A GUIDE TO MAKING THE SAE SUPERVISION VISIT!

The term “Supervised Agricultural Experience” strongly implies this activity is to be **supervised**. The supervision normally (but not always) is done by the agriculture teacher. Exactly how does one make this supervisory visit and what should occur during the visit? This guide will focus on that question.

Why Make a Supervisory Visit? It would help if we understand how the practice of supervising the SAE got started and how it has evolved. That will provide the foundation for the modern day supervisory visit.

Agricultural education, as a school subject, emerged in the early 1900s. The nation at the time was primarily an agrarian nation, and a need existed to make schools more relevant to everyday life and to also improve agriculture. Schools were criticized for teaching largely impractical subjects such as Latin, ancient history, etc. New developments were occurring in agriculture that needed to be communicated to the agricultural community. The solution to both problems was to teach agriculture in the public schools.

In the early 1900s, there was a nationwide movement to start teaching agriculture in the public schools. With leadership from the USDA, plans to teach agriculture were developed and implemented in many states. Each state took a different approach to implementing agricultural education. The quality and practice of agricultural education programs varied greatly from state to state and even community to community. By 1915, agriculture was being taught to 90,708 students in 4,665 high schools across the nation.

The Smith-Hughes Act was passed by the federal congress in 1917. This Act provided federal funds to support the teaching of vocational agriculture in the public schools. The Smith-Hughes Act REQUIRED every student to have a "directed or supervised practice in agriculture, either on a farm provided for by the school or other farm, for at least six months per year." The purpose of this provision was to ensure that

the agriculture being taught would be practical and applied, as opposed to being merely theoretical or “book learning.”

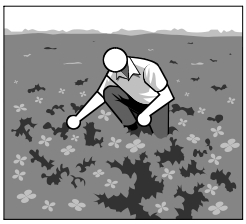
The federal officials responsible for implementing the Act placed great emphasis on this “supervised practice” provision. It was made very clear that the teacher was to go out and supervise the farming “projects” (This is what they were commonly called.) of these students. There were even mandated forms for reporting of the supervisory visits.

So what did the teacher do on these supervisory visits?

1. Verify that the student did indeed have a project as required by federal law. The agriculture teacher was required to fill out forms reporting on the student’s farming program. The teacher had to make sure the student did actually have the farming program being reported.

2. Make sure that the student was following the modern farming practices that had been taught. During the early days of the 1900s, many farmers were still using outdated farming practices handed down from father to son. Some farmers did not see value in the use of fertilizers. Archaic livestock and farming practices were being used. The agricultural instructor was teaching about the new scientific agricultural practices and made visits to ensure that these new practices were being implemented on the farms of the students.

3. Teach skills. A one-on-one supervisory visit provided the teacher the opportunity to provide individualized instruction to the student. Many students learned how to take a soil sample, castrate a pig, groom a show steer or sucker a tomato plant under the direct tutelage of the teacher during a supervisory visit.



4. Look for problems that needed to be fixed and give advice. During a supervisory visit, the teacher was able to troubleshoot problems. Why was the corn turning yellow? Why were the cattle doing poorly? The teacher would often identify disease, insect, fertility and other management problems and then give the appropriate advice on how to solve the problem.

The early teachers of agricultural education were pioneers in the effort to improve agriculture and promote scientific farming. Supervisory visits were a major tool used in these efforts.

There were a number of side benefits of making the supervisory visit. The teacher developed a better understanding of the community and its needs. By getting out into the community and seeing what was going on, the teacher could then adjust what was being taught in the classroom.

Another benefit of the supervisory visit was getting to know the parents and student better. If a teacher knew the parents on a personal basis and knew the home situation of the student, this information was very useful in handling discipline problems and in classroom control. The more visits the teacher made, the fewer the discipline problems in the classroom.

Since the Smith-Hughes Act required the students to have a farming program that was supervised, and since farming is a year-round activity, this led to the practice of having agricultural teachers employed on a 12-month contract. It was critical that the teacher be available to supervise during the height of the growing season, the summer.

While making SAE visits is no longer a federal mandate, it is still a sound educational practice. The curriculum and objectives of agricultural education have expanded, thus the focus of the SAE may have changed somewhat, but there is still a need for SAE supervision. So what is the objective of the SAE visit today?

1. Verify that the student does, indeed, have an SAE program. Federal law no longer requires agricultural students to have an SAE. However, a number of states and many teachers still insist on students having an SAE program. Many teachers base part of the students' agriculture grade on the SAE program. Just as an English teach can require students to write a research paper, or a biology teacher can require all students to do a science project, an agriculture teacher can require all students have an SAE.

