ABSTRACT

WAASWA, ANDREW. Exploring the Influence of an Agricultural Leadership Development Program on Commodity Organization Leaders. (Under the direction of Dr. Joy Morgan Fleming).

In 2021, employment in the agriculture, food, and allied industries accounted for 10.5% of all occupations in the United States (OER Commons, 2024; USDA, 2023). North Carolina is among the most diversified agricultural states in the nation with an estimated 50,200 farmers growing over 80 different commodities (Lambar & Thomas, 2019). Throughout North Carolina, active commodity organizations and a leadership program, North Carolina Tobacco Trust Fund Commission Agricultural Leadership Development Program (NCTTFC ALDP), seek to prepare leaders to advance agriculture and pursue commodity organization goals. This study explored leadership development by the NCTTFC ALDP former participants and how they applied their leadership within commodity organizations in North Carolina. Vroom's (1964) Expectancy Theory of Motivation, founded on three main components: expectancy, instrumentality, and valence, guided this study. This qualitative multiple case study interviewed eight 2006-2023 NCTTFC ALDP former participants drawn from five cohorts representing seven commodity organizations, including cotton, cattle, dairy, pork, Christmas trees, greenhouse, and soybean. Data were analyzed deductively and inductively to yield six major themes: *for the greater good of agriculture; interpersonal skills; advocacy and influence; allowing space for reflection; continuous personal and organizational development, and Suggested changes vary from participant to participant.* This avenue of inquiry could further unearth unexplored dimensions of leadership development and NCTTFC ALDP's impact on commodity organizations.

Exploring the Influence of an Agricultural Leadership Development Program on Commodity Organization Leaders

by
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DEDICATION

To Dr. William Kerr (Bill) Collins!

BIOGRAPHY

Andrew Waaswa was born and raised in Kibuku District, Eastern Uganda. He attained his bachelor's degree in Agricultural and Rural Innovation from Makerere University, Uganda, and his undergraduate action research project focused on using locally available innovations (stone-contained tins) to control pest birds and enhance rice yields among rice farmers in Kamuli District, Uganda. Andrew earned a Master of Science degree in Agricultural Extension from Egerton University, Kenya, and his MSc research investigated the determinants of potato farmers' adoption of Climate-Smart Agricultural Technologies, Innovations, and Management Practices (TIMPs) in Kenya under the Kenya Climate Smart Agriculture Project and the Community Action Research Program Plus (CARP+). Andrew worked as a graduate assistant with the North Carolina Tobacco Trust Fund Commission Agricultural Leadership Development Program. Andrew's role as a graduate research and teaching assistant in the Department of Agricultural and Human Sciences at North Carolina State University included leading and assisting with teaching the AEE 435 and helping with the Rurally Engaged Agricultural Leadership (REAL) Program, Institute for Future Agricultural Leaders (IFAL) and the NC Farm Bureau Young Farmers & Ranchers (YF&R) Program. Andrew has worked as an agronomist and farm manager with the Industrial Promotion Services in Uganda and as a resource assistant with the United States Department of Agriculture Southeast Climate Hub.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

Background and Setting

Since 1948, agricultural production in the United States has more than doubled (up 156%), and the proportions of various commodities in overall farm output have changed over time (Wang et al., 2015). In 2021, employment in the agriculture, food, and allied industries accounted for 10.5% of all occupations in the United States equating to 21.1 million full- and part-time jobs in the agricultural and food sectors, making for about $1.264 trillion (5.4%) of the GDP (OER Commons, 2024; USDA, 2023). Farms directly supported over 2.6 million jobs in the United States or 1.3% of all jobs and another 18.5 million jobs were supported by employment in sectors related to agriculture and food (OER Commons, 2024; USDA, 2023). Additionally, the output of America's farms contributed $164.7 billion—about 0.7% of the United States. Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The entire amount of agriculture's GDP contribution is higher than 0.7% because industries related to agriculture, such as forestry and fishing, food and beverage manufacturing, food and beverage retailers, food services, and eating and drinking establishments, depend on agricultural inputs to add value to the economy (OER Commons, 2024; USDA, 2023).

Agriculture is a significant contributor to national and state development agendas. With agriculture’s expansion throughout numerous sectors, organizations that work closely with farmers and producers are vital to their success not only economically but also through advocacy and research focused efforts. Commodity organizations create a unified voice that aligns closely with the views of their members as they work to strengthen education, research, and the commodity itself. Most commodity organizations employ individuals whose full-time responsibilities align with the mission of the organization, however, in addition to those

employees, commodity organizations rely heavily on their officer team and board members to further direct the work of the organization. These officer teams and board members serve in volunteer roles and are made up of farmers, ranchers, and producers as well as industry representatives. Collectively, these individuals share the responsibility of directing the work of the organization that can greatly impact the direction of the specific commodity.

Agriculture in North Carolina

Agriculture is one of the significant industries in North Carolina, and North Carolina's farm sector consists of diverse commodities and farm sizes (Herath & Hill, 2013). The agriculture industry in North Carolina contributes over $103.2 billion annually to the state's economy (North Carolina State University - College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, 2023). In 2021, 17.5% of all North Carolina jobs – or three-quarters of a million – were in agriculture (Hejlkova, 2022). According to Lambar and Thomas (2019), North Carolina is among the most diversified agricultural states in the nation, with an estimated 50,200 farmers growing over 80 different commodities, utilizing 8.4 million acres of the state's total land area of 31 million acres. The latter added that North Carolina is the second-largest producer of Christmas trees; the top producer of tobacco, poultry, and sweet potatoes; and the eighth-largest producer of agricultural products overall in the United States (Table 1). Furthermore, North Carolina provides more than $13 billion to the market value of all marketed agricultural goods and is among the country's top 10 producers and exporters of several agricultural commodities. It is also ranked as the 11th largest exporter of agricultural products (Quaicoe et al., 2023).

Table 1

North Carolina's top 10 rankings of commodities in U.S. agriculture

Rank	Commodities	Production	NC's % of U.S.
1.	Flue-cured tobacco	252 (million Lbs)	80.4
	Sweet potatoes	18322.5 (000 Cwt)	63.5
	All tobacco	252.4 (million Lbs)	52.8
	All poultry and egg cash receipt	5762.3 (million $)	16.2
2.	Turkeys	30 (million Hd)	13.9
	Annual Pig Crop	17.9 (million Hd)	13.5
	Trout Sold (food size)	3.5 (million Lbs)	7.7
3.	Cucumbers	1565.5 (000 Cwt)	10.9
	Hogs and pigs	8 (million Hd)	10.8
4.	Broilers	971.4 (million Hd)	7.8
5.	Peanuts	495.9 (million Lbs)	7.8
	Watermelon	2557.5 (000 Cwt)	7.5
	Bell Peppers	506 (000 Cwt)	5
	Burley tobacco	0.4 (million Lbs)	0.5
6.	Eggs-value of production	512.8 (million $)	5.9
	Livestock, dairy, and poultry cash receipts	9234 (million $)	5.6
	Upland cotton 2	773 (000 Bales)	4.5
7.	Squash	437.5 (000 Cwt)	6.3
	Blueberries	35.7 (million Lbs)	5.3
8.	Chickens (excludes broilers)	24 (million Hd)	4.6
9.	All commodity cash receipts	13283.8 (million $)	3.7
12.	Pumpkin	292.3 (000 Cwt)	1.8

Note: North Carolina is not ranked 10th in any commodity.

Adapted from North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services & USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (2022).

North Carolina agriculture is supported by state and national agricultural commodities that offer support to farmers to help in adhering to policies, acquiring quality inputs, and soliciting higher output prices.

Agricultural Commodity Organizations in the United States

The development of agricultural organizations and commodity organizations in the United States was a gradual process that began in the early 19th Century; these organizations were formed to promote the growth and development of agriculture in the country. The first recorded agricultural organization was the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture, established in 1785 (Pennsylvania State Council of Farm Organizations, nd). The Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture was founded by a group of prominent farmers and civic leaders in Philadelphia to promote agricultural knowledge and best practices among American farmers. The Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture played a significant role in developing agriculture in the United States by advocating for policies that supported farmers at both state and federal levels. Its contribution has been recognized over time; for example, George Washington echoed the sentiment of many Americans when he wrote, "Among the advantages resulting from this Institution, it is particularly pleasing to observe that a spirit of emulation has been excited by the rewards offered to excellence in the several branches of rural economy...." (Ellsworth, 1968, p. 2). The Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture played a significant role in advancing agricultural education and innovation in the early days of the United States by organizing meetings, publishing agricultural journals, and awarding prizes for agricultural achievements. Since then, a multitude of other agricultural organizations have been established in the United States, and they have contributed significantly to the agricultural development and

leadership of farming communities by providing members with access to resources such as research, education, marketing, and policy analysis (Pitman, 2018).

The evolution of agricultural organizations has been inclusive of particular populations. An example is the American Agri-Women (AAW) which encompasses several organizations. The AAW was created by four state-based women's agriculture organizations, including the Washington Women for the Survival of Agriculture, Oregon Women for Agriculture, Wisconsin Women for Agriculture, and Women for the Survival of Agriculture in Michigan, was formally launched on November 14, 1974. Soon after, Illinois Agri-Women (then Illinois Women for Agriculture) and Kansas Agri-Women (then United Farm Wives of Kansas) joined (Jones, 2020). Today, AAW has more than 50 state and affiliate organizations and individual members throughout the country, representing tens of thousands of women in agriculture (Jones, 2020). Thus, it is the country's largest coalition of women in agriculture, ranching, and agribusiness. The latter added that during the AAW's existence, its members have actively participated in and positively impacted legislative and regulatory issues at the municipal, state, and federal levels. Following AAW members' initiation of the Agriculture in the Classroom (AITC) program, they have also played a significant role in the education of consumers and students about agriculture.

Throughout the United States, many agricultural organizations are working toward the greater good of supporting agriculture. As agricultural organizations are often considered broad with representation from diverse sectors, commodity organizations or commodity associations offer support for commodity specific growers. These commodity organizations and associations are largely made up of farmers who serve as members, board representatives, and officers. These commodity organizations also employ full-time employees who may serve as the lead for directing the work of the organization. Throughout the United States, commodity organizations

can be found for every commodity with many having state, regional, and national representation. Not only do they advocate on behalf of the growers they represent but they also promote and provide research-based information and lead check-off programs.

> Check-off programs allow commodity groups to pool resources for advertising campaigns, market research, new product development and consumer education. They empower the industry chain to establish their own goals and decide for themselves how to best develop new markets and strengthen current markets for specific commodities" (Shipma, 2011, para. 4).

Checkoff programs, also known as research and promotion programs, empower agricultural producers, importers, and other players in the marketing chain to optimize resources and mitigate risks. It is necessary to prioritize collaboration within the industry rather than allowing the farmers to work independently in order to increase or extend commodities markets. Shipma (2011) adds that checkoff programs are fully sponsored and controlled by industry stakeholders, and they enable the industrial chain to set their objectives and choose the most effective strategies for expanding into new markets and enhancing existing markets for certain goods, which requires commodity leaders to initiate, fosters these relationships and guide the process.

According to the Agriculture Marketing Resource Center (2022), the National Corn Growers Association and the American Soybean Association represent the United States' two largest crops in terms of production. Some commonly known agricultural commodity organizations in the Southeast include the Southern Peanut Farmers Federation (Southern Peanut Farmers Federation, 2020), which represents peanut growers in the southern states, advocating for policies that benefit the peanut industry and conducting research to improve peanut

production. Like the latter, the Louisiana Rice Growers Association, is focused on promoting Louisiana rice and rice products, supporting rice research, and advocating for policies that support rice farmers in the state (Louisiana Rice Growers Association, nd). It should be noted that the Southern Cotton Growers Association (Southern Cotton Growers, Inc.) is the largest commodity association in the southeastern region, known for its size and prominence. Southern Cotton Growers, Inc., was founded in 1964 and is a non-profit entity that advocates for numerous cotton producers across Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Florida, and Virginia. It is the leading commodity organization in the United States that produces only cotton and has the authority to appoint producer delegates to the National Cotton Council, members to the Cotton Board, and directors to Cotton, Inc. The Southern Cotton Growers Association's success is contingent upon its financial standing and the commitment of its officers, directors, and members. It also seeks to address political impacts in the United States regarding cotton production (Garric, 2011).

Commodity Organizations in North Carolina

In total, there are approximately 36 commodity organizations in North Carolina that address unique problems and contribute uniquely to North Carolina's agricultural development (see Appendix A**)**. These commodity organizations employ full time employees who direct the work of the commodity organization and work closely with organization officers and boards of directors who are made up of farmers and industry representatives. As leaders of these organizations and associations, they are vital to the work of promoting and advocating for efforts that will foster increased demand and awareness surrounding agricultural commodities. One of the first commodity organizations in North Carolina was the North Carolina Potato Association, established in 1928 by a group of potato farmers in the state's northeastern coastal regions. The

founders chose to form an association to work together for their mutual benefit. Today, this non-profit group works with the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services marketing experts to help promote North Carolina potatoes across the United States and Canada, and represents potato growers throughout North Carolina (NCDA & CS, n.d.). Other agricultural commodity organizations/associations documented by North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (n.d.) include but are not limited to the North Carolina Soybean Producers Association, established in 1969; the North Carolina Cotton Producers Association, founded in 1954; North Carolina Apple Growers Association, established in 1964; North Carolina Blueberry Council, founded in 1951.

Agricultural Leadership Development Programs in the United States

Agricultural leadership development programs in the United States have a long history dating back to the mid-20th century. The Kellogg Farmers Study Program (KFSP) established agricultural leadership programs in 1965 (Carter & Culbertson, 2012). The KFSP was established to develop effective agricultural leadership and to create a stronger tie between industry and the consumer. The KFSP provides the most available literature on modern leadership development programs (Kaufman et al., 2012). Through the KFSP, participants could increase their understanding of political, social, and economic systems, develop social skills, be effective spokespeople for their industry or community, expand individual networks, and develop future political, civic, and organizational leaders. Soon after the KFSP, state-level agricultural leadership programs in California and Pennsylvania were established, and over time, other states, provinces, and countries established agricultural leadership programs. At least 40 states in the United States and three provinces in Canada and Australia all have agricultural leadership programs developing agricultural and community leaders (Kaufman et al., 2012) as

well as strengthening networks (Dodson, 1996; Humphrey et al., 2023). The International Association of Programs for Agricultural Leadership [IAPAL] serves as a unified association for all of the agricultural leadership programs (Carter & Culbertson, 2012). According to Kaufman et al. (2012), IAPAL seeks to improve leadership development and distribute helpful knowledge to program administrators which by the year 2000, had graduated more than 7,200 participants and had received more than $15 million in funding.

Agricultural Leadership Development Program in North Carolina

The North Carolina Tobacco Trust Fund Commission Agricultural Leadership Development Program (NCTTFC ALDP) is a College of Agriculture and Life Sciences leadership program at North Carolina State University that seeks to empower farmers and agricultural professionals in North Carolina to use their civic and personal leadership. The Department of Economics and Business, presently known as the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, under the guidance of Dr. Bill Toussaint, launched the program in 1984. Farmers and agricultural professionals in North Carolina have benefited greatly from the NCTTFC ALDP's leadership development programs partly due to its curriculum which includes in-depth assessments of each participant's leadership style along with coaching, as well as domestic and international study tours and seminars on public policy, communication, and teamwork. The program develops personal and civic leadership skills in North Carolina mid-career farmers and agricultural-related professionals (Radford, 2020).

The NCTTFC ALDP was formerly funded by Philip Morris and known as the Philip Morris Agricultural Leadership Development Program and exclusively targeted flue-cured tobacco producers in North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Florida, and Georgia from its inception in 1984 until 2006, when it started recruiting all categories of farmers and

professionals working in the agricultural industry (Dr. W.K. Collins, personal communication, February 10, 2023). According to Radford (2020), the program was restructured in response to the apparent need for agricultural leadership development across North Carolina to support all individuals working in the state's agricultural industry. After restructuring, the primary funding source has been a five-million-dollar endowment granted by the North Carolina Tobacco Trust Fund Commission. In addition, participants must pay a fee to enroll in the leadership program. However, they also have the opportunity to apply for scholarships based on their financial circumstances, which can assist in reducing some of the costs involved. Radford (2020) adds that each cohort in this program receives approximately 50 days of training and leadership development distributed over two years. Brown (2023) elaborated that the program is segmented into seven 3-day sessions conducted in various locations in North Carolina, a legislative study tour to Washington, D.C., an international study tour to Brazil, a domestic study tour to Texas, and local study tours that explore the diverse agricultural landscape of North Carolina. The foreign study tour provides participants with essential knowledge about farmers' and agricultural professionals' production and marketing tactics, many of whom are major competitors in the United States' agricultural industry. The Texas and North Carolina trips offer attendees the chance to observe the manufacturing of several agricultural goods and enterprises, demonstrating the interdependence of agriculture as a cohesive entity (Radford, 2020). Moreover, these tours provide participants with direct exposure to various agricultural production techniques and allow them to witness how producers in the United States and Brazil tackle agricultural challenges and issues, which may differ from those faced in North Carolina.

