

## **LEADERSHIP EXPECTATIONS OF COUNTY FARM BUREAU BOARD MEMBERS**

**Hannah S. Carter, Rick D. Rudd**, University of Florida

*The objective of this study was to measure the extent to which county Farm Bureau members practice the leadership expectations held by state Farm Bureau leaders and the level of importance they assign to those skills. This study examined the expectations that the Florida Farm Bureau Federation has of its local leaders who are members of county boards and the level of importance and proficiency that those board members place on these skills. A sample of county board members from the Florida Farm Bureau Federation, a voluntary agricultural organization, were given an instrument to measure the importance and their proficiency of 66 leadership practices in four competency areas, which were: leadership, political process, effective boards, and knowledge of Farm Bureau. This study found “gaps” between importance and proficiency, with this data, the Florida Farm Bureau Federation can tailor a leadership development program to meet the needs of the Farm Bureau organization and its members.*

## INTRODUCTION

Those involved in agriculture in the United States and the State of Florida realize the need for people to step forth and provide a strong and educated voice to lead agriculture, and bring the needs and issues of the rural community to the forefront at the community, state, national and international levels. A reasonable choice to provide this voice for rural communities and provide individuals to participate in the leadership process are members of Farm Bureau. Farm Bureau reflects the future of agriculture and rural communities in its membership, the younger members who are embarking on their careers and looking towards leadership positions in the future (P. Cockrell, personal communication, September 10, 2002).

For those that do accept leadership positions within the Farm Bureau organization, will they be effective and provide strong leadership? Florida Farm Bureau realizes the need to provide leadership training for its members, but what training should it offer? McCaslin (1993) theorized that sustainable rural development has been and will be realized only through programs, which focus on active involvement of human resources rather than a passive approach. Florida Farm Bureau is taking this proactive approach, realizing the need for leadership development and wanting to take the next step in designing a leadership-training program for its county board members.

A focus group consisting of county Farm Bureau presidents agreed that training for county board members should be improved, with one participant going on to state that it is “the very weakest link” in his county Farm Bureau’s program (Florida Farm Bureau Public Relations Division [FFBPRD], 1998). Findings from a study of those who went through a leadership development program found that those who participated felt more confident about promoting causes, were able to motivate others better, made more informed decisions on public issues, were better able to work with people and lead a group, and deal with local leaders better (Rohs & Langone, 1993). If the Florida Farm Bureau Federation (FFBF) were to offer such a leadership-training program to its county Farm Bureau board members, the expectations are that participants would have similar experiences and results.

Organizations can play a significant role by nurturing future leaders. They can provide the education and training necessary for the advancement of leadership among their members (Foster, 2000). Pernick (2001) states:

There are two advantages of building leadership talent within an organization. First, the next generation of leaders is groomed by the organization and can instill the culture and agenda of the organization. Secondly, the organization has greater control over the supply of leaders with the necessary skills, which makes implementation of the organization’s agenda easier and quicker. (p. 429)

Leadership development resides in the context of a community or organization and must answer the question, “leadership for what?” (Foster, 2000). This study will attempt to provide a basis for the “what” for the FFBF. It will provide research that will

allow the state organization to customize a leadership development program for its membership with the expectations that after members go through this training they will have the leadership background necessary to become effective leaders not only in the Farm Bureau organization, but in their homes, businesses, and communities. The effects of a leadership development program for Farm Bureau members could be far reaching, but before those effects can be felt, desired leadership practices must be identified, existing behavior in current leaders must be determined, and “gaps” between desired practices and existing behavior must be identified.

## **THEORETICAL/CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Farm Bureau is

An independent, non-governmental, voluntary organization governed by and representing farm and ranch families united for the purpose of analyzing their problems and formulating action to achieve educational improvement, economic opportunity and social advancement and, thereby, to promote the national well being. Farm Bureau is local, county, state, national, and international in its scope and influence and is non-partisan, non-sectarian and non-secret in character (AFBF, 2003, para. 2).

The strength of Farm Bureau from the county to the national level begins at the grassroots with individual members who decide to become active and take on leadership roles in the organization. Farm Bureaus across the country are voluntary organizations, which rely on their membership to provide leadership on local, county, state and national boards and committees.

