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## **Research Report**

**Publication Focus Groups**

**With Florida Farm Bureau Federation**

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## Background

The Florida Farm Bureau Federation (FFBF) commissioned the UF/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources (PIE Center) to conduct research in order to understand the thoughts and perceptions of both active and associate Florida Farm Bureau members regarding FFBF publications. The data collected will be used to guide FFBF as the organization plans for a new publication identity as well as new media avenues.

## Methods

In October of 2011, the PIE Center conducted a focus group in Orlando at the Peabody hotel with FFBF active members. Eight active members participated in the Orlando focus group. There were two female participants and six male participants, ranging in age from 37 to 62 years old. Seven participants were Caucasian and one did not report their race; all participants were non-Hispanic. All eight participants reported yearly incomes greater than \$35,000 a year. The highest income level reported by four participants was more than \$75,000 a year.

In November of 2011, a focus group was conducted in Ocala at a Marion County Extension office with associate members of FFBF. However, based on the combination of participants in this single focus group, it was determined to be an outlier, and was removed from the study.

In order to retrieve accurate results and findings from FFBF associate members, the PIE Center recommended that FFBF conduct two more associate member focus group in a geographical area with a high concentration of members. Based on that criterion, Polk County was determined to be the best location.

In February 2012, the PIE Center conducted two focus groups with associate members of FFBF in Bartow, FL at the Polk County Farm Bureau office. The first focus group was comprised of 10 associate members of FFBF, the majority of which held auto, home and/or life insurance. There were five female participants and five male participants, ranging in age from 19 to 65 years old. Nine participants were Caucasian and one reported their race as Hispanic.

The second focus group also had 10 participants, three of which were female and seven were male, ranging in age from 42 to 60 years old. Nine participants were Caucasian and one of which reported being of Hispanic culture and another participant recorded their race as "other." In the second Bartow focus group, two of the male participants were current or previous active members in FFBF, while the other eight were associate members. The two potential active members expressed a deeper knowledge of the organization and were the only two participants who indicated awareness of an active membership status. The majority of participants in the second group also had auto and/or home insurance while three individuals held commercial, life and/or farm insurance.

## Results

### Awareness of Florida Farm Bureau

Associate member participants in the Bartow focus groups were asked how they discovered FFBF. Associate members reported finding out about the organization through word of mouth, needing an insurance policy or because of a family tradition of FFBF insurance. Active members were not asked this question.

### Word of Mouth

Many associate members heard about the FFBF through word of mouth and recommendations from friends, neighbors, and family. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme.

- “My neighbor was the one that introduced me to a lovely insurance agent whose name was (name omitted). And he just seemed to be such a, you know, friendly person, that came to my house and talked to me about insurance which I know nothing about and still don’t. That’s how I got in.”
- “Somebody was in the office, who was with Farm Bureau, and they suggested them. I was looking for home insurance.”
- “We bought a new home in Fort Mead and needed homeowner’s insurance. I talked to someone at work and she was very pleased with Farm Bureau. They were the most reasonable, we checked around.” Followed by a second participant confirming, “I have to say, it was the same thing, word of mouth.”

### Need for Insurance Coverage

Others associate members discovered the organization when they needed new insurance, were dropped from their current insurance company or were seeking lower insurance rates. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme.

- One participant discussed their home insurance history and how getting dropped from one company meant he needed to find another. “I guess about ‘87, we moved from Frostproof over to Fort Mead to a little rental house because we both worked in Bartow. And I think it was State Farm would not insure us because they saw me adding a renter’s policy on, so they canceled my homeowners on my house in Frostproof. And I said, ‘This is ridiculous, there are millions of people that have lake houses and they have insurance.’ They said, ‘Well, you just can’t do it.’”
- Another participant mentioned how he needed a variety of policies and FFBF could provide all of them under one company saying, “I have got house, car and I have got my livestock insured. Everybody won’t do that.”

### Family Tradition

Several associate member participants stated that they had been with FFBF for many years and that insurance with FFBF was part of a family tradition. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme.

- One participant stated, “Farm Bureau was the first insurance company I have ever had. So, when I came out from under my father’s wallet that is who I went with. I had Farm Bureau in Georgia and then when we moved to Dallas, Texas we transferred it to there and then when we came here, we transferred it here.”

- Another, younger participant mentioned their awareness of FFBF from his parents, “My parents have had Farm Bureau for forever, so when I got a vehicle and started driving, I got my own policy with them.”

### Value of Florida Farm Bureau

Both active and associate member participants were asked what value they thought FFBF offered them individually as well as to the state. In addition, the associate member participants were asked how they felt about their associate membership status within FFBF.

#### Active Members

##### *Value to the state*

When the active member participants thought of the value the FFBF and its services provide to the state of Florida, they described the FFBF as the voice of Agriculture. Additionally, they mentioned the economic and financial value of the industry, the jobs provided, and political involvement for Florida agriculture. The participants also mentioned that they felt there is a misconception among the general public that FFBF only benefits farmers. The following quotes are examples of discussion of this topic.

- One active member participant, when thinking about the value of FFBF, said the following, “But you know, with most anything, economics is the first thing that comes to my mind. And Farm Bureau being the voice of agriculture in the state of Florida, and being as politically active as we are, when you look at what ag does economically for this state...then that is the importance of it.”
- Another active member participant discussed what they thought associate and non members might think of FFBF, “I think they might have got a misconception because it says, ‘Farm Bureau,’ that it is just for farmers, not for the general public, maybe. I never thought about it like that but the general public probably doesn’t realize how much we benefit them by keeping food prices down because of regulations, we have kept out immigration or whatever. It’s a good point.”

##### *Personal Value*

The active member participants also valued FFBF personally as a resource that informs them and the community on issues. Active members also valued the ability to stay connected with all different commodities within Florida agriculture. The following quotes are examples of discussion of this topic.

- An active member participant described their reasoning for becoming involved with FFBF, “I got involved actually, just for knowledge, to learn more. Obviously the regulation and that kind of stuff came with it, but the knowledge that I have learned, just of other industries and the knowledge that I have learned from other growers, that I can take and use in my business has been almost unbelievable...some of the stuff that I have learned.”
- A second active member participant discussed their enjoyment in gaining knowledge in all the segments of the Florida agricultural industry, “There’s people from all different types of farming organizations; beef cattle, citrus, FNGLA, all those. They are all members of Farm Bureau, and all of their information can come to one main group

which is Farm Bureau and then all of that can be combined and given out to everybody who has a general membership so that they can stay connected to what is going on in all of the areas.”