Similar in structure to other agricultural leadership development programs across the US, NCTTFC ALDP has a compelling mission and vision which it strives to achieve in its pursuit to

help farmers and other agricultural professionals enhance their civic and personal leadership abilities (Brown, 2014). The mission statement reads as follows:

> To empower the next generation of agriculturalists with the knowledge, experience, and skills to become successful leaders in their businesses, communities, industries, state, and nation. We provide our participants with immersive exposure to ideas, perspectives, people, trends, and issues that will shape their lives, agriculture, and the world in the 21st century, experiences that are not possible in the normal course of farm life and business. We challenge our participants to expand their comfort zones, develop critical thinking skills, appreciate diversity in all its forms, gain the ability to communicate with a wide variety of audiences, and understand the impact that effective leadership can have to strengthen families, farms, businesses, communities, and the world (Morgan, 2023b).

Morgan (2023b) stated the program's vision as:

> Our vision is an expanding and influential network of mature, confident, and creative North Carolina leaders in farming, business, government, and community organizations that are rooted in a common understanding of the importance of agriculture. This network provides program graduates with a firm footing in starting their leadership journeys, and peers with whom they can connect throughout their careers, both in their work inside the agriculture industry and in the larger world.

The NCTTFC ALDP has produced over 250 alums with many currently holding or having held leadership positions in various agricultural commodity and community organizations. This highlights the program's importance in shaping agricultural leadership in North Carolina and other areas (Radford, 2020). However, despite its long-standing training, an in-depth assessment had not been conducted to evaluate the program's contribution to impacting

agricultural commodity organizations through its efforts to develop competent leaders. Therefore, this study explored the perspectives of former NCTTFC ALDP participants who have entered into leadership positions to make meaningful contributions within commodity organizations in North Carolina.

Statement of the Problem

Agricultural commodity organizations are integral components of the agricultural sector and food industry. Within North Carolina, NCTTFC ALDP seeks to develop and empower agricultural leaders who will lead in their families, communities, organizations, and careers. Several of the NCTTFC ALDP components have been evaluated; for example, Radford (2020) looked at the effectiveness of the NCTTFC ALDP in developing leadership skills. Additionally, Radford (2020) investigated where the participants applied leadership skills within their communities and profession. However, no study has been conducted to explore the perspectives of former participants and the NCTTFC ADLP's influence on the leadership within agricultural commodity organization in North Carolina. This coupled with NCTTFC ALDP’s vision to expanding an influential network of mature, confident, and creative North Carolina leaders in farming, business, government, and community organizations that are rooted in a common understanding of the importance of agriculture justifies the need of this study to bridge the knowledge gap.

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to explore the influence of NCTTFC ALDP on commodity organization leaders in North Carolina. Assessing the perceived leadership competencies gained by the former participants and how they apply these skills to within commodity organizations allows program leaders and stakeholders to assess overall results, recognize areas for improvement, and make

required modifications (Njah et al., 2021). With this kind of information, the NCTTFC ALDP leadership team and stakeholders can improve the quality and usefulness of the program and align their efforts to achieve excellence in leadership development beyond graduating participants to making lasting positive impacts in commodity organizations and the entire agricultural industry (Lamm, 2023).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1) What motivates NCTTFC ALDP former participants to engage in commodity organizations leadership roles?
2) What leadership development competencies are credited to the NCTTFC ALDP by the former participants?
3) What are the perceived contributions of the NCTTFC ALDP former participants to commodity organizations?
4) How do the NCTTFC ALDP former participants perceive the overall benefits of the program and what are the perceived areas of growth?

Significance of the Study

The durability and excellence of North Carolina agriculture depends on preserving a continuous supply of proficient leaders who can tackle ever-changing challenges and take advantage of growth opportunities. The primary purpose of this study was to fill a significant research void by examining the NCTTFC ALDP alums from the cohorts of 2006-2023 who have held leadership positions or are within leadership positions in commodity organizations in North Carolina. This study sought to explore the influence of the NCTTFC ALDP on commodity organization leaders. The decision to conduct this research was partly based on Kaufman et al.'s

(2012) and Njah et al.'s (2021) assertions that several leadership development programs train participants and that the absence of thorough research hinders their capacity to gain insights and improve their strategies. In the context of this study, agricultural commodity organizations are significant components of the agricultural sector and food industry by aiding, advocating, and leading the commodity. This research was necessary based on related previous studies, for example, Black and Earnest (2007), who documented program outcomes and recommendations to the donors and the directors of a leadership development program on how the past participants applied the leadership competencies gained from the training to impact communities.

This study highlights the outcomes of NCTTFC ALDP and areas for improvement by establishing the perceived leadership skills acquired by program participants and their practical implementation in agricultural commodity organizations. The qualitative data produced by this research provides in-depth and numerous advantages from various perspectives, including offering significant direction to the NCTTFC ALDP leadership team in creating training modules that develop and prepare future leaders who can initiate and lead positive change in agricultural commodity organizations in North Carolina.

Operational Definition of Terms

Agricultural Leadership Development Programs (ALDPs): These are programs designed to build leadership capacity amongst emergent and established leaders within the agricultural industry (Lamm et al., 2020, p. 1).

Commodity organizations: Commodity organizations are initiatives that unite diverse interest groups associated with a specific commodity or industry (e.g., horticulture) in each state, region, or nation, regardless of whether the commodity is intended for export, the domestic market, or both. Membership in these associations may come from support service providers, as

well as from individual farmers or their associations, crop buyers, processors, distributors, and exporters. In some cases, governmental organizations can also assume membership in these associations (Shepherd et al., 2009).

Evaluation: "Evaluation is the systematic process to determine merit, worth, value, or significance" (American Evaluation Association, 2014). In this study, evaluation will mean establishing how the current agricultural commodity organization leaders in North Carolina who participated in the NCTTFC ALDP between 2006 and 2023 apply leadership competencies.

Former participants: A former participant is a person who has been active but has ceased actively participating in the program for any reason (Law Insider Dictionary, n.d.). In this study, the former participant means anyone who participated in the NCTTFC ALDP between 2006 and 2023.

Leadership competencies/ skills: These skills and behaviors contribute to leaders' superior performance (Society for Human Resource Management, 2008).

North Carolina Tobacco Trust Fund Commission Agricultural Leadership Development Program (NCTTFC ALDP): The NCTTFC ALDP is a College of Agriculture and Life Sciences leadership program at NC State University to develop personal and civic leadership skills in North Carolina farmers and agricultural professionals. NCTTFC ALDP involves in-depth, unique leadership assessments, coaching and training in civic leadership, and learning opportunities in North Carolina, the United States, and global agriculture (Brown, 2023).

Quintain: “A quintain (pronounced kwin′ton) is an object or phenomenon or condition to be studied—a target, but not a bull’s eye. In multiple case studies, it is the target collection” (Stake, 2006, p. 6). In this study, a quintain means 2006-2023 NCTTFC ALDP former participants.

Assumptions of the Study

Prior to commencing this research investigation, the researcher made several assumptions below:

1) The researcher assumed that guiding questions and probe questions would yield enough information required to address all research questions.
2) The researcher assumed that participants would understand interview questions as intended and that all research participants would be willing to respond to all questions.
3) The researcher assumed that the participants would willingly share genuine information regarding their motivations for assuming leadership roles.
4) The participants would participate and provide truthful responses to the research questions, accurately representing their authentic thoughts and experiences with their participation in the NCTTFC ALDP and their leadership in agricultural commodities organizations in North Carolina.
5) The researcher assumed that the participants would be open to giving honest feedback about their views on the program's benefits and providing helpful suggestions for improvement.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to eight participants (cases) in the 2006-2023 cohort of the NCTTFC ALDP in leadership positions within commodity organizations in North Carolina and focused on understanding the leadership competencies developed and their contributions to the agricultural commodity organizations. Hence, the findings of this research are limited to this group and cannot be deduced to all program graduates. This is partly because the leadership qualities acquired and their impact on commodity organizations may be specific to this

demographic and may not apply to those outside this sample. Additionally, data collected comprises the participants' subjective opinions, and there may be sources of heterogeneity due to respondents' personal perspectives and the many years since they completed the program, which could lead to decreased truthfulness. Also, participants' leadership competencies could be influenced by factors such as additional training, prior experience, personal growth, or maturity, which could compromise the accuracy of the results. It is possible that some participants could not recall the precise impact of the program on their leadership skills.

Nevertheless, the researcher attempted to overcome this limitation by offering comprehensive explanations of the research questions and ensuring that the questions under investigation were presented clearly and understandably. In addition, this study employed a qualitative approach, allowing the researcher to understand each participant's perspective comprehensively. Specifically, this study used a case study design, which led to the development of a compelling and robust narrative since each case possesses a unique and distinct attribute. Analyzing multiple participant perspectives provided comprehensive representation of the experience, enhancing the study's trustworthiness and credibility.

Chapter Summary

Since 1948, agricultural production in the United States has more than doubled (up 156%), and the proportions of various commodities in overall farm output have changed over time. Agriculture is one of the significant industries in North Carolina. The development of agricultural commodity organizations in the United States was a gradual process that began in the early 19th century when these organizations were formed to promote the growth and development of agriculture in the country.

Agricultural leadership development programs in the United States have a long history dating back to the mid-20th century. These were established by the Kellogg Farmers Study Program (KFSP) in 1965 to develop effective agricultural leadership and to create a stronger tie between industry and the consumer. The NCTTFC ALDP was formerly funded by Philip Morris and known as the Philip Morris Agricultural Leadership Development Program and exclusively targeted flue-cured tobacco producers in North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Florida, and Georgia from its inception in 1984 until 2006, when it started recruiting all categories of farmers and professionals working in the agricultural industry. The NCTTFC ALDP has produced over 250 alumni with many currently holding leadership positions in various agricultural commodity organizations at the regional, state, and national level.

This study aimed to explore the influence of NCTTFC ALDP on commodity organization leaders in North Carolina. Four research questions guided this study: 1) What motivates NCTTFC ALDP former participants to engage in commodity organizations leadership roles? 2) What leadership development competencies are credited to the NCTTFC ALDP by the former participants? 3) What are the perceived contributions of the NCTTFC ALDP former participants to commodity organizations? 4) How do the NCTTFC ALDP overall perceive the benefits of the program and what are the perceived areas of growth? Besides detailing the study background, Chapter 1 also provided other components of this dissertation, including the statement of the problem, purpose and significance of the study, definitions, assumptions of the study, scope, and limitations.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

This study aimed to explore the influence of NCTTFC ALDP on commodity organization leaders in North Carolina. Vroom's (1964) Expectancy Theory of Motivation guided this study. This is explained in detail within this chapter, in addition to a literature review on topics that address this study's key components and research questions.

a) Theoretical Framework
    - Vroom's Expectancy Theory of Motivation
b) Literature Review

The review of literature explored the following topics:

1) Impact and Need for Agricultural Leadership Development Programs. 2) The North Carolina Tobacco Trust Fund Commission Agricultural Leadership Development Program. 3) Factors that Motivate agricultural Leaders to Assume Leadership Roles within Organizations. 4) Leaders' Roles/ Contributions to the Development of Organizations 5) Leaders' Perceptions on Leadership Development Programs Post-Participation

Theoretical Framework

Vroom's Expectancy Theory of Motivation

Vroom's (1964) Expectancy Theory of Motivation is founded on four assumptions. According to Fred (2011), one assumption is that individuals join organizations with preconceived notions regarding their previous experience, needs, and goals, and these factors impact how individuals respond to the organization. The second assumption is that an individual's behavior is a product of intentional decision-making. Individuals have the freedom

to select behaviors based on their own expectancy estimations. The third assumption is that individuals have varying preferences for what they seek from the business, such as a competitive wage, job stability, opportunities for career growth, and challenging work. The fourth assumption is that individuals will select from different options to maximize results for themselves. Based on this, the expectancy theory is founded on three main components: expectancy, instrumentality, and valence, as seen in Figure 1. An individual's motivation is determined by their belief in the likelihood of their effort resulting in satisfactory performance (expectancy), the expectation of being rewarded for their achievement (instrumentality), and the perceived positive value of the rewards [valence] (Filipova, 2016; Zboja et al., 2020).

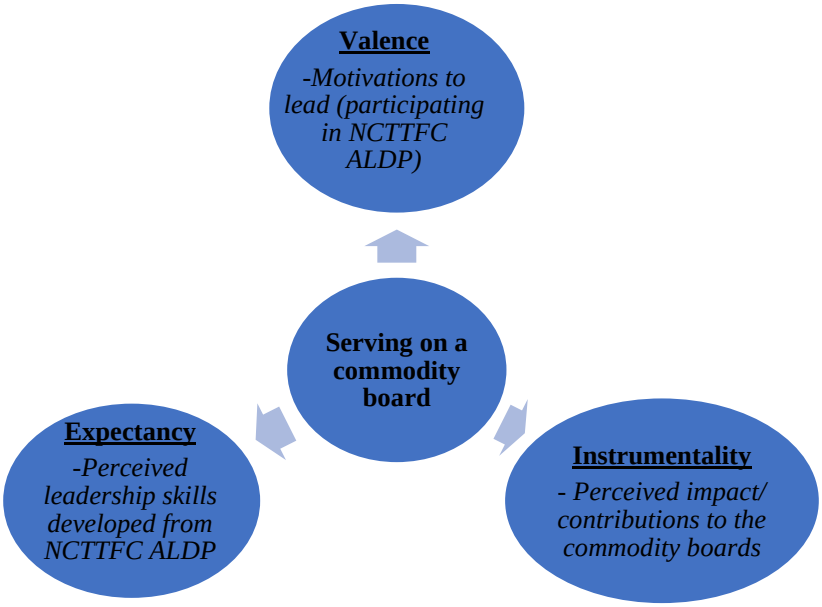

Figure 1. Schematic representation of study attributes in Vroom's expectancy model.

The primary purpose of developing expectancy theory was to explain motivation, particularly individuals' deliberate decisions when presented with several choices. It was initially centered on job roles, examining choices, satisfaction, and performance levels in the selected work role (Zboja et al., 2020). Vroom emphasized that the intensity of a desire was extrinsically

influenced. On the other hand, Galbraith and Cummings (1967, p. 7) expanded expectancy theory by suggesting that the values linked to a particular behavior can be inherent to the behavior – "from the point of view of the individual, intrinsic-rewards bear an expected relationship to the behavior and are a natural-consequence of that behavior." Conversely, Morris et al. (2022) asserted that both internal and extrinsic rewards influence individual motivation.

With the incorporation of this extension, expectancy theory is well-suited for studying leadership in commodity organizations. Commodity leaders decide to take up leadership positions after evaluating the potential rewards, which they consider either desirable or undesirable. According to Manz (1986), "in developing a broader perspective, self-influence should be viewed as more than a set of strategies designed to facilitate…...behaviors that help meet standard" (p. 6). This study explores the influence of NCTTFC ALDP on alums from the 2006-2023 cohorts in leadership roles within commodity organizations in North Carolina and how they apply these skills to impact commodity organizations. As conceptualized in Figure 1, the commodity leadership attributes investigated in this study reflect expectancy theory's three major factors (expectancy, instrumentality, and valence).

Valence

Valence refers to the intensity of an individual's inclination towards a specific incentive. Therefore, wage raises, promotions, peer approval, acknowledgment from managers, or any other form of compensation may vary in significance for different individuals, and it can be positive or negative. A strong liking for a reward results in a favorable valence for an employee, and on the opposite end, if valence is "0," it leads to unfavorable employee interest in a reward, and the overall range spans from "-1" to "+1" (Fred, 2011). Vroom proposes that motivation is determined by the product of expectation, instrumentality, and valence, as expressed in the

equation Motivation = Expectation * Instrumentality * Valence (Zboja et al., 2020). Valence, in this context, represents the importance placed on the benefits of the outcome (supporting the agricultural industry). If valence means value placed on the rewards of the outcome (developing the agricultural industry), a commodity leader's desire to represent and move the agricultural industry forward serves as a measure of this value. Therefore, besides their motivation, commodity leaders value advocating and championing agricultural development, and this may explain their participation in the NCTTFC ALDP to hone their leadership skills to serve the agricultural community better.

Expectancy

Expectancy is an individual's perception of the likelihood that their work-related efforts will lead to a specific level of performance. Expectancy is determined by probabilities and falls within the range of "0" to "1." When an employee believes their work will not result in the expected performance level, their expectancy is "0," and if the employee is confident that the task will be finished, the expectancy is assigned a value of "1" (Fred, 2011). Typically, employees' estimates of expectations fall somewhere in the middle of these two extremes. In the context of this study, possessing leadership competencies would increase the expectancy-value to "1" and enhance the certainty that agricultural leaders will positively contribute to the development of agricultural commodity organizations.