Developing a sense of identification with the organization is of high importance to grassroots organizations. The development of group cohesion, team building, and increasing perceived social support may prove effective in enhancing the identification and further strengthening the favorability of members’ attitudes (Hinkle, Fox-Cardamone, Haseleu, Brown, & Irwin, 1996). The development of a social identity serves to sustain membership in a grassroots organization. This social identity serves as a motivator for participating in a group. Individuals strive to maintain their self-esteem by committing to a group, participating in its activities, identifying with its behaviors, and adopting its symbols (Pratkanis & Turner, 1996). Bettencourt (1996) states, “grassroots efforts may succeed if they capitalize on initiating grassroots involvement by helping potential volunteers to become identified with the grassroots organization and on maintaining activism by encouraging cohesion and commitment among the members of their group” (p. 209).

A lack of leadership in grassroots organizations may have dire consequences on the success of the group and the attempt to achieve change. To reduce chances of failure, grassroots organizations need to foster the leadership skills of their members (Bettencourt, 1996). An organization’s strength is a direct result of the strength of the leaders of the organization. Organizational leaders must be active in their organization,

generate productive activity, and must encourage and command changes in the organization (Maxwell, 1995). The survival of institutions depends on the capacity of “leaders to develop and maintain organizational cultures that foster and sustain autonomy and independence while strengthening the ability of individuals to care for and commit to the organization and the larger community” (Scott, 2000, p. 13).

Leaders in organizations have many roles that they fill. Duke (1998) stated that individuals are seen to occupy roles which represent sets of expectations and these roles are a function of social context and individual understanding. An assumption about human nature supports this “role theory” is that humans are capable of self-reflection and evaluation. Inquiry in sociological research must focus on understanding how people define situations, determine what is expected of them, and select courses of action. Role expectations become an important source of information for the study of organizations.

Organizational leaders will need to be able know the roles they play and to be able to read the larger environment at various levels to know which level to focus attention on so their organization can negotiate change successfully. Not-for-profit organizations need leaders who can engage in the process of “systems thinking.” This is leadership that can understand the bigger picture without being pulled into tunnel vision or allow quick fixes of problems (Scott, 2000).

Staples (1984) notes, “The person who acts alone has very little power. When people join together and organize, they increase their ability to get things done. The goal is to strengthen their collective capacities to bring about social change” (p. 1). “Organizations with the broadest base of participation usually develop the best leaders and, in turn, those leaders help increase membership involvement. Existing leaders and organizers have the responsibility for expanding the leadership core and motivating, teaching, and supporting the new people who emerge” (Staples, 1984, p. 129). An organization’s choice not to innovate or change with the times is the largest reason for its decline. Organizational performance is measured by its development of its people, its standing, innovation, and its productivity. Changes in population structure and population dynamics are important trends to watch in the future of organizations, as these trends will cause an organization to evolve. The populations that comprise the memberships of organizations are changing and no longer remain as constant as they once did (Drucker, 2001).

Northouse (1997) defines leadership as, “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 3). At the core of leadership are the ideas that leadership is a process, it involves influence, it occurs within a group and it involves the attainment of a goal by the group (Northouse, 1997). An important impediment to achieving leadership effectiveness is a lack of leadership skill. Skill is needed because the role of the leader is both complex and simple. Simple, because effectively functioning groups have a natural synergy that gives them momentum and complex because the relationships with group members are dynamic and constantly changing, depending on the situation, goals, and the environment (Hersey, Blanchard & Johnson, 1996).

One of the fastest ways to build leaders in an organization is to train them. Leadership development programs that aid in the assurance of an adequate supply of effective leaders are a vital and continuing need in communities and organizations across the U.S. (Rohs & Langone, 1993). Leadership development builds the capacity of local leaders and citizens. This means enhancing the potential of individuals to solve problems. It is done by engaging citizens and organizations to identify needs, resources, and opportunities (Hustedde & Woodward, 1996).

A major responsibility of an organization is to cultivate leadership skills and pass on that knowledge to the next generation of leaders. Because of retirement, many organizations are facing a high turnover rate, which means that the leaders of tomorrow could look, and think a lot differently, about their commitment and role within the organization (Eisinger, 2002). Eisinger (2002) continues by stating, “once associations identify future volunteer leaders, they must offer specific training programs” (p.14). Much of this training needs to be directed towards those volunteers who are serving on organizational boards as they sometimes lack the necessary skills to be effective board members.