2. Make sure the student is applying what is taught. The subject matter being taught in the agriculture classroom has changed in many states, but there is still an expectation that students will apply what is being taught in the classroom to the home situation. In some communities, this may include farming practices. In other localities it

could include small animal care, lawn care, forestry management, agricultural mechanics, etc. If the student is conducting agriscience research, is it being done properly?

3. Teach skills. There is still a need to teach skills on an individual basis. Some of the skills taught 75 years ago, such as taking a soil sample, are still just as appropriate today. We have merely added to the inventory of skills that can be taught on the SAE visit.

4. Look for problems that need to be fixed and give advice. This reason for making an SAE visit has not changed over the years, but the advice given has changed to reflect advancements in knowledge and practice.

5. See how the student is performing in placement situations and provide advice as appropriate. After the passage of the Vocational Education Act of 1963, placement as a type of SAE became more popular. SAE visits should occur where students are employed. The teacher will consult with both the student and the employer during the visit to make sure the student is learning, and there are no problems with the placement.

6. Public relations. Since society has become more urbanized, people today may not understand the modern program of agricultural education. They may not understand why agriculture is taught in the public schools. The teacher has a golden opportunity to promote agricultural education during the SAE visit.

The benefits of getting to know the community better through SAE visitation and to know the parents and student better still are valid today. It is amazing how one SAE visit can have a profound difference on the behavior of an individual student in the classroom.

BUILDING THE FOUNDATION FOR THE SUPERVISORY VISIT

There are several actions the teacher can perform that can make it easier to conduct SAE visits.

1. Send a welcome letter to new students. Some times it is a challenge to get students to understand that they should have an SAE and should belong to FFA. One way to greatly reduce this potential reluctance is to “strike first” before the student ever walks through the classroom door. It is recommended that a welcome letter be sent to

the student prior to the start of the semester in which the student is enrolled. A sample letter is in the Supervision and Resources Section of this document. In this letter the class in which the student is enrolled is described, along with paragraphs describing the FFA and SAE components of agricultural education. The letter is upbeat and positive but clearly conveys the message that the student will have to put some effort into the agriculture class and is expected to have an SAE and be a member of FFA.

Of course, the parents will read the letter. It would be a rare parent who doesn't want his/her son or daughter to develop leadership skills or gain practical knowledge that can be used in the future. A letter such as this sets the foundation for SAE supervisory visits.

2. Establish a regular routine for visits. SAE visits should be made year-round, not just in the summer. Some teachers with extended contracts believe the only time for SAE visitation is during the summer. While it is true that the original rationale for extended contracts was to visit the SAE during the summer, this is not the only time SAE visitation is to occur. Students may have problems at other times during the year or the SAE may not be conducted during the summer months. Therefore, the teacher should be involved in SAE visitation year-round.

One way to communicate clearly to students that SAE visitation is important is to schedule a regular, recurring time for SAE visits. There is an agriculture teacher in Ohio who schedules SAE visits every Thursday afternoon. This is announced to the students at the start of the school year. There is a sign up sheet for visits posted on the classroom bulletin board. Typically, the teacher will visit 2-3 students every Thursday afternoon. Students who live in the same geographic area are encouraged to all sign up for the same date. If a student doesn't voluntarily sign up for a visit, the teacher will ask the student when will be a good time for a visit. The simple process of scheduling one day a week for SAE visits and having a student sign up sheet has virtually eliminated any question that students will have an SAE and the teacher will supervise it.

3. Ask for a supervisory period and/or for a last period planning period. In some schools, agricultural teachers are given one class period a day for SAE supervision. This is in addition to the normal planning period. It is more commonly done where the teacher operates a coop program or has a large number of students involved

in SAE placement activities. During this period the teacher makes SAE supervisory visits. It is often scheduled for the last period of the day. If your administrators have never heard of this, the worst that can happen if you ask for it is they will say no. It does exist in some schools.

If you can't arrange for a supervision period, you might ask to have the last period of the day for your planning period. You could make visits during this time.

4. Teach about SAE visitation in class. Every teacher should teach a unit on SAEs early in the semester. One of the lessons in this unit should be on SAE supervision. Students need to be taught that the SAE will be supervised, and they should be taught what to expect on the visit. Then it will not be a surprise when the teacher asks to visit the SAE program.

5. Have an SAE bulletin board or website. A teacher should carry a digital camera in a visitation kit (more about that later) and take photographs of SAE programs. These photographs can then be displayed on a bulletin board in the classroom or posted on the chapter FFA website. When students see pictures of other students and their SAE program posted, they will be more receptive to having the teacher come for an SAE visit.