Instrumentality

Instrumentality refers to an individual's perception of how likely a specific degree of task performance will result in different work-related outcomes. Instrumentality, like expectancy, varies between "0" and "1," and if an employee perceives that a high-performance rating consistently leads to a wage raise, the instrumentality is valued at "1" (Fred, 2011). If there is no

apparent connection between a high-performance rating and a wage raise, then the instrumentality is “0.” In the context of this study, the belief held by commodity leaders that they have a responsibility to contribute to the development of the agricultural industry motivates them to effectively lead and represent commodity organizations to impact the farming community positively. For this case, instrumentality can be valued at “1” if agricultural commodity leaders believe they have a role to play in moving commodity organizations forward.

Literature Review

Impact and Need for Leadership Development Programs

The longevity and success of agricultural commodity organizations in the United States are attributed to the effectiveness of leaders who are willing to sacrifice their time for the good of agriculture, as Isaacs, featured by Bausch (2023), clarifies:

> You may not be an effective leader if you're serving because nobody else will or out of a sense of guilt. If you're serving just to live up to someone else's expectations, think again. If you're just serving to get free vacations, goodness gracious, that's a lousy reason to be in a leadership position. These folks have dedicated countless hours and traveled thousands of miles for the sake of the organization's mission. Their personal schedules have revolved around the group's calendar for as long as anyone can remember - Isaacs in Bausch (2023).

Isaacs in Bausch (2023) further points out the need for agricultural commodity leaders to receive specialized training through leadership development programs. Isaacs notes:

> Once folks get through these leadership development programs, we need to find a way to get them engaged, and depending on the organization, you may want people from

different types of operations. Livestock people, row crop growers, and specialty producers may all see the same situation very differently.

Like Isaacs in Bausch (2023), Wilder (2023) stresses the importance of leadership in agricultural industries on a global scale, their call reads, “At the heart of the agriculture industry is the need to produce enough food to feed a growing population. This requires effective leadership to ensure that resources are used efficiently and sustainably, and that the needs of both consumers and producers are met.” Furthermore, renowned and 1970 World Noble Peace winner Dr. Norman Borlaug, expressed an urgent need that “the battle to alleviate poverty and improve human health and productivity will require dynamic agricultural development” (Borlaug, 2007, para. 1). This therefore necessitates efficient and capable agricultural leaders to tackle key peace, health, and safety challenges confronting an expanding global population. Several institutions have responded to the call; for example, the National Leadership Education Research Agenda promotes leadership development, with a specific emphasis on agricultural leadership development, to tackle both local and global food production needs (Andenoro, 2013). Broadly, agricultural leadership addresses global issues such as sustainable development, food security, and poverty reduction, and they insist that agricultural leaders play a crucial role in advancing agricultural development to improve human health, ensure food supply, and increase production (Lamm et al., 2021). This makes agricultural leadership development a ‘necessity’ rather than an option.

On the other hand, multiple research projects (Apaliyah et al., 2012; Brennan, 2014; Diem & Nikola, 2005) from the community development and planning fields recommend enhancing leadership development with an element of community development to facilitate community change. Experts in planning and development have raised this need since the late

1960s, emphasizing the significance of incorporating community development to bring about change (Cawley, 1989; Etuk et al., 2013). Similarly, Etuk et al. (2013) found that leadership development programs can impact essential aspects of rural communities, for example, the Ford Institute Leadership Program developed rural communities by improving the knowledge, leadership abilities, motivation, and networks of rural leaders, resulting in a new group of engaged, effective, and motivated leaders with increased community connections.

Also, in other parts of the world, leadership plays a crucial role beyond sectors like agriculture. Kolaj et al. (2017) alluded that some communities exhibit high levels of cooperation, with members showing compassion for one other and willingness to work together towards a shared goal, whereas other societies experience internal conflict, discord, envy, and self-centeredness. Therefore, leadership in this setting is a crucial aspect that extends beyond agriculture to solving such societal problems. Fostering leadership in agricultural communities will result in advantages extending beyond farming to encouraging effective management and preservation of common and natural resources.

Various research (Black & Earnest, 2007; Bower et al., 2019; Campos et al., 2020; Diem & Nikola, 2005; Hughes et al., 2021; Kaufman et al., 2010; Kelsey & Wall, 2003; Lacerenza et al., 2017; Lamm et al., 2021; Ulvenblad & Cederholm Björklund, 2018) on leadership development programs demonstrate their overall benefits, summarized in Figure 3, supporting their necessity. Leaders benefit from mentorship to navigate the challenging work environment when they undergo leadership development programs, allowing them to make decisions, receive feedback, and enhance their leadership skills. Leadership development programs enhance leaders' cognitive knowledge and skills to equip them to tackle challenging situations through various developmental assignments they get to do throughout the program (Lacerenza et al.,

2017). Such specialized training enables them to handle dynamic industry climates that need leaders capable of making prompt judgments.

Figure 2. Overall impacts of leadership development programs on organizational leaders. Adapted from Lacerenza et al. (2017).

Previous studies associate organizations with leadership development program graduates to high performance because well-developed leaders positively influence their followers through collaboration, enhancing organizational efficiency (Alimo-Metcalfe, 2013; Waite, 2014). Abner et al. (2021) found leadership development programs positively affect leaders and are a worthwhile investment but recommended continuous and sound evaluation. While Hunter and Chaskalson (2013) and Waite (2014) agree, they also highlight that leadership development programs cultivate leaders who demonstrate innovation, improved decision-making, strong

leader-follower connections, enhanced organizational performance, adaptability to evolving business landscapes, and successfully handling challenges.

Leadership development programs often involve experiential learning, where participants engage as teams to address real-world organizational problems and create practical solutions (Waite, 2014). Team engagement motivates leaders to enhance and refine their interpersonal abilities while working alongside their teams to address practical job problems, and experiential learning facilitates a transition from an individual-focused to a team-oriented environment. This shift occurs as leaders contribute their personal successful experiences to the team, fostering a more unified relationship between leaders and their teams (Henry, 2013; Waite, 2014). Such leaders can meet the demand posed by the rapid fluctuations in the overall environment and expectations of people served by organizations for leaders' interpersonal abilities, which requires that leadership development programs specifically target the enrichment of these competencies.

Lacerenza et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis of 335 independent samples found leadership training enhanced organizational performance by 29% and was linked to the organizations' gaining from excellent performers, highly motivated personnel, and low turnover rates. As noted by Prochaska et al. (2013), this high performance is due to having organizational leaders going through effective leadership development programs. Most of the leadership development programs include coaching, needs assessments, and feedback models that enhance participants' essential competencies and improve their overall growth.

North Carolina Tobacco Trust Fund Commission Agricultural Leadership Development Program

Like many other ALDPs, the NCTTFC ALDP is intentional in its approach. Throughout the two-year program, individuals from North Carolina actively participate in frequent interactions with leaders from government agencies, commodities associations, farm organizations, and other institutions relevant to agriculture. These conversations cover various topics and offer extra leadership opportunities (Radford, 2020). In addition to the program's action model described in the subsequent parts of this subsection, the program provides further training and exposure on essential subjects, such as acquiring a comprehensive knowledge of the agricultural environment and improving participants' comprehension of the global and domestic dimensions of agriculture (Brown, 2023).

As previously mentioned in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, the establishment of the NCTTFC ALDP was inspired by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation's initiative to explore the potential of adult education. The W. K. Kellogg Foundation's guidelines offer valuable and significant perspectives on tackling the fast-paced transformations and growing agricultural challenges at the local, state, and global levels. The guidelines further clarify the fundamental qualities that state-level agriculture leadership development program participants must possess (Helstowski, 2000). Helstowski (2000) adds that Helstowski the W. K. Kellogg Foundation urges potential agricultural leadership programs to capitalize on previous achievements to fostering and strengthening future agricultural leaders. The call is outlined as:

1) Linking programs and alumni by regions, interests and other avenues, particularly in ways that capitalize on technology to increase communication and action.

2) Networking with clear purposes and goals, such as around specific issues and policies.
3) Affecting agricultural policies and practices at multiple levels by forging a national network of program alumni and raising the profile of the programs nationally.
4) Addressing gender and diversity in program composition.
5) Continuing education for alumni and program directors.

Leadership Modules and Instruments used by the NCTTFC ALDP

To achieve its mission, vision, and objectives, NCTTFC ALDP utilizes unique leadership modules and instruments (see Table 2) facilitated by a specialized leadership team. The approach allows participants to have class time to discuss the application of instrument results and to receive personalized coaching sessions that specifically focus on utilizing their instrument outcomes. This data-driven approach enables the use of validated, reliable, and pertinent psychometric assessments aligned with NCTTFC ALDP's Mastering Self, Relationships, and Organizational Action model. Confidentiality is maintained for all participant's assessment results throughout the whole process (Morgan, 2023a).

Table 2

Leadership instruments used by NCTTFC ALDP

Instrument	***Description***
MBTI® (Myers Briggs Type Indicator Assessment)	The Myers Briggs Type Indicator® assessment is used to make people more effective by providing a framework for understanding individual differences and provides a dynamic model of individual development.
Human Patterns® Inventory (HPI)	The HPI is a comprehensive psychometric assessment tool used to measure interests and preferences. The inventory has been used for over 30 years to select, place, and develop managers and leaders. The 250 question assessment forces individuals to make 2000 decisions. Factors captured are grouped to cover Keys to Personality, Basic Motivations, Preferred Work Roles, Likely Leadership Behaviors, Direction of Energy, Criteria for Management Choices, World Views, Sensitivities, Team Interaction, Interpersonal Relations, Defenses Used When Confronted, Preferred Work Environment, and others.
FIRO-B® (Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation Behavior)	The FIRO-B® instrument identifies how you tend to behave toward others and how you want them to behave toward you. Your FIRO-B results can help you increase your self-understanding in several important areas, including how you handle interpersonal relationships and your own social needs, how others perceive you, and how you see them.

Table 2: (continued)

Crucial Conversations®	Crucial Conversations is a course that teaches skills for creating alignment and agreement by fostering open dialogue around high-stakes, emotional, or risky topics—at all levels of your organization. By learning how to speak and be heard (and encouraging others to do the same), you'll begin to surface the best ideas, make the highest-quality decisions, and then act on your decisions with unity and commitment.
EQ-i2.0® (Emotional Intelligence)	Emotional intelligence is the unique repertoire of emotional skills that a person uses to navigate the everyday challenges of life. In his book Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ, Daniel Goleman defines EI as the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and our relationships.

Adopted from NCTTFC ALDP (2023)

Factors that Motivate Individuals to Assume Leadership in Commodity Organizations

A leader's passion to lead is driven by either intrinsic or extrinsic motivations as seen in Figure 4. According to Khan et al. (2020) leaders can be fueled by enjoyment, and developing as a leader can be fulfilling due to the advantages of increased intrinsic rewards like well-being and the inner drive to enhance one's environment. George (1992) explains that intrinsic motivation involves being driven to enhance the well-being of others and finding fulfillment in achieving goals for the benefit of others. Eva et al. (2019) explain that servant leadership and authentic leadership exemplify an extrinsic need to lead, knowing this is crucial because individuals who lead for external reasons may lose their motivation to lead once they have achieved their external

objective or else, they need to continually sustain their motivation by setting new external objectives. Leaders may also be driven by extrinsic reasons such as social ties, achieving, or avoiding a specific objective, economic benefits, and a desire for power. Conversely, Xue et al.'s (2022) meta-analysis of leadership and intrinsic motivation using 50 independent samples and 21,873 participants found that intrinsically driven leaders do not face such issues because they possess an inherent passion and purpose that goes beyond the immediate exterior objective of leadership. The inherent motive behind intrinsically motivated leaders implies that agricultural leadership development programs need to identify and prepare such leaders to ensure they will continue serving the interests of the farmers even in the absence of tangible rewards in the turbulent and changing business world.

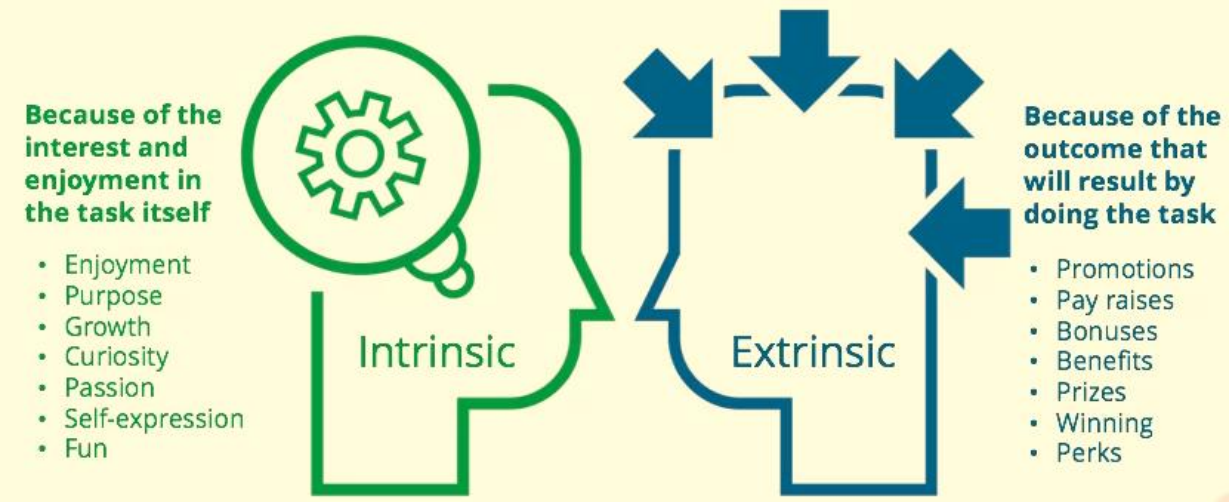

Figure 3. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for assuming leadership roles.

Source: Kahawewithana (2023).

An example of extrinsic motivation was found by Ingerson et al. (2014) in a study where stakeholders, the departmental atmosphere, and necessary traits impacted the decisions of certain department heads to take on leadership roles and how they conducted themselves. Ingerson et al. (2014) disclosed that numerous job descriptions mandated department heads to collaborate with

stakeholder groups or customers and some department heads considered this relationship crucial for their role and took advantage of it. However, Ingerson et al. (2014) acknowledged the most significant areas of influence for a department head are those that have been internalized. Ingerson et al. (2014) defined internal influences as experiences, situations, and personal traits that shaped the identity and actions of department heads. Ingerson et al. (2014) also found common internal factors among department heads, including values, strengths, limitations, personality traits, beliefs, past experiences, and the leadership knowledge they have accumulated. Like Ingerson et al. (2014), Kaufman et al.'s (2010) research on leadership planning revealed that agricultural leaders were driven by intrinsic motivation to pursue leadership positions and that they wanted to engage in leadership development programs for their own benefit. For instance, certain leaders in Kaufman et al. (2010) stated their motivations for involvement as:

> We need a voice in government that's extremely strong. Cause it seems like we are the ones that are taken advantage of. We're the ones that suffer from some of these decisions that are being made and no one is hearing our voice because we are being phased out… (Kaufman et al., 2010, p. 13).
>
> I think it would be helpful for everyone within agriculture, from farmers to people that work in [food] processing throughout, to be more knowledgeable on political issues and be more involved in the political processes that can bring about positive outcomes for our industry as opposed to some of the negative ones that we are seeing right now (Kaufman et al., 2010, p. 14).

Leadership motivations can be classified as extrinsic or intrinsic, essential for leaders' development, especially in a dynamic yet humanity-centered agricultural industry. This

distinction helps differentiate between motivating followers and motivating leaders, which is a cornerstone on which generational organizations' leadership, such as agricultural commodity associations, should be built for continued sustainability and relevance.

Leaders' Roles/ Contributions to the Development of Organizations

As stated by Bell and Bodie (2012), leaders are the primary catalyst for any significant organizational change. Gibbons (2015) added that leaders are accountable for inspiring, advocating, visualizing, and influencing the team to embrace a continuous learning culture to drive organizational change processes. Burns (1978, 2004) concurred that leaders not only serve as visionaries but also offer solutions for executing change and exemplify the necessary attitude, conduct, and culture to uphold and maintain the change. Similarly, Allen et al. (2017) observed that transformational leaders can present captivating ideas of an improved future and gain the confidence of their followers, who have a steadfast belief in their leadership. Additionally, Musaigwa (2023) asserts that without competent leaders, businesses attempting change often do not reach their goals, and change efforts can result in significant costs that outweigh the benefits. Therefore, organizational transformation requires skilled and capable leadership to oversee the change processes and reach the intended objectives.