Many non-profits have a functioning board. Those that serve on the boards have a personal commitment to the organization’s cause. Most board members should have a deep knowledge and understanding about the organization. The key to making the board effective is organizing the work of the board (Drucker, 2001). The board of an organization should reflect the makeup of the membership, which includes people of different backgrounds, ethnicities, ages, and interest. If the board has been homogeneous in the past, it needs to broaden its horizons and welcome new ideas that emerge from interactions among different groups (Eisinger, 2002).

Tweeten (2002) states, “dynamic, visionary boards are absolutely critical to the future of nonprofit, service delivery organizations” (p. 1). Twenty-first century boards are facing inevitable changes as a result of dramatic and continuing societal changes. These changes include the way people learn, the way they view authority, philanthropy, and non-profit organizations, and the way they live, work, and play with emphasis on self-development, independence, flexibility, rapidly moving technology, and family (Tweeten, 2002).

There are several ways organizations will have to change to remain viable and effective in the future. Organizations need to realize that there are other ways for the meaningful involvement of people in their organizations other than on their boards. Boards will need to be more resourceful and their membership more diverse to reflect the population they represent accurately. Board members will have to be team players, with the ability to work effectively in a group. Board members will need to make intense commitments to their board responsibilities. This commitment may result in board members cycling in and out appropriately, depending on their available time to be fully engaged as they serve on the board. Commitments may be shorter, but more concentrated (Tweeten, 2002).

A study by Bright (2001) on the commitment of board members suggested that individuals believe that commitment among board members is essential to the effective functioning of boards. When board members served primarily because they had an emotional attachment to the organization, the board experienced higher performance, though passions and personal experiences individuals bring to the cause often obscure objective thinking and may thwart the success of the organization. Research has suggested that ideal board members are personally affected by the problem(s) the organization focuses on. It has also shown that board members who care, but have some distance from the issue are best because they are able to make difficult decisions for the good of the organization as a whole, based on facts, not emotions (Bright, 2001).

The more citizens participate in organizations and their communities, the more they learn to trust others; the greater the trust of others, and the more likely they are to participate. Social capital is the reciprocal relationship between civic participation and interpersonal trust. Brehm and Rahn (1997) believe that, “civic engagement and generalized trust, and the dynamic that sustains them, have important consequences for the polity, specifically, citizens’ confidence in political institutions” (p. 1003). According to Garkovich (1984), associations and organizations, “provide the locus in which individual interests are articulated and translated into action goals, and humans and other resources are mobilized for goal accomplishment” (p. 199).

Whether volunteering on an organizational board or for the organization in general, it is important that the group has common goals. Hersey et al. (1996) state “research has consistently shown that group productivity is highest in those groups in which techniques are used that simultaneously further the attainment of group goals and bring fulfillment of the needs of individual group members” (p. 363).

The goals of an organization help shape the organizational leaders as do the context, norms and values of the organization and determine the effectiveness of a group. Two conditions that face all organizations and their leaders are external adoption and internal integration. External adaptation is the idea that all organizations fit a context; the survival of the organization is contingent on the organization’s ability to address the needs and expectations of its environment. Internal integration is the assurance that all members of the organization value and pursue the goals of the organization (Duke, 1998).

Effective groups are those in which the needs of the group are harmonious with the needs of the individuals. Individual needs may be different for each group member. The key to individual needs satisfaction is that those needs are dependent upon the accomplishment of the group goals. The degree to which individual need satisfaction is achieved differentiates those effective groups from ineffective ones (Hersey et al., 1996).

The shifting demographic trends may make it necessary for organizations to modify their approach to volunteerism and how leadership opportunities are structured. Differing leadership styles need to be considered. Keeping the interest levels high in volunteers is not achieved by increasing their responsibilities, instead, they need to feel like they have ownership in the association (Eisinger, 2002).

Those who volunteer are less interested in serving in long-term commitments and in a designated role for the entire year, and are more willing to work on one project and see it through to completion. Organizations are learning that the more you give board members to do, the more they tend not to return (Eisinger, 2002). Washbush (1998) states, “personal motivation, self-assessment, diagnostic skills coupled with vision, and the ability to communicate are fundamentally important to one who aspires to have an impact in the organization” (p. 251).

Sorcher and Brant (2002) state, “homogenous groups often run more smoothly, but they lack the synergistic power of a diverse team of people with talents, skills, and characteristics that complement one another” (p. 80). Exceptional leaders are willing to take risks by picking people who are not like them and who may have different leadership styles.

