

News Release
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STATE CERTIFICATE PROGRAM RECOGNIZES AG EDUCATION ACHIEVEMENTS

A growing consumer demand for locally produced foods is creating a job market for West Virginia workers in dozens of fields, and state officials have started a program that will help recent graduates and business owners.

The West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) now awards an Agriculture Education Concentration Certificate of Completion that students can use to document various agricultural specialties. This certificate also gives business owners an opportunity to recruit workers they know have the job skills they need.

That's because industry representatives were consulted during the development of the curricula.

The West Virginia Department of Agriculture and other subject matter experts also collaborated on the development of the program and officially endorses the certificate.

The program serves two purposes: to help business owners verify the skills and knowledge of a potential employee, and to encourage high school students to consider agriculture as a career.

"We want employers to understand that this is a statewide program with real substance behind it; it's not just a sheet of paper," said Commissioner of Agriculture Walt Helmick. "We have tremendous economic opportunity as a state if we decide to feed ourselves, but as in any industry, we need a trained workforce to make it happen."

Agriculture education certificates are offered in agribusiness, animal systems, food products and processing, natural resources, plant systems and power, structural and technical systems.

All student "completers" must take Introduction to Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources, a core concentration course, a specialized concentration course and two years of Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAEs) Projects.

SAEs are career-oriented, hands-on learning experiences that round out classroom discussion and leadership development in FFA, the student agriculture organization.

One of the primary advantages of an SAE is that students can develop a project or program according to their interests and abilities. As long as the SAE is relevant to agriculture, it counts. There are unlimited options to accommodate both urban and rural students.