### **Associate Member**

Unlike the active members, the associate members of FFBF did not distinguish between FFBF’s value to the state and to them personally. Generally, the values associate members discussed only pertained to them individually or personally. The values that associate members place on FFBF included financial value, consistency, personal relationships with their agent, perks/discounts and political representation. However, some of the associate member participants were unaware of the value of FFBF.

### **Financial Value**

The associate member participants found that FFBF offered a financial value that other insurance companies did not. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme.

- One associate member participant stated a scenario in which they received a savings because of their membership, “[Farm Bureau is] a good value. I like the idea of when I bought a car recently and I got a \$500 rebate because of them. They offer a lot.”
- Another associate member participant compared FFBF’s financial principles to other insurance companies, “When they raise rates and things like this, they didn’t care about the people of Florida. They were looking at the bottom line about how much money they were making. And I am sure that Farm Bureau is making money, you know? I hope that they are. But still, they are looking at servicing the people, too. They are not just looking at the bottom line.”

### **Consistency**

Associate member participants also appreciated that FFBF insurance maintained consistent insurance policies and coverage, especially after hurricanes. The following quote is an example of discussion surrounding this theme.

- One associate member participant said, “Particularly after the hurricanes, I know people who were trying to buy a house and they had the money, they had the mortgage, but they couldn’t find anybody to give them homeowner’s insurance. So, the state of Florida, you know...they need people to come here and to live here and people are not going to live here if they can’t insure their homes. So, I think it is real important...but it makes me feel really good to hear some of you around the table say you have been with them for years, because that says a lot.”

### **Personal Relationship**

Many associate member participants described a personal connection and trust relationship that they value with their FFBF insurance agent. In addition, the participants enjoyed the personal, one-on-one contact and constant availability they received from their agent. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme.

- One associate member participant described the helpfulness of their agent, “It is just nice, when you call them on the phone and they are always helpful. They are always trying to help you cut corners. I felt that my insurance was

kind of high on my house compared to the neighborhood and they were able to cut a few corners. They are real nice about trying to help you save money and stuff like that. I like them.”

- Another associate member participant described a particular experience they had with her agent, “They are really personable, too. Because after my accident, they called several times just to see how I was doing. That was nice.”
- During discussion, one participant mentioned the agent also being a friend, “I think, just about every county has a Farm Bureau agent. And they are not just an agent, generally speaking. They are friends. Like when we lived in Frostproof, (name omitted) was a friend too, but he was also the insurance agent. He would come to your house and he was always looking out for you.”
- Two associate members recalled how they enjoyed the availability of their agent, “I can call my agent any time. I have his cell phone; he is always willing to help me. Anytime, day and night, he will meet me anywhere if I can’t make it to his office. I appreciate that very much.” A second associate member corroborated, “I agree with that also. The Lakeland rep was transferred over to Winter Haven and I called and I said, ‘I don’t want to lose her.’ So, I asked if I could be transferred to the Winter Haven one even though I am still in Lakeland, she is always there for me. So, I agree with that, very much.”

### *Perks/Discounts*

Some FFBF associate member participants also find value in the perks and discounts available to them as an associate member, in travel, insurance, and from the magazine. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme.

- One associate member participant recalled how they saved money because of FFBF, “This summer I went on a twelve thousand mile drive around the US and the Farm Bureau card that I had got me twenty percent off every single Choice Hotel, every night. It was the biggest discount. It beat AAA, AARP and everything.”
- Another associate member participant commented on other FFBF perks, “I just saw that there is a 1,700 dollar accidental death benefit, as being a member as well. I was just looking at the card.” Another participant added, “Every year it goes up a hundred dollars.”
- One associate member participant recalled a discount she had received from the monthly publication, “I just picked up 300 slices of pre-cooked bacon and 11 pounds of sausage.”

### *Political Representation*

In the second associate member focus group, participants were aware of the political representation FFBF offers the agricultural industry and placed a value on it. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme.

- One associate member participant stated his value, “Politics, Farm Bureau does that. There is a Farm Bureau in every county. State politics is a big thing...they really push the agenda.”
- Another associate member participant stated their value in the political aspect of FFBF, “The politics and the way they do their lobbying, it helps all of us that are in agriculture.”

### *Unaware of Value*

While most of the associate members could express the value they saw in FFBF, some participants, in both associate member focus groups, were unable to identify a value that resonated with them personally. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme.

- During a conversation between associate member participants they discussed their lack of knowledge about FFBF, “You know what? I don’t know that much about the Farm Bureau. I didn’t know that they did a lot of lobbying or anything. I was looking for insurance and I was able to get it that way. That is about all I really know about them.” A second associate member continued, “I am new to Florida’s Farm Bureau, new to Florida. So, I am not familiar with it yet.” A third associate member emphasized the point, “I was just looking for homeowner’s insurance. I know that they do have other things to offer, it is just that I haven’t had an opportunity to take advantage of it.”
- Another associate member participant discussed their unawareness of the purpose of fees associated with his associate member status, “When I get the bill for the yearly dues, that is a bill that I look at and I go, ‘I am not really sure what that does for me.’.... We have only been here for a short while in Florida, but I am not really sure, not being in agriculture that I get...I guess I don’t understand what that membership is.”

## **Florida Farm Bureau Communication**

### *Active Members*

Active member participants were asked about the current and potential target audiences of FFBF for communication materials as well as the overall messages that should be communicated with the audiences and the channels to use.

### *Current Target Audience*

The participants of the active member focus group believed that the main current target audience was other active members and growers. Realizing the current target audience of FFBF’s communications, the active member participants expressed some concern and a need to be more proactive. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this topic.

- The following is an example of a discussion between the active member focus groups regarding the current target audience of FFBF communications and the potential issues:  
Moderator: “Who do you currently think that the main target audience is for Farm Bureau?”  
Participant 1: “Growers.”  
Participant 2: “The active members. The currently active members.”  
General Comment: “Growers, that’s right.”  
Participant 3: “Which is the smallest population.”  
General Comment: “Yes.”  
Participant 2: “And the population that we probably don’t really need to be...”  
Interrupting Comment: “It’s the choir.”  
Participant 2 continues: “...that we really don’t need to be reaching with our publication message.”  
General Comment: “Same old story that we are selling ourselves.”