There are several trends that need to be addressed by nonprofit boards: (1) limited availability of board members, (2) lack of preparation of board members, (3) lack of recruitment strategies, (4) board members who are on too many boards, and (5) board members who do not understand their roles (Tweeten, 2002). Many organizations do not have procedures in place to identify or recruit potential leaders. Potential leaders are sometimes assessed based on hearsay, observations, and insufficient information. The process of identifying these future leaders is not simple or straightforward as leadership is a complex, multifaceted capability (Sorcher & Brant, 2002).

Organizations need to consider these trends as many organizations are struggling with a shortage in leadership, though in these organizations, there may be a lot of leadership talent that goes unused. Leaders tend to favor other potential leaders with backgrounds, experiences, and characteristics that are similar to their own. Often promising potential leaders are overlooked because of differences in gender, race, or cultural, academic, socioeconomic, or geographical background (Sorcher & Brant, 2002).

Leaders are managers of group dynamics. They are a key component to the effectiveness of any group. Effective leaders will recognize the variations among individual members in their abilities and willingness to do a job and assign work roles accordingly. Effective leaders are sensitive to the natural cycle of commitment to long-term projects and provide the necessary support to sustain commitment over prolonged periods (Garkovich, 1984). Organizations need to retain their volunteers to remain effective and viable into the future.

A major responsibility of an organization is to cultivate leadership skills and pass on that knowledge to the next generation of leaders. Eisinger (2002) states, “once associations identify future volunteer leaders, they must offer specific training programs” (p.14). Much of this training needs to be directed towards those volunteers who are serving on organizational boards as they sometimes lack the necessary skills to be effective board members.

## **PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE**

Organizations can play a significant role by nurturing future leaders. They can provide the education and training necessary for the advancement of leadership among its members (Foster, 2000). The effects of a leadership development program for Farm Bureau members could be far reaching, but before those effects can be felt, desired leadership practices needed to be identified, existing behavior in current leaders needed to be determined, and “gaps” between desired practices and existing behavior needed to be identified.

The objective of this study was to measure the extent to which county Farm Bureau members practice the leadership expectations held by state Farm Bureau leaders and the level of importance they assign to those skills. This study examined these expectations that the FFBF has of its local leaders who are members of county board and the level of importance and proficiency that board members place on these skills. With the data this study provided, the FFBF can tailor a leadership development program to meet the needs of Farm Bureau and Farm Bureau members.

## **METHODS/PROCEDURES**

The research design of this study was a two-part assessment of the Florida Farm Bureau and its membership using qualitative research methods. The two parts of this study included: (1) a qualitative long interview of members of the state leadership of the FFBF. This interview was the first part of the study and provided the foundation for the leadership competency instrument given to county farm bureau board members. Interview questions included their expectations of desired leadership practices and behaviors of local board members and their expectations of what county farm bureau boards should accomplish and (2) a qualitative survey instrument was developed by the researcher, based upon findings from the qualitative interviews and given to a random sample of members of local Farm Bureau boards. This instrument had a list of 66 leadership practices divided into four competency areas, each respondent rated their perceived importance and proficiency of each.

This instrument was pilot tested with a group of county board members who were not included in the final sample. Participants were asked to rate the importance of each competency to the success of a county board using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (low importance) to 7 (high importance). In addition, how proficient they felt they were, was also rated on the same Likert scale. A conceptual model for this part of the study depicting the relationship between the competencies found in the first part of the study and what makes a successful board member is presented in Figure 1. This model represents that being a successful board member is a function of competencies in the four theme areas.

This instrument was comprised of four competency sections: (1) 15 leadership questions, (2) 20 political process questions, (3) 15 effective board questions, and (4) 16

knowledge of Farm Bureau questions. The mean and standard deviation was calculated for the importance and proficiency of each competency section.

