## Program Overview & Purpose of this FAQ

The Agricultural Career Exploration (ACE) program is a statewide initiative of the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture (UADA) designed to prepare Arkansas high school students (age 16-19) for the rapidly changing agricultural industry. Funded by a NIFA grant, ACE focuses on agricultural technology and sustainable farming practices, connecting youth to emerging tools and techniques that improve crop management, pest control, quality assurance, and resource conservation.  
  
The program recruits Arkansas High School youth ages 16–19 each year, providing them with immersive, hands-on experiences in fields such as:  
- Food science  
- Robotics  
- Precision agriculture  
- Sensors and data analytics  
- Drones and UAS technology  
- RFID tracking  
- Water and soil conservation practices

- Animal Science

- Artificial Insemination  
  
Participants engage directly with researchers, farmers, industry leaders, and educators, learning how technology can address global challenges like food security and climate change. Visits may include farms in the Arkansas Discovery Farms Program, research stations, universities, and agricultural businesses.  
  
ACE also prioritizes increasing access for disadvantaged youth and serves as a bridge into the 4-H program for those not yet involved. As a result, all participants, including non-4-H youth, must enroll in 4-H. Through this process, youth are introduced to their county clubs, local agents, and state 4-H events, ensuring that ACE strengthens—not bypasses—the 4-H experience.  
  
This FAQ was developed to help county agents, volunteers, and applicants understand the program’s goals, eligibility requirements, and expectations. By clearly stating application timelines, membership responsibilities, and program standards, it ensures consistency across the state and addresses common questions about participation.

## Program Highlights

ACE is a 12-month, hands-on, immersive program. Participants will:  
- Attend in-state STEM enrichment seminars featuring tours, guest speakers, and interactive workshops.  
- Receive mentorship from professionals in agricultural technology fields such as plant pathology, food science, robotics, and environmental conservation.  
- Join career exploration webinars to develop leadership, communication, and workforce readiness skills.  
- Participate in independent STEM projects that address real-world challenges.  
- Travel on an international study tour to learn about agriculture innovations in other countries.  
- Present their ACE experience during State 4-H O’Rama.

## FAQs

### Q1: Who can apply for ACE?

The ACE program is open to all Arkansas high school students (age 16-19), whether they are current 4-H members.

### Q2: Why are non-4-H participants allowed?

This is by design and part of our NIFA grant requirements. One of the program’s goals is to reach youth who are not currently involved in 4-H, introducing them to the program and its opportunities.

### Q3: Do non-4-H participants have to become 4-H members?

Yes. All ACE applicants must:  
- Apply through ZSuite and become enrolled 4-H members upon acceptance into the program.  
- Schedule and complete an introductory meeting with their county agent to discuss club expectations, club involvement, and available opportunities.  
- Actively participate in their county club and maintain a solid standing throughout the program year. Solid standing includes consistent attendance at club meetings, participation in activities and events, and adherence to county and state 4-H guidelines.  
Failure to maintain these requirements will impact continued participation in ACE and eligibility for advanced opportunities, including international travel.

### Q4: When will applicants know if they’re accepted?

Applications open in September and are reviewed in the fall. Acceptance notifications are sent in December.

### Q5: What happens between September and December?

This two-month period will give non-4H participants time to attend club meetings and be an active member before a spot is extended for ACE. County agents are expected to continue their usual responsibilities, checking enrollments, maintaining accurate records, and bringing in new members as normal. This preparation helps ensure members are ready to meet ACE expectations if selected. In December, if non-4H members are considered for ACE, we will be checking to ensure they have been active with their county agent.

### Q6: Is club participation required for ACE acceptance?

Yes. Members must demonstrate active participation and make a positive contribution to their local club during the entire time they are in ACE. This involvement is an important factor in acceptance and continued eligibility for ACE programming, especially for travel-based experiences.

### Q7: What happens at State 4-H O’Rama for ACE participants?

ACE participants present on their ACE experience during State 4-H O’Rama. This requirement applies equally to all members in the program. Participants may register as either a District O’Rama winner or a State only O’Rama participant – whatever the participant and their county agent see fit. Either way, they must attend State O’Rama.

### Q8: Is this a temporary exception or a permanent rule?

This is a grant-funded recruitment strategy and will remain in place as long as required by the NIFA grant.

**Q9. Why are past participants not allowed to apply for ACE again?**

To meet our NIFA grant requirements, we must serve 80 unique participants over four years. Allowing past participants to reapply would limit opportunities for new youth and repeat the same experience for those who have already participated. Our goal is to provide disadvantaged youth with the chance to try something new, gain fresh experiences, and expand their exposure to 4‑H opportunities.

**Q10. Can agents or adults participate multiple times in ACE?**

To maximize the program’s impact, ACE prioritizes engaging new agents each year. Allowing the same agents or adults to participate repeatedly would limit opportunities for others and reduce the diversity of perspectives and experiences. Apart from the leadership team responsible for organizing and facilitating the program, the goal is to provide new agents with the opportunity to contribute fresh ideas, gain experience, and support underrepresented youth in meaningful ways. This approach ensures that ACE continues to expand its reach, foster innovation, and deliver unique experiences annually.

Note: While agents or adults may be considered if they wish to participate by funding their own participation, grant-funded spots are reserved exclusively for new agents each year.

**Important Dates (Tentative)**

* **Applications Open:** September 1, 2025
* **Applications Close:** October 30, 2025
* **Selection Process:** November 2025
* **Notifications Sent:** December 2025

**ACE Program Dates (Tentative):**

* **Session 1 (Orientation):** January 16–17, 2026
* **Session 2:** February 13–14, 2026
* **Session 3:** March 6–7, 2026
* **Session 4:** April 24–25, 2026
* **International Prep via Zoom:** May 28, 2026
* **International Trip:** June 17–24, 2026
* **International Debrief:** July 9, 2026
* **State O’Rama:** Mid/Late July 2026

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