MAKING THE SAE VISIT

Every student is unique and every visit may be different. However, there are some general guidelines that will apply in most situations. There are three major factors to consider in making an SAE visit—the timing, preparing for the visit and the actual visit.

Timing of the visit. If at all possible, it is advantageous to visit the student prior to classes starting. When most teachers had extended contracts and the schools operated on a year-long schedule, it was an expectation that the agriculture teacher would visit all new students prior to the start of the school year. During this visit the teacher would meet the student and family, observe the farm or home situation and plant the seeds of SAE. This is still a recommended practice today. New students should be visited prior to the start of class.

The first regular SAE supervision visit should be immediately prior to or shortly after a major activity within the SAE. If a student is planning a garden, the teacher

should visit before planting occurs to make sure the student has carefully planned out the garden. When offspring are born, the teacher should visit soon afterwards to make sure the young are being cared for properly. When a student starts a new on-the-job placement, the teacher should make every attempt to visit the placement setting within the first two weeks. The commencement of an SAE activity is an opportune time for a visit. It is recommended that the teacher make a calendar of critical times associated with each SAE (when an animal was bred, planting dates, collection of data from an experiment, etc.) and then plan visits accordingly

Preparing for the Visit. Notify the student in advance. The student should know the date and approximate time of the visit. Parents should be aware of the visit and be available, if possible. If the visit is to a business, the manager or owner should be present at the time of the visit.

Prior planning with the student may be needed. Ask the student if there are certain things he or she needs help with or if there are certain expectations for the visit. The student or teacher may need to arrange to have equipment or supplies available. The student may need to be reminded to have the record book updated and available.

Review the observations and recommendations from past visits. What recommendations or suggestions were made? Forms for recording this information are found in the Supervision and Resources section of this document. Be prepared to check up on past recommendations. The student should be reminded that this will be done.

Dress appropriately for the visit. The teacher should wear clothing that is appropriate for the planned activities. What a teacher would wear to observe a placement situation in an agricultural financial center would probably be different than a visit to a student placed on a swine farm.

If you are visiting a student of the opposite sex, arrange to make two visits on one trip and visit the opposite sex first (if you are transporting the students in your vehicle). If the student will meet you at the site of the SAE, make sure there will be other people present.

Making the Visit. When you arrive at the site of the visit, first ask to meet the parents, employer or other adult supervisor. Introduce yourself and explain the purpose of your visit. Tactfully indicate that you are not there to evaluate the business, snoop or

criticize. You are there because you have a genuine interest in the student and want to see what you can do to help the student learn and grow. Be upbeat, positive and optimistic.

For entrepreneurship, research and improvement SAEs, ask to see the SAE. Invite the parents to accompany you. Ask questions of the students about the SAE. The majority of the observation time should be spent in questioning. Some possible questions might be:

What have you have done up to this point in time?

Why did you choose this SAE?

What successes have you had?

What types of problems have you encountered?

How have you solved these problems?

What would you do differently next time?

What changes do you plan on making?

What have you learned?

If the student is doing something wrong or corrections need to be made, attempt to do this through questioning. Resist the temptation to criticize. Some possible questions to lead the student to change are:

Have you thought about doing it this way?

What do you think would happen if we did this?

Are you currently pleased with the results?

Are there other ways to do this?

Would you be willing to try a different approach just to see what would happen?

As a part of the supervision process, ask to review the records. Spend some time looking at the records and asking questions about the record book.

The next step in the supervision visit is to provide individualized instruction or perform some activity if appropriate. Examples of activities might be taking a soil sample, grooming an animal, pruning a tree, conducting a crop yield check, taking a tissue sample, adjusting the height of a lawn mower, demonstrating how to use a software program, etc. The list of activities is endless and will vary greatly depending upon the type of SAE.

In concluding the SAE visit, always try to find something on which to compliment the student. Ask the student about future plans for the SAE program and future career plans. Discuss the progress of the student with the parents. Review with the student the improvements or changes he or she has agreed to make. End the visit by taking digital photographs of the student and his/her SAE program. These will go on the SAE bulletin board or website. The photos may even be used at the annual FFA banquet.

Prior to leaving, make a record of your observations and improvements the student plans to make. These data should be recorded on the SAE Supervision form.

The procedure for supervising a placement, agricultural service learning, directed school laboratory or exploratory SAE is similar. The primary difference is that you will also talk with the employer, manager or adult supervisor. You will want to verify that the student is exhibiting proper work behavior and attitudes and is meeting the expectations of the SAE.