- Another active member participant gave further comments regarding the current target audience of FFBF communications and discussed becoming more proactive: “I think we need to shed our, as an active member, we need to shed our isolationist mentality and realize that we have got to get proactive, you know. The days are long since passed where, ‘Leave me alone on my farm and let me do what I do.’ We have got to join together as cattle producers, dairy producers, berry producers, citrus producers, foliage producers, you know and... because what issue reflects...that may hit me today, may not hit you until tomorrow, but if I am gone, then I may not there to help you to fight to defeat it.”

### *Potential Target Audiences*

When asked who FFBF should target with communications materials, active member participants suggested focusing on the general consumer who is not involved in agriculture, but also children and their parents. In addition, active member participants believed that the generational gap between those in agriculture and young adults needed special attention. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this topic.

- One active member participant emphasized children as the future decision makers, “I think children are a really big focus that we need to keep as a major focus because those children are going to grow up to be parents and taxpayers, voters, and if we could start earlier and get them educated as to the value of ag in their life, no matter where they live or what they do or what their occupation is, that’s a great...would be a great benefit to everybody.”
- Another active member participant discussed the distance between agriculture and young adults and the issues FFBF faces because of that distance, “We’ve missed two generations...and I think that is part of our problem now. Those people that are voting now that are removed from the ag industry. We have got to go back to the education thing with the kids and to the 18 to 35 year olds because I think about people my age getting into the ag business and there are none. If they don’t inherit it, they are not doing it. A lot of them that are inheriting it are selling it off. You really have lost that two generations and so it creates another problem is who do you hire in order to run your business while you go out and do what (name omitted) is talking about to get off the farm and be able to do what we know we need to do? So you have got two problems, first of all you have got educate and second of all you don’t have anybody to fill your position to do what you are doing. And then really a third problem is how do you work all that out? So there is a lot of issues there.”

### *Stronger Messages*

When asked what the overall message should be when communicating with the target audience, active member participants developed some new ideas for messaging, including how agriculture benefits the consumer on a daily basis and the economic benefits agriculture provides. However, the group also discussed how the agricultural industry has been off message, how the industry needs to be more proactive in its messaging, that getting back on message costs money, but spending the money is important. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this topic.

- An active member participant stated what they thought the overall messages of FFBF should be, “To point out to them how agriculture benefits their lives on a daily basis, whether it be from providing open spaces, water recharged areas, protecting the environment, the food that we provide them, the economics that we provide to the community; all of the above and inclusive of anything else.”

- One active member participant discussed how the agriculture industry is off message, “My issue with the message, period, is that we have been taken off our message. I have asked myself a number of times, when did we become the bad guy? ... I don’t know, but I do know this...that we spend so much time defending ourselves on environmental issues that we start to look anti-environmentally friendly. When in fact we are environmentally friendly.... So, we are being defined in a way and because we are always playing defense, we are selling ourselves into the same line of thought. So, I don’t know when...I don’t know how you get out of that, I don’t have the answer. I do know that I have spent the last 15, 18 or 20 years playing defense more than offense. I think, inherently, that is the problem.”
- Another active member participant discussed the price associated with messaging, but that it was worth it as an investment in the future, “And the thing that we all have to keep in mind, a lot of the things that have been said so far, there is a cost involved in getting that message out. And the other thing that we have to do is sell to active farmers that there is a cost involved in your future.”

### *Use of New Communication Channels*

The active member participants also discussed opening up new communication channels to reach different, younger audiences. Though most of the participants weren’t comfortable with social media or text messaging, they recognized its importance to outreach. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this topic.

- One active member participant suggested changing the focus of the communication channels. “So, I think that we need to change the focus of what we are doing, but I am really more into...I think it would be great to have a Florida Farm Bureau YouTube channel and go look at (name omitted)’s dairy farm. Because I have never even seen (name omitted)’s dairy farm.”
- Another active member participant discussed their experience with social media, “I don’t understand what the word ‘social media’ really means. I certainly don’t understand how it works, but I know a couple of things. Two months ago...my phone bill came in and it was two and a half times what it should be. We have three [cell phones] in my house, I have two boys and they communicate with everybody...they make me look like a hermit, quite honestly. I called my provider and asked them to get me a copy of the bill, I needed to find out who was using all the minutes, and the lady said, ‘I don’t know how to tell you this, but there were three minutes used between the other two phones.’ Three minutes. They were my minutes. Please call that a clue. My boys communicate but it is not on the telephone, it’s their Facebook.” Later the participant continued, “What I love about the social media aspect is that ... I think that is a good avenue to get some of the positive out about agriculture. Because I have got ... a lot of my friends that aren’t involved in agriculture, but they see posts on my wall that are from me and other friends that are talking about agriculture.”

### *Associate Members*

Associate member participants were asked to describe their level of satisfaction with the information they received from FFBF including their likes and dislikes, relevancy and preferences as well as who they thought was the current target

audience of FFBF. In addition, associate member participants were asked to recall what publications they receive from FFBF and how they would seek out more information about the organization.

Most participants were happy with or indifferent about the amount of communication material they currently receiving from FFBF, including some participants who stated they did not get a lot of information. However, communications preferences varied greatly.

### *Publication Identification*

When associate member participants were asked to list what publications they currently receive from FFBF, the following list was generated:

*In the Field*

*Ag News*

*The Voice of Agriculture*

*FloridAgriculture (FLAG)*

*IFAS*

### *Current Target Audience*

Associate member participants identified the current target audience of FFBF to mainly be the active members because their perception was that the associate members were a smaller proportion of the total membership. The following quote is an example of discussion surrounding this topic.

- When asked about the target audience of FFBF, associate member participants believed the following:  
Participant 1: “I imagine with Farm Bureau, the associate members are a very small minority compared to the agricultural members, it is probably more for them.”  
Participant 2 interrupts: “And as an associate member, they don’t have to do anything in that book for me. My agent also explained that at one time you had to be in agriculture to use this insurance. I just look through it, if there is something in there that I can use, that’s great, but they don’t have to change it for me because, like you said, we are in the minority.”