According to Julia (2023), Skilled and capable leaders guide the successful pursuit of organizational objectives through their understanding of the anticipated change and have the mindset to foster a culture of learning inside the organization. Within the agriculture industry, competent leaders are needed to address the changes brought on by the growing industry. Many leaders can cope with agricultural sector changes after going through leadership development programs. For example, Alexander’s (2013) Master of Science Research with an agricultural leadership development program alumni found that participants assumed leadership roles in

which they influenced political decisions that favored the farmers they represented. Alexander (2013) added that leaders effectively communicated to advocate and influence policies and make the farmer's story known– "if you think of the term "kings and king makers," that's often how agricultural leaders work" (p. 69). Agricultural leaders are also tasked with navigating science along public perception, requiring them to work hard to make the general public understand that the agricultural industry strives for the good of everyone.

Interestingly, Abington-Cooper's (2005) doctoral research that evaluated the LSU agricultural center's agricultural leadership development program concurs with the latter and points out the sensitivity of the international and national issues that agriculture leaders have to deal with for good agricultural organizations. Abington-Cooper (2005) found greater evidence of the need for general awareness among the public of the role of agriculture, which leadership development program alums were actively addressing within their respective agricultural organizations and extremely developed positive perceptions about the sector. The leaders' roles further support the need for vibrant leadership development programs to train and nurture them to effectively communicate organizational changes and handle emerging issues.

Leaders' Perceptions on Leadership Development Programs Post-Participation

Going through a leadership development program imparts key competencies that improve leaders' effectiveness. However, leadership development program participants have varied needs that cannot be met within the training timeframe and inform their perceptions post-participation. For example, insightful participants' perceptions are reported by Hartzell et al.'s (2017) study that assessed the existence and opinions of leadership training programs among Graduate Medical Education trainees and leaders at the Walter Reed National Military Medical-Center staff. The participants identified key areas, they believed should be part of leadership training

and the most crucial topics included team building, feedback delivery, motivation techniques, conflict resolution, change implementation, and mentoring skills. Hartzell et al.'s (2017) further reported that staff, instructors, and trainees acknowledged a need and desire for additional leadership training, as they were only somewhat happy with their past leadership training. This assertion supports studies by Kaufman et al. (2010) and Roupnel et al. (2019) that suggest leadership development programs need not adhere to a universal approach and that one strategy to bridge the gap in leadership development is concentrating on the developmental requirements voiced and perceived by participants. Kaufman et al. (2010) stated that participants may need to be educated on leadership abilities and qualities relevant to their current or future situations. This is further explained by McCauley and Palus' (2021) relational view, which reported that some former participants find leadership development programs lacking relevance and innovation, citing significant impediments to their efficacy. The obstacles cited by McCauley and Palus (2021) were a lack of return-on-investment demonstration, uncontextualized content, and insufficient external thinking and knowledge.

Similarly, Mirani (1999) observed that participants in leadership programs expressed a need for more training after completing the program but did not specify the themes for such training, as seen in Kaufman et al. (2010). In contrast to Mirani (1999), Fritz et al. (2003) pointed out the future leadership training needs of three groups, including participants in an adult agriculture leadership development program. In 2003, Fritz and colleagues found that graduates of leadership programs were keen on receiving further training in engaging others in a similar vision, motivating others, attracting the right individuals for the work, and influencing others. The results of Velez et al.'s (2014) research on agriculture leadership development programs are consistent with Verlinden's (2021) which specified essential leadership competencies for

effectively leading organizations. Verlinden (2021) categorized the essential competencies for leading organizations into three main areas: leading the organization, leading others, and leading yourself. This implies that agricultural leadership development program participants know the necessary skills for organizational leadership, and program leaders/ trainers should ensure that the curricula are comprehensive to have a lasting impact on both participants and the organizations they lead.

Like Fritz et al. (2003), in a study with collegiate agricultural education participants, Gordon et al. (2012) identified communication skills, engaging with the media, leadership/management training, and strategic planning as areas requiring more skills development. Based on their findings, Gordon et al. (2012) suggested leadership educators should comprehend and choose the most efficient delivery methods to address adult leaders' ongoing leadership training requirements to influence the success of supplementary professional development opportunities for current and future alums of leadership programs. The rapid changes and growing complexity of agricultural concerns at local, state, and global levels may offer insight into the necessary leadership competencies participants need, which agricultural leadership development programs should address.

In Kaufman et al. (2010), another past participant's viewpoint on their involvement in leadership development programs was expressed as “I’ve had leadership programs all along… they didn’t use examples that were real in my world” (p. 1). This calls for leadership development programs to incorporate experiential learning opportunities for their participants, and Kaufman et al. (2010) recommends that an agricultural leadership development program should prioritize three specific aspects:

1) knowledge of the changing industry;

2) relationship building across industry sectors; and,

3) practical, transferable skill development.

Kaufman et al. (2010) categorized the top skills desired by participants into three main subthemes: *creative problem-solving, political activism,* and *communication*. Specifically, participants expressed a need for a focus on key areas to address leadership challenges such as industry changes, resource constraints, and conflict resolution, and they highlighted the significance of problem-solving and communication skills that are both creative and innovative. Honing leaders' problem-solving and communication skills is crucial as many misconceptions about agriculture and the general farming industry arise daily, which agricultural leaders must defend and address.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed Vroom's (1964) Expectancy Theory of Motivation, founded on three main components: expectancy, instrumentality, and valence. Vroom's theory demonstrates that an individual's motivation is determined by their belief in the likelihood of their effort, resulting in satisfactory performance (expectancy), the expectation of being rewarded for their achievement (instrumentality), and the perceived positive value of the rewards (valence). The additional topics discussed include the impact and need for agricultural leadership development programs, the details of the NCTTFC ALDP, factors that motivate agricultural leaders to assume leadership roles within organizations, leaders' roles/ contributions to the development of organizations and leaders' perceptions on leadership development programs post-participation.

A literature review revealed that the success of agricultural commodity organizations in the United States is attributed to the effectiveness of leaders willing to sacrifice their time for the good of agriculture. Past research (Black & Earnest, 2007; Bower et al., 2019; Diem & Nikola,

2005; Kaufman et al., 2010; Lacerenza et al., 2017; Lamm et al., 2021; Ulvenblad & Cederholm Björklund, 2018) on leadership development programs demonstrate their overall benefits supporting their necessity. The review of literature further illustrated how leaders benefit from mentorship to navigate the challenging work environment when they undergo leadership development programs, allowing them to make decisions, receive feedback, and enhance their leadership skills. NTTFC ALDP intentionally provides further training and exposure on essential subjects, such as acquiring a comprehensive knowledge of the agricultural environment and improving participants' comprehension of agriculture's global and domestic dimensions. Additionally, literature revealed that leaders' passion to lead is driven by either intrinsic or extrinsic motivations and leaders are the primary catalyst for any significant organizational change through inspiring, advocating, visualizing, and influencing the team to embrace a continuous learning culture to drive organizational change processes. Also, after completing leadership development programs, participants express a need for more training with varied perceived needs.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This chapter gives readers an insight into how this multi-case study was planned and executed. The following section of this chapter describes reasons for choosing the qualitative research approach, specifically a multi-case research design, followed by a detailed explanation of the methodology used to achieve this study's purpose. The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of NCTTFC ALDP on commodity organization leaders in North Carolina. This section elaborates on the procedures employed in conducting the research, encompassing the research design, target population, participant selection (it introduces 8 participants with more details in the subsequent chapters), and data collection instrument. Furthermore, it delves into aspects such as pilot testing, data collection, and coding procedures and discusses how validity and reliability were established. It describes the ethical guidelines followed, for example, seeking Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and how a structured interview protocol that guided the collection of data was designed and executed.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1) What motivates NCTTFC ALDP former participants to engage in commodity organizations leadership roles?
2) What leadership development competencies are credited to the NCTTFC ALDP by the former participants?
3) What are the perceived contributions of the NCTTFC ALDP former participants to commodity organizations?
4) How do the NCTTFC ALDP former participants overall perceive the benefits of the program and what are the perceived areas of growth?

Reflexivity Statement

Acknowledging the researcher's background which is also termed as “presence of the researcher in the accounts they present” by Creswell (2012, p. 45) is necessary for detecting any potential biases that may have been introduced into the study and ensuring the study results' validity. Darwin Holmes (2020) adds that providing the researcher's specific knowledge and opinions allows for observing viewpoints that could impact the interview process and interfere with objective analysis of data and reporting of study results. The description of the researcher's subjectivity is as follows:

At the early start of my academic journey, I envisioned becoming a teacher partly because I admired my social sciences teacher and how he cared about us (his students). I enjoyed attending his classes and always wanted to associate myself with him. However, I later developed a love for agriculture and hoped to be a successful farmer one day. My love for agriculture was partly because of the small piece of land that I was given to till by my mother on her two-acre land. I remember planting tomatoes and buying my first goat from the harvest sale which confirmed that agriculture would feed me and the world and help me earn an income. However, as I furthered my education and moved from one school to another, I continued interacting with students from different backgrounds, with varying amounts of exposure and dreams. Many hoped to become engineers, medical doctors, nurses, and other careers. Whenever asked, some would say they aspired to become whatever they wanted because of the need they saw in their communities, and others said it was because of what they had gone through while growing up. For example, I remember my friend [name] aspired to become a doctor because of the many women who were dying while giving birth in his village due to inadequate access to medical services.

Reflecting on my experience studying with students from different backgrounds with varied interests at different levels has taught me to understand how people are diverse. I constantly reflect on the various strategies I have heard over the years from the students. Besides attending the same courses, each has had differing life desires. Coming to North Carolina State University, as a doctoral student, I have been privileged to be funded by NCTTFC ALDP and work as a graduate assistant with the program.

However, I understand that people have different experiences shaping how they perceive certain phenomena. Based on this, I view the world as diverse, with no single approach to realizing goals. I believe that the lived experiences of the NCTTFC ALDP former participants shape their ways of life. I understand that my evaluation of the skills they credit to the program and how they apply their leadership skills should not be approached with a preconceived mind. My worldview and personality, as shaped by experience, make me feel that people have different life paths to achieve their goals. As agricultural leaders receive training from the NCTTFC ALDP, the experiences may be better applied based on what they want to accomplish in their leadership positions. I have learned that this view is partly informed by my being a constructivist, which makes me believe that individuals are more likely to modify their actions, adapt when they face a challenge, and actively participate in problem-solving (Detel, 2001). My philosophical stance is fundamental in this study, where NCTTFC ALDP former participants' interaction within commodity organizations and agricultural communities and active engagement in identifying and addressing agricultural leadership challenges is expected to promote more yearning for leadership skills and their application. Since I think of different perspectives on reality, I did not approach this study with a fixed point of view.

Qualitative Research Design

The researcher opted for qualitative research to explore the perceived leadership skills gained by NCTTFC ALDP former participants and how they apply these skills to contribute to the growth and development of commodity organizations in North Carolina. The choice for qualitative research was based on the assertion by Austin and Sutton (2014) and Tenny et al. (2024) that qualitative research allows investigation of how individuals construct meaning of their experiences. Austin and Sutton (2014) claim that qualitative research fundamentally recognizes that meanings are not innate but formed by individuals through their interactions with and interpretation of the surrounding world. Austin and Sutton (2014) add that qualitative research is centered around knowing how individuals interpret and provide meaning to their experiences within the unique circumstances they find themselves in. According to Given (2008), this is where philosophical stances like constructivism attribute the emanation of their definition and meaning. Constructivism is a philosophical position in qualitative research highlighting the subjective aspect of human interpretation and understanding of their contexts. It alludes to the fact that people actively create their perceptions of reality by engaging with and interpreting their surroundings (Detel, 2001; Given, 2008). Within the NCTTFC ALDP context, qualitative research allows for an in-depth exploration into former participants' perceptions and understanding of their leadership development experiences and contributions to agricultural development in North Carolina and beyond through their engagement in commodity organizations.

Specifically, this study used a case study approach to thoroughly understand how NCTTFC ALDP influences the leadership competencies of the 2006 to 2023 former participants in leadership roles within agricultural commodity organizations in North Carolina. This allowed

the researcher to offer a contextually rich explanation for the collected data. Based on Harkiolakis (2022), this approach reveals the holistic and meaningful attributes of the NCTTFC ALDP's former participants' application of the leadership competencies learned. A multiple case study was used to establish the application of leadership competencies across various cases to yield comparable or differing results. As guided by Hunziker and Blankenagel (2021), this approach allowed scrutiny of numerous cases to achieve profound insights into the influences of the NCTTFC ALDP on the former participants' contribution to the commodity organizations in North Carolina. Additionally, using a multiple-case design led to developing a compelling and robust narrative since each case possesses a unique and distinct attribute. Analyzing multiple cases gave a more comprehensive representation of the phenomenon, enhancing the study's trustworthiness and credibility.

Philosophical Stance

Creswell (2012) advises that it is essential for the researcher and the readers to understand the philosophical assumptions that form the foundation of every research investigation. Also, it is vital to consider Jacob and Schreyer's (1980) viewpoint that it is imperative to view theoretical perspectives as guiding "*orientations*" rather than "*rigid categories*." Boundaries between different perspectives can be unclear when examining the theoretical framework of a qualitative research study. As a researcher, I align myself with interpretive and social constructivist perspectives, recognizing that reality is subjective and shaped by personal and social experiences. Therefore, this qualitative study uses an interpretative and social constructivist theoretical framework (Creswell, 2012; Creswell & Poth, 2013). Instead of perceiving the universe as governed by '*one*' truth, this study acknowledges and recognizes the ambiguity and socially constructed nature of human experience. Therefore, at most, this research

can only be seen as an analysis of NCTTFC ALDP former participants' analysis of their own experiences. The chosen methodological approach reflects a pragmatic perspective rooted in interpretive and social constructivist principles.

Although specific research and interview questions directed this research, the researcher remained open to investigating emerging circumstances that were initially unexpected. The researcher made sure he remained open to the participants as they shared experiences that held significance for them regarding their participation in NCTTFC ALDP and their engagement in leadership positions within and beyond commodity organizations. Additionally, the researcher allowed participants to share their backgrounds and personal experiences. The researcher believes these insights would enhance the overall findings and interpretations of the NCTTFC ALDP former participants' perceived leadership skills and how they influence their contributions to commodity organizations. Conversely, the number of participants was deliberately predetermined for interpretation and analysis within a collective case study design (Tenny et al., 2024). The eight cases formed a multiple case study, also known as a collective case study (Ebneyamini & Sadeghi Moghadam, 2018; Ridder, 2017; Salmi, 2010). Further details regarding the case study methodology and associated methods are found in the subsequent section of this dissertation.

Rationale for a Case Study Research

The decision to undertake this research as a case study was an endeavor to explore and gain a deeper understanding of leadership skills gained by the former participants and how they have contributed to their commodity organizations. Mere data collection and reporting findings without a contextual framework would render the research incomplete; however, employing a case study presented such a chance. According to Priya (2021), case studies are necessary

because they help in understanding complicated social processes by enabling investigators to preserve real-life events' comprehensive and significant attributes. Creswell (2012) further asserts that some researchers highlight the term case study because it directs focus on the specific knowledge that may be gained from examining one case. In this study, the researcher utilized the multiple case study approach as suggested by Stake (2006), specifically adhering to the collective case study framework. This methodology is frequently selected due to its ability to examine the same phenomena through multiple studies, either by producing similar results,*literal replication,* or by generating contrasting results for predictable reasons, *theoretical replication* (Ridder, 2017, p. 7). Crowe et al. (2011, p. 2) support Ridder's (2017) claim and assert, "the collective case study involves studying multiple cases simultaneously or sequentially in an attempt to generate a still broader appreciation of a particular issue." It is based on this appreciation that this study selected cases with the belief that understanding the cases would result in a more profound comprehension and potentially improved theorization of a broader set of cases.

Additionally, utilizing a multiple-case strategy usually enhances the narrative, increasing the research's robustness and reliability (Yin, 2017). Due to the nature of this research and the distinctiveness of each former NCTTFC ALDP participant, this study emphasized literal replication instead of theoretical replication because commodity leaders serve related farmer and commodity interests; therefore, there was a probability of observing related outcomes across different cases. Although each case had its own distinct characteristics, similarities found in the data were duly noted and recorded. However, each case exhibited the characteristics of the broader category of phenomena to which it pertains, and each case is likely to be distinct and unique; as stated by Yin (2017, p. 84), "recall that a single-case study is analogous to a single

experiment, and many of the same conditions that justify choosing a single experiment also can justify a single-case study." Although, "for multiple case research, the cases need to be similar in some ways—perhaps" (Stake, 2006, p. 1), and "each case will have its own unusual features" (Stake, 2006, p. 40) and it should be noted, "We study what is similar and different about the cases in order to understand the quintain better" (Stake, 2006, p. 6).

