

January 14, 2022

Agricultural Educators,

In these rapidly changing times with new COVID variants, testing protocols, extensive illnesses, and lives disrupted, witnessing the harmonious and cooperative spirit among the agricultural education family has been remarkable. Our priority is to continue to provide our agricultural community with the support and services you can count on every day during this time of uncertainty. As new developments emerge regarding our programming or events, we'll share information with you via list serves, as well as post this information on our website.

The health and safety of those in our agricultural education community, teachers, and our students remains our top priority. Given the uncertainty surrounding the Omicron variant, **as of 1/14/2022, New York Agricultural Education and FFA have made the difficult decisions to cancel the FFA Member Leadership Series Conference for students** (formerly 212/360) on January 29-30, 2022 in Syracuse, and the **State Leaders Conference** on February 14-15, 2022 in Albany.

For complete information and updates regarding changes to the FFA Member Leadership Conference, January Professional Development for teachers, LDE's, Sub-States, and the Welding Boot Camp, please visit the following link:

While it is disappointing that we will not be able to gather in person for some of our upcoming events, our hope is that we will be able to prioritize live in-person events in the future when it is safe to gather in large groups.

As we navigate these uncertain times, the well-being and safety of everyone will always remain our utmost priority. We are committed to facing these challenges and disappointments together, and dedicated to helping you stay informed about important agricultural education events and steps we are taking to serve all of our teachers and students throughout this pandemic and beyond.

As always, please reach out anytime with questions.

COVID Leadership Team

Shari Lighthall, Director, NYS Agricultural Education Outreach

Derek Hill, NY FFA Director

Betsy Foote, NYS FFA/NYAAE Governing Board Chair, President

Tara Berescik, NYS FFA/NYAAE Governing Board Chair, President Elect

Todd Eick, NYS FFA/NYAAE Trustee and Finance Chair

Programming Updates Related to COVID for January-March 2022

1/14/2022

We continue to face challenges with the ongoing pandemic. Unfortunately, we have had to make changes to our programming for a third straight year due to COVID-19. These are never easy decisions, and it disappoints us all when opportunities are cancelled or diminished. However, the safety of our students, teachers, staff, volunteers, etc. are at the center of our discussions and decisions. We will get through this and are optimistic that we will be able to hold events later in the year. Below are the updates as it relates to our upcoming events January-March.

2022 FFA Member Leadership Series:

- The student programming is cancelled for this event for the following reasons:
 - Continued wide-spread infections of COVID-19 across our state
 - With over one thousand participants registered, we are no longer able to properly social distance at all times.
 - We also have concerns with our ability to enforce all the preventative measures (proper masking, handwashing, social distancing during meals, etc.) in place regarding COVID-19 at Member Leadership Series
 - Chapters have already begun to cancel on their own

- What if we already submitted our payment for MLS?
 - All payments received will be returned

- The professional development programming for teachers is going to take place as scheduled with the following updates:
 - With space now available due to the cancellation of the student programming we will be using larger meetings spaces, which will allow us to socially distance
 - If a teacher decides not to participate because they are no longer bringing students to the event, or they don't feel comfortable coming they will be able to cancel their registration without penalty
 - Teachers will receive a communication early next week assessing if they still plan to attend. If you are attending a new invoice will be issued and there will not be any late fees assessed.
 - We are requiring proof of vaccination or negative test within 48hrs

2022 State Leaders Experience:

- This program is cancelled for this year for the following reasons:
 - Continued wide-spread infections of COVID-19 across our state

-The Legislative Office Building (LOB) is currently closed (visitors are not allowed in the LOB) and would severely limit our ability to meet with legislators in-person

-Other like-minded organizations have or are considering cancelling their advocacy events in Albany and switching to virtual

-Individual opportunities that can still have an impact on students and support from our legislators can still be done at the local level:

-We will still be providing resources for teachers to use in their classrooms and to set up meetings virtually or at their legislator's local office

-We encourage all our chapters to take advantage of the resources we have available and still meet with your legislators either virtually or if you are able to at their local office or invite them to your school

2022 District and Sub-State LDE's

Districts:

-To allow as many students as possible to still have this enrichment experience in-person, we are going to allow each district to decide how they would like to proceed with their district level event based on local circumstances. The district host will take the lead on coordinating the district level LDE's. Below are options that each district should consider:

1. In-person event only
 - a. The event will be conducted as planned
 - b. Follow all stated COVID guidelines (including the capacity limits of the facility)
2. Hybrid event
 - a. Those that can attend in-person will and those that are restricted by their school district from traveling would be able to compete virtually
 - b. To try and make this equitable, we are encouraging those districts that go in this direction have the students competing virtually do so through a live virtual platform (Zoom, Google Meet, etc.) on the same day with the same judges
 - c. Follow all stated COVID guidelines (Including the capacity limits of the facility)
3. Virtual only
 - a. The event would be transitioned into a completely virtual event
 - b. As with the hybrid event, we would encourage hosts to do this live through a virtual platform, however if you choose to allow video submissions there will need to be some additional rules in place that we can assist you with based on our experience last year

- We want to encourage all the district advisors to work together to come to a consensus with the host advisor taking the lead
- If the date of your event needs to be pushed back because of the changes we encourage you to do so as long as it is before March 9, 2022
- The district host will communicate any changes made regarding the district LDE event
- State staff will assist hosts with any questions they may have and is prepared to provide support as needed

Sub-States:

- We are currently still planning to host these events in-person
 - At this time students and teachers should plan to compete in-person, not virtually for sub-states
- As we get closer to March, if the pandemic is still causing safety concerns about traveling, we will transition to a virtual event. We will decide by 2/19/2022.

February Welding Boot Camp:

- At this time, we plan to proceed with this program as planned with this small group of teachers.
- We are requiring proof of vaccination or negative test within 48hrs