### *Communication Preferences*

Most participants were happy with or indifferent about the amount of communication material they currently receiving from Florida Farm Bureau, including some participants who stated they did not get a lot of information. However, communications preferences varied greatly. Some participants preferred phone calls, others felt more comfortable reading brochures or other materials on their own, or said they would prefer email contact. However, there were several associate member participants that did not want to receive FFBF communication by email. In addition, many associate member participants would like to have options in how they receive their communication.

### *Communication Methods*

The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding the various methods of communication preferred by the associate member participants.

- One participant mentioned that the type of communication would be dependent on the audience and subject, “Well, it depends on what they are going to communicate with you. Most of it is in there anyway, most of the advertising and companies that you can use. Do they have a website? I don’t even know if they have a website.”
- In the first associate member focus group, one participant said, “I would like to see emails. I would prefer that over the stuff in the mail.”

However, in the second associate member focus group, participants had the following discussion:

Participant 1: “No more emails. By the time I get through all that I have to do in a day.”

Participant 2: “The younger generation, maybe.”

Participant 3: “Yeah, or if you put it on Facebook and the younger generation might look at it.”

Participant 2: “I think emails are less personable than maybe.”

Participant 4: “This is what I do to relax. Emails are what I do for work.”

General Comments: “Exactly. Yeah.”

### *Communication Options*

The following quotes are examples of discussion about having options to choose from when it receiving information from FFBF, including digital formats and how options could help the organization reduce its costs.

- In the second associate member focus group, the participants discussed options for received future communication:
  - Participant 1: “Rather than sending out an email, just have a site to go to, if you choose to. That way you are not bombarded with emails. Because let’s face it, a lot of emails, I delete. If I don’t know who they are, I delete them before I open them up.”
  - Participant 2: “I think the option, having the option of ‘Hey, would you rather have the email newsletter or would you want a mailed one?’ Not newsletter, but publication. I think the option to have that would be a good thing because some people would say... I think it would probably save money because there is going to be a group of people that want the email and there is going to be a group of people that want the magazine.”
  - Participant 3: “As long as that option is available, yeah. That’s a given that they need to have the option.”
- In the first associate member focus group, there was also discussion of options and how options could help save money, “Maybe we could have an option to have something like this emailed to us rather than mailed to save on paper and cost.”
- Also in the first associate member focus group, participants thought opting out completely, might be a good option:
  - Participant 1: “And you know, going to another point, it is something that if people are not interested, then opt out of it.”
  - Participant 2: “Oh yeah, give people a choice, to opt out. That would save money, too.”
- Another participant mentioned that they received communication digitally and received FFBF communication in the same format might suit his needs better, “I like the digital format. I get a lot of my current other literature, bills

and entertainment and whatever by email, either as an attachment or just in the body of the email itself. Because I have an iPad, I really like to use that more for reading than I would say the laptop. I am not going to sit there and read something on the screen of the laptop, but I will read it on a handheld device. I know that not everybody has jumped on board that bandwagon yet and certainly within agriculture circles it is still sort of developing. But, you know, if you did something that was a publication like this, and say it could be exactly what (name omitted) was talking about where you have got, you could just basically flip pages on your iPad or on your Kindle or wherever you happen to get it, that would be great.”

- In addition, a participant thought it might be best to ease the members into a communication delivery change, “I think that something that would be nice is for them to start doing both, maybe, to start with, to get people used to getting it coming. I don’t think it costs that much to send it by email, or it shouldn’t. By doing that which is extra, it is still cheap, just about free-cheap.

## Opinions of Publication

Both active and associate member participants were asked a series of questions about the FFBF publication, the FLAG, and asked to compare and contrast it with a variety of other magazines and newsletters. Participants gave input to help FFBF make decisions on how to continue to serve their information needs while also making its publication more cost effective. Input was given on a variety of publication details including the aesthetics, content, cost of production, distribution, target audience, and frequency of delivery.

### Active Members

Active member participants had opinions and perceptions of the aesthetics, content and frequency of the publication as well as who the audience of the publication would be, how much it would cost to produce and how it should be distributed.

### Aesthetics

The aesthetics discussed by the active member participants included the glossiness of the paper, photos and graphics and first impression. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this topic.

- One active member participant expressed their interest in the appearance of a non-FLAG publication, but also her appreciation for the FLAG’s look, “That’s glossy, that is likable because it feels expensive. Think about it, it does feel...it feels expensive. It has got nice sharp photographs. It costs a lot of money to produce. The FLAG, I don’t know what it costs to produce, but it gives me more of a homey, newspaper-y feel like I would get in a newsletter from the kid’s school or from my community. In fact, it is almost identical to my community association’s newspaper in look and feel and content, even.”
- Another active member discussed the importance of a first impression, “Something that I just realized today that I think maybe important to us and we have hit on it probably very well. It is that the appearance on the outside and size and quality of paper and the title of this thing that we are talking about is important. I think as a first impression, to get the non-ag people to be interested enough to pick it up and read it. I really hadn’t ever considered that.”

- One active member participant admitted a lack of enthusiasm toward the publication's appearance, "I will be honest with you, when it comes, I don't get excited about it. I just kind of put it off to the side of my desk and when I get time."
- Another active member participant expressed an interest in the images, "The photographs draw me in, honestly."

### *Content*

The active member participants discussed their preference for more human interest stories, stories about children and the length or depth of an article. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this topic.

- One active member participant stated, "I am more interested in the stories that are more about what is more human interest about somebody's farm and stuff like that." That comment was followed up by another participant who said, "We do some good human interest stories for us. I don't know how applicable it may be to the average inactive member. I think that stories relative to farming are probably an interest to most folks, because most folks do have a desire to know. But a lot of times it covers the full gamut, but we really need, as we write those stories, we need to make sure that they are on operations where they can tie in the environmental benefit that those farms are doing. And if it's animal agriculture, the fact that their animals are being treated humanely."
- Another active member participant commented, "I do like to see the focus on children and children's activities."
- While looking at a non-FLAG publication, an active member participant stated, "It looks like they have in depth stories. It looks like they go for pages, which may be a pro, may be a con depending on what type of reader that you are."
- While looking at the Tennessee Farm Bureau's publication, the following conversation occurred:  
Participant 1: "I think from a standpoint of telling our story, we definitely need to put a little bit more about what we are doing in here. We are reaching our general membership, but I love this."  
Participant 2: "It is getting closer, isn't it?"  
Participant 1: "Yeah, it is."  
Participant 3: "This one has a feature story about a state FFA advisor that is pretty much as homegrown as you can get."