Nevertheless, multiple cases contribute to a more elaborate depiction of the phenomena, which enhances the study's trustworthiness and credibility. The purpose of this study was the same when each NCTTFC ALDP former participant shared their own experiences participating in the program and leading commodity organizations. Compiling their cases into a single study provided an in-depth understanding of the program's impact on shaping the leadership competencies of its participants and contributing to the realization of commodity organizations' objectives in North Carolina. Within the context of the case study framework, the researcher focused on what Stake (2006) defines as an intrinsic case study, "when the main and enduring interest is in the case itself, we call it 'intrinsic case study'" (p. 8). With this approach, cases were chosen not primarily for their representation of other NCTTFC ALDP former participants or illustration of a certain attribute but because the cases themselves, with all their unique and ordinary characteristics, were of interest.

Although the primary objective of this research was not to achieve generalizability, the researcher anticipates that it may provide valuable insights to other agricultural leadership development programs regarding leadership development among their participants and their application in different agricultural organizations and beyond. This assertion is partly informed by Stake's (2006) claim that case study methodology can be employed to make inferences from one context to another, though the major problem is that if the researcher devotes excessive

effort to relating the case to other contexts, their focus may be diverted from the essential aspects necessary for an in-depth understanding of the case. However,

> The researcher should talk briefly or at length about individual cases. He or she should enrich the reader's experiential knowing with as much of the action and context of the cases as possible. Because the reader knows the situations to which the assertions might apply, the responsibility of making generalizations should be more the reader's than the writer's (Stake, 2006, p. 90).

The choice of multiple case studies as a methodology has implications for participant selection, data collection, and analytic approaches, which are covered in detail in the following sections.

Population

The population for this study was the former NCTTFC ALDP of 2006-2023 cohorts that have held leadership positions or are currently leading agricultural commodity organizations in North Carolina. After reviewing the alumni list and identifying individuals who had been active in commodity association leadership, the list was reviewed to select individuals from multiple cohorts and representatives of various agricultural commodity organizations, as described in the participant selection section. It is also important to note that individuals were selected based on their previous willingness to provide both positive and negative feedback to program leaders and on evaluation forms.

For this study, "Someone who participated in NCTTFC ALDP program and has led or is presently leading a commodity group in North Carolina" is referred to as an alumnus, and the study participants are all from North Carolina. The researcher employed thick descriptions of participants to gain a deeper insight into the population, as seen at the beginning of chapter four.

Kaiser (2009) supports this decision with their claim that detailed description helps maintain participant anonymity during the discussion of the findings and throughout the reporting process.

Participant Selection

Several studies (Hintze, 2015; Hudon, Aubrey-Bassler, et al., 2022; Hudon, Chouinard, et al., 2022) advise to have four to ten cases in a multiple-case study. The latter add that less than four cases may not provide sufficient contextual diversity, whereas more than ten cases could derail the depth of case study research. However, care should be taken when selecting cases for multi-case research. Stake (2006) advises that the case should meet the following three criteria (p. 23):

1) Is the case relevant to the quintain?
2) Do the cases provide diversity across contexts?
3) Do the cases provide good opportunities to learn about complexity and contexts?

Also, this study being an 'evaluation in nature that employed a constructivist philosophical stance,' the researcher clung to Creswell's (2012) guidelines in selecting *multiple* cases:

> In practice, the individual using this worldview will use multiple methods of data collection to best answer the research question, will employ multiple sources of data collection, will focus on the practical implications of the research, and will emphasize the importance of conducting research that best addresses the research problem (p. 28 & 29).

To meet both Creswell's (2012) and Stake's (2006) criteria, this study focused on eight 2006-2023 former NCTTFC ALDP participants who have held or are in leadership positions in commodity organizations in North Carolina. To obtain the study participants, the researcher requested the NCTTFC ALDP director for the former participants' detailed directory

information, after which the participants of interest were noted on a piece of paper based on their commodity organizations for the list from which prospective participants were selected.

Following IRB approval and purposefully deciding on the participants, 16 people from five cohorts were sent emails seeking their participation (see Appendix B). Ultimately, eight alumni were able to participate in the study within the timeframe. The rest of the prospective participants either never responded to the email request or committed to participate but their schedules didn't allow them to be a part of this research. If more respondents than recommended for multiple case studies expressed interest, eight participants would be chosen randomly. The invitation email included an overview of the researcher and the study, and it was sent along with a consent form for those willing to a part of this study (see Appendix C). Once willing participants confirmed by email to participate in the study, interviews were scheduled based on their availability but within the study timeline.

Detailed information for each case is provided in the following section of this dissertation. Selected individuals actively hold or have held leadership positions in commodity organizations, and this was a major inclusion criterion on who to participate in the study, leading to the selection of the eight cases. Additionally, the researcher sought participants who were recognized as providing both positive and negative feedback. Five cohorts were studied with the following commodity organizations: cotton, cattle, dairy, pork, Christmas trees, greenhouse production, and soybean. Female and male former participants were included in the study to ensure a diverse representation, and out of the eight participants, three were females, and five were males. Additional diversity was portrayed in the different commodities and years/ cohorts studied, and location throughout the state.

Data Collection

The data collection process was broken into two interviews with each interview lasting for an average of one hour and conducted via Zoom video recording. Interviews took place between 8 AM and 9 PM, throughout November and December 2023 at the convenience of the participants. The first interview is necessary, because according to Read (2018), it provides an interview an opportunity to learn about life history, contextualize the phenomenon, and extract information about the subject's experiences. Supported by Read's (2018) claim, second interviews helped to elicit specifics about the participants' participation in the NCTTFC ALDP, experiences with commodity organizations, and the application of the leadership skills gained from the program.

The use of interviews was based on the advice by Dunwoodie et al. (2023) who support that they consist of open-ended questions, allowing interviewees to deviate from the predetermined set of questions and provide detailed information which would otherwise not be revealed in a structured questionnaire. Based on this, a series of interview questions were prepared after conducting a literature review that analyzed previous research studies involving leadership programs (see Appendix D). Interview questions were employed to guide the interviewing process and were adjusted based on the participants' input to effectively investigate the leadership skills developed by the former participants and their application in agricultural commodity organizations. The initial adjustment of the interview questions was done after the pilot study with an alumnus which was conducted with one of the former participants currently leading a commodity organization and has served in leadership roles both at the regional and national level. Their participation was limited to the pilot and from there eight others participated in this study. Adjustment of questions was based on the responses that were yielded, the amount

of time it took to complete the interview, and how well the information answered the research questions, as guided by Savin-Baden and Major (2023). Additional adjustments were made after interviewing with the first participant based on questions, they did not understand.

All interviews were recorded using the recording feature provided by Zoom and the transcripts, audio and video recordings were saved on the Zoom cloud at NC State only accessible by the researcher and committee chair. The use of interviews is also supported by Boyland (2019) that constructivist research frequently employs naturalistic research methodologies, such as personal interviews and Mills et al. (2006) add that constructivist research involves the establishment of trust between participants and researchers. To establish trust and enable direct interpersonal communication between the researcher and research participants, the video feature on Zoom was enabled, though participants had the right not to turn their video "on." Direct interpersonal communication enables individuals to see and respond to each other's nonverbal cues, a form of information that is not accessible through written surveys or telephone interviews. According to Lavee and Itzchakov (2023), direct interpersonal communication enhances the effectiveness of conversation by enabling listeners to actively participate as co-narrators through both verbal and non-verbal reactions, ultimately resulting in improved storytelling.

Given the objective of constructivist research to foster trust and comprehension, interviews were primarily centered on promoting dialogue rather than adhering to a rigid question and response format. For this purpose, utilizing Zoom recordings helped capture the precise and authentic information of an interview. This claim is based on McMullin's (2023) and Penn-Edwards' (2004) argument that such recordings enhance the vitality of research by allowing the researcher to relive the authentic dialogue that took place during a conversation

because in most cases, interviewers are unable to reliably remember the exact words used during discussions, let alone the pauses, tones, and intonations that convey non-verbal information.

Data Analysis

Zoom recorded each interview, serving as the initial means of data collection. Although Zoom includes a built-in transcription option, some transcriptions contained errors throughout, possibly due to varying accents of participants. Therefore, the researcher thoroughly reviewed and edited each of the transcripts for accuracy. All participants were interviewed twice except one participant who was interviewed only once, making 15 transcripts, which created initial familiarization with the data. One participant was unable to complete the second interview due to a family emergency that led to additional responsibility. The researcher watched and listened to each interview recording two times to guarantee that the final transcripts were accurate. Following each interview, a within-case analysis was conducted, involving a thorough study of all 15 transcripts to gain an in-depth insight into each case. To gain this in-depth understanding both deductive and inductive coding methods were used. Guided by Bingham (2023), deductive coding entailed creating a pre-established set of codes aligned with the study's research and interview questions and overall purpose. Initial codes were developed based on research and interview questions and entered into Delve Qualitative Data Analysis Software, where all 15 transcripts were uploaded. Deductive coding was opted for because it is suitable for research that entails program evaluation, as it enables researchers to analyze the data with an emphasis on specific phenomena and identify helpful information for program improvement.

However, the major challenge of deductive coding is the possibility of disregarding good information due to a preconceived focus. With this knowledge, the researcher utilized inductive coding, which involves creating codes based on the relevant information discovered in the data

during the coding process (Saldana, 2015). According to Thomas (2006), deductive coding enables the narrative to be developed *from* the data itself. By integrating deductive and inductive coding, a clear analytical focus was developed while simultaneously permitting the emergence of new codes during the data analysis process. In the initial coding phase (i.e. *iterations of analysis*), structural coding was used, and as guided by Saldana (2015, p. 218), structural coding involved assigning content-based terms that represented the topic under investigation. Saldana (2015) further supports the structural coding approach by claiming researchers can utilize this method to organize a vast collection of semi-structured data into smaller components and analyze the shared characteristics, relationships, and differences across comparable segments.

The initial phase of structural coding formed the foundation for an in-depth description of each case plus its context. A second coding cycle was undertaken to reevaluate, reanalyze, and reorganize data that was initially coded using the first round during structural coding in the first phase. Again, as Saldana (2015) asserts, "If the goal is to capture the participant's worldview or personal ideology, then the first and second codes are more grounded in his or her perspective" (p. 135). Performing a second phase of coding enables the establishment of logical connections between seemingly unrelated information and the organization of categories to create a coherent data synthesis.

For the second coding stage, pattern coding was used to arrange codes into fewer closely linked themes. Pattern coding was deemed fit based on Saldana's (2015) recommendation that it facilitates the examination of individual cases to identify specific insights and find common themes across multiple cases. Saldana's (2015) guide reads:

> Depending on the study, for example, Pattern Coding could be used as the sole second cycle method. ……Pattern Coding develops the "meta code" – the category label that

identifies similarly coded data. Pattern Codes not only organize the corpus but attempt to attribute meaning to that organization" (p. 235).

Furthermore, pattern coding facilitates the comparison of cases by enabling the analysis of participant views on the same interview questions. Pattern coding established the foundation for cross-case analysis by producing shared patterns across cases, which resulted in identifying themes in the analysis. The resulting themes are supported by quotes from different cases and reported collectively in the following section of this dissertation.

Trustworthiness

This study established trustworthiness by creating detailed and thick descriptions of each case. According to Stake (2006), providing thick and extensive descriptions of each case allows the reader to assess whether the findings may be applied to related cases due to shared attributes and make inferences about other contexts. Furthermore, the researcher consistently examined the data used for within-case and cross-case analysis, offering an opportunity for validation and the emergence of new themes. Qualitative research is considered less reliable due to the limited sample sizes, making it difficult to generalize the findings (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Leung (2015) cautions that due to the inability to make generalizations from the findings, qualitative researchers must be intentional in addressing their studies' reliability. With this in mind, the researcher enhanced this study's credibility, dependability, and transferability by establishing reliability and validity.

Validity and Reliability

According to Quintão et al. (2020), validity in qualitative research refers to the extent to which data accurately capture what the researcher intends to measure, while reliability refers to the extent to which the data consistently measure what they are expected to measure. The

researcher used a multiple-case study to help enhance external validity and generalizability of the findings. While Quintão et al. (2020) states that the major concern regarding the case study approach is the possibility of the investigator becoming careless and permitting prejudiced perspectives to impact the outcomes and conclusions, to mitigate this, the researcher carefully focused on recommended techniques that guarantee the validity and reliability of qualitative studies. The initial validation approach employed was unveiling the researcher's bias through a reflexivity statement, as described by Creswell (2012), which was done by the researcher acknowledging previous experiences and preconceived ideas that would potentially impact or prejudice the research process. This eliminated any preexisting assumptions that might potentially be present.

The researcher developed and used an interview protocol as the second validation strategy. After conducting a literature review of previous research surrounding leadership development programs, specifically those within the agricultural setting, interview questions were created that focused on participants' motivations to participate in the program, motivations to embark on leadership positions in commodity associations, and their perception of how needed leadership skills were further developed and utilized. The interview protocol ensured the researcher was well-guided on what to ask and maintained focus throughout the interview process.

The researcher employed a third validation technique, which involved pilot testing the interview questions. A pilot test helped the researcher improve and refine interview questions that best address the research questions. As stated earlier, all interviews conducted in this study were recorded in audio and video format with the permission of each participant. Lastly, this study used triangulation through document analysis to provide additional insight and evidence of

the data collected through the interviews. Cohort directories, magazine articles highlighting participants, and websites served as document analysis. These sources highlighting the research study participants assisted in triangulating the data.

IRB and Ethical Considerations

The researcher completed the CITI program in Fall 2022 in preparation for this research, which honed his expertise in general research and ethical practices when dealing with human subjects. Besides this, the researcher sought approval from North Carolina State University IRB, which was approved under NC State eIRB #: 26588 on November 14, 2023, as exempt from the policy outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations (Exempt d.2) before implementing this study, see Appendix B. The researcher used semi-structured interviews to collect data following careful selection of the participants, critically analyzed the data, and presented the findings. The researcher informed the selected participants about the study's objective and sought their explicit permission to participate in this research. The researcher also assured participants of their voluntary participation in the study and avoided any form of coercion to participate in the study, which is cardinal and ethical according to Xu et al. (2020). The researcher refrained from misleading the participants throughout the data collection process by revealing the objective and intended utilization of the collected data. Furthermore, as guided by Cairns-Lee et al. (2022a) and Cairns-Lee et al. (2022b), during the interview process, the researcher made a conscious effort to avoid asking leading questions, which aided in collecting data that addressed research questions reliably. Similarly, the researcher refrained from exhibiting bias towards certain participants or exclusively revealing one perspective of the matter at the onset and throughout the process of data analysis. As cautioned by Crowe et al. (2011) and Sutton and Austin (2015), the researcher made sure he included multiple views and also presented contradictory findings in the

results section under Chapter 4 of this dissertation. The researcher ensured that he remained honest when presenting the findings by taking great care to avoid any fabrication or falsification of data, information, findings, or deductions. Again, based on Tierney and Lincoln's (1997) best practices in reporting research, the researcher communicated findings concisely and unambiguously to prevent twisting the information provided by the research participants and misleading the consumers of this study's findings.

Chapter Summary

Chapter three provides details about the methodology and procedures that were used to explore the influence of the NCTTFC ALDP on the leadership competencies of the alumni from the 2006-2023 cohorts in leadership roles within North Carolin agricultural commodity organizations. This qualitative study used an interpretative and social constructivist theoretical framework to explore the perceived leadership competencies gained by the NCTTF ALDP alumni, motivation factors for assuming leadership roles within commodity organizations, their contributions to commodity organizational development and subsequently their perceived needs and recommended areas of growth. To comply with this approach, a researcher positionality statement was provided. Agricultural commodity leaders were purposefully selected to participate in this study because they are the cornerstone of agricultural development. However, within the context of the case study framework, the researcher focused on what Stake (2006) defines as an intrinsic case study, "when the main and enduring interest is in the case itself, we call it 'intrinsic case study'" (p. 8). With this approach, cases were chosen not primarily for their representation of other cases or illustration of a certain attribute but because the cases themselves, with all their unique and ordinary characteristics, were of interest. The researcher used semi-structured interviews to collect data following careful selection of the participants, and

critically analyzed the data producing shared patterns across cases, which resulted in identifying themes. The resulting themes are supported by quotes from different cases and reported collectively in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 4

Results

The chapter summarizes and reports this study's results. The results are presented in a way that enables readers to get the impression that they are there, hearing from the NCTTFC ALDP former participants, learning about the leadership competencies they developed, and their participation in leadership positions within commodity organizations in North Carolina and beyond. The study's purpose and the four research questions guided this qualitative investigation that yielded findings on the influence of the NCTTFC ALDP on the leadership competencies of the alums from the 2006-2023 cohorts in leadership roles within commodity organizations in North Carolina.

