



2026 National FFA Organization

Agriscience Research

Proficiency Awards

Handbook

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Official Rules and Policies

for the Agricultural Proficiency Awards Program.

Refer to the Agricultural Proficiency Program webpage at FFA.org/proficiency for the most up-to-date edition of the handbook.

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FFA VISION

Growing the next generation of leaders who will change the world.

FFA Mission

FFA makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education.

Guiding Principles

National FFA believes that awards and competitive events should:

1. Be inclusive and engaging for all students and FFA members.
2. Provide awards and recognition opportunities for students at all levels.
3. Inspire members to explore, learn, and be prepared for future careers related to the AFNR career pathways and FFA AFNR Value Chain.
4. Recognize achievements in skill development and knowledge, including:
 - a. leveraging relevant technologies
 - b. utilizing creative problem-solving
 - c. meeting developmentally appropriate learning objectives (Bloom's Taxonomy)
 - d. utilizing employability skills (teamwork, communication, collaboration)
5. Work with other groups to utilize or partner with existing experiences.
6. Provide feedback that promotes personal and professional growth.

National Quality Program Standards for Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resource Education

The National Council for Agricultural Education has provided permission to the National FFA Organization to use the National AFNR Career Cluster Content Standards in the development of their educational resource materials. AFNR Career Cluster Content Standards © 2016 and reserves all rights to the original material used here with permission. In addition, The National Association of State Directors of Career and Technical Education/National Career Technical Education Foundation (NASDCTE/NCTEF) has provided permission to use the Common Career and Technical Core (CCTC) Standards in support of this project. NASDCTE/NCTEF are the owners and developers of the Common Career and Technical Core (CCTC) Standards © 2012 and reserve all rights to the original material used here with permission.

The National AFNR Career Cluster Content Standards are a guide to developing a well-planned curriculum in agriscience education to be delivered to students throughout the country. For a complete set of the standards, please visit the [2016 AFNR Career Cluster Content Standards](#).

The National FFA Organization has adopted the National AFNR Career Cluster Content and integrated them into the national award and recognition programs for the benefit of members, school administration and agriculture as a whole.

AGRICULTURAL PROFICIENCY AWARDS

What Are They?

Agricultural Proficiency Awards are based entirely on a member's Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE). These awards recognize individual skills and career-based competencies developed through multiple years of participation in Immersion type SAE projects.

Agricultural Proficiency Awards are divided into "areas" where members exploring or becoming established in specific agricultural career pathways can receive recognition. Each area has a specific description that the SAE project must fit to apply in that area.

Proficiency award areas do not and are not meant to define SAEs. Not all SAE projects will have a proficiency award area to be recognized in, though areas are added and updated each year, attempting to include as many SAE projects as possible.

For Which Agricultural Proficiency Award Does My SAE Qualify?

There are three important steps to selecting the right proficiency award area to apply in: determining the SAE type, determining the correct application type and finding the best proficiency award area.

SAE Types

The correct SAE type must first be known to determine which Agricultural Proficiency Award area an applicant should apply in. Five SAE types are recognized by the [National Council for Agricultural Education](#) and defined by the [SAE for All Guidelines](#). Learn more about these on the website [SAE for All](#).

Click any of the following to learn about and accurately determine the type of SAE:

- [Placement/Internship SAE](#)
- [Ownership/Entrepreneurship SAE](#)
- [Research: Experimental, Analysis or Invention SAE](#)
- [School-Based Enterprise SAE](#)
- [Service-Learning SAE](#)

Award Application Types

Once the correct SAE type is determined, the next step is to select the correct Agricultural Proficiency Award application type. There are four application types. This handbook deals specifically with the first type, the Agriscience Research type:

- **AGRISCIENCE RESEARCH** – This application type is for Research SAE projects in which members are actively engaged in doing their own research individually, as well as those students who may be cooperating on research projects with others including but not limited to teams in school, experiment stations or colleges/universities. The member must be actively involved in the development
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of the experimental design, formulation of the hypothesis, collection of data, interpretation of the data and publicizing the results to be considered for an agriscience research proficiency award.

The other three types of proficiency award applications are covered specifically in the [Agricultural Proficiency Awards Handbook](#). Change to this handbook for information specific to these agricultural proficiency award types.

- **ENTREPRENEURSHIP** – The application type is for Ownership/Entrepreneurship SAE projects, School-based Enterprise SAE projects and some Service-Learning SAE projects.
- **PLACEMENT** – This application type is for all Placement/Internship SAE projects and some Service-Learning SAE projects.
- **COMBINED** – This application type is for applicants who have multiple SAE projects, some of which are fit into the Entrepreneurship application type and some of which fit into the Placement application type. This application allows both SAE types to be included.

Award Areas

The list of available Agricultural Proficiency Award areas is updated yearly and released each fall. The current list is available on the [Agricultural Proficiency Awards webpage](#) of FFA.org.

Carefully review the current year's award area list to find an award area description that matches the SAE project(s). Read all possible award areas to be certain. Some types of agriculture are specifically specified in certain areas. If the wrong award area is selected, the application will perform poorly in the judging process.

With constant changes in agriculture and the creativity of students, parents and advisors, it is possible to have an SAE project that will not fit into any Agricultural Proficiency Award area. Updates are made each year, attempting to include all types of SAE projects.

Local chapters and state FFA associations may offer additional or different agricultural proficiency award areas for local and state-level competition. Only the current year list, published by the National FFA Organization, is applicable for national-level competition.

Consult with the chapter FFA advisor, state or national FFA staff if help is needed to determine the most appropriate Agricultural Proficiency Award area for an SAE project.

Competition and Recognition Levels

Agricultural Proficiency Awards start competing at the chapter level and are narrowed down through multiple levels of competition until a single national winner in each award area is

named at the National FFA Convention & Expo. Opportunities for awards and recognition are provided at each level.