### *Audience*

In addition, the active member participants discussed what the audience for the publication is and the content or focus would be appropriate for the audience. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this topic.

- One active member participant discussed how FFBF has a greater opportunity to reach people because of the immense mailing list, "What other organization, and I am sure there are other organizations, but there are very few organizations that have the mailing list....our agricultural organization has the mailing list of the general public, 98% of which has nothing to do with agriculture. What an opportunity to tell your story. You know? How do we get to that 98%?"

- Another active member participant suggested adding a publication to reach a non-agricultural audience, “When I look at the FLAG paper that we get, I think of it more as ours. Like maybe there should be a different publication, like you said, that outreaches to non-ag people. The FLAG gives me what we are doing within Farm Bureau.”
- A third active member participant reiterated the importance of defining an audience, “I think it is important for us, and all of us are hitting on it, who are we shooting for? What audience? And once you get there, you have to make some decisions. There would certainly be some subject matter presented in certain ways that would appeal to us and not to most people and the other way around. And the answer may be to have a single publication with mixed articles, some that would appeal to us and some to the others. You know, we would understand that, when we look at certain articles, we may not be interested in them or you may try to blend the articles and subject matter in a way that can appeal to both, I don’t know. But I think it is important to be where we are now and try to decide who we are directing our attention to.”

### Frequency

The active members discussed how frequently they felt they wanted or needed a publication from FFBF and how frequently associate members could receive a publication. Active member participants had several ideas on the frequency and format of publication distribution. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this topic.

- In the following conversation between active member participants, they discussed the pros and cons of a quarterly newsletter while viewing a newsletter example:  
 Participant 1: “Yeah and just do it quarterly. That is slick, and it is produced well.”  
 Participant 2: “But is it big enough to hold all of the information that we...if you are going to do it quarterly, instead of monthly?”  
 Participant 3: “Well, this you could...I mean something like this as far as for a newsletter format, you could still produce this on a monthly basis for active members and then go quarterly on something like that to associate members.”  
 Participant 1: “That’s right. Because quarterly to active members is old news.”  
 General Comments: “Yeah, Right.”  
 Participant 1: “There is nothing we need quarterly, I don’t think.”  
 Participant 3: “I think once you go into active members, that definitely still needs to be on a monthly basis. But you definitely could go to our associate members quarterly, and I think they would see more value in getting something like this on a quarterly basis than what they see in getting FLAG on a monthly basis now, in the current format of the publication.”
- Also in the active member focus group, two participants came to the following conclusion:  
 Participant 1: “I think the active members need something every month.”  
 Participant 2: “Well, yeah. I mean, I think a quarterly publication to everyone, but then to the active, a newsletter type publication on a monthly basis.”

### *Cost of Production/Distribution*

During discussion of message development and improving the aesthetics of the FLAG publication, the active member participants brought up the cost associated with a publication's distribution. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this topic.

- One active member participant, during a discussion of changing the current distribution, asked, “Are we willing to spend the money to do that? It would cost a bunch of money to distribute it like that.”
- Another active member participant, when discussing updating the FFBF message, said, “I think that we can probably put that message out better than anybody else, but we need to look at the competition, the PETA's and the environmentalists, and those people. And they are using big guns to go after...and they are spending beau coups dollars to deliver their message. And that is our competition.”

### *Distribution*

When discussing the content of the FLAG publication and other publications they were sampling, the active member participants considered new methods for distributing the publication to a broader audience outside of active and associated members of FFBF. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this topic.

- One active member participant asked, “Have we ever experimented with putting FLAG somewhere besides our normal membership and see if anybody picks it up to read it? Have we taken it to the local feed store, have we taken it to Wal-Mart and put it out there in the free rack out front?”
- Another active member participant, while looking at a non-FLAG publication, also thought about expanding the distribution of the publication if the content was updated and the look was modernized, “A publication like this with the human interest stories and done a little fancier and more expensive, can be more than just something that you send out to your associate membership. This is something that I would expect to find in the B&B, in the Chamber of Commerce, even in the feed stores, you know? Not just for associate members. Because it is going to contain things that will be of interest.”

A second participant interrupted to add how an expanded distribution could increase membership, “Well, it could be a membership tool to gain new members also. Because I see within that, obviously, Tennessee is touting their membership benefits and stuff like that, so we could be putting that out into the general public as a sales tool to recruit new members, also.”

A third participant contributed, “Yeah, if you are going to put that in feed stores you are going to get those little mom and pops that have got five acres, ten acres and then they have got their horse out back and they have got chickens and they are going in there to get chicken feed or whatever.”

### *Associate Members*

Associate member participants had opinions and perceptions of the aesthetics, content and frequency of the publication as well as how much it would cost to produce as well as how they currently use the publication.



## Aesthetics

The aesthetics discussed by the associate member participants included modernization, the paper quality and glossiness, as well as the overall design and size of the publication. In the first associate member group, participants generally preferred glossy paper, with high quality graphics and a standard magazine size (as opposed to the newspaper style). However in the second associate member focus group, participants generally preferred the newspaper type of paper and the newspaper-sized publication, but differed in the preference for an updated design. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this topic.

### Paper

- One associate member participant discussed their favorability towards a glossy paper finish, “My own opinion is that this type of paper, the shiny gives you more of a quality type of look than that other more newspaper type paper. First impression, anyway.”
- In the first associate member focus group, one participant suggested that the publication could be modernized, “I think that *FloridAgriculture* could really benefit from switching from the newsprint format to something a little more twenty-first century. What I mean by that is, whenever you sit down with the [FLAG], there is a lot of good information in it. There is a lot of stuff that you can use, but a lot of people have an aversion to the texture.”
- In the second associate member focus group, participants had the following comments about paper quality:

Participant 1: Yeah. I don't like the slick finish, personally. There is a glare”

Later in the group:

Participant 2: “Just the look of it, the feel of it. Like I said earlier, it is just comfortable. This is comfortable to look at and read and this is not.”

