

I Believe.

They're only words. Two-hundred and fifty-eight of them, to be exact.

Taken individually, they aren't cause for much discussion. But grouped as they are, they form the FFA Creed, about which lots of people have been talking recently.

The familiar lines, penned by E.M. Tiffany (Erwin Milton for trivia buffs) have become an important tradition of the FFA organization. Thousands of members cut their public speaking teeth on the five paragraphs, nervously stuttering "I believe..." before intimidating panels of judges. State and national officers cite the FFA Creed as their first training exercise in leadership.

But what really is a creed? What should it do for an organization? Webster's dictionary defines a creed as any statement of belief or principles. A creed should express the philosophy of a group and its members. It describes the group's actions, aspirations and beliefs, and communicates this to outside audiences. New members are initiated to the group's values through its creed.

This definition introduces the issues surrounding the current FFA Creed. Back in 1930, when the first FFA Creed was presented, it was written for an organization of rural boys whose main career goal was to produce food for a growing nation. The original creed, part of which follows here, described the FFA's philosophy well.

I believe that the dignity of labor depends not so much upon what you do, as upon how you do it; that opportunity comes to a boy on the farm as often as to a boy in the city; that life on the farm may be full, happy and free, and that a prosperous agriculture is essential to our national welfare; that my success depends not upon my dreams, but what I actually do, not upon luck but upon pluck.

Written by an unknown author, this first creed was published in the 1930 FFA Manual.

FFA chapters are in Philadelphia and Chicago, with hundreds of members who have never set foot on a farm. FFA members across the country are preparing for careers in sales, research, engineering, communications, and the many other careers available in agriculture.

Yet the Creed embraces only one segment of our membership—those who have come from and plan to go back to the farm. Though not to be ignored or forgotten, that segment is clearly the minority in today's diverse membership. In a time when agricultural education and FFA are striving to expand their mission, the Creed, by its narrow focus, limits those efforts.

An ideal FFA Creed for today would encompass all members...no matter what their Supervised Agricultural Experience programs, home situations or career goals. The Creed should inspire each member to take ownership in its words, and to truly believe in its philosophies.

Of course, there are members, teachers and alumni who believe that the current creed does this job, and does it well. In some parts of the country, the FFA Creed is as appropriate today as it was 60 years ago, and may continue to be for the next 60 years.

Considering a change in the Creed has been the task of the FFA Manual Revision Committee. Convened by the National FFA Board of Directors, one of the committee's missions is to consider the Creed and its possible revision. The Board has requested input from FFA members and advisors. If you have any suggestions, ideas, or would like to pen a few paragraphs of a creed, send your ideas to the Information Department at the National FFA Center, P.O. Box 15160, Alexandria, VA 22309-0160.

Virtually every national FFA convention presents new issues, some of which result in dramatic alterations to the constitution. Change is the very nature of a progressive organization.