Agronomic Crop Research Experience (ACRE) 2015-2017 Summary Report

The Agronomic Crop Research Experience (ACRE) is a summer internship program hosted by the Ohio State University Extension Agronomic Crops Team. The program was started in 2015 to provide a hands-on training experience to undergraduate students in a diversity of agronomic disciplines. Interns were placed in county offices throughout the state and worked closely with local county educators and state specialists to support scouting, training and on-farm research and Extension activities.

The program had three goals of:
1) training the next-generation of agronomists, entomologists, plant pathologists, and soil scientists
2) empowering locally-directed on-farm research
3) identifying solutions to critical and emerging agricultural issues in Ohio.

The internships started with a 2-day orientation training and interns met semi-regularly throughout the summer for additional trainings and field days.

Over the past 3 years, a total of 26 undergraduate students completed the training and internship program (8 in 2015, 9 in 2016, 9 in 2017). These students were from 6 institutions (The Ohio State University, Wilmington College, Morehead State University, Wright State University, University of Kentucky, University of Rio Grande), representing a diversity of agricultural and environmental majors. The interns supported numerous projects directed by both Extension specialist at the state level, as well as county-based educators. We estimate that over 50,000 acres were scouted/researched with over 1,000 farm visits from 2015-2017. The interns supported research and Extension activities in no less than 32 of Ohio’s 88 counties including: Adams, Ashtabula, Auglaize, Brown, Champaign, Clark, Clinton, Darke, Defiance, Delaware, Fayette, Fulton, Highland, Knox, Licking, Madison, Mahoning, Mercer, Miami, Morrow, Paulding, Pickaway, Pike, Ross, Sandusky, Seneca, Scioto, Trumbull, Tuscarawas, Wayne, Williams, Wood.

Feedback on the program from ACRE Interns:
Over 90% of interns surveyed anonymously said the program:
- Better prepared them for their career
- Was extremely hands-on as advertised
- Increased their desire to be a county Extension educator

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OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

3 YEARS

26 STUDENTS

1,000+ FARM VISITS

50,000+ ACRES SCOUTED

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF FOOD, AGRICULTURAL, AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES
Feedback on the program from ACRE Interns:

“This program gave me the opportunity to see what OSU Extension, OARDC, and other organizations had to offer to the public. I had known about Ag. and Natural Resource agents, but I never knew the impact they could have in a county. I come from a county that did not have an ANR Educator, and I now know that we are missing out. I was able to interact with State specialist, who have a great depth and breadth of knowledge, but I was able to do so at a level that I could understand and educate others on.”

“I learned an incredible amount from both the OSU staff I worked with and also the farmers. The hands-on learning was superb and gave me lots of material to use in my future career as a classroom educator.”

“The connections you make during the internship is probably the greatest strength of the program. By going to field days, talking to farmers, and attending meetings I was able to learn about future internships, jobs and about what the farmers concerns are. Another strength is the experience one may gain in field researching, public speaking, communication.”

“Agriculture is at the forefront of technology and Extension is doing everything it can to make sure that the technology is being used correctly... one of the biggest things I’ve learned from this program is the ability to sift through the recommendations of companies, and get down to the cold hard facts of what the farmer needs and why they need it.”

“I love the independence of this program. My bosses would give me set directions then allow me to go out and work on my own. Both of my supervisors took me out my first week and introduced me to the local farmers I would be working with in that area. This allowed for me to establish trust with the farmers and to have a sense of direction within this internship. This program has allowed me to meet many influential members of the agricultural community and has opened up the pool for potential employers.”
Feedback from OSU County Extension Educators:

“The ACRE internship program was excellent for our county. For me, as an ANR Educator, to offer a more comprehensive and relevant On Farm Research program will serve the needs of our commodity farmers. The ACRE internship program did a great job of fostering collaborative research among OSU’s state specialists, county educators and the intern. This relationship will better allow Extension to serve the needs of clients and build more competent graduates in the future.”

“The ACRE program has increased the amount of agronomic research that occurred in our county. Additionally it provided increased visibility to farmers and funders on the work of OSU Extension. Farmers are now asking for the research results and looking to OSU Extension for information at a higher frequency than prior to the ACRE program.”

“The ACRE internship is a great program to assist with implementation of consistent multi-county and state level research by having the same person trained to collect data. It was an honor to host a younger college student to help train them for future generations of consistent unbiased research.”

“A big strength of the program is that interns get the “behind the scenes” look at what is involved in County and State Extension Programs. My intern was a former 4-H member in our county, but he was surprised at what all happens on the ANR side of the county Extension office. Interns get the opportunity to be involved in a variety of research projects, they work with clients, they work with other Extension staff, and farm cooperators. The ACRE internship program is a very well-rounded program for undergraduate students, it exposes the intern to many different aspects of the agricultural industry.”

“The best part of the program I witnessed was our ACRE intern in the fields with farmers along side State Specialists Anne Dorrance and Peirce Paul diagnosing problems with the spring crop or estimating wheat disease pressure and yield potential.”

“The ACRE intern program not only gives young people exposure to Extension roles but also helps them build applied skills in the agriculture industry. The hands-on experience working in a field setting and communicating with growers will be valuable no matter what career path they ultimately choose.”

For more information, please visit go.osu.edu/acre or contact Steve Culman (culman.2@osu.edu)