

FFA seeks partners

In a tight labor market, one organization wants to supply the entire green industry with workers

BY FRANK H. ANDORKA JR./CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

The Green Industry is scrambling for employees, searching for new labor sources. Have no fear, the FFA is here. Future Farmers of America's membership includes 452,000 students who love to work outdoors. With consolidation putting the pinch on family farms, FFA says these kids are looking for alternatives to keep them working outdoors and offer them job security.

To that end, industry representatives huddled with FFA leaders last October to plan a curriculum for 10,000 high school teachers, promoting green industry careers.

"Most people in the Green Industry don't realize we already have moved the focus beyond the traditional animal husbandry disciplines," says Bernie Staller, COO. "We've already tailored some programs to address issues like urban forestry, biotechnology and landscape architecture. It's not just about animals anymore."

Training the trainers

Roscoe Vaughn, executive director of the National Council on Agricultural Education, says Western Kentucky University will unveil the curriculum on Oct. 31.

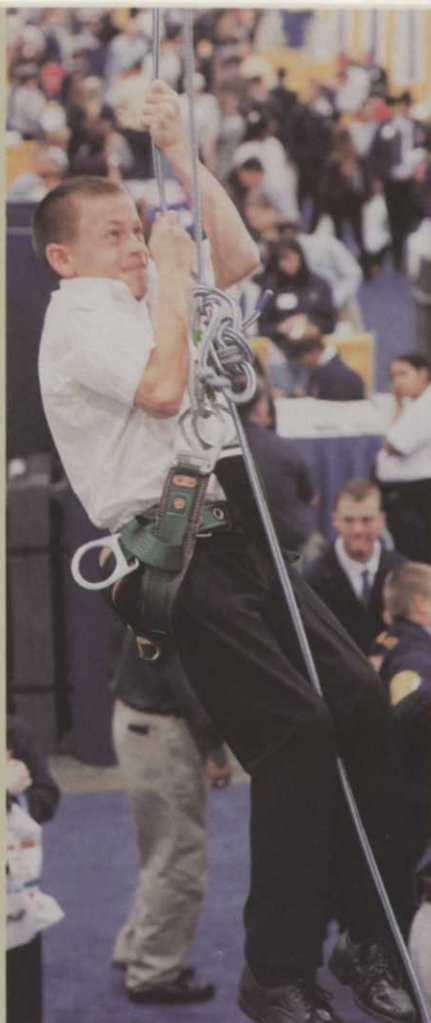
"We've talked about expanding the horizons of FFA for years, but this is the first time we've been able to do it," he says. "This is where FFA is going to grow, and right now our curriculum isn't as strong in the Green Industry as it is in other areas."

He hopes to have the curriculum established at 2,500 to 3,000 schools by 2001. Once the curriculum is complete, the council will bring teachers to Indianapolis to teach it. They will return to the field and educate their peers.

"We're setting up a 'training the trainers' program," Vaughn says. "We believe that will be the quickest way of getting our message out."

If FFA students realize other opportunities exist instead of focusing solely on farming, both the FFA and the Green Industry will benefit, Vaughn says.

"We'd like to offer these students something other than the family farm, and opening up other fields to our students is a way to do this," he adds. "If we can create a sense of excitement among our students, there's no telling where this might go."



Tap into this

How can you tap into this pool?

► Contact your local high school guidance counselors. They will allow you access to students who could be your future work force. They will also help you network with local FFA teachers.

► Sponsor an FFA field day at your business. Bring students to your business and show them what you do. Experience is the quickest way to get these students excited about careers in the green industry.

► Volunteer to speak at a local FFA meeting or teach a class in an area where you need employees. It will relieve the pressure on FFA teachers and offer another point of contact with the students.

► Create an internship. Provide the FFA students with an opportunity to further their education and gain tangible work experience at the same time.

► Provide a scholarship. With a little investment on your part, FFA students will further their education with your help. Your company will be at the top of their minds when graduation comes around.