- **CHAPTER** – Agricultural Proficiency Award applications start the competition process at the local chapter level. Check local chapter and state rules to ensure eligibility, meet local deadlines, and use the correct application forms and procedures. Chapters have many options to provide recognition to local winners. Certificates, pins, plaques and even cash awards may be offered.
- **DISTRICT/AREA/REGION** – Some but not all state associations have competition levels between the chapter and state levels. Consult state FFA staff in your state association for information, rules and instructions. Winners at these levels are recognized for winning above the chapter level.
- **STATE** – State FFA associations set their own rules, deadlines, application procedures and judging processes for recognizing Agricultural Proficiency Award competitors. Consult your state association for the specifics. Through funds given by National FFA Foundation donors, associations are provided financial support from the National FFA Organization to recognize state winners. Check with your state FFA association to discover the state recognition offered.
- **NATIONAL** – The National FFA Organization allows each state association to submit one national competitor in each current year's Agricultural Proficiency Award area for competition at the national level. Each state association may submit only FFA members from their association.

If an FFA member moves to another state between the time of qualifying as an association's national competitor and the national level competition, the member is still eligible to compete at the national level for that award year from the original state association.

National-level competitors receive a rating of Participant, Bronze, Silver, Gold, National Finalist or National Winner from the national judges.

- **Participant Rating** – Applications rated Participant are not recognized on the national website or provided an award pin. These applications generally have major errors such as being submitted on the wrong application type, being non-agricultural or being submitted in the wrong proficiency award area.
- **Gold, Silver, Bronze** – Applicants are listed on the National FFA Organization website and receive a bronze, silver or gold medallion to wear on their FFA jacket. Gold-rated applications received high scores from judges. Silver-rated applications received middle scores, and bronze-rated applications received low scores from the judges.
- **National Finalist** – Four competitors in each award area are rated National Finalist. These applicants move on to the finals round of judging and are expected to attend the National FFA Convention & Expo to be recognized in person. These applications are recognized on the National FFA Organization website and may receive certificates, medals, plaques, or cash awards.

- o **National Winner** – One applicant from the four National Finalists is selected in the finals round of judging as the National Winner. This achievement is announced live during the National FFA Convention & Expo. The national winner is recognized on the National FFA Organization website and may receive additional certificates, medals, plaques, or cash awards.

National Application and Competition Rules

Agricultural Proficiency Awards are available to all FFA members, including students with disabilities, who meet the following minimum qualifications:

1. Applicants must be current National FFA Organization members in good standing during the membership year in which the application is submitted for each level of competition.
2. Only activities, events and SAE records that took place while an active FFA member may be included in the application.
 - a. *EXAMPLE: Juanita began conducting sheep research at the age of 8. Only what happened while she was an active FFA member can be included in the proficiency award application. The earnings, activities she performed, skills she learned, etc. before becoming an FFA member may not be included in the award application.*
3. Applicants may apply through the calendar year immediately following high school graduation but not beyond.
 - a. *EXAMPLE: Tom graduated from high school in 2024, so he may apply for a proficiency award in 2025. Jane graduated in 2023, so she is no longer eligible to apply.*
4. SAE records, information about activities and skills acquired after Dec. 31 of the calendar year before application submission may not be included.
 - a. *EXAMPLE: In January 2025, Jamal applies in his chapter, hoping to compete in the 2025 state-level competition. On Nov. 31, 2024, he started a new phase of his research project. In Feb. of 2025, he had new research findings. Jamal could include information about starting the new research phase in his application since he started it before the application's end date. He could not include any information in his application about the progress or findings of his research since it happened after Dec. 31, 2024.*
5. Applicants may be submitted for national competition only once, in the same agricultural proficiency award area.
 - a. *EXAMPLE: In 2023, Min was submitted by her state FFA association to compete at the national level in the Agriscience Research - Plant Systems proficiency award area. In 2024 she expanded her research and now wants to apply for the Agriscience Research - Plant Systems proficiency award again in 2025. She is no longer eligible to apply in this proficiency area since she was already submitted at the national level in a previous year.*

- Min started a new and different research project in the Power, Structure and Technical Systems area in 2023. She can still apply for the Agriscience Research – Integrated Systems proficiency award area since she has not yet competed in that area. She would include only information about the power, structural and technical systems project in the application.*
6. A state association may submit an applicant for national competition in only a single award area in a single award year.
 - a. *Example: Festus raises catfish, does research and experimentation on the catfish and works for a local landscaper trimming trees and shrubs. His state FFA association rules allow applicants to apply in multiple Agricultural Proficiency Award areas in the same year. Festus is selected as the winner in both the Specialty Animal award area and the Agriscience Research – Animal Systems proficiency award area. Only one of these applications may be submitted by the state association for national competition.*
 7. Applicants can compete at the national level only in the same calendar year and award area in which they are submitted for national competition by the state association.
 8. National level applications must include SAE records from at least two calendar years for the specific SAE project(s) on which the application is based. **NOTE:** *More years make the application more competitive.*
 - a. *Example: Cindy started a social science research project in 2023. She could not apply in 2024 since she can report only one calendar year of research records. She continues the SAE project through 2024 and can now apply in 2025 since she has SAE records for this project covering at least two calendar years.*

Zara from the neighboring state began doing social science agriscience research in 2021 and has completed one multi-year study and three smaller social systems research projects. She applies in 2025 with four years of records and experiences. Zara's application scores higher than Cindy's.
 9. The SAE project(s) detailed in the application must be agricultural in nature and meet the written description of the award area.
 - a. *Example: Liam conducts research on the most popular type of music in his county. He applies for an Agriscience Research – Animal Systems proficiency award. Liam's application is ruled out of area by the judges. The project is non-agricultural and does not meet the award area description, which specifies conducting research related to animals.*

How to Complete the Application

The application provides information to judges about the applicant's Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) project(s). Questions are designed to give judges a detailed look at the project, how it has developed, and what the applicant has learned and earned. The best start to an application is a complete set of SAE project records.

