics in the secondary schools. Funded by federal grants-in-aid to be matched by state or local contributions, the act required that state boards submit their plans for vocational education to the board for approval, thus providing for greater federal control than previous education grants. Supplementary acts have extended the original activities to vocational counseling and rehabilitation. As an old ag teacher that got his start during the 1971-72 school year I am well acquainted with the regulations and requirements that were laid out by this act. I had an intimate knowledge of the importance of the Smith Hughes Act to agricultural education and of course to the intra-curricular organization originally called the Future Farmer of America and now in the last few years to just "the FFA Organization". It is amazing that we are celebrating its Centennial!

As I recall Senators Smith and Hughes' passions for education stemmed from observing their own children learning both in the classroom and on the farm. Smith himself also served as Georgia's 58th governor and together, Smith and Hughes were instrumental in creating railways in Georgia for farmers like themselves to better market their crops. Their work went beyond the State of Georgia and reflects today all across our great Nation in thousands of programs and FFA Chapter. Thanks to the work of Smith and Hughes, we can live in a world where career and technical high school classes do exist and their missions are alive and well, preparing the next generation of business professionals, chefs, mechanics, and most importantly, farmers and/or agriculturalists, through career and technical education. This act established the basis for what we recognize today as Career and Technical Education, and within agricultural education specifically, provided an organized structure that laid the groundwork for the birth of the Future Farmers of America just 11 years later. As we finish celebrating FFA Week, please also take time to also celebrate agricultural education and its history. Smith and Hughes rocked!!

The preceding information comes from the research and personal observations of the writer, which may or may not reflect the views of UNL or Nebraska Extension. For more further information on these or other topics contact D. A. Lienemann, Nebraska Extension Educator for Webster County in Red Cloud, (402) 746-3417 or email: dlienemann2@unl.edu or on the web at: <http://extension.unl.edu/statewide/webster>