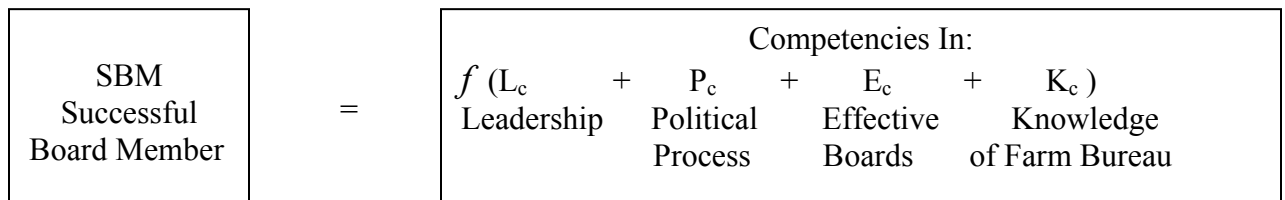


Figure 1. *Competencies Necessary for Successful Board Members.*

The responses from the long interviews underwent content analysis and four major theme areas emerged from the analysis of the interview transcripts and audiotapes. These areas were: leadership, political process, effective boards, and knowledge of Farm Bureau. These were all areas that the state leadership determined county Farm Bureau board members should possess skills in. Questions on the interview questionnaire were not separated into these four areas, but the responses given by interview participants were easily categorized into these four theme areas.

The population for this study was composed of members of local county Farm Bureau boards. A random sample of 280 county board members out of a total of 666 county Farm Bureau board members of the Florida Farm Bureau was sent a researcher-designed questionnaire. Using a table provided by Salant and Dillman (1994), the researcher chose a 50/50 split with a  $\pm 5\%$  sampling error, thus a sample of 280 individuals was chosen.

The basic survey procedure outlined in Salant and Dillman (1994) was used for data collection. This survey procedure was comprised of four separate mailings. The first was a personalized, advance notice letter, which was mailed to all members of the sample. This letter explained to the individuals that they were selected for the survey and that they will be receiving a questionnaire. The second mailing was sent a week later. It included a personalized cover letter, which explained the survey, their rights as survey subjects, a survey instrument, and a stamped return envelope. Exactly six days after the second mailing, a postcard was sent to each participant thanking those who had sent back their survey and requesting a response from those who had not yet responded. Three weeks after the second mailing, a third mailing was sent out to all those who had not responded. It included a personalized letter again explaining the importance of their returning the survey, a replacement survey, and another stamped return envelope.

This procedure was used to produce an acceptable response rate so as to try to avoid nonresponse error. The response rate for the qualitative interview was 100% and 46% for county board members. As Ary, Jacobs, and Razavieh (1996) state “using information only from those who choose to respond can introduce error, because the respondents represent a self-selected group that may not represent the views of the entire sample or population” (p. 460). Research has shown that respondents differ from

nonrespondents and the extent of this difference should be determined. For this study, early and late respondents were compared as late respondents are similar to those who do not respond at all (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1996). Those who responded to the survey early (after the first survey was sent to them) were compared to those who responded late (after the follow-up survey was sent). Differences were examined in the responses of these groups to determine if there were any significant differences between the responses, the differences examined include survey responses and demographic information. There were no significant differences found in the surveys of the early and late respondents, which indicates that it was an unbiased sample of recipients.

This instrument was developed using the Borich needs assessment model, which assessed the respondents' perceptions about the importance of each item or competency and their proficiency (or ability) to apply this skill or knowledge. By analyzing the perceived importance and proficiency about a particular topic, individuals will learn the actual need for further education or programming efforts (Waters & Haskell, 1989).

A Likert-type scale from one to seven was located on the side of each competency, on the left survey participants were asked to rank how important they believed it was for an ideal county Farm Bureau board member to possess the following abilities or competencies with 1=low and 7=high. On the right side, respondents were asked how proficient they believed they were at each ability or competency with 1=low and 7=high.

## RESULTS/FINDINGS

The importance and proficiency mean scores for each competency were compared. The comparisons for the leadership section can be found in Table 1. As would be expected the proficiency scores are less than the importance scores, which would indicate that respondents feel the competencies are important for ideal county board members to possess, but do not feel as proficient as the importance scores in these competencies. The greatest gap (0.8) is found in the competency "use effective communication skills in media interviews," which would indicate that respondents feel it is important, but they do not feel proficient in this skill area.