The application is electronic and completed online. A reliable internet connection is required to access and complete the application.

This portion of the handbook explains the application sections and provides instructions, definitions, examples and helpful hints for each section of the application.

Professional Integrity

FFA members participating in national FFA programs and events understand and agree that all work must result from their own effort and ability, created, and completed alone (except for partner or chapter applications). When outside sources (direct quotes or phrases, specific dates, figures, or other materials) are used for a project, document, or application, the required reference citation must be completed according to the rules specified by the applicable handbook.

While participating in National FFA programs, FFA members are prohibited from:

- Plagiarizing
- Violating copyright
- Cheating
- Falsifying information
- Using another person's results or thoughts as their own, even with this person's permission. This includes work done by a family member or a mentor.
- Using information or data obtained from the internet without proper citation.

Any attempt to gain an unfair advantage will not be tolerated. Non-compliance represents plagiarism and will automatically disqualify a member.

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for National Programs and Events

Artificial intelligence (AI) refers to computer systems capable of performing complex tasks that historically only a human could do, such as reasoning, making decisions, or solving problems. As AI continues to evolve, it can be a tremendous tool to help companies, organizations and individuals enhance their productivity and work. Therefore, the National FFA Organization allows the use of AI tools. FFA members may use AI tools, such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and CoPilot, to assist them in their learning.

Appropriate uses of AI may include:

- generating ideas for any FFA-related assignments, projects, contests and award applications
- checking facts of a phenomenon
- checking for and correcting grammatical errors in a paper written by a member

For more information, please see the [Standard Operating Procedures on the Use of Artificial Intelligence \(AI\) for National Programs and Events document](#).

Code of Conduct

FFA members participating in National FFA programs understand and agree to abide by the [National FFA Code of Conduct](#).

Overview

1. Report your records on a project basis.
2. Review your chapter and state association rules and submission deadlines.
3. Obtain the required signatures on the application in the proper places.

4. Review your application carefully for spelling, grammar or mathematical errors. Spell check is available in every text box.
5. Include only your share of all research, inventory, income and net worth in the award application if the SAE project involves multiple people.
6. Verify that the figures used are true and match your SAE records. Round them to the nearest dollar. Applications that are incomplete or have mathematical errors are penalized.
7. Use information and examples on the [Agricultural Proficiency Awards](https://www.ffa.org) webpage of [FFA.org](https://www.ffa.org) to clarify and assist you in completing your application.

Instructions and Icons in Application

Carefully reading the "Instructions" screen/page of the electronic application before beginning the application will help avoid technical issues and save much frustration while filling out the application.

For help and tips, click on the following icons as you complete the application:



Click on this icon to get additional help and tips for that application section.



Click on this icon for tips from the scoring rubric to help get maximum points.

Read the instructions and "Special Notes" at the top of each screen/page in the electronic application carefully. This will save a great deal of time and effort.

Application Screens/Pages

The following information will cover each screen/page of the electronic application.

Cover Page

1. **Name:** Enter your name or confirm that your name is spelled correctly if already entered. Be certain your name is typed exactly as you want it to appear on awards, websites and press releases. National FFA staff download this information directly from the application, so your name will appear exactly as shown in the application.
 - a. If the box is grey and will not allow you to type in it, change the information in your record book where the information is downloading from.
2. **Name on FFA Roster (if different):** If the name you entered on the application is different from your name shown on the FFA roster, type your name here exactly as it appears on the FFA roster. This helps staff confirm FFA membership eligibility.

3. **Chapter ID:** This information will load automatically into the application based on the login credentials used to start the application.
4. **FFA Member ID#:** This information will load automatically into the application based on the login credentials used to start the application.
5. **Name Pronunciation:** Provide an easy-to-read pronunciation example of your name so award announcers can pronounce it correctly.
6. **Personal Telephone Number:** Provide the best phone number to reach you. This number will be kept private. FFA staff will only call to provide assistance and correct errors.
7. **Home Mailing Address:** All mail will be sent to this address, including, in some cases, checks. Be certain this address is complete and correct. DO NOT USE the school address.
8. **Email Address:** This is the primary way FFA staff will communicate to provide information on competitions and awards. Provide an email address that will remain active even after high school graduation. Your email address will not be sold or provided to anyone outside of FFA without your permission.
9. **Physical Address:** If your mailing address is different from your physical address, complete this section. This ensures packages can be delivered as some mail cannot be delivered to P.O. boxes.
10. **Names of Parents/Guardians:** This information is used for press releases and award announcements. Ensure the spellings are correct and the name(s) is the one they wish to use.
11. **FFA Chapter Name:** Provide the official name of the FFA chapter (Example: Western FFA).
12. **Name of High School:** Give the complete official name of the school as it is often different from the chapter name. This information will be used on websites and press releases.
13. **School Address:** FFA advisor(s) or other school officials will be sent mail at this address.
14. **School Telephone Number:** Include the area code and number where your FFA advisor or school officials can be reached.
15. **Chapter Advisor(s):** Click the (Refresh) link to load this information automatically from the FFA.org Chapter Profile. If the information is not up-to-date, ask your advisor to update the information.
16. **Year of High School Graduation (or expected graduation):** Enter the calendar year you will graduate from high school. This date will determine your award eligibility.
17. **Years of Ag Education Offered (grades 7-12) in High School Attended:** This number provides important data to National FFA.
18. **Years of Ag Education Completed in High School:** This number provides important data to National FFA.