SUPERVISION AND VISITATION RESOURCES

A. Sample Introductory Letter

Dear Student,

Your name appears on my class roll for Horticulture I next semester. I'm looking forward to having you in class. This class is one of the most exciting and interesting classes in school. We will learn all about plants and how to raise them. This course combines a healthy dose of academic work and hands-on activities. There is a lot of work involved, but we learn a lot and have fun.

There are two unique aspects of our agricultural education program. One is FFA, and the other is SAE. FFA is a leadership club where students practice and apply leadership skills. All students are expected to be in FFA. In FFA you will get to go on trips, participate in competitive activities, attend workshops and conventions, and develop leadership skills. Research indicates the leadership skills you learn in FFA will still be useful years from now.

The other unique aspect is a program called Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE). An SAE program is a series of activities done outside of class time in which you obtain "hands on" experience in agriculture. Instead of just talking about agriculture or reading books, you actually do things. In an SAE program, you can work in a greenhouse, observe agriculturists working, raise animals, plant trees, design landscapes, conduct agricultural experiments, work in an agribusiness, grow plants or do a variety of other things. You learn about agriculture by actually participating in it. All students are involved in SAE activities.

There are a number of reasons why you have an SAE program. As a result of participating in an SAE program you can:

- Develop skills that can be used in getting a job
- Earn money
- Win FFA awards (FFA proficiency awards are based on your SAE)
- Develop skills to start your own business
- Obtain skills and knowledge that will be helpful in college
- Learn more about possible careers
- Develop management skills
- Learn how to keep accurate records
- Advance in FFA (FFA degrees are based on your SAE)
- Improve decision making skills
- Develop skills that can be used as a hobby or for recreation.

You will learn how to organize and conduct an SAE program in this class. I will actually go out into the community to supervise your SAE. The SAE is a bridge between where you are and where you can be in the future. I am looking forward to having you in class this semester.

Sincerely,

Your Agriculture Teacher

B. Visitation Took Kit

It is highly recommended that the teacher have an SAE Supervision Took Kit. This tool kit is actual a plastic storage container that is kept in the teacher's vehicle. It contains a variety of items that might be useful in making an SAE supervision visit. What goes in the tool kit will vary depending upon what part of the county in which one teaches and the types of SAE programs the students conduct. Following is a list of some possible items for a visitation kit. It would be a rare kit that contains all these items. This is not an all inclusive list, and one could easily think of other items that could be added.

- Digital camera with extra battery
- County map showing all the back roads
- Soil test probe
- Plastic bucket
- Soil test container
- Biltmore stick (for determining board feet in a tree)
- 100 ft. tape measure
- A spring scale
- A burlap bag (Note the tape measure, spring scale, and gunny sack can be used to perform corn yield checks)
- Handiwipes
- Knife
- Roll of paper towels
- Work boots
- 2nd pair of socks
- Assorted publications such as an insect identification book, state chemical guide, etc.
- First aid kit
- Set of sockets, wrenches and screwdrivers
- Antifreeze tester

C. SAE Supervision forms

Three different sample SAE supervision forms follow. It is recommended that the teacher develop an observation form appropriate for his/her situation. These forms can provide ideas or can be used as is. The forms are:

- On Site Instruction and SAE Evaluation Form – This form comes from the FFA Local Program Success guide and was originally developed by Kit Hamiltion and Harold Niehaus at Preble Shawnee High School in Ohio. It can be found electronically at http://www.ffa.org/ageducators/html/core_lps.htm. (Note: If you don't see it under the SAE Handbook, look under the FFA Handbook.)
- SAE Program Supervision Record - The New Teacher Survival Guide website at Texas Tech University was the source of this form. The website is http://www.depts.ttu.edu/agriculturalteachers/Survival/AGTCHNBK/10SAE.pdf
- SAE Visitation Form – This form is found in the Local Program Success Guide and comes from Kris Krems, Cuyahoga Valley Career Center in Ohio. This form can be found electronically at http://www.ffa.org/ageducators/documents/lps_guide.pdf in chapter 2.