General Comment: “This feels like the Winn-Dixie sales paper.”

Participant 2: “You got it.”

Participant 3: “That is probably another thing to think about, it is like...you know that big stack of coupons you get every week? (crosstalk and agreement) That is the exact same feel.”

Following up, participants in the second group talked about how the paper made them feel and how they connected it to the FFBF organization:

Participant 1: “Well, it represents at least my experience with Farm Bureau, is that they have more of a hometown.”

Participant 4: “The word I was going to use but didn't since you mentioned that, was they want to keep the magazine kind of a “country-bumpkin” style. They don't want it to look too ‘city.’”

### Design

In the first associate member focus group:

- While reviewing a recent edition of the *Florida Grower* magazine, one associate member participant said, “You know, in looking it over, I am not sure that there is a whole lot that doesn't appeal to me. I do like the fact that it

is done pretty professionally. You have high resolution photographs, you have very professionally formatted pages, that whole idea is very appealing. Especially if a publication like this is going to be competitive with things that are not necessarily agriculture driven. This is a quality publication.”

- Another associate member participant said, “If it doesn’t get my attention when I pull it out of the box...I have got four or five seconds to look at something before it goes into the garbage. You take five seconds, who is it from? Okay, what is that? I may set it aside. It has got to catch my attention or it is gone.”

In the second associate member focus group:

- While reviewing a recent edition of the AgriMarketing magazine, one associate member participant commented about their favorability towards its design, “Yeah, the layout, the design and all, is excellent in here...the layout and the design and the color...it pops. I mean, if this was something that I was interested in as far as working in the agriculture industry, it would be a great magazine.
- While assessing a newsletter from another Florida agricultural association group, one associate member participant said. “I like the way it is titled...like the headers, you have got the larger header for the main idea and then as you look through it, they are in different colors so that you can see all the titles to all the columns immediately. So, you can scan over it really quick and see kind of what is in there, if it is something that you want to see. I think you can scan over it quickly and find what you want.”
- However, several other associate member participants has the following conversation regarding the overall design of publications  
Participant 1: “I prefer the less formal.”  
Participant 2: “This is like Money magazine.”  
Participant 1: “Yeah, big money ... I would say that when you pick this up and you look at it, it is like he said...(name omitted), he said that it is like the Money magazine. It looks like to me that this should be in a lawyer’s office that is sitting on a table. It is more geared toward marketing.”

#### Size

- Participants in the first associate member focus group had the following discussion about the overall size of the FLAG while reviewing an edition of the *Florida Grower* magazine:  
Participant 1: I am debating on whether I like this size better than what we get.  
Participant 2: “This [*Florida Grower*] is more of a uniform size, I think.”  
Participant 1: “Right.”  
Participant 3: “If you were going to be interested...if I were receiving something that I was interested in, I probably would take [the *Florida Grower*] size and put it with my briefcase rather than having to fold that in half...I wouldn’t do that”

- While in contradiction, another associate member discussed the appeal of the current size of the FLAG, “I don’t have a problem with it being this size because when I see it in the mailbox I know exactly what it is because it is the only one I get that is this size.”

### *Content*

Both associate member focus groups discussed the content of the publication and their preferences. Both groups mentioned the classifieds, the presence of advertisements, as well as having articles with personal interest story lines and increasing the overall length of the publication. In addition, the first associate member focus group wanted the FLAG to display the member benefits clearly so that they could be more aware of the value of membership. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this topic.

### *Classifieds*

Both associate member focus groups wanted to keep or add to the current classifieds section of the FLAG.

- In the first associate member focus group, when asked what they wanted in an FFBF publication, on participant said, “Add a couple of pages of classifieds too.”
- In the second associate member focus group, when asked what was important to keep in the FFBF publication, one participant said, “Well, the classifieds in the back are my biggest.”
- Also in the second associate member focus group, one participant commented that the classifieds section of the FFBF publication made it stand out from other publications, “And I think it is the only one that has this classifieds section. I don’t think that you see those in the others.”

### *Advertisements*

Both associate member focus groups were concerned about the amount of advertising in the publications they reviewed, knowing that advertising is necessary to keep costs down but it could also reduce the content.

- In the first associate member focus group, one participant discussed how many publications motivated by ads, but that it could reduce their costs, “Some of these publications are just advertising driven. The content is very little when you extract. And those are meant to be looked at, read, take out whatever you want, and then recycle. I think that is really the intent behind them and they are less expensive to produce. They have to be.”
- In the second associate member focus group, one participant commented that the 2012 edition of the FLAG had more advertising than a 2011 edition, “It seems like they need to advertise more in this one than they did in that one. It just is full of advertising, doesn’t seem to be very personable. I just don’t like the setup.”

### *Personal Interest Stories*

Participants in both associate member focus groups discussed wanting the articles in the FLAG to have more personal interest storylines including locally focused stories, recipes and articles that didn’t concentrate on big agricultural operations, but the smaller hobby farmer.

In the first association member focus group, the following comments were made about the content of articles or stories in the FLAG:

- “Maybe if it had some articles about our local schools and the ag classes and what they are doing, that would catch my eye.”
- “I think in terms of the content, it would appeal to associate members a little better with the recipes and it looked like there was an article about, maybe, a local farmer. So rather than it being so industry focused, like what is the best pesticide and the rest of these...I think the content in that is more applicable to associate members, possibly.”
- “I am not sure that as associate members, that a lot of the articles are as relevant.”
- “Every once in a while, they will have a great recipe in there too, from one of the agriculture’s...whether it be the strawberry industry, or whatever. But, at different times of year, it will have great recipes in it.”
- “I like that it is concise and that there is a recipe here and it seems diverse in terms of the content.”

In the second association member focus group, the following comments were made about the content of articles or stories in the FLAG:

- “I would say, keep more personal stories in here about different people throughout the state.”
- “I think that for the person that has got Florida Farm Bureau homeowner’s insurance ...if they have insurance through them, they might be more apt to want to see more of the local businesses, local smaller...something that works for them versus maybe a grower or a business that is a member of the Farm Bureau wants to see more of the industrial side to the business.”

### *Publication Length*

Participants in both associate member focus groups thought the overall length of the FLAG publication was too short and could be increased, but that individual article length should be concise.

