

Abstract of The ACRE Project

Secondary Education, Two-Year Postsecondary Education, and Agriculture in the K-12 Classroom Challenge Grants Program (SPECA)

Agriculture Creating Rural Entrepreneurs

Overview

The ACRE Project (Agriculture Creating Rural Entrepreneurs) seeks to “promote and strengthen secondary and postsecondary agriscience and agribusiness education” in Carroll County by reinforcing connections between the school district, the cooperative extension service, and state universities in Kentucky with the overarching goal of encouraging more students to “pursue and complete baccalaureate degrees in these areas.”

Background

Located at the confluence of the Kentucky and Ohio Rivers, Carroll County has a rich agricultural history. Before the age of mass truck transport, Carroll County’s strategic position astride the two main waterways of the state was a strength. Additionally, during that time, the business of farming was big business in the county.

According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), Carroll County boasted more than 1,100 farms in 1909, containing more than 80,000 acres of total farm land.

Almost 100 years later, the number of farms has dropped by 72%, and acres of farmland have dropped by 21%.

If this reduction in farms and farming was a case of creative destruction, where new industries replace old ones, Carroll County’s situation would not be so dire.

As it is, the county has averaged a 9.98% unemployment rate for the past year (Bureau of Labor Statistics). 20.6% of the county’s children live in poverty, and 29.7% of children in the county are born to mothers who lack a high school diploma. Additionally, only 8.1% of the county’s residents hold a bachelor’s degree or higher. In order to reach Kentucky’s rate of 20.6%, 1,352 more college graduates would need to be added to the population, a 155% increase over the current number. Furthermore, 24.2% of the population lives below the poverty level, which is 6.1% higher than Kentucky’s 18.1% (2010 United States Census). All indicators point to a community in need of supportive initiatives that will increase student achievement as well as the odds of future success.

In other words, what Carroll County needs is an agricultural revival.

The local population, with historical ties to agriculture, has become divorced from its economic roots. The ACRE Program seeks to reverse this trend by encouraging more of the county’s youth to pursue degrees in agribusiness and agriscience by way of establishing career pathways starting at Carroll County High School.

The ACRE Program

Revitalizing Carroll County's farming economy will require a reinvigorated, local agri-economy built on the foundation of local students moving from Carroll County High School's agriculture program into post-secondary degree programs in agribusiness and agriscience.

Carroll County High School has an existing connection with the University of Kentucky where students can take video course modules of an Animal Science class, which allows them to get dual credit. Building on this connection and cultivating new connections with other state universities will allow CCHS students to earn up to twelve hours of dual credit toward degrees in agribusiness and agriscience.

Beyond dual credit opportunities, students who participate in the ACRE program will have the opportunity to co-op with local agribusinesses (veterinary clinics, feed stores, farms, etc.) during the students' senior year.

Finally, each student in the ACRE program will be matched with a mentor from the local business community who will help guide the student through the basics of rural entrepreneurship and leadership.

The end result will be graduating seniors from CCHS who have twelve credit hours of agriscience and agribusiness classes, who have real-world experience working in local agribusinesses, and who have training in the basics of rural entrepreneurship.

Overall Goal

The overarching goal of the ACRE Program is to create a new generation of rural agri-entrepreneurs who will help revitalize Carroll County's agricultural community.

By 2025, the ACRE Program hopes to have its graduates found 100 new agribusinesses in Carroll County, businesses ranging from land and soil surveying, veterinary science, community food co-ops, and small-scale farms to agricultural auction houses, farm equipment servicers, and agricultural-based construction firms.

Through a unique partnership between a local school district, an extension agency, and state universities, the ACRE program has the potential to revive not only Carroll County's economy but also its cultural heritage.