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to explore the influence of NCTTFC ALDP on commodity organization leaders in North Carolina. Assessing the perceived leadership competencies gained by the former participants and how they apply these skills to positively impact commodity organizations allows program leaders and stakeholders to assess overall results, recognize areas for improvement, and make required modifications (Njah et al., 2021).

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1) What motivates NCTTFC ALDP former participants to engage in commodity organizations leadership roles?
2) What leadership development competencies are credited to the NCTTFC ALDP by the former participants?
3) What are the perceived contributions of the NCTTFC ALDP former participants to commodity organizations?

4) How do the NCTTFC ALDP former participants overall perceive the benefits of the program and what are the perceived areas of growth?

Participant Descriptions

Eight participants who were purposefully invited to participate in this study and to ensure their anonymity, each was assigned a pseudonym, and their descriptions are based on the demographic data collected throughout the interview process. Below is a full description of the eight participants with a summary of their demographic information provided in Table 3.

Alan

Alan has served as an officer on the state commodity association in the past and currently serves as a delegate for a national commodity council. Additionally, he plays a vital role on an executive committee, where he represents the common interests of regional producers. As a member of the executive committee, Alan actively participates in formulating strategic initiatives and policy directives that specifically cater to the state's requirements of commodity growers. In addition to participating in related associations, Alan serves as a treasurer for his County Farm Bureau. In this capacity, he is responsible for managing financial matters and assisting in promoting the organization's objective to further the welfare of agricultural communities.

Alan is active in his local community and contributes to the school board and church committees. Alan's journey into agriculture was influenced by growing up on a family farm, which instilled a profound gratitude for the land and a passion for farming. His decision to pursue a career in agriculture stemmed from a desire to continue his family's farming legacy and contribute to the well-being of rural areas.

While Alan did not complete agricultural classes in high school, his practical experience working on a family farm taught him a strong understanding of farming techniques. Alan

attended NC State and returned to his family farm after graduation. Alan supervises and oversees multiple facets of agricultural operations at the farm, including financial administration, equipment operation, and crop management. He closely cooperates with family members and farm personnel to guarantee their farming business's prosperity and long-term viability.

Brook

Brook serves as the president of an area farmers market association which is a nonprofit organization. In this role, she plays a pivotal part in determining and implementing the various projects of the community farmers' market. She is responsible for formulating strategies to achieve equilibrium between supply and demand, improving community awareness through marketing initiatives, and actively engaging in events to foster the growth and accessibility of the market. Brook not only leads the farmers' market but also acts as an advisor to a North Carolina commodity association board. She utilizes her extensive knowledge in farming and industry dynamics to offer strategic recommendations. Through her involvement, she ensures that the organization's aims align with the changing requirements and problems in the food and agriculture sector.

Brook's agricultural journey was initiated by her upbringing on a small family farm in Western North Carolina, where she cultivated a profound admiration for the labor and achievements of farmers. Although she first contemplated a profession in veterinary medicine, her encounters on the farm and participation in agricultural programs such as FFA ignited her enthusiasm for pursuing opportunities within the agricultural field. Brook did not pursue a conventional agricultural degree at the university level; however, she believes her expertise has provided her with analytical skills well-suited to her Extension role. She offers assistance and direction to [ag industry] farmers throughout North Carolina, specifically focusing on farm business management. Brook's work often takes her on the road to engaging directly with

producers and industry stakeholders, providing valuable insights and resources to assist them in their operations and decision-making.

Loretta

Loretta serves in multiple roles, including being the president of commodity association at the county level. Loretta is also involved in the state-wide commodity checkoff program committee, which promotes and supports the industry. As a board member of the state commodity group, Loretta offers representation and advocacy for growers in a broader scope. Although facing difficulties due to the county's volume-based organizational structure, Loretta is dedicated to utilizing her position to tackle industry issues and promote cooperation among growers throughout the state. Loretta's passion for agriculture originates from her family's engagement in cultivation despite not being raised directly on the farm. Although she initially studied a non-agricultural major, her work ultimately brought her back to the family farm, where she has had a substantial impact for over ten years.

As a CEO of her family business, Loretta manages multiple aspects of the business, such as coordinating logistics, overseeing sales and organizational management. Loretta's work is driven by a strong feeling of duty toward her family's heritage and the future of the business. She takes a practical approach to tackling obstacles and promoting expansion in the agriculture industry by daily engaging in strategic decision-making, problem-solving, and operational management. Her primary objective is to adjust to seasonal fluctuations and restructure the business to ensure long-term sustainability. Loretta's leadership involvement has and currently is centered on her roles within the North Carolina and local commodity organizations.

Dolly

Dolly's participation in agricultural commodity organizations mainly revolves around her position on the executive board of a North Carolina commodity association. For the past two years, she has actively served as a board member, making valuable contributions to initiatives in the agricultural industry at both the local and state levels. Growing up in a rural community in Eastern North Carolina exposed Dolly to agriculture early in life and fueled her interest in the field. This, plus her initial employment, offered excellent practical knowledge and a deep understanding of the cycles involved in agricultural production. Her family's farming background, including her grandparents' involvement in tobacco cultivation and hog farming, further influenced her appreciation for agriculture's significance in providing livelihoods. Dolly actively participated in the FFA during high school, acquiring practical knowledge and skills in agricultural practices, and her academic studies in agriculture at NC State.

Currently, as the owner of a wholesale agricultural business, Dolly's daily responsibilities include directing the sales team, supervising inventory, handling customer orders, and strategizing for upcoming production cycles. Dolly also serves as a volunteer firefighter and holds the position of secretary on the executive board of the local fire department.

Hank

Hank has an unwavering commitment to agriculture and is extensively engaged in multiple agricultural commodities associations. He currently serves on a national commodity council, utilizing his expertise as an [specialization] to navigate public policy and advocate for the commodity. Hank is a former officer of a state commodity association and currently actively participates in the County Farm Bureau, where he contributes to formulating policies and represents various agricultural interests in his community. Hank's background and growing up in a farming family, where he developed a passion for farm machinery and livestock under his

father's tutelage, influenced his pursuits in the agricultural industry. Hank participated in the local chapter, laying the groundwork for his future agricultural career. He pursued a degree focused in agriculture from NC State, which helped him discover the opportunities within the agricultural industry and impact his rural community. Hank has participated in one other leadership academy organized by the commodity board.

Waylon

Waylon is a former president of a North Carolina commodity organization, and served a one-year tenure in which he supervised the membership. One of his primary responsibilities was to oversee the management of revenues generated from the check-off. Waylon has served on an executive committee of a state commodity council for a number of years, and he does not only participate in state council but also serves as the president of the County Cattleman's Association. He took on this role to rejuvenate the association, working alongside one of his family members. Waylon took the lead in revitalizing the association, emphasizing the significance of involving young people. Their efforts aimed to cultivate a sense of solidarity among local cattle producers in the area.

Waylon's interest and involvement in agriculture originated from being born and raised in a farming family, where he developed a profound passion for the agriculture industry. Waylon pursued a non-agricultural degree at the university and worked in the non-agricultural sector for over several years but later returned to his family farm, where he now works as a full-time farmer. His motivation to return to the farm emanated from a strong desire to directly contribute to his family's future and positively impact agriculture.

Cole

Currently, Cole is a member of various national advisory committees, and he places great importance on community engagement and serves as an elected town official. He has extensive involvement in leadership positions, such as serving as the president of the county Farm Bureau for almost ten years. He has demonstrated leadership at state and national levels, actively participating in a commodity association and various committees such as the Farm Bureau Young Farmer and Rancher committees, specialty livestock committees, and scholarship committees. Cole's enthusiasm for agriculture originates from his family's cattle enterprise and his career, which focuses on large animals. He holds degrees in agriculture both at bachelor's and graduate level.

Willie

Willie serves as a delegate with a national commodity association, representing North Carolina. In addition, he serves as a board member for another national commodity association, which grants him a position on the Executive Committee for a North Carolina commodity association. Willie's primary responsibility is to represent North Carolina farmers at the national level and advocate for policies that align with the State's diverse agricultural landscape and production practices. Willie was born into a farming family, and he is a fifth-generation farmer, which explains his strong bond with agriculture. Agricultural classes were not available in his high school, but he participated in FFA for two years. Willie pursued an agricultural degree at NC State and returned to his family farm as a full-time farmer upon graduation. As a self-employed farmer, Willie is responsible for various tasks such as fieldwork, operating farm equipment, marketing crops, and managing finances.

Table 3

Summary of participants' demographic information

Participant	Gender	Local leadership	NC commodity leadership	National commodity leadership
Alan	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes
Brook	Female	Yes	Yes	No
Loretta	Female	Yes	Yes	No
Dolly	Female	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hank	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes
Waylon	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cole	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes
Willie	Male	No	Yes	Yes

Themes

The cross-case analysis of the 15 interview transcripts from the eight cases resulted in six common themes, summarized below, that answer this study's research questions.

1) For the Greater Good of Agriculture
2) Interpersonal skills
    - *Power of Others to Participate and Lead*
    - *Collaboration and Engagement*
    - *Open Conversations*
    - *Networking*
    - *Handling Challenges and Seeking to Make a Positive Difference*
    - *Group Dynamics Skills*
    - *Adaptive Leadership*
    - *Team Building Skills*
3) Advocacy and Influence
    - *Strategic Communication*
    - *Impact on Initiatives and Goals*
    - *Building Understanding and Respect*
4) Allowing Space for Reflection
5) Continuous Personal and Organizational Development
    - *Opening Doors to Opportunities*
6) Suggested Changes Vary from Participant to Participant

For the Greater Good of Agriculture

One of the drivers that pushed the NCTTFC ALDP former participants to assume leadership roles is for the good of agriculture, which many associate with, and the desire to serve their communities. For example, Dolly said, “So just being part of that group that gives back to the community and serves a big purpose of the community to keep people well and safe” (D1). Dolly added that it brings her a sense of fulfillment being in meetings where she knows she is working on budgets and effecting change to make the organization better in the future. Dolly felt like she was delayed by her age to assume leadership roles besides developing the desire to serve on board meetings at a young age. She appreciated the opportunity given to her to serve, especially when they called on her and several others, wanting them to play more pivotal roles and take on positions in commodity organizations and the agriculture industry in general.

Cole liked what the organization stood for and the fact that it was there to work on behalf of all and of agriculture. Cole described his motivation and his gratefulness to serve commodity organizations this way,

> It’s made clear that agriculture, you know, touches every one's life in in different way, in many different forms and fashions, and that you know the idea and the understanding that yeah, We have to be present, and we have to be involved and we have to fight for what we believe in and that you know [Agricultural Organization] certainly does that and provides that opportunity. ‘I think I would definitely be interested in being a part of this,’ and I mean, it's you know it was certainly a learning curve, and I wouldn't trade it for anything (C1).

While Willie had a strong bond with the agriculture industry, his motivation to assume leadership roles did not sprout until he started attending a couple of commodity meetings where

he saw that it was beneficial work making a difference. Making a difference for other commodity farmers is what motivated him to pursue leadership positions deeper and harder, to the extent of going through the top leadership ranks of the organization. For his part, when interviewed, Alan said he wanted to be one of those who “tell that story” and be a voice of reason. Alan added,

> I do love talking about it, thinking about it and just again if you're not at the table if you're not there talking about it, somebody else is making that decision for you. Several reasons, one I enjoy the people. The people you get to meet and work with, (2) is, I enjoy looking at the big picture and being involved in decisions. Dad always said, growing up it's like people are making decisions that are gonna affect you and in our farm every day you might as well be one of those people making those decisions rather than just sitting back, letting somebody else make them. (A1).

Experiencing a challenge at her work pushed Brook to professionalize an organization to solve the problem she and her business partners were experiencing. This challenge, plus her experience in writing and managing grants and understanding entities, was her primary motivation for becoming a member of [commodity] board and eventually having a leadership role on other commodity associations as an additional involvement in the agricultural industry. She explained further,

> That's why I work with that commodity organization because that is my audience. So, you know, that's part of the job, if you will, I probably do more than is required, because I appreciate the value of an organization, you know, helping the greater industry so that one choice, one's force. But that's you know I feel like both of them are important, and I'm happy to be able to help in the different capacities in each one (B1).

Additionally, Brook assumed leadership roles because she felt the gap between what was being done and what was expected of the people in power, and she thought she could do something. She said, “and this sounds bad, there have been cases where I felt like I could do something better than the person that was in there” (B2). Brook further emphasized,

> But there have indeed been times when I've said, I've learned I know how to do that. I can do that, let's I'm gonna do that. There's also been times when I just knew that if from a farmers market example as well as [commodity] association, I have recognized that unless somebody does something XYZ, it might not get done, and a golden opportunity would be missed. And so, in those cases, I guess it's more the end goal or a successful story for the organization is what I felt like I could contribute so that would have been the motivation feeling. Feeling like I had the skillset to do a job well, and or seeing an opportunity, and feeling like, if not me, who else? (B3).

One reason Loretta gave for assuming a leadership role in a commodity organization was to get exposed to other producers and ease the marketing of their products to allow everyone to benefit. She gave an example of when commodity producers rallied at their organization. Her statement goes,

> “We were in an oversupply, and farmers would go to the commodity groups and want the commodity groups to be marketing their product and talking about why real [products] were better than fake [competitors’ products], and cause that's our main competition (L1).

Loretta insisted that participating in and having a strong commodity group is integral and important. Loretta centered on building a strong commodity organization to help its members market their products. She shared an example: "Because if you were wanting that commodity group to help market your [product] back when you were having trouble selling them and you

wanted to increase your market share, you're gonna need the strong commodity group." (L2). Although Loretta has observed a lull where it has been hard to have people participate in their commodity organization, her participation and assumption of leadership roles are not based on coercion. She makes it clear that,

> I think, just participation, just a sense of responsibility and duty, that if you want to have a healthy commodity group that you need to be involved. But again, for me personally, having some past experience volunteering with that same organization. I also want to make sure that I'm healthy, participating within it. Sometimes organizations are really desperate for volunteers. And so, you know, people might ask, because they say, 'Oh, you might be somebody that'd be willing to do this..,' but no, I don't really think there's been anybody who's pushed me into doing it that I can think of. (L3)

Loretta had been president of the county commodity association, and the organization normally recommends their leaders to assume roles beyond the county to serve on State commodity boards. This was another exposure that made her identify more need for her service and drove her to assume more roles in the executive truck of her commodity organization in hopes that it would help with the greater good of their commodity. She explained the protocol her organization follows as,

> They're always asking for people to serve on the Board, and they want the County Commodity group to recommend people to serve on the State Commodity group, and it seemed to me that if you were a past President of this County Commodity group that you should probably expect to go on the State Commodity Group Board, and so I guess I volunteered myself to go on the board. (L4).

Like Loretta, Dolly thinks it's important for groups like theirs to have a coalition to be stronger and better themselves. Dolly justified her drive to assume roles with an example citing the many challenges like water, drought, labor issues, and immigration issues that affect the agricultural workforce. Dolly believes that standing alone makes one voiceless and incapable of addressing cardinal issues in the agricultural industry. She elaborates,

> …. but when we're together a lot of those things can be heard, and we can make a bigger impact. And so I think that just being able to share information and to be part of a bigger group for a bigger calls and then to set examples for other people coming into the industry, that this is what it means, and this is how you can effect change in order to make the future a bigger and brighter, better place. I think just being a participant of something that keeps our industry together is really important to stay up to date on things that are happening and making sure you're doing all that you can to be at the forefront of the industry which is really important. (D2).

Interpersonal Skills

Participants narrated the different interpersonal skills they gained from participating in the NCTTFC ALDP and how they have shaped their approach to various issues, including accepting advise from others, seeking mentorship, and engaging agricultural stakeholders in pursuit of commodity organization development.

Power of others to participate and lead

Although Cole shared previously that he was motivated because he liked what the organization stood for, the power of others influenced him greatly. It helped him realize how relevant it was to lead a commodity organization, and he even discussed how he was also pushed in high school to participate and lead. He revealed,

> I was kind of pushed into it, or I was told I was just kind of moved up. It wasn't something that I went into saying, yes, I'm gonna want my goal is to be in a leadership role and I think over my lifetime. I seem to end up in leadership roles whether I'm looking for them or not you know. I mean, that was the way through high school. It was that way through college through [graduate school] school. You know, and then in my career and my public life, in my private life, I mean, I just seem to stumble into those roles, you know, one way or another. (C2).