On Site Instruction and SAE Evaluation Form

Local Program SUCCESS for agricultural education®

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Date: _____ Student's Name: _____

Student Site of SAE Visit: ☐ Home ☐ School ☐ Lab ☐ Ag Bus. Worksite ☐ Other

SAE Description _____ Site Phone: _____

Parent/Guardian _____ Phone: _____

Evaluation Area	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent	Points x	weight factor =	points earned
	1 Point	2 Points	3 Points	4 Points	5 Points			
SAE Record Books	Not Available	Available / Not Started	Available/ Started	Available and up to Date with Questions	Available/ Up to Date with Documentation		3	0
General Record Book	Not Available	Available / Not Started	Available/ Started	Available and up to Date with Questions	Available/ Up to Date with Documentation		2	0
Home and Community Improvement	Not Available	Available / Not Started	Available/ Started	Available and up to Date with Questions	Available/ Up to Date with Documentation		1	0
Student Evaluation of SAE Assessment Form	Not Available	Not Completed prior to On-Site Instruction	Completed with Assistance	Completed and Reasonable	Completed and Justifiable		1	0
Agricultural Experience Observation	No Student Work Observed/No Decision Making	Little Student Work Observed/No Decision Making	Student Work is Evident with Some Student Responsibility	Student Work Shows Evidence of Consistent Effort and Responsibility	Student Work Shows Evidence of Consistent Effort, Responsibility, and Decision Making		3	0
					TOTAL	(50 points possible)		0

Additional Comments:

_____

_____

_____

Teacher: _____ (Signature) Parent/Guardian/Student: _____ (Signature)

Source: Kit Hamilton and Harold Niehaus, agriculture teachers, Preble Shawnee High School, Camden Ohio

FORM

SAE PROGRAM SUPERVISION RECORD

Student name: _____ Date: _____

Travel (miles) _____ Time: _____ to _____

Description and observation of current SAE program:

_____

_____

Suggestions, comments and instruction offered to student:

_____

_____

_____

Future needs, education, support and/or follow-up:

_____

_____

_____

Condition of records: ☐ Excellent ☐ Good ☐ Poor

Discussed program with parent(s)/guardian(s) or employer during visit: ☐ yes ☐ no

Name(s): _____

Other Notes:

_____

_____

Signatures:

Student: _____

☐ Parent/Guardian: ☐ Employer: _____

Instructor: _____

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SAE Visitation Form

Teachers: Fill out this form when you visit students' SAEs to keep track of their progress.

DATE OF VISIT: _____ TIME OF VISIT: _____

STUDENT'S NAME: _____

WORKSITE: _____

SUPERVISOR: _____

SUMMARY OF SITE VISITATION

COMMENTS BY STUDENT: (if applicable)

TEACHER COMMENTS: (Describe how students' activities relate to instruction.)

RECOMMENDATIONS/NEXT STEPS:

_____

Student's Signature Date

_____

Teacher's Signature Date

Source: Kris Krems, agriculture teacher, Cuyahoga Valley Career Center, Ohio

SAE SUPERVISION AND VISITATION IDEAS

1. During the summer, group the visitations by township or geographic areas. Before school dismisses for the summer, determine which township/geographic area will be visited on which dates. Let the students who live in the various areas know which date you will be in that area.

2. Before school is out for the summer, obtain a supply of postcards from the postal service. Have each student address a postcard to his or her home. On the message side of the card, have the students write out the message "I will be visiting SAE projects in _____ township on _____ (date). Please try to be home on that date. If you will not be at home, please call me at _____ to let me know." Collect the postcards and sign each postcard. Mail out these postcards a week or so before the planned visit.

3. Obtain e-mail addresses from each student and establish an e-mail mailing list of students. Send reminders out via e-mail of your supervision schedule during the summer.

4. Post a weekly or monthly schedule of your activities during the summer on your office or classroom door. If the school administration, students or other people are looking for you, they will know where you are. A good rule of thumb is that half of the time during the summer should be spent on SAE supervision.

5. For students with directed school laboratory SAE programs, the school facility may need to be open during the summer. It is a good practice, especially if the SAE involves agricultural mechanics, to have the school agricultural mechanics laboratory open one day a week during the summer. Friday is often a good day. Students are told before school lets out for the summer that the agricultural department will be open for student use every Friday. Students are encouraged to come to school to work on projects or practice their mechanical skills.

6. SAE supervision doesn’t have to be done solely by the agriculture teacher. Just as alumni and others in the community are willing to help train CDE teams, chaperone students on trips, etc., they are also willing to supervise SAEs. Orange High School in North Carolina has a corps of alumni who come to school to help supervise activities in the school shop, greenhouse and livestock facility. West Craven High School in North Carolina has a group of retirees who perform similar duties. Don’t hesitate to think outside the box in regards to SAE supervision.

7. In programs with large numbers of students, it is a challenge to visit each student. One alternative that may help is to have students bring in photos of the SAE. The teacher can get a general overview of the SAE by observing the photo. While this does not take the place of an on-site supervision, it is better than not visiting the SAE at all.