Membership Check

This information will load automatically into the application based on the login credentials used to start the application.

- Click the "Refresh Membership Data" button if the information is not complete.
- Read the "Special Notes for this page" at the top of the screen if you have issues.

Proficiency Area

Click the "Select" button next to the proficiency area you wish to apply for. Make this selection carefully for your application to compete well. Read the "Special Notes for this page" at the top of the screen for assistance.

Basic Setup

This page interacts with and impacts the following screens/pages in the application. It should be completed before trying to enter data into the following screens/pages:

1. Dates for This Application

- Beginning Date** – Enter the date the SAE project(s) included in the application began or the date your FFA membership began, whichever is later.
 - Example: FFA membership began Aug. 1, 2020. The SAE project(s) on which the application is based did not begin until June 1, 2021. Enter June 1, 2021, as the later date. This will ensure that only records from this specific SAE project(s) will be included in the application.*
 - The beginning date **MUST** be entered on the Basic Setup page for the rest of the application pages to work properly.
- Ending Date** – Enter the year prior to the National FFA Convention year in which the application will be submitted for competition.
 - Example: The ending date for an application that will be turned in to compete at the state or national level in 2025 must have an ending date of 2024.*
 - IMPORTANT** – Only records and activities that occurred prior to the ending date of the application are eligible to be entered into the application. Any mention of records, skills, events or activities that occur after this date will cause the application to be penalized. *(Including future SAE goals or plans is acceptable; reporting outcomes is not.)*
 - Want to add years to an application already started in a prior year? Changing the Ending Date will allow additional years of records to be entered into the application.

2. Proficiency Type

Based on the research project(s) you will include in the application choose the correct option from the dropdown menu.

3. Primary Pathway

These are the Agriculture Food and Natural Resources pathways created by the [National Council for Agricultural Education](#). To learn more about the pathways and see all of the possible standards in each pathway review the [2016 AFNR Career Cluster Content Standards](#).

Select the primary pathway your SAE fits into. Even if entering multiple SAE projects from different pathways, one of the eight career pathways or Career Ready Practices or Cluster Skills must be selected. For only the Agricultural Communications and Agricultural Education award areas Career Ready Practices or Cluster Skills may be selected.

The pathway selected will determine the Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources (AFNR) Performance Indicators available to select in a later section of the application. This selection can be changed at any time, but if the pathway is changed and the "Skills, Competencies and Knowledge" portion of the application has been completed, this section will need to be redone.

Pathways available to select are:

- a) **Agribusiness Systems** – The application of business principles, including management, marketing and finance to agriculture, food and natural resources.
- b) **Animal Systems** – Applying and managing animal life processes, health, nutrition, genetics and processing.
- c) **Biotechnology Systems** – The use of data and techniques of applied science to solve problems concerning living organisms.
- d) **Environmental Service Systems** – Using instruments and technology used in waste management and to influence the environment.
- e) **Food Products and Processing Systems** – Developing and applying skills in product development, quality assurance, food safety, production, and regulation and compliance within the food science industry.
- f) **Natural Resource Systems** – The management of soil, water, wildlife, forests and air as natural resources.
- g) **Plant Systems** – Applying and managing plant life cycles, classifications, functions and practices to crops, turf grass, trees and shrubs and/or ornamental plants.
- h) **Power, Structure and Technical Systems** – Developing and applying skills creating, using, or maintaining agricultural equipment, power systems, alternative fuel sources, and precision technology, as well as woodworking, metalworking, welding, and project planning for agricultural structures.

Tip: Career Ready Practices and Cluster Skills are not actually AFNR Pathways but rather practices and skills that should be applied to all pathways. These selections should not generally be selected as the Primary Pathway for agriscience research proficiency award areas.

- i) **Career Ready Practices** – fundamental skills and practices to be career-ready, including responsibility, maintaining personal finances, communication, decision making, creativity and innovation, critical thinking, problem solving, management, technology use, and cultural/global competency.

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- j) **Cluster Skills** – Developing and demonstrating fundamental knowledge of the nature, scope, and relationships of agriculture, food and natural resources systems and the skills necessary for analysis of current and historical issues and trends; application of technologies; safety, health and environmental practices; stewardship of natural resources; and exploration of career opportunities.

Performance Reviews

The following instructions and suggestions cover Performance Review A, B and C.

- Provide clear and concise information to allow judges to understand the SAE project(s) the application is based on.
- Only include information on the specific SAE project(s) that qualify in the selected Agriscience Research Proficiency Award area. Research about growing hay in an Animal Systems proficiency area is irrelevant and penalizes the application score.
- The performance review section must be supported by details provided in the remainder of the application. Stating that your research was conducted with a partner and then claiming all of the research and findings as your own provides contradictory information to judges and will reduce the application score.

1. **Performance Review A – Question 1:** Briefly explain your SAE and how it is related to this award area.

a) Suggested information to provide:

- i) What is the research project(s)? Providing a clear, concise overview of the research project for the judges is the most important piece of information to provide here. This helps the judges better understand the rest of the application. Remember that judges have only the information provided in the application. Be clear!
- ii) Explain unusual project aspects such as collaborators, use of an research facilities equipment, etc. that helped start or sustain the project.
- iii) What interested you in this career area and motivated you to begin this specific project?

2. **Performance Review A – Question 2:** Briefly explain how your roles, responsibilities and/or management decisions related to this award area changed.

a) Suggested information to include here:

- i) How have your roles and responsibilities changed over the life of this project(s)?
- ii) How have your responsibilities related to this award area changed or increased?

- iii) How have your knowledge and skills related to this area changed or increased?