*Table 1. Leadership Competencies – Comparisons of Importance and Proficiencies*

	Mean Importance	Mean Proficiency	Gaps
Use effective communication skills in media interviews	5.6	4.8	0.8
Use effective communication skills in writing letters	5.5	4.8	0.7
Demonstrate ability to conduct an orderly meeting	5.9	5.4	0.5
Use effective communication skills in working with groups	5.7	5.2	0.5
Choose individuals to serve the organization who are respected in their communities	5.9	5.5	0.4
Demonstrate success in leadership capacities	5.4	5.0	0.4

Table 1. *Continued*

	Mean Importance	Mean Proficiency	Gaps
Identify how committees are utilized in the Farm Bureau organization	5.3	4.9	0.4
Practice progressiveness (not do things the way they have always been done)	5.7	5.4	0.3
Choose individuals to serve who are recognized as leaders by their peers	5.6	5.3	0.3
Recognize different types of leadership	5.3	5.0	0.3
Demonstrate ability to use email and the internet	4.8	4.5	0.3
Identify potential leaders	5.4	5.2	0.2
Demonstrate ability to use conflict resolution practices	5.2	5.0	0.2
Recognize personality differences (as indicated by personality tests such as the Myers Briggs)	4.7	4.7	0
<b>Total Mean</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>0.4</b>
<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>0.97</b>		

*Note.* Means are derived from a Likert-type scale with 1=low and 7=high.

Several competencies in the political process section had large gaps between the importance and proficiency scores. As with the previous section, all the mean proficiency scores in this section were less than the mean importance scores. Four competencies had a gap greater (>1.00) than 1.00, these were: “identify the political structure in Washington, D.C.” (MI=5.1, MP=4.1), “develop relationships with elected officials on the county level” (MI=5.7, MP=4.7), “develop relationships with elected officials on the national level” (MI=5.2, MP=3.9), “identify the importance of regulatory agencies” (MI=6.1, MP=4.9), and “participate in state government meetings impacting agriculture” (MI=5.5, MP=4.3). Table 2 shows the results of this data.

Table 2. Political Process Competencies – Comparisons of Importance and Proficiencies

	Mean Importance	Mean Proficiency	Gaps
Develop relationships with elected officials on the national level	5.2	3.9	1.3
Participate in state government meetings impacting agriculture	5.5	4.3	1.2
Develop relationships with elected officials on the state level	5.7	4.7	1.0
Identify the political structure in Washington, D.C.	5.1	4.1	1.0
Participate in county government meetings impacting agriculture	5.8	4.9	0.9
Determine how policy decisions made in Washington, D.C. impact Farm Bureau	5.2	4.3	0.9
Choose ways to be more politically active	5.5	4.7	0.8

Table 2. *Continued*

	Mean Importance	Mean Proficiency	Gaps
Identify the political structure in Tallahassee	5.4	4.6	0.8
Develop relationships with elected officials on the county level	5.9	5.2	0.7
Explain agricultural issues on the county level	5.8	5.1	0.7
Analyze policy development on issues that affect Farm Bureau on the county level	5.7	5.0	0.7
Demonstrate ability to be involved in local government	5.5	4.8	0.7
Determine how policy decisions are made in Tallahassee impact Farm Bureau	5.5	4.8	0.7
Demonstrate ability to formulate policy	5.2	4.5	0.7
Support Farm Bureau legislative activities	5.8	5.2	0.6
Identify the importance of regulatory agencies	5.5	4.9	0.6
Demonstrate knowledge of the political process	5.5	5.0	0.5
<b>Total Mean</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>0.8</b>
<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>0.98</b>		

*Note.* Means are derived from a Liker-type scale with 1=low and 7=high.

The scores in the effective board section had a narrower range between the two means (MI=6.1, MP=5.9), which indicated that the mean scores of the importance competencies were only slightly higher than the mean scores of the proficiency competencies. Only two, “participate in Farm Bureau sponsored programs” (MI=5.7, MP=5.3) and “represent Farm Bureau to others in the community” (MI=6.1, MP=5.7) had a gap of 0.4, which would indicate that respondents feel it is important, but feel they are not as proficient in this area. The results of the comparison of the means for importance and proficiency are presented in Table 3.

As with the three previous sections, the overall mean scores of importance were greater than the overall mean scores of proficiency in the knowledge of Farm Bureau section, found in Table 4. One competency had a wider gap than the other 14 competencies in this section. “Demonstrate a knowledge of the AFBF” (MI=5.2, MP=4.2), which would indicate that respondents felt it important, but also felt they were not as proficient in this skill area.

