



Informational Report – December 2023

ACT 243 - TO CREATE AN AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION PILOT PROGRAM IN PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Access Act 243 at

<https://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/Home/FTPDocument?path=%2FACTS%2F2023R%2FPublic%2FACT243.pdf>

Arkansas Agriculture

With its fertile soils, temperate climate, and rich agricultural history, the Natural State has emerged as a critical player in shaping the nation’s agricultural landscape. Arkansas boasts a diverse agricultural sector that spans across fertile plains, rolling hills, and the delta regions. From cotton to rice paddies, the state’s agricultural tapestry paints a portrait of resilience and innovation. As a testament to its agricultural prowess, Arkansas consistently ranks among the top producers of various commodities, including rice, poultry, soybeans, and timber.

What is Ag in the Classroom?

The term “Agriculture in the Classroom” refers to a nationwide program that aims to promote agricultural literacy and awareness among students, educators and the general public. The primary goal is to help people understand the importance of agriculture in their daily lives and its broader impact on society.

Such a program typically involves the development of educational resources, curriculum materials, and outreach activities that integrate agriculture concepts into various subjects taught in schools. Different programs include curriculum development, teacher training, classroom resources, hands-on learning, partnerships with the agriculture community, and promoting agriculture literacy.

By bringing agriculture into the classroom, these programs aim to ensure students develop a well-rounded understanding of where their food comes from, the role of agriculture in the economy, and the impact of agriculture practices on the environment.

These programs also help students appreciate the diverse career opportunities available in the agriculture industry, from farming and agribusiness to science and technology roles.

In 2018, Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal signed the [Georgia Agricultural Education Act](#), which called for an agricultural pilot program in elementary schools. Eventually, 26 elementary schools participated in the program during the 2019 school year.

Arkansas Farm Bureau representatives learned of this program and decided to try to implement it in Arkansas.

What is Arkansas Act 243 (HB1336)?

Arkansas Rep. Bruce Cozart of Hot Springs filed House Bill 1336 in the 2023 legislative session. The act sought “to create an agricultural education pilot program in public elementary schools and for other purposes.” Act 243 states the program would start with the 2025-2026 school year.

Within the bill, it says, “local school district board of directors for each of the elementary schools selected under subdivision, may employ an agricultural education teacher to provide the agricultural education program at its public school district. The pilot program should be based on the nationally recognized three-component model of school-based agricultural education, which includes without limitations:

- (1) instruction in an organized classroom or laboratory environment;
- (2) hands-on, real-world learning opportunities; and
- (3) leadership and learning opportunities through participation in Arkansas Division of the Future Farmers of American and Arkansas 4-H Foundation, Incorporated program.”

House Bill 1336 of 2023 – Bill History		
Date	Bill Location	Action
Feb. 1, 2023	Filed in House	Referred to House Education Committee
Feb. 16, 2023	2 nd Reading	Amendment adopted
Feb. 22, 2023	Passed in House (94-0)	Sent to Senate Education Committee
March 6, 2023	Passed in Senate (34-0)	Sent to Governor
March 10, 2023	Became Act 243	

A minimum of six elementary schools will be selected under Act 243. Pilot schools would operate the program for a minimum of three years. The program will focus on providing collaborative learning experiences through (1) instruction and inquiry, (2) experimental learning activities, and (3) personal and leadership development opportunities.

About Arkansas Farm Bureau Federation

Act 243 named the Arkansas Farm Bureau Federation as a partner in introducing agriculture into classrooms through the use of pilot programs in Arkansas elementary schools.

The federation was established in 1935 to advocate for and promote agriculture throughout Arkansas, the region and the country. The organization represents more than 190,000 “members families” in Arkansas, according to the organization’s website.

Interview with Arkansas Farm Bureau Federation

Applications for the pilot program have not opened yet. The Arkansas Farm Bureau Federation hopes the pilot program will become a permanent option for elementary-age children to learn about Arkansas agriculture (L. Rucker, personal communication, Nov. 11, 2003).

“We hope that they will implement ag in their schools in some way. It doesn’t have to be curriculum, but we at least want kids to understand where their food comes from and know about the industry that works so hard to feed and clothe us - whether they end up working for the industry or not,” said Lindsey Rucker, an education coordinator for the Arkansas Farm Bureau, in a personal communication.

Rucker said she expected existing elementary classroom teachers would be responsible for teaching the pilot curriculum. Schools would have the discretion to hire someone if they choose, but the school is responsible for the funding, whether it be local funding or district funding.

Rucker provided tips for applying to participate in the pilot program:

- Implement this program into your schools in the best way it fits your school. There is no ‘right’ way for every single district, and we know that. We want the pilot sites to determine what works best for their school and go with it. In some schools, it may look like one hour a day; some will implement it for one day a week for nine weeks, some will do it every day for 30 minutes, and some will integrate it into everyday instruction.
- Choose a project to go along with the program and to choose a project that works for them. Some schools will do raised beds, some will do classroom gardening, some may ‘adopt’ an animal, some may work with high school FFA chapters, etc. As long as the students are learning and retaining the info, we will be satisfied and see the program as successful.

The Arkansas Farm Bureau plans on opening the application process soon to all public schools in the state; however, they will have a cap on the number of schools that can participate, which right now is still being determined.

Conclusion

With this new state law, students will gain an insight into the field of agriculture at a younger age when they are trying to figure out their interests. Even if they do not see their future in the industry, they will at least have a better understanding and be educated correctly on the industry itself.

In the world in which we live today, understanding the fundamental importance of agriculture is more crucial than ever. Children need to know where their food, clothing, and even the football they play with at recess comes from. Agriculture is not just about farming; it is a cornerstone of our daily lives.

Agricultural education allows them to go on a journey that goes beyond those classroom walls. By bringing agriculture to the classroom, these programs will ensure that students develop a well-rounded understanding of the role that agriculture plays within the economy. It will also show students the diverse career opportunities available in the agriculture industry, from farming and agribusiness to science and technology roles.

About the Author

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