3. **Performance Review A – Question 3:** Briefly explain the single greatest challenge you faced in this award area and how you overcame that challenge.

a) Suggested information to include here:

- i) Specifically describe the challenge and provide the judges insight into your management and performance skills when describing what you did to overcome the challenge.
- ii) Be clear and detailed.

4. **Performance Review B – Question:** Briefly explain your three greatest accomplishments or findings in this award area.

a) Suggested information to include here:

- i) Summarize the most important findings from your research or experiment.
- ii) Training, certifications, or knowledge gained that impacted success and/or your growth as a researcher.
- iii) Expansion, adaptation or major changes to the experiment that had a significant positive impact.
- iv) Successful implementation of new methods or technologies.
- v) Personal growth or skill increase gained through the project that can be applied to future life or career.

TIP: Avoid repetition. If you have already shared information on a skill, experience or challenge, do not repeat it. Provide the judges with new and additional information.

5. **Performance Review C – Question:** Identify three experiences from your SAE in this award area and explain how they will impact your future.

a) Suggested information to include here:

- i) What future career choices has your SAE helped you select from or against?
- ii) What training, skills, certifications, or degrees has participation in this SAE project decided you to learn/earn?
- iii) Personal or business connections gained through this project that will impact your future.

- iv) Life skills learned through this project and the future impact.

Research Projects ([Research SAE](#) type projects ONLY)

Enter details about ONLY the SAE project(s) on which this application is based.

You can make multiple entries in each year or in different years. For example, if you have three different experiments that all fit into the same award area, you can enter information for each. Enter all the research and experimentation that meets the award area description to be the most competitive.

Pathway Agribusiness Systems (ABS) ▼	Start Year (Choose) ▼	End Year (Choose) ▼	Hours 	Add
Research Title ? 		Income/Funding 	Expenses 	

- Pathway** – There is no right or wrong answer for this selection; choose the pathway that best fits the project. (See [Primary Pathway](#) for descriptions)
 - Select your desired pathway from the drop-down menu.
- Start Year** – This drop-down menu will include only the years you designated on the [Basic Setup](#) screen/page of the application. The earliest year available will be the year of the "[Beginning Date](#)" you entered. The latest year will be the year of the "[Ending Date](#)" you entered. Change these dates to make additional years available if appropriate.
 - Select the year in which the project started from the drop-down menu.
- End Year** – Agriscience Research projects can be single or multi-year. Enter the year in which the findings were published or the current ending year if the project is ongoing.
- Hours** – Enter the number of hours invested in the research project. Round to the nearest hour. This number should come from careful record keeping and not be a guess or estimate made after the fact.
- Research Title** – Enter the title of the research project or experiment. This title should be descriptive to help judges understand the project.
- Income/Funding** – Enter the amount of any funding received and used to conduct this research/experiment project plus any income that was earned through the project. If none leave this box blank.
 - Example: Madeline received a \$500 research grant from Petco to perform research on optimal enclosure temperatures to promote guinea pig breeding. The \$500 would be entered as "Income/Funding".
 - Example: After three years of continuous research and experimentation Ali developed a new and less expensive method to test for nitrates in surface water. Ali

sold his research to a company that wished to manufacture and sell test kits for \$50,000. The \$50,000 would be entered as "Income/Funding".

7. **Expenses** – Enter the amount for any expenses to conduct the research/experiment.

a) *Example: Nikola purchased PH test kits, petri dishes and paid for gas to travel multiple times to a from her test site. The total of these expense would be entered as "Expenses".*

8. Click "Add" to enter the information into the application.

Repeat this process until all projects have been entered. Only enter projects that fit the award area applying in.

Research Finances

The Research Finances screen is a detailed list of the cash income and expenses for each specific research project included in the application.

Select the specific project for which you want to enter the detailed finances from the dropdown menu in the heading. The listed projects are those you entered on the "Research Projects" screen.

The dates entered in the application on the [Basic Setup screen/page](#) set your application years.

Your records should be organized by calendar year. If your research records have a short year (*example: four months*) and then a complete year (*12 months*), you will need to separate the records into two calendar years.

Example:

Year 1: Sept. 1 to Dec. 31 (four months of records for the year)

Year 2: Jan. 1 to Dec. 31 (12 months of records for the year)

Research Paper

Special Notes before you begin this page:

- Entries are saved as you go.
- Set up your list of Research Projects on the "Research Projects" page.

Select a Project:

1. Examining Nitrate Levels in Different Water Sources ▼

Abstract: One page abstract for each research project listed. An abstract is a brief summary of your paper, which concisely describes your purpose, methods, results and conclusions. Do not include the title in the abstract. Your abstract may include potential research applications or future research. The abstract should be in paragraph form and no longer than one page.

Procedure: A well-written procedure will enable others to reproduce your results by duplicating your study. Explain the technical and experimental procedures employed. Use good judgment with details. Note easily understood tests or procedures, but do not describe them in detail.

Conclusion: Draw conclusions from the results of your study and relate them to the original hypothesis. If the results were not what you expected, take this opportunity to explain why.

Learning Outcomes and Efficiency Factors

Learning Outcomes are specific skills or abilities learned or developed through the SAE project.

Efficiency Factors measure how well an enterprise is managed compared to accepted industry standards. Efficiency factors are like grades on report cards. They help you know if your business is doing well and if you should continue your current practices or make changes to increase efficiency.

Click "+ Add New Outcome/Efficiency" in the upper left corner of the application table to make an entry.

1. **Learning Outcome or Efficiency Factor** – Enter clear, specific and measurable skills and abilities you have increased or efficiency factors you have achieved. *See examples below.*

TIP: Clear and realistically measurable outcomes/factors score better.

2. Beginning Level

- a) **Year** – Enter the year the specific outcome or efficiency started. This is generally the same year as the project started.
- b) **Level** – Enter the specific outcome or efficiency level you started at when the learning outcome or efficiency factor began.