Table 3. *Effective Board Competencies – Comparisons of Importance and Proficiencies*

	Mean Importance	Mean Proficiency	Gaps
Participate in Farm Bureau sponsored programs	5.7	5.3	0.4
Represent Farm Bureau to others in the community	6.1	5.7	0.4
Attend board meetings	6.3	6.1	0.3

Table 3. *Continued*

	Mean Importance	Mean Proficiency	Gaps
Demonstrate ability to work together for the benefit of the whole Farm Bureau organization	6.2	5.9	0.3
Demonstrate ability to work together to solve problems	6.2	6.0	0.2
Support the organization	6.2	6.0	0.2
Demonstrate ability to work together to develop the goals necessary to achieve the vision of the organization	6.1	5.9	0.2
Identify with the business structure in the community	5.8	5.6	0.2
Pay attention to proceedings at meetings	6.3	6.2	0.1
Employ mutual respect for all board members	6.2	6.1	0.1
Support board decisions	6.2	6.1	0.1
Up-hold the bylaws of the organization	6.2	6.1	0.1
Support the county president	6.1	6.0	0.1
Evaluate materials involving issues	5.9	5.8	0.1
Demonstrate interest in serving on the county Farm Bureau board	5.9	5.9	0
<b>Total Mean</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>0.2</b>
<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>0.895</b>		

*Note.* Means are derived from a Likert-type scale with 1=low and 7=high

Table 4. *Knowledge of Farm Bureau Competencies – Comparisons of Importance and Proficiencies*

	Mean Importance	Mean Proficiency	Gaps
Demonstrate a knowledge of the American Farm Bureau Federation	5.2	4.2	1.0
Participate in media and farm tours	5.7	4.8	0.9
Demonstrate a knowledge of the Florida Farm Bureau Federation	5.5	4.7	0.8
Demonstrate ability to look at future needs of the Farm Bureau organization	5.7	5.0	0.7
Identify the role of county Farm Bureaus to advise the state organization on policy issues	5.7	5.0	0.7
Encourage Farm Bureau members to take on additional responsibilities	5.6	4.9	0.7
Differentiate between the structure and organization of Farm Bureau to other organizations who develop policy	5.4	4.7	0.7
Participate in events that promote agricultural education	6.0	5.4	0.6
Identify how powerful grassroots organizations can be	5.7	5.1	0.6
Determine how to be a progressive member of the organization	5.6	5.0	0.6

Table 4. *Continued*

	Mean Importance	Mean Proficiency	Gaps
Identify the role of county Farm Bureaus to serve as a spring board for ideas	5.6	5.0	0.6
Identify the organizational structure of Farm Bureau	5.5	5.0	0.5
Identify the history of Farm Bureau	4.9	4.4	0.5
Participate in events that promote Farm Bureau	5.9	6.3	0.4
Identify your role within the Farm Bureau organization	5.6	5.2	0.4
Define grassroots organizations	5.5	5.1	0.4
<b>Total Mean</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>0.7</b>
<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>0.98</b>		

*Note.* Means are derived from a Likert-type scale with 1=low and 7=high.

### CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS/IMPLICATIONS

This study provides valuable information to the FFBF on the leadership expectations of county Farm Bureau board members. The generalizability of the conclusions and recommendations proposed in this study extends to the FFBF and the county Farm Bureaus in Florida. The information provided in this study could be useful to other Farm Bureau organizations in the United States as they are organizations who are composed of the same types of individuals and are organizationally structured the same. Information may also be useful for other grassroots agricultural organizations.

Findings from this study can be applied to the Florida Farm Bureau population, even with response rates that could be perceived low in some research communities. To defend this return rate, Hager, Wilson, Pollak, and Rooney (2003) determined that surveys of organizations typically receive substantially lower return rates, with a return rate of 15% reaching a level of acceptability for organizational surveys. In a study by Green and Hutchinson (1997) on the *Effects of Population Type on Mail Survey Response Rates and on the Efficacy of Response Enhancers*, the authors found that the response rate for those involved in agriculture was 30%, while the general public had a return rate of 35%. For the population who participated in this study, the response rate was 46% for county board members.

It could be theorized that county board members returned a greater percentage of surveys because they had more of a vested interest in the organization and believed that results from this study would benefit their county organizations. As one county board member stated on their returned survey, "I appreciate the progressive attitude of Florida Farm Bureau and the realization that we must seek input from all stake holders if we are to serve the industry and maintain a resource for industry leaders."

Early and late respondents of both quantitative survey instruments were compared to determine if there were differences between those who responded early and late to the surveys as late responders are often similar to nonrespondents (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh,

1996). There were no significant differences found between the early and the late respondents in this study.