- In the first associate member focus group, one participant discussed how the length of articles could affect readership, “Well, (name omitted)’s idea about the articles, you know these are a little bit more concise and to the point, I guess, but they are shorter. A person is a lot more apt to read them if they are a little bit shorter. If it is going to be four or five pages, it is kind of like sending memos out. When we used to send memos out to the principals and things...good God, if you had a whole four page memo, you had better put the important stuff in the first paragraph, because they aren’t going to read past the first paragraph. They just don’t have time. People don’t have time.”
- One associate member participant in the first group commented about how the FLAG’s length has changed over time, “They have gotten smaller than what they were before. They have gotten thinned out a little bit more.”
- In the second associate member focus group, two other participants also discussed how the FLAG’s length has changed over time,  
Participant 1: I agree. It seems like the articles have been shortened up some too, doesn’t it?  
Participant 2: Big time. (crosstalk and agreement)

- When asked what could be changed about the current FLAG publication, one associate member participant in the second focus group said, “A little bit thicker, a little bit more...a few more articles.”

### Benefits

The first associate member focus group also requested that the benefits of associate membership be displayed in the FLAG publication.

- Participant 1: “Show what our benefits are. Put it in the paper, let us see.”  
Participant 2: “And the other thing that I was going to say is, look how many people, when we got here tonight, said that they just throw it in the trash and now look at how many people with a little bit of education of what is in here, are willing to take a look at it?”
- Another participant from the first associate member focus group explained why it’s important to display the membership benefits, “Tell them what is in here that is going to be beneficial for their lives.”

### Frequency

Associate member participants had mixed feelings about changing the frequency in which the FLAG publication is delivered. Some associate member participants were okay with a reduction in delivery, while others thought of some potential issues of a quarterly publication. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this topic.

- One associate member participant commented that a quarterly publication might not be consistent enough to remember, “If is a quarterly, there is not much to it. There is nothing...if this is an example of what most of them are, it would probably end up after the first couple of times of opening it and looking at it, it would probably go in the trash the third or fourth time without even looking at it.”
- An associate member participant in the first focus groups mentioned how they would be okay with a receiving the publication less frequently, but wouldn’t want to be a minimal as quarterly, “I would go ahead with every other month, but I wouldn’t want it less because like I said, the shopping on the back is just too important for me, you know? And if you do it every other month you are going to miss out. Especially when you go towards the fall, you have got one every month. And I would hate to see that go.”
- In the second associate member focus group, several participants agreed there were pros to a monthly publication:  
Participant 1: “I like it monthly myself.”  
Participant 2: “I enjoy the monthly issue.”  
General Comment: “I do, too.”  
Participant 3: “Because we plan on it coming.”  
Participant 4: “Because you are not cramming everything in with a quarterly where there is too much to read and you don’t have enough time. Here you just take your leisure for the month and read it and pick it back up. The next month it comes and...I just think if you start putting every three months or every six months, it is just going to make it too thick, just like the average *Time* magazine or the *People* magazine. It is going to get so thick you can’t read it.”

Participant 1: “There is too much that goes on every month.”

Participant 5: “That is what I think. I think if you take it away month by month, you are going to take more of the person-ability out of it. It is going to be more geared to...I don’t know if that is a fact, but I think it would have to be...there would be more technical stuff in it versus being able to have the time. If you do it every month, you have the time to do these articles about the 4H and the FFA and about the...”

Participant 6 interrupts: “Plus, if you do a quarterly, if there was a special event in January, we wouldn’t know about it. It would already be passed because you would be getting it in April.”

Participant 5: “Or you got it in August about December and by the time December got here you would have forgotten about it.”

### *Cost of Production*

While reviewing other publications and considering the potential modernization of the FLAG, associate member participants did want the update to be cost effective and did not want the cost of updating the publication to increase the price of their insurance. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this topic.

- One associate member participant suggested that the content was more important than the aesthetics when considering cost, “Well, I am a conservative and if what this whole study is about is trying to save money, I am all about that if it is going to benefit the consumer. The content is important. I don’t think the quality of the material is all that necessary from what I have heard. The content is what is important.”
- During the second associate member focus group, while reviewing a non-FLAG publication, several participants agreed that the quality of the aesthetics of the publication were not important if it meant their insurance rate or membership dues would increase:

Participant 1: “You can tell the quality when you look at it. But, personally I don’t think it is necessary. Not for me. Not for my needs.”

General Comment: “I agree.”

Participant 2: “If it means cheaper insurance because they are paying less on the magazine, then that would be really good, too.”

### *Purpose and Use of Publication*

The current FLAG publication has been used in a variety of methods and has had several purposes for the associate member participants. These participants’ uses of the publication ranged from using it consistently to help with a child’s homework, to simply scanning it for information to throwing it away every month. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this topic.

- One associate participant explained how their daughter used the publication, “When I first got it, my daughter was having to do a lot of book reports for extra credit and I found interesting stories for her about dogs and animals...that is what she loves. And she used those inside the Ag News. She liked it and the teacher really liked it, too. It was beneficial at that point in time.”

- Other participants skimmed the publication to see what was included, one participant said, “Well, we have them in the house and reflect back on them. We look to see if there is anything going on. It ends up in the bathroom in the magazine rack.”
- One associate member participant explained why he had never read the publication, “My wife and I have three boys under the age of twelve, so just to be right honest, it goes right from the mailbox into the garbage can for me. Just simply because I don’t have time to sit down and read a whole lot of anything that is not connected with my role, but it’s beautiful and I am not offended by it. It is just something that would be clutter for me, right now.”
- Another associate member participant discussed her use of the publication, “I am not in agriculture, but I scan it. I never read the whole thing. I scan it because I am, I have in the past done some gardening and I am planning on doing some more. So, if there is a big article about blueberries it is directed to commercial growers, but I scan it to see if there is anything that I can learn. And I too, like the recipes in it.”

## Findings

### Value of FFBF

- Both active and associate members of FFBF agree that the general public and associate member’s knowledge or awareness of FFBF, its benefits, and values is lacking.

### Active Members

- Active member of FFBF value the organization as the voice of agriculture. Additionally, they mentioned the emphasis that FFBF places on the economic and financial value of the industry, the jobs provided, and political involvement for Florida agriculture.
- Active member participants also valued FFBF personally as a resource that informs them and the community on issues. Active members also valued the ability to stay connected with all different commodities within Florida agriculture.