3. Level Attained

- a) **Year** – Enter the year the specific outcome or efficiency finished. This is generally the same year as the application closes.
- b) **Level** – Enter the specific outcome or efficiency level you have reached for the learning outcome or efficiency factor.

4. **Describe how this factor or outcome impacted the management decisions or performance objectives** – Provide a clear explanation of how the outcome/factor listed made a difference to the project the application is based on.

Learning Outcome or Efficiency Factor EXAMPLES:

☒	I learned about safety in the shop....	Year 2011 Level 10% knowledge	Year 2011 Level 90% knowledge	This helped me in my job....	Delete	Edit
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Skills, Competencies and Knowledge

This section of the application is linked to the [2016 AFNR Career Cluster Content Standards](#) (AFNR Standards) established by the [National Council for Agricultural Education](#). This section of the application requires applicants to show how the included project(s) meets AFNR Standards.

The application provides the opportunity to select 10 different standards: five (5) from the selected primary pathway you selected two (2) from any AFNR pathway and three (3) from Cluster Skills and/or Career Ready Practices.

1. **A. Select up to 5 different primary pathway performance indicators you have gained skills, competencies, or knowledge in through your SAE project.** – This table in the application requires selections from the [primary pathway](#) selected on the application's [Basic Setup](#) page. If you decide the offered standards do not match well, consider returning to the Basic Setup page and choosing a more appropriate primary pathway.

If you find that no AFNR Standards match well with your SAE project, you should consider whether or not your SAE project is actually within an agriculture, food or natural resource pathway. SAE projects determined to not fit within these indicators are rated Participant in the judging process.

- a) **AFNR Performance Indicator from Primary Pathway** – Select up to five different indicators that match your research and activities from the drop-down menus. Do not select the same indicator more than once including indicators used in other sections.
- b) **Specifically describe the research activities performed to learn or demonstrate the performance indicator selected.** – Concisely and clearly explain what you did that directly and clearly relates to the selected indicator. Describe how the activity contributed to the success of the included SAE project(s) and how it demonstrates performing the selected indicator.

TIP: The written description needs to match the selected indicator directly and closely.

2. **B. Select up to 2 different pathway performance indicators from any pathway you have gained skills, competencies, or knowledge in through your SAE project** – This table allows selection from any AFNR Pathways, Cluster Skills and Career Ready Practices.
 - a) **AFNR Performance Indicator** from any Pathway– Select up to 2 different AFNR Performance Indicators from the drop-down menus. Do not select the same indicator more than once including indicators used in other sections.
 - b) **Contributions to Success** – Concisely and clearly explain what you did directly and clearly related to the selected indicator. Describe how the activity contributed to the success of the included SAE project(s) and how it demonstrates performing the selected indicator.

3. **C. Select up to 3 different Career Ready Practice and/or Cluster Skill content indicators you have gained skills, competencies, or knowledge in through your SAE project.** – These selections are limited only to Cluster Skills and/or Career Ready Practices.
 - a) **Cluster Skill or Career Ready Practice Performance Indicator** – Select up to three different CRP or CS Performance Indicators from the drop-down menus. Do not select the same indicator more than once including indicators used in other sections.
 - b) **Contributions to Success** – Concisely and clearly explain what you did that directly and clearly relates to the selected indicator. Describe how the activity contributed to the success of the included research project(s) and how it demonstrates performing the selected indicator.

TIP: Do not use a performance indicator more than once. Selecting the same indicator will result in a zero score for that indicator even if the activity described is different.

Photo Pages

Photos are used as supporting evidence to help tell the project's story. They need to show activity, size and your involvement in the selected agriscience proficiency award area. Good photos and informative captions help judges understand projects and provide additional information.

Carefully read these important rules and tips to ensure the photo section of the application makes a positive impact on the application score.

1. **Workplace Safety Photos #1 and #2**– The first two photo pages must be used to show and describe the applicant demonstrating one or more safety practices appropriate to maintaining their own safety and the safety of other people for the SAE project described in the application.
2. **SAE Project Photos #3, #4, #5, and #6**– The last four photo pages are available to insert one photo and caption on each page. These photos and captions are for the application to show and explain their SAE.
3. **Photo Rules** – Breaking any of the following rules will result in penalties up to and including disqualification of the entire application.
 - a) Each photo page may contain only a single original photo.
 - i) Photo pages on which multiple photos have been combined in anyway including to produce a single photo file (*collage, before/after, etc.*) are scored zero.
 - b) Photos may only show equipment, scenes, activities, etc. that are of the applicant's SAE project included in the application.
 - i) Using photos taken from magazines, the internet, photo banks, etc. and claiming they are of the applicant's project will result in the application being disqualified.
 - c) Using photos that include a copyright mark, watermark or any other mark that shows the photo is the intellectual property of someone other than the applicant will result

in the application being disqualified unless the following information is included in the application.

- i) Professional photos that have been legally purchased or are used with permission of the photographer are allowed if the applicant clearly asserts permission to use the photo has been obtained and that the National FFA Organization has permission to use the photo as well. This statement may be included in the photo caption or as part of the Supplemental Information uploaded to the application.
- ii) Using professional photos in the application is not needed and generally not recommended to avoid any issues.
- d) Judges are instructed to deduct points from photo pages which show/discuss unsafe practices.

4. **Photo Tips** – The following suggestions can greatly improve the score for the photo pages.