Waylon's motivation looks 'inherited' because he grew up in a leaders' home. With his father being a leader in several organizations, Waylon discussed how he was constantly around his father and seeing and hearing about the organizations his father was involved in. He went on to share that "All through my life he's been president of many of these organizations. So, I've grown up in some of these" (Wa1). Waylon's inherent desire for leadership roles within commodity organizations makes him receptive to others' requests/nominations to fill certain positions. He tries to support the organization and advocate for the organization because he recognizes its importance. Waylon gave an example that best describes this phenomena,

> With the [commodity] Council I was asked if I would be willing to run for a term for district [#]. There're [#] districts in the state that represent the [commodity] production and I live in District [#], which is the [region] part of the State, and I was asked if I would run for one of those open seats. I agreed to it, and I went for election, and that's how I got on the board from the board. I just kinda was, you know, willing to do, and I was asked to go to Washington once or twice. So, I always when somebody asks me to do something, even if it's not something that's in my comfort zone, I try to, you know, look at it and try

> my best if I can, work it with my schedule to agree to do that cause, I think it'll develop me as a better person and a leader. (Wa2).

Unlike Waylon, Cole did not grow up in a leader's house and partly attributes his involvement in leadership positions to his past participation in Farm Bureau activities and the individuals he met through Farm Bureau. North Carolina Farm Bureau has multiple events designed to promote young farmers and ranchers in the state and Cole unveiled his perspective,

> I became involved when I was asked to give a presentation to the State Young Farmer and Rancher committee which was gonna be in our area and the district field representative asked if I would be willing to give a talk to them and I said, sure, yeah, I'd be glad to do so and in turn, after that she looked at me and frankly said, hey, you're gonna be my next young farmer rancher person for this county. And so, it sort of, you know and then I had other friends that were involved in that particular organization and it just yeah, they were certainly encouraging and we did a lot. We traveled quite extensively together throughout that process. And just really you know showed me the ropes… (C3).

However, Cole believes that his nominators have been supportive in helping him perform to his best in various leadership positions in which they have pushed him. For example, he revealed, "I had mentors that were there to, you know, help me. I had opportunities, for, you know, for training to help me kind of expand my understanding of issues. You know, and the continual education part of it I think has been a big, positive, you know." (C4).

It is worth noting that there is a commonality in how Waylon, Cole, and Willie got into leadership positions and ascended to executive roles. For instance, after gaining interest in pursuing commodity leadership roles, Willie could accept nominations and willingly take on

positions without hesitation or being pushed by others. He has gradually developed an appreciation for serving on different boards, and he narrated,

> So, once I turned out on the North Carolina Association, I spent two years off the board, and then they called and asked if I would serve as a delegate to the [National Commodity Association]. There was a local farmer that was terming out years ago, and they were sort of looking for someone to fill his role and yeah, I asked if he had any, if I could have his support to take his board seat, and he offered his support and carried that back to the association. So, they asked me to serve. And Lord! That was 15 years ago and here we are still going. He was supportive of me, joining now I didn't really feel pushed. I was wanting to do it on my own and so it's been a good thing all around. (Wi1).

Like Waylon, Alan was influenced to assume leadership roles by his father, with whom he grew up, and he (Alan's dad) was always involved in leadership, making Alan believe being a leader was natural for him. With this mindset, Alan has been involved in leadership roles across community organizations like his local church and agricultural organizations like Farm Bureau and commodity organizations. Yet, he aspires to take on more leadership roles. Like Cole, Alan has succumbed to other people's requests but acknowledges their support in enabling him to better his leadership skills and serve effectively. He recounts,

> I mean, I've been encouraged along the way. I will say, had some good mentors. You know, and I've had some encouragement where they're saying maybe you should look into this, whatnot but I knew I always wanted to, but I have had some good mentors and some good encouragement from some older farmers. (A2).

Alan utilized the opportunities whenever others encouraged him to take on leadership roles, and his reception and involvement turned into ladders that afforded him a chance to serve on numerous commodity boards, including getting to the national level. Alan recalled,

> So, I've always been interested in that and once I got my feet wet, so to speak, with the State organization then you start talking to other folks and meeting other folks, and you learn you know, there's more out there and so you get involved. They ask if you want to go and be involved in this next level, this regional group and go meet with those folks and then again move on to the national so just again working on the large issues. (A3).

Brook brings an interesting perspective when she shares,

> I don't like to be in the front of a room, and I've always known that I'm more introverted than not. You know, as a really bashful kid, and my parents had to push me a lot, and you know I'm glad they did because I can put on my game face and do the people thing. (B4).

Brook affirms that though others have encouraged her to take on leadership roles, she has a deep interest in commodity organizations, which has enabled her to serve cheerfully. She elaborated, “So yes, I have had to be encouraged but you know I also have done it and taken it all willingly, I mean I'm not. I don't do it begrudgingly, but yes, I have had to be encouraged” (B5).

Dolly also shared that the need to fill up leadership positions in her commodity organization and hone future [commodity] representatives led a team from her association to ask her former boss to allow her to take on a leadership role several years ago. She clarifies that besides reaching out to her, she did not get pushed per se; her perspective reads,

> The previous owner of my company had told me years ago that they had approached him, if he would be okay with him, asking me to be part of the board, and he thought that I had too much on my plate at the time, taking over this company and trying to start all over.

> And so they waited a couple of years before they came back to me and asked me if I was ready and willing to serve, and so I don't think they pushed me necessarily, but they definitely wanted me to be part of it, and they asked a couple of years prior and it was just one of those things that it was the right time. It worked, and I said 'yes' to taking on that so currently, in my second year of a 3-year term on the board. (D3).

This vignette from Hank's first interview illustrates the 'power of others' but also an appreciation for opportunities to serve; it states, "I said I was fortunate that people approached me to join some of these organizations, and I was glad that I was open-minded enough to take a chance at it" (H1). Despite Hank being approached to serve on commodity boards, he admired successful personalities who were already meaningfully impacting the agricultural industry. For example, Hank described how he was encouraged by [Tammy], whom he met in 1994 while in college when she was recruiting for [Hank's current employer] at the time, and that she would go to universities and show up at events where agricultural students were. Hank was taken up by [Tammy]'s approach and accomplishments in the agricultural industry and later inspired to immerse himself in serving on different commodity boards. Hank narrated,

> I admired [Tammy]. I would say she was my biggest inspiration to taking on leadership roles being involved in organizations outside of the farm. That was my first experience in knowing that there were people that have my best interests at heart that I never knew existed when I was only just working at the farm level, and sometimes you could have difficulties in markets or inflation, or something like that, and just on the farm sometimes you feel isolated, and that you're alone. And that gave me a good opportunity to network with other growers and swap stories and you find out that you're not by yourself. And

> also, you get to see people that are not on the farm level that are helping you, until I took on some leadership roles, I didn't know that we had lobbyists. (H2).

Collaboration and engagement

Initiating and sustaining collaborations and partnerships are skills effective leaders use for the effective running of their organizations. NCTTFC ALDP former participants identified various ways going through the program honed their engagement and collaborative skills. For example, Waylon shared his experience during the training. He stated, "I had an opportunity to have about an hour in front of my cohort to share a story on something that we went through on the farm and how we overcame it, and how that worked out" (Wa3). He revealed that serving on a commodity board involves working with others, which requires confidence. He indicated,

> Sure, the biggest thing would be, have confidence in what you're doing, and you being selected as the leader of your issue, and then I would say, lean on your Co-workers, lean on your peers on getting their ideas and working through it as a group. (Wa4).

Waylon added that working with people is uncomfortable, but participating in the program taught him how to write speeches and work with people professionally. He declared, "So I'm pretty comfortable talking to, you know, the people that work for us and with us and my family" (Wa5).

Willie used an example of a practical experience to share how he developed and applied collaboration and engagement techniques. His practical experience reads,

> Just talking with different leaders from other organizations and helping our organization have a good relationship with the most kind of Department of Agriculture and with the University. I know several people in university administration, now, yeah…." Yeah, I'll go back to just being able to identify what drives people and how to work with their

> character traits to reach a common goal of specifically oh, I mean there's many reasons. I mean, you could go back to negotiating with [university administrator] obviously he wanted something, and we did, too, were able to reach that common goal of the sponsorship of, I'm not sure I can think of a specific example at the second. (Wi2).

Interestingly, Hank disclosed, “You don't have to know everything, but it's nice to know somebody that definitely expanded my network of colleagues in the Ag not only I mean, we have participants that worked on the farm that are row crop farmers” (H3). He further illustrated how he used this skill to build partnerships with people beyond the North Carolina agricultural industry. This surfaced when he said, “I also know people from Clemson neighboring universities, LSU, Alabama, and Auburn all the land-grant universities” (H4). Like Waylon, Dolly garners much support in her business and tenure with the commodity from different people with whom she can collaborate. The development of this skill was evident when she said, “And so, I think, being able to do that and have a team of people around you that support you and that you can delegate to that really make you successful is important, and to always be like a forever learner” (D3).

While Loretta’s background is not in agriculture besides being a farmer, she credits her participation in the NCTTFC ALDP, which helped her initiate collaborations with people in the agricultural industry. Loretta’s narrative reads,

> So it was a lot of very like a lot of differences and I'd say that I believe the program once again helped me understand and find commonalities between people that are different from you and so the ability to try to find common ground is probably one of the things that I learned and then, just I think it re-emphasized the sense of responsibility as a leader

and that again encouraged me to be part of my commodity group where I hadn't really planned on participating on the statewide level. (L5).

Brook said she has been serving her primary group but also engaging with other groups that she feels need her service and can benefit from her work. However, she attributed this to specific ALDP components when she said,

> It is a self-awareness and relationship tool that I have embraced and feel like it has impacted my ability to work with families in stressful situations…. It sounds like more work on the front end, but I have found that it's been worth it. Both professionally and personally. (B6).

Brook added that this has enabled her to build lasting relationships and work in complicated environments. She revealed this when she said,

> The producers that I'm working with each have their own sort of independent chiefdoms. They have their own little kingdoms that they're working on, but just the process of going through and learning and trying to appreciate the person and what he or she brings to the table based on their intentions and their experience. (B7).

Like Brook and Waylon, Cole acknowledged how the skills gained from his participation in the NCTTFC ALDP have helped him engage and effectively work with people from different contexts. Cole was so direct and said,

> I would say these skills have helped me to get others engaged to work with folks of different backgrounds and different thought processes, and to like said find that middle ground and commonality and to you know that which allows everyone to come together and work for the same end goal. (C5).

Open conversations

While it is publicly known that leaders can accomplish little if they cannot engage in open and fruitful discussions, NCTTFC ALDP former participants boast about being trained to add value to discussions by initiating 'crucial conversations.' For instance, Alan shared,

> I think the easiest thing to do is just be non-confrontational and just let it be and most everyone was going to gloss over the issue, and I just said, look, guys, you know, we've talked about budget constraints. Why don't we talk about the number of delegates each state is allowed and at the end of the discussion everybody was glad it was brought up but no one else wanted to bring it up and I just thought, well, we traveled a long distance to meet in person we need to at least discuss the difficult topics whether we want to or not. (A3).

As for collaboration and engagement skills, Brook associates her ability to engage and turn hard conversations rewarding to specific components of the NCTTFC ALDP. She shared,

> I can think of back to that crucial conversations session that we had with that book and those exercises where you really, you restate, you reframe and you don't make assumptions you really try to clarify what the person means, and you don't make assumptions about things they did or didn't say not making assumptions about what other people in the room mean when they sit there in silence, or when they nod their head, or when they're looking down there. (B8).

Additionally, while open conversations are used to resolve conflicts and reach a consensus, Brook noted that they have helped her build motivation when people feel 'stuck' in life. Cole's experience offers additional application of the crucial conversation sessions applauded by Brook. Cole related,

> Just being willing to meet people where they're at and have these open and honest conversations. I think that helps in those situations where we are talking about hard conversations and things that can be emotionally charged and you know things that you don't really want to talk about, but you have to talk about them. (C6).

Willie discussed how open conversation skills have helped him in his leadership roles with his personality as an introvert. Willie shared,

> One of them is to be able to, like I referenced well, yet to build my confidence in communicating in larger groups, yeah, I am an introvert that was obviously brought out in the leadership program. So, for me to be able to step, you know, into these groups and have even a leadership role in front of people is really me stepping outside of my comfort zone. (Wi3).

Dolly also said she learned to be open to things and discern when to participate, which is super important in leadership. She complimented the open conversation skills and said, “and to be a team player myself, and to really foster that environment of open communication. ….and so, there's a way in which you know to handle all of those conversations appropriately” (D4).

Networking

Hank shared his perspective and said he developed networking skills that make his work easy. He elaborated,

> One of the most important things I felt in my career was networking with other people in the industry and getting out of the box and experiencing new things. Another example of a leadership skill was one through networking because, you know, I became more popular so that you can look me up on social media and see some of the things I've accomplished in the past. So, I get approached by people without pitching ideas. It's like

> a family atmosphere... I have friends at NC State, NC A&T. I have friends in extension and friends all across the country. (H5).

Loretta said participating in the NCTTFC ALDP was very rewarding and exposed her to many people in the agriculture industry. She added,

> I do hope that some of the connections that I made, and some of the fact that I'm just open and willing, and the fact that I know that there’re other things going on, I hope will help the Commodity group one day. (L6).

Brook thinks participating in the NCTTFC ALDP is one of the best things in her personal and professional journey that has helped her have people to reach out to in case of any questions about agriculture. She added that her most significant contribution to her commodity organization is because she can directly tie back to ALDP that built her into a person who can create a network that surrounds her with people with different experiences. She expressed,

> It was a fantastic opportunity, and I still keep in touch with them. Well, in fact, I called one out of the blue the other day and talked to him in several years, but I had a question about agriculture in his neck of the woods, and so you know, I sent him a text, and I said, hey remember me, you got time to chat and it was a really easy phone call and very helpful. And so, I think the people that I met in the networks and the relationships created we'll carry forward, you know, from now on. I'm grateful to have been able to be part of it. (B9).

Like Hank, Dolly said that the networking skills and the connections built during her participation in NCTTFC ALDP offer her a wide range of options for who to contact when something comes up in her business or life. She said,

> Just the networking and the friends you make and the connections that you just keep for a lifetime. You know you have a connection, and you've made a connection. So that you can reach out to that person or that company for more information, or for support or anything like that. So, I think it just builds your network of people and businesses that you know are kind of your cohort, and that can help you make decisions through life and through business forever. (D5).

Waylon's perspective was this: "I've developed a lot of people I can lean on outside…. I definitely got a lot out of it and made a lot of friends out of it and enjoyed it" (Wa6). He added,

> So, once we graduate from this program, I can go back to those people and lean on them, whether it's a personal decision, a personal struggle, a business issue or connection, or getting on, you know, a national stage and leading a commodity organization. But you got all those cohorts that are in various entities and agriculture that went through this program with you, and you develop those bonds. (Wa7).

Willie described the networking skills gained from the program with an example of how he links up with fellow former participants and learns from each other, and also how he is able to network and represent his board. Willie said,

> Last week I was in a meeting in St. Louis and ran into a girl that was in my cohort, and she's based in St. Louis now, and she does governmental relations for [agricultural company]. So, you know, I was able to talk with her and learn a few things from her, and we could talk back and forth. I really enjoyed networking with the cohort. I made some really good friends, and learned a lot from their individual circumstances, you know, so not all the education came from the facilitators. (Wi4).

Handling challenges and seeking to make a positive difference

From the analysis of this study's interview data, it was revealed that participating in the NCTTFC ALDP honed former participants' ability to recognize and willingness to solve societal challenges. This is partly evidenced by Waylon's recognition of the potential of the formerly collapsed commodity association and his active involvement in reviving it. He discussed an organization that his father was a president of many years ago that fell into close to non-existence for almost 30 years. Waylon, seeing a need for the organization, worked with his father and another family member to become more involved and rejuvenate the organization. Waylon shared the approach he used,

> And so, I was elected president of that, and my [relative] is a vice-president and so kinda we agreed to put more youth into this program, though it's been difficult….. I think that leadership, in my opinion, is the reason I got involved. I would add that I agreed to be president of a struggling organization in the [county] County [commodity]Association. So, my willingness to step up as a leader in that group and using my skills from that ALDP hopefully, we'll build that program back into what it once was, or maybe even better. (Wa8).

Loretta also gained problem handling skills from her participation in NCTTFC ALDP and she shared, "I think just the fact that at 1 point in time they did not treat me very well, and I'm still there, I'm willing to participate, even after they were pretty nasty" (L7). She thinks participating in the leadership program gave her the resilience to persist amidst challenges with the ultimate aim of arriving at a solution for the good of the commodity organization. Loretta described a phenomenon where she solved a challenge in the commodity organization,

> I went to them and said, 'Hey because what had happened is we had a new [leader], and that person wasn't really doing anything,' so as the local commodity group was becoming defunct, just because the person who is supposed to be calling meetings, and, you know bringing everybody together, even authorizing, you know, bills to be paid wasn't doing that. And the rest of us couldn't really make decisions without that person approving things. So, I went to a local grower and went to somebody who helped make sure to galvanize the rest of this core group of people to say, do we want to continue the association, or do we not? And they decided that we did. And so, you know, I kinda said, all right. Well, if you wanna keep it going, I said, okay. Well, then, you have to agree to send somebody to be on board. (L8).

