

## Abstract

### **Planting Seeds for Success: An Agricultural Education Curriculum for Middle and High School Students**

Preparing the next generation of students for higher education requires equipping students with knowledge, skills, values and experiences to succeed academically and professionally. Fortunately, agricultural education is credited as a critical component in preparing the next generation of leaders, entrepreneurs, and innovators in food, agriculture, natural resources, and human sciences (FANHHS). For this reason, the NEXTGen project is developing an agricultural education leadership curriculum tailored for middle and high school students, particularly targeting students in schools with limited-resource and underrepresented persons in Tennessee. This comprehensive curriculum integrates core educational objectives with hands-on activities, mentorship programs, and career exploration opportunities to foster interest and readiness for higher education and careers in agriculture-related fields. A goldmine for experiential learning, this curriculum will engage students in an array of agricultural career pathways while equipping them with essential leadership, personal development, and professional skills. Thus, paving the way for future academic and career success while fostering diversity and inclusion within agricultural education and FANHHS career pathways.

Regarding content, the curriculum is built upon five key pillars: (1) personal branding, (2) leadership development, (3) professional development, (4) college applications, scholarships and financial aid, and (5) college agricultural courses and career exploration. Through a structured grade-level progression, students will begin by developing foundational skills in self-evaluation, goal setting, and financial literacy. As they advance, they will engage in more specialized career readiness training, including resume writing, job shadowing, college application and financial aid workshops, ensuring they are well-prepared for future academic and professional opportunities. In the end, middle and high school students will develop an understanding of agricultural concepts and their relevance to real-world applications and be inspired to explore how their passions can contribute meaningfully to the global agriculture industry.

Ultimately, this initiative seeks to inspire and empower a diverse generation of students to pursue careers in FANHHS. By providing essential knowledge, skills, and professional networks, the curriculum will build a sustainable pipeline of future agricultural professionals, strengthening and diversifying the industry's workforce. This transformative program will also prepare students for higher education while fostering a deeper appreciation for agriculture's critical role in society.