- a) Photos and captions need to be related to the project. Pictures of a grand champion ram in an Agricultural Mechanics application will score zero as sheep are not included in the Agricultural Mechanics proficiency area. A picture of a sheep in the fitting stand you built and a caption describing your steps to make the stand strong, durable, and safe are relevant. Don't add details about the sheep.
- b) Don't use photo captions to tell judges something they can already see by looking at the picture. Use the caption to add more information.
- c) An SAE project must cover at least two years; a national-level application is more competitive if showing more years. Inserting only recent photos all taken on the same day does not tell the story of your SAE as well as photos taken over multiple years that show the progress and growth of the project.
- d) Only six pictures can be included in the photo pages. Make each picture count. Judges don't know your project, so make sure the photos and captions emphasize your strong points, not your weaker ones.
- e) Ask a person unfamiliar with your project to review your photos and captions to determine the type of message they convey.

Supplemental Information

The application form does not always allow the freedom to include all the information an applicant feels the judges need to evaluate their project properly. Supplemental Information allows the applicant the freedom to provide additional details of their choice.

1. Supplemental Information Rules

- a) Uploaded information must be a single PDF file of fewer than 10 megabytes. Larger files will not load.
- b) There is no specific page limit.
- c) There is no specified format.
- d) Information can be anything legal based on the rules in this handbook and specified within the application itself.

TIP: The application will not allow the upload of a document that is not PDF format and larger than 10 megabytes. If unable to load the document, check the format and size.

2. Supplemental Information Tips and Examples

- a) Ensure the information provided is relevant. The information uploaded should help the judges better understand the specific SAE project included in the application. Information about anything else will not score points.
- b) Keep information clear and concise. Judges are reading 10 – 40 applications; making them read extra, unhelpful information does not increase the application score. There is such a thing as too much.
- c) Be sure that the information provided does not contradict or repeat information already included in the application.
- d) Examples of potential supplemental information include but are not limited to:
 - i) Additional project photos with captions. These can be multiple per page.
 - ii) Proof of financial claims such as copies of receipts, checks, deeds, insurance policies, tax statements, etc. *(Be sure to black out personal information such as account numbers, social security numbers, tax IDs, etc.)*
 - iii) An SAE Agreement or copy of a business contract to explain labor exchanges, rental agreements or leases.
 - iv) Simple additional written explanations. Explain why your expenses or income are unusually high or low. Explain the unique circumstances of your project in greater detail.
 - v) Screenshots of online marketing campaigns, websites, or social media campaigns for or about the project.

- vi) Samples of articles or curriculums created for agricultural communications or agricultural education projects.
- vii) Letters of recommendation from teachers, employers, clients, etc.
- viii) Appropriate SAE Record Book pages.

These are just a few ideas. Remember: Be clear and concise, and don't go overboard.

Checklist

The application includes an automated checklist to help find errors or information missing from the application. It will not find every possible error. A clean checklist does not guarantee that the application won't be penalized.

1. **NOT MET, MISSING or ERROR** – The application cannot be submitted for national-level competition if there are any "Not Met," "Missing" or "Error" items in red font on the checklist. This signifies incorrect or missing information that may prevent the application from qualifying.
2. **REVIEW** – A checklist item that says "Review" in red font is not an error and may be fine. The checklist is simply calling attention to information in the application that should be double-checked. Applicants are advised to make sure the information the item points to is clearly explained in the application.
3. **MET** – Ideally, all items on the checklist should say "Met" in green font. This does not mean the application is perfect and without errors. It does mean everything the computer can automatically check for has been cleared.

TIP: Computers are not as smart as people. The computer can check whether or not a box contains text or numbers; it can't determine if the text or numbers are correct information. A clean checklist does not guarantee that the application has no errors.

Electronic Signatures

Carefully read the signature statements before electronically signing the application. Commitments are being made for all signatories — know what you are signing.

1. **Student Approval** – This is the signature of the applicant. Information can only be entered when the applicant is correctly signed into their electronic account.
2. **Advisor Approval** – This is the signature of the supervising agricultural education teacher/FFA advisor. The advisor's signature is required to verify and certify the application. The advisor must be signed in to their electronic account to enter information here.
3. **Request for Parent/Guardian Approval** – This area is for the parent/guardian to certify the information in the application and give permission for information to be used.
 - a) Enter the email address of the parent/guardian whose signature is being requested and click the "Request Signature" button. The application will send an email to that address, which says:

Dear *(Insert Parent/Guardian Names)*,

(Name of Applicant) has applied for an Agricultural Proficiency Award and parent/guardian approval is required to complete the application process.

Please click this link to review the application and complete the approval:

(A unique link to the specific application will be shown)

If you have questions, please contact the *(Name)* FFA chapter advisor(s) listed below:

Advisor(s): *(The names of the FFA advisors in the application will be listed here.)*

Email: *(The email addresses of each listed advisor will appear here.)*

Phone: *(The school phone number will appear here.)*

- i) The parent/guardian must open the email message, click the link and follow the instructions to sign the application electronically.
- b) **Employer Approval** – This signature is for the employer or supervisor to verify that the application information is accurate. This signature is required even if the SAE project is unpaid. For an SAE to be a Placement type, there must be an employer or supervisor who makes the overall management decisions and directs the work. This could be a work supervisor, business owner, review committee chair, FFA advisor, parent, volunteer leader/manager, etc. — whoever supervises the project and can verify the claims in the application.
 - i) This signature request appears only on Placement or Combined applications, which include Placement records. It will not appear and is not needed for Entrepreneurship applications.

- ii) Enter the email address of the “Employer” whose signature is being requested and click the “Request Signature” button. The application will send an email to that address, which says:

Dear *(Insert Employer Name)*,

(Name of Applicant) has applied for an Agricultural Proficiency Award and the Employer’s approval is required to complete the application process.

Please click this link to review the application and complete the approval:

(A unique link to the specific application will be shown)

If you have questions, please contact the *(Name)* FFA chapter advisor(s) listed below:

Advisor(s): *(The names of the FFA advisors in the application will be listed here.)*

Email: *(The email addresses of each listed advisor will appear here.)*

Phone: *(The school phone number will appear here.)*

- iii) The Employer must open the email message, click the link and follow the instructions to sign the application electronically.