Conclusions from this section are based on the differences between the level of importance assigned to competencies and the level of proficiency (or if they are practicing these skills). For the first section on leadership competencies, the mean of the importance scores is only slightly more than the mean of the proficiency scores ( $M_{\text{Importance}}=5.4$ ,  $M_{\text{Proficiency}}=5.0$ ), which indicates that board members feel they are as proficient in the competency as they deem it important. A proficiency level of 5.0 would still indicate that there is a learning curve and members would benefit from additional training in these competency areas, especially those with the lowest proficiency scores. Proficiency scores were also low in communication skills (working with the media, writing letters, working with groups) which also indicates that additional training would be beneficial in these areas as county Farm Bureau members are supposed to be the spokespeople for Farm Bureau on the county level.

The proficiency scores for the political process section were the lowest for the four theme areas ( $M_{\text{Proficiency}}=4.7$ ). None of the competencies was higher than 5.1 and one ranked 3.9, a score that would reflect a very low proficiency level. This area is crucial for Farm Bureau as it is a policy development organization and its members need to be comfortable and knowledgeable about the policy development process. Farm Bureau needs to do more work in this area and educate county Farm Bureau board members in policy development and the political process.

The mean scores for the effective boards section were extremely close ( $M_{\text{Importance}}=6.1$ ,  $M_{\text{Proficiency}}=6.0$ ) and relatively high, an indication that county board members felt the competencies were important and that they were proficient in each. Results of this section are questionable as several state officials noted that members of county boards were not working together effectively, which cause the board to not be as successful as it could be. Even one county board member stated that meetings “were more poorly run and poorly lead committees or board meetings I have served on.” One reason for the high scores in this area could be that those board members who completed the survey belonged to the more effective county Farm Bureau organizations, an indication of this would be that members are willing to take the time to complete the survey which means that they have a vested interest in the board and a desire to make it even better.

The final section of competencies, those that dealt with knowledge of Farm Bureau ranked fairly low in the proficiency area as well ( $M_{\text{Proficiency}}=4.9$ ). Results from this section showed a low proficiency in identifying the history of Farm Bureau, knowledge of the FFBF and the AFBF, and the ability to distinguish how the policy development process differs in Farm Bureau from other organizations (top down versus grassroots).

The survival of institutions depends on the capacity of “leaders to develop and maintain organizational cultures that foster and sustain autonomy and independence

while strengthening the ability of individuals to care for and commit to the organization and the larger community” (Scott, 2000, p. 13). In order to care for and commit to the organization, Farm Bureau members need to understand why Farm Bureau was formed, how it is organized and how they, as county board members fit into the organization. Basic knowledge of the history of Farm Bureau, the structure of Farm Bureau on the local, state, and national level, and grassroots organizations is needed for county board members.

This study identified the needs of Florida Farm bureau members in regards to potential leadership training that could be provided by the Florida Farm Bureau Federation. From the four theme areas, there were many competencies that had gaps between importance and knowledge and should be included in leadership programming. This training should be provided to current and incoming county Farm Bureau board members.

This study could be the starting point for additional leadership research within the FFBF. Results from the qualitative questionnaire given to state leaders of the FFBF indicated that county board members needed specific leadership skills and abilities to be effective board members. If leadership programming was developed and made available to county board members, an experimental research design could be implemented to determine board members’ leadership skills before they participated in such a program and after program completion.

County Farm Bureau board members ranked themselves fairly high in proficiency for all the competencies in the “Effective Board” theme area. The state leadership would probably disagree with their high perceived proficiencies in this area as the lack of proficiencies were determined in the interviews. Additional research is necessary to assess the proficiencies of board members in regards to items listed in this theme area.

The leadership styles of county board members could be another area of research as this study did not attempt to discover what types of leaders county Farm Bureau members were and it would be an interesting and insightful study due to the age ranges of board members.

Another deficit in the literature is current research on agricultural organizations. With the number of agricultural organizations in the United States, it would seem that there would be studies on these organizations such as organizational composition, leadership, changes in agriculture, changes in membership (diversity), policy development, etc. A study could be conducted comparing the FFBF with other state agricultural organizations in regards to their membership characteristics, their perceived power and influence in policy making, the policy development process, and the leadership styles of the individual leaders of both organizations, just to identify a few.

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