### Associate Members

- The strongest aspect of the connection between associate members and the organization is through personal relationships and word of mouth communication. Associate members enjoy, value, and trust their relationship with their insurance agent. In addition, associate members have confidence in the organization because they have a positive association with those who told them about the organization, including family, friends and neighbors.
- Though associate members of FFBF value the financial savings they receive from their insurance policies and the perks or discounts gained from membership, they are generally unaware of the other benefits associated with being a member of the organization.
- Other values that associate members place on FFBF included financial value, consistency, and perks or discounts.

## Communication Preferences

- Associate and active members of FFBF use technology at varying levels, which effects their perception of receiving publications digitally. Some participants wanted to be able to read the *FloridaAgriculture* on their iPad or other mobile device, while others wished for the magazine to continue in its current, printed format.
- Both active and associate members of FFBF believe that the current audience of FFBF's communication is only the active members or those engaged in agriculture to support their livelihood.
- Both active and associate member participants discussed the opportunities for FFBF to develop new communication channels and offer more options for how they received their communication materials from FFBF, including generating more social media, email, and website content.

## Active Members

- Active member participants would like to see FFBF target more non-agricultural audiences, including children and young adults, in its communication strategies.
- Active member participants are concerned about the current, more defensive, messaging used by the agricultural industry and would like to be more proactive in strategic messaging. Even though the active members recognized that a strategic messaging strategy might have a high cost, they thought it would be an investment in the future.

## Associate Members

- Associate members of FFBF are confused about the differences between publication distributed by the FFBF and other publications, mainly *Ag News* and *In the Field*.

## Publication Preferences

- Both active and associate members of FFBF wanted more lifestyle content in the FFBF publication. Active members liked the agriculturally focused content but recognized the associate members may not find it favorable. While the associate member participants preferred content related to local events and stories about local individuals or students to stories involving technical skills of large agricultural operations. Participants thought the technical, agricultural content was directed at the active member audience only.
- Both active and associate member participants felt that a monthly publication was the best delivery frequency. Participants felt that if the publication was more infrequent than monthly the information published would be 'old news' and lack relevancy. However, associate members thought there should be an option to opt out of receiving the publication.
- Both active and associate members discussed the cost of distributing a publication, but for different reasons. Active members wanted to spend more money on the distribution and messaging within the publication while the associate members wanted FFBF to spend less on the publication to reduce their insurance rates.
- Active and associate members of FFBF have varying perspectives on their preferences regarding the format and aesthetics publication. For instance, some participants preferred glossy paper, others prefer newsprint; some



participants preferred a smaller size, others liked a larger, folded publication; some participants like updated graphics, while other preferred and older style graphic.

Though the associate members' opinions regarding publication style and formatting varied greatly in the focus groups, there were some demographic variables that could explain the variation. For example, the first focus group had a lower average age than the second and no agricultural/farm insurance while the second group did. Finally the professions of the first group of participants did not include agriculturally-related professions, while the second group included individuals who work for Mosaic and Florida's Natural. These small differences, while representative of the associate member population, could account for the varying perspectives on formatting, style, and use of technology.

- After considering the demographics of the each focus group, it was determined that older, more traditional associate members prefer their publications arrive in print, through the mail, and in a newspaper format, while younger, more contemporary associate members, preferred to receive the publication through email and to view publications digitally.

### Active Members

- The active member participants thought FFBF should consider testing new distribution methods including placing the publication at Wal-Marts and feed stores, bed and breakfasts, the Chamber of Commerce and other venues. Active member participants thought that increasing the distribution would also increase awareness of the organization and therefore increase membership.
- Active member participants liked the idea of a monthly newsletter, but only as a replacement to the FLAG.

### Associate Members

- Currently, associate members are using the FLAG publication in a variety of ways. The use ranges helping with a child's homework, to simply scanning it for information to throwing it away every month.
- Associate member participants did not favor the look of a newsletter because it strongly reminded them of junk mail that they would throw away. Therefore, they thought it would not be useful to develop a newsletter that would never be read.

## Recommendations

### Top Tier Priorities

- Based on the varying demographics, and therefore perspectives, of the FFBF associate member population, with regards to the format and style of the publication, FFBF should offer more options for how the publication is received, to increase the favorability of readership without disturbing current readership. Options for the receiving the FLAG publication should include email, the website, ground mail, and a choice to opt out.

- Based on feedback from both active and associate members, FFBF should not change the frequency of delivery for the FLAG publication. Members feel they would miss information that is important to them. In addition, they have the expectation to receive the publication every month and do not want it to be disrupted.
- Aesthetic preferences of the active and associate members of FFBF were too variable and the individual preferences do not allow for a clear recommendation to be made with regard to paper type, publication size, or overall design of the FLAG publication.
  - Given that there are distinct demographic differences among FFBF's associate members, FFBF should use an incremental approach to making changes to the *FloridAgriculture* publication. More traditional readers will need time to get used to glossy, thin paper, as well as the more contemporary graphics. The process of making changes should be evolutionary in nature, which will appeal to younger members who will appreciate seeing changes, while keeping the pace of change manageable for the more traditional members.
- FFBF should include more human interest content in its publication. Active and associate members expressed interest in wanting more articles and information about local events and individuals, students, recipes, and how to farm at a smaller scale. However, based on feedback, FFBF should also be sure to make articles more concise with distinct headings and titles.

## Second Tier Priorities

- In order to increase the associate members' connection with the FFBF, the organization should focus on the associate members' relationship with their insurance agent. The trust bond that most associate members have with their agent is strong. Therefore, FFBF should use the insurance agents as a way to inform associate members about the benefits of membership and FFBF as an organization. If possible, insurance agents should be trained about all of the benefits of membership in order to ensure all associate members receive the same message.
- FFBF should update the title and heading of its *FloridAgriculture* publication to ensure it is not confused with other local, agriculturally-focused publications. To further reduce confusion, county Farm Bureau offices should consider removing non Farm Bureau publications from their offices.
- As changes are made, FFBF should continue to be transparent about why changes are being made, and continue to solicit member feedback through including periodic survey questionnaire in publication, and/or online.