Generate Your Application

Judges do not access the live online application. The live application can be constantly accessed by applicants and is ever-changing. The document that judges review is the specific, time-stamped PDF version of the application that is generated and submitted. If no PDF of the application is generated by completing the following steps, there is nothing to be submitted or judged.

1. **Save a New Version #** – The button labeled “Save a New Version #” is how application PDF versions are generated (created). This generated PDF is what is actually submitted and judged. As versions are generated, they are listed in the table on the screen. The most recent version prior to the deadline is generally the one available to state leaders to select. Confirm with state leaders which version you want submitted.
2. **Get PDF** – To view the generated application, click the “Get PDF” button next to each listed version. What you see when you open this file is what is being submitted for the judges to review, possibly minus some pages depending on your state *(see details below in the Application Submission and Judging sections)*.

Application Submission

Each state FFA association has its specific directions and deadlines for submitting applications for local/state judging. Consult with the chapter FFA advisor or state FFA staff for these instructions.

Only state staff may certify and submit applications for national judging. Instructions for state staff to submit applications online are provided yearly by national FFA staff and available in the State Staff Dashboard on FFA.org.

Each state association may submit a single application for national-level competition in each award area available at the national level each year. Find the current year's Agricultural Proficiency Award List with Descriptions on the [Agricultural Proficiency Awards](#) webpage of FFA.org.

Application Judging

Each chapter and state FFA association uses its own processes to select winning applications. Consult with the chapter or state association for those specific rules. The national judging process starts in July.

National judging is conducted in two rounds — the Finalist Selection Round and the Finals Round.

National Judging Application Version

Only the generated PDF version of the application, certified and submitted by state staff, is received by National FFA. This does not include SAE record books or added information that may be used to verify and judge at the local/state level.

While all pages of the national application are important and used to administer judging and award presentations, not all pages are scored or even seen by judges.

1. **Page 1: Signature Page** – This page is required to certify the application but is not scored or provided to judges.
2. **Page 2: Applicant Information Page** – This page provides essential information for administering the judging and award process but is not scored by or provided to judges. This page includes personally identifiable information, including the applicant's name, state and contact information, and is removed before applications are made available to judges. This protects the privacy of the applicants and removes any potential for bias by judges based on who the applicant is or where they are from.
3. **Extra Pages** – Some state associations and chapters have added additional pages to the application for local or state use. These pages are removed for national judging and are not seen by national judges. This ensures that for national judging, all applications contain the same pages.

Finalist Selection Judging Round

A team of judges from around the country is assigned to each national proficiency award area. These judges score each application independently using the [scoring rubrics](#). Judges submit their scores to national FFA staff.

The application score of each application from each judge is added together and averaged. The average application score for each application is used to rank it against the other application scores.

The top four applications, by average score, are named National Finalists and compete in the Finals Round of judging. Their rank is not announced.

All remaining applications are rated Gold, Silver, Bronze or Participant based on their average score. No rankings are announced. The process is complete for these applications. The ratings are announced and recognized on [FFA.org](https://www.ffa.org). Applicants may be recognized with certificates or pins.

Finals Judging Round

A second team of judges from around the country is assembled to interview the four national finalists. The national judge application versions of the four finalists are provided to the judges before the interview so the judges can review and prepare questions specifically about each finalist's SAE project.

Each judge ranks the four finalists and submits their rankings independently to national FFA staff. National FFA staff combine the rankings of all judges to determine the Finals Judging Round ranking of each finalist.

Winner Selection and Announcement

The applicant ranks from the Finalists Selection Judging Round and Finals Judging Round are combined to determine the national winner.

National Finalists are expected to attend the National FFA Convention & Expo to appear on stage to be recognized. The national winner is announced live on stage. All national finalists and winners may be recognized with certificates, pins, plaques or cash awards.

Scoring Rubrics

At the national level, judges score applications using specialized scoring rubrics developed to ensure that applications are all scored using the same criteria. The rubrics used for national judging are available for anyone to download and use on the [Agricultural Proficiency Awards webpage](#) of FFA.org. The online application provides links on multiple pages to the Agricultural Proficiency Awards webpage, or you can go directly to the scoring rubrics by clicking [HERE](#).

There is a specific scoring rubric for each of the four [agricultural proficiency award application types](#).

1. **Entrepreneurship Rubric** – This rubric is used to score all [Entrepreneurship application types](#). Entrepreneurship application types will be found in Entrepreneurship only award National FFA Organization

areas and in [Combined areas](#) that include Entrepreneurship, Placement, and Combined award types. In Combined award areas, use this scoring rubric for Entrepreneurship only applications. The application Signature Page (page 1) and the Basic Award Setup Information page (page 3) will note the award type.

2. **Placement Rubric** – This rubric is used to score all Placement application types. [Placement application types](#) will be found in Placement only award areas and in Combined areas that include Placement, Entrepreneurship and [Combined award types](#). In Combined award areas, use this scoring rubric for Placement only applications. The application Signature Page (page 1) and the Basic Award Setup Information page (page 3) will note the award type.
3. **Combined Rubric** – This rubric is used to score [Combined application types](#) that include both Entrepreneurship and Placement SAE records. Combined award applications will be found only in Combined award areas that include Entrepreneurship, Placement and Combined award application types. The application Signature Page (page 1) and the Basic Award Setup Information page (page 3) will note the award type.
4. **Agriscience Research Rubric** – This rubric is used to score all [Agriscience Research Proficiency Award application](#) types.

Additional Information

The [Agricultural Proficiency Awards](#) webpage of FFA.org has additional resources such as “Tips and Tricks” from past judges, application examples and help videos.