From Brook's response, she enjoys the fruits of her engagement in solving agricultural challenges, which motivates her to address more issues as they arise to maintain and grow the agricultural industry, specifically farmers markets. Her perspective reads,

> I'm most proud of the farmers market side of things. The fact that it is still going and growing despite pandemics and, despite, you know, lots of challenges. I'm probably the most proud of it, because it's a real goal to try to maintain an agricultural, a truly agricultural type market in an area where, you know, we're growing houses more than anything. The fact that it's still here is still thriving, and it's still growing in terms of the dairy associations in which I'm advising. I'm probably most proud of seeing some fruits of work that we've put behind the scenes for the last three to five years finally taking shape. (B10).

Dolly shared that she learned to be flexible while working with different people on board, which allows her to suggest policies that solve agricultural challenges, “being flexible and open to change, and determined” (D6). She indicated,

> Just understanding those differences in people, and having making an effort to try to know more about the those aspects of the people on the board, in between the meetings, not just at the meetings, I think, has helped me move some ideas forward, and some policies and some changes that might have otherwise met a lot of friction. Just by being sensitive and being aware of how I either present information or ask other people to respond, etc. (D7).

Willie shared that the skills he gained from the ALDP have enabled her to develop tangible solutions to contribute to North Carolina agriculture. He narrated how he was able to identify the need for an employee to fill a gap that turned out to impact agriculture positively and significantly. He narrated,

> We put together a solid plan and put together a presentation and demonstrated the need for the position and was able to get unanimous buy-in from the board and we hired an individual and she did a phenomenal job….it still brings value to growers in North Carolina and so yeah, I was very proud of that. So that's I think the best place to start and definitely learned a lot as to how to communicate with people to know where other people are coming from when they have a position to be able to better understand. With there you know what position they have, where they're coming from in that and so that allows you to be able to navigate to a solution easier. (Wi5).

Loretta said going through the ALDP taught her many things, including handling stress that comes with the busiest seasons on the farm she shared, “but I also learned that it didn't have

to be that way either, or I think, for me going forward that's really helpful you know, things could be more organized something like harvest didn't have to be as stressful. You didn't really need to be yelling at everybody all the time." (L9). Like Willie, Brook employs people management skills learned from ALDP to navigate challenges associated with working with diverse people from different backgrounds. She explained,

> We're geographically in different locations or different departments. But we're all serving the interest of [commodity] in North Carolina. So, we try to meet and work as a somewhat cohesive team; it's not always cohesive. We have people who contribute, we have people who contribute very little, we have people who show up and work really hard, and probably take on too much responsibility, and we have others who don't show up. So, I think there's been situations, you know, just in sort of daily work and or seasonal planning, you know, looking at the year to see what activities we're all gonna be engaged in and trying to split those up so that one or 2 people aren't carrying the most weight, etc. (B11).

Cole added, "These skills have allowed me to, you know, to help guide staff and to help work through situations that could have ended in a way that was not positive for either the department or for the stakeholders, the people involved." (C7). After citing this example, Cole described the situation where skills gained from ALDP helped influence decisions in his organization for the good of the people they serve. His description reads:

> I would say the example with the [Ag product] would be a big one. You know, because we've and this has been really recent, actually, this past weekend recent but we you know the industry felt strongly one way. The members of that committee felt very strongly against it and yet there was a lot of desire, for, you know, a [Ag product] type, I mean a

raw meal product to be available and you know when you have an organization whose long standing policy has been against something like that, and you bring it, it's brought forward, and you challenge folks to consider, you know, changing that. . …...I think what makes me the most proud is when we can look at a difficult issue, an issue that not everyone may see the same way, and we can have an open, and we can have an honest dialogue in a conversation, and really look at the pros and the cons of the issue. (C8).

Group Dynamics Skills

Groups usually fall victim to group-think and polarization. However, NCTTFC ALDP former participants reported how the program honed their ability to understand and manage the interactions, relationships, and behaviors within a group setting. They narrated how they apply group dynamic skills gained from the program to elicit responses from fellow board members and promote dialogue for better representation of the farmers. For example, Willie shared,

> The least favorite tactic of mine is I would call someone by name and ask their opinion and nobody liked that, because nobody wanted to be called out. But you know sometimes you have to do what you have to do. It's a board, it's not a one-man's ship. …...I don't care, but it doesn't need to be my decision alone. So, you just have to draw those opinions out of people. (Wi6).

Like Willie, Brook uses unique group dynamics skills to ensure every board member is engaged and participates actively to avoid what she termed as "that limits their participation in lobbying" (B12). She said,

> I have been known to text people during a meeting because they're not speaking up, and if I say, are you in? You know, how do you feel about this? I'm not hearing from you. Would you know? How do you feel most comfortable responding to this? And sometimes

it's they'll then take the queue and speak up. Sometimes they'll respond and say, “I don’t wanna say this out loud. But here's how I said, you know, here's how I feel, and so I do fall afraid of multitasking in some of these commodity meetings. (B13).

Waylon shared that his leadership skills enable him to make commodity members responsible for the decisions made to ameliorate challenges facing the agricultural industry and the farmers they represent. He said, “So you know, make it be everybody's problem, not yours” (Wa9). Waylon added, “I'm leading that meeting and speaking in front of up to 40 people in the room …...you’re going to spend a lot of time with people you don't know” (Wa10). However, to manage groups and board members, Waylon keeps reflecting on the activities they used to do when participating in the NCTTFC ALPD, for example,

> And like, I told you they kind of selected me to be a spokesperson for it. And you know from those experiences, those smaller group experiences. …. I would go back to the small group projects we did in the program, where we had a challenge. (Wa11).

Hank explained that his participation in the NCTTFC ALDP exposed him to self-evaluation, which helped him realize that he was not a good delegator. After participating in the ALDP, Hank can now identify everyone’s strengths and incorporate them into group activities. He expounded,

> Primarily the one thing I learned from evaluating yourself that I'm not really a delegator, that often because typically before the program I was so focused on how things have to be done in a certain way, and I sometimes feel like I'm the only person that can get it that way and it's from the evaluating what my weaknesses were and learning to identify the strengths of every person in a group and then I would try to put those people in my group in positions where their strengths are really elevated and you could you go to a group of

three or four, and you have each one doing what elevates their strength, and it seems like it makes accomplishing goals a lot easier. (H6).

Loretta further credited her participation in the ALDP for helping her gain a lot more patience, which allows her to be accommodative while working with commodity members in a group setting. She shared her perspective,

> I think it probably gave me some more patience with the commodity group as something that just was a part of my professional life, and that I you know could evolve slowly and that was okay. …. although in our County Commodity group I stepped up to be President again and I think I was you know I had more confidence in telling people what I could and couldn't do, and telling them what you know, I really kind of needed from them to move forward with that group. (L10).

Cole thinks ALDP allowed him and his group to see and identify cracks in relationships, and it also allowed him to see the positives, which enables him to capitalize on others' strengths when working with groups or serving the agricultural community. He also noted that this has helped him know how to make others' contexts appreciated and work with them effectively. He narrated,

> I think a big one with that is meeting people where they're at and making sure they understand that you do care about their viewpoint. You care about their experience, you care about what they have, what they have dealt with and once they understand that you respect that, I think it allows you to make a whole lot more of growth and gains on any particular item. If people don't think you care, then they're not really interested in working with you, and I think the leadership aspect of it is once they know you care, you can bring them along with you a whole lot better, whole lot easier. (C9).

Adaptive Leadership

The subtheme of adaptive leadership emerged in that NCTTFC ALDP empowers its participants to put the agricultural community's ambitions before theirs and to ameliorate challenges that emanate from applying fixed technical solutions to every context. For example, Cole shared,

> But to be able to use that you know leadership is about bringing people along with you. You can't direct people; you know especially on big issues or areas of concern. You have to be able to meet people where they're at, and to bring them along with you, and to lead from that angle and I think this has helped in that regard, you know, to respect differences but at the same time to appreciate those differences and use those differences to your strengths, and to use those to help find that win-win situation. ……I think it allowed me to be a stronger leader and be a better advocate for agriculture, and for you know not just the issues that I feel passionate about, but be willing to wait in and to help you know, advocate for agriculture in general, and to how important it is that we tell our story, and that how important it is that we, we interact with the community and with the population. (C10).

Dolly described her participation in the NCTTFC ALDP as an invaluable experience that got her actively involved and gave a comprehensive appreciation of all the different aspects of agriculture, the leadership tactics, and the abilities that she needs to be an active leader. Dolly exemplified her approach,

> And not do something that you've always done is a challenge for a lot of people, and I think scary for some people. …. I think you just have to approach each one individually and differently, as everyone's different. ……I think that just having those connections

> and being able to bring all together are things that you know I've been able to bring to the table. … I think being able to speak with others in the organization, to gather their input so that you can talk about all of the concerns of the group as a whole. ….....For growth and for what's right for people, and you know being part of organizations you meet lots of different people from lots of different backgrounds. And you have to be able to, you know, have something for everyone and make sure that everyone has the ability to participate, and that you hear, and they feel heard when they bring things to your attention (D8).

While Waylon shared that participating in the different NCTTFC ALDP experiential activities gave him a little more leadership on how to manage commodity boards, he explained how he is able to adapt his skills to the different people he serves and works with to advocate for farmers and agriculture in general. Waylon stated,

> That's what you're supposed to do, especially as president. We're more leading the meeting than running it. ….....I wasn't the one that said, let's do this, but I've been able to lead and be able more than less be a voice for the State, and what the people in our State want at the national level. (Wa12).

Willie explained how he sits on one of the national boards and regularly finds himself in a room with 60 directors who are some of the best farmers across the country and how intimidating this can be. However, he added that he strives to know everyone's standpoint using the skills gained from the NCTTFC ALDP, which enables him to communicate and draw ideas from each one of them effectively. Willie explained,

> Some people like to talk more, some people are more comfortable listening. Just try to identify you know, what type of person we're working with and communicate with them

> in a way that makes them comfortable, you know try going back to emotional intelligence and figure out where people are coming from on the issue, and things like that and all that stuff makes you a better communicator when you sort of roll all those skills up into one. (Wi7).

Hank added that he learned to serve people based on their needs; he stated, "I learn a lot from people that are not in Ag because it lets me know what issues concern them" (H7). He elaborated that participating in the NCTTFC ALDP taught him tactics for keeping people in the loop and getting a buy-in. He mentioned, "So you have to be able to find that sweet spot to explain what you're doing, and a way that people understand" (H8). He said that this was one of his biggest takeaways from the ALDP and exemplified further,

> So, I would say, being able to identify for example, we have some people that are in your group that are introverts, and some are extroverts. So typically, introverts are more technical and those drive the technical part - I'm making sure the eyes are dotted and the tease across type things. If it's a project that you want to accomplish that requires a PowerPoint presentation or something like that, I will look to my extrovert people, the ones that love to communicate. They have more of an outgoing personality, and you link the 2 together you can get a lot accomplished. (H9).

Brook prides herself on having garnered people skills from the NCTTFC ALDP, which has guided her in dealing with the farmers she serves, the Congress, and the general political environment. She added that she can apply the people skills to the '*whole group and specific individuals*,' which allows her "to plug into their strengths, and you know how to partner with them, which might be useful" (B14). She expounded further that she has been able to not only

serve on commodity boards but also apply adaptive leadership skills beyond settling her clients' direct farming issues to family matters related to her work. She shared,

> And you know the generational differences, but also just differences within the family and their dynamics and being aware of all the different types and all the different motivations, and how they come to the table helps me diffuse sometimes situations that are stressful and or at least create space for people to express themselves especially when they have an unpopular thing to say that maybe the rest of the family wants to kick them out, for you know whatever I have definitely grown and been able to use this in in my professional life. (B15).

Team building skills

The NCTTFC ALDP alumni shared team-building skills gained from the program in an interesting way. Most of them built their narratives from their activities during the training. An example is Hank, who reflected on how the bonds were initiated with cohort mates while they were on some of the trips and those adventures that were part of their training. He specified,

> …...I got from my networking friends like [cohort mate] that I met when going through the program. ……I enjoyed the people in my cohort group probably the most is the connection and the bond that we had while we were doing those experiences when we were doing those team building exercises and then that increased when we're in Brazil, when were in Texas, at the border, things like that. We could develop friendships, bonds and working relationships that, no matter where it seemed like, no matter where we were. (H10).

Relatedly, Brook enriched the team-building narrative by sharing her experience participating in the NCTTFC ALDP team-building activities. She narrated, "I remember having a

media day, you know, where we had to be on camera, and then maybe we had some other exercises to make us comfortable" (B16).

Cole articulated, "I think it helped develop open-mindedness. I think it helped develop an appreciation for others' viewpoints" (C11). He supplemented that it developed him into a leader who is able to see and make a difference while serving in different capacities, which is important in this era of working in teams of people from different contexts. Like Hank, Cole shared specific team-building activities in which he participated,

> One of the exercises we did was toward the end of the trip. We were up in the Redwood Forest and they had us go through …you pick someone that you know. Yeah, that you really admired, and you told them why you admired them, you know, what characteristics and I think that's one of those things where it's good for the person to hear it. But it's also good to express that to someone, and I think that helps to deepen relationships and to build those bonds. (C12).

Advocacy and Influence

The NCTTFC ALDP's former participants work towards moving their societies forward by applying the skills gained from the ALDP to advocate for their commodity organizations and the general agricultural industry. They employ several tactics to advocate and influence decisions that are in the best interests of the agricultural community. For example, Alan shared,

> …discuss different issues and well, how does it affect you and oh, it's different for me and this is how it affects me and just having those discussions with other farmers, or whether it's in the community or at other meetings and you can get a better picture of, say, hey, this new rule, or this new law, or this legislation, or this potential bill here's how it's going to affect us. Then take opportunities to either make Hill visits to Capitol Hill,

> you know, go to Raleigh or invite elected officials to the farm and have farm tours. Sometimes we'll have what we might call a legislative breakfast and invite the local politicians into just speak for a few minutes and then be able to engage with them so you just have to be intentional and have to try to interact any chances you can. …sometimes you have one on one conversations, and sometimes you have to meet with groups, and sometimes you lay out the facts. (A4).

Alan added that as leaders, knowing the perceived needs of the commodity organizations or the farming communities they represent is not enough. He said there is a need to form a coalition with other leaders from other commodity boards and different parts of the country to be able to have a strong voice, advocate, and influence favorable decisions. He shared,

> Now, within those board meetings, we're not meeting with those elected officials every single meeting but within those board meetings we get together and try to come up with our message sometimes what I think we should do, and what a neighboring farmer thinks we should do are not same so we have to have internal discussions and try to come up with a consensus to say, hey, here's the position we need to share and then again, we'll go speak to those elected officials or people in position of power to say, hey, we'd like for you to listen to us and here's our viewpoint on this particular issue. (A5).

Willie believes that the leadership skills gained from his participation in the NCTTFC ALDP have impacted his ability to advocate and occasionally have difficult but needed conversations. He added, “I think the thing I'm most proud of is I feel like we make a positive impact for agriculture in North Carolina and nationwide and try to get policies that benefit farmers out of Washington” (Wi7). He unveiled that they work behind the scenes that most farmers don't know; for example, he goes to Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, twice a year to talk

with Congressional members from North Carolina regarding the commodity Association. Also, they meet twice a year for the North Carolina commodity association to develop policies they have to convey to Congressional members. He revealed that they go beyond advocating and influencing favorable policies to taking legal actions to revoke regulations that threaten the farmers. Willie further shared that he utilizes the confidence in communication gained from the ALDP to voice his opinion and, together with his fellow leaders and partners from the Midwest and across the country, to educate the politicians about agriculture and promote policies that are favorable for all. Willie expounded that their advocacy efforts stretch to supporting political candidates with agricultural interests at heart. Willies' story reads,

> But also, our organization makes it a priority to elevate to educate Congressional members and also the Administration, the President with the White House and his staff and administrators on what we need out here in farm country because it doesn't look anything like Washington, DC. and then sometimes they can get inside of a bubble, and they don't realize what things back home really are and what needs to be done and basically explain how policy affects us as farmers and then we also do have a political side where we support candidates that are favorable to agriculture. ……...North Carolina [commodity] Producers Association as part of that focusing on policy and research, you know, we set up the research coordinator, but we also set up a political action committee which you know we use to financially support Congressional candidates that are friendly to North Carolina agriculture, and we saw that as a need. We want members of Congress that are friendly to North Carolina farmers, and we'll pay attention when we take our time to go to Washington to speak to them and bring issues to them. (Wi8).

Cole uses a consensus approach to collect views from people he represents for him to seek and influence policies that everyone can live with. He shared how he approaches his followers on pertinent issues, "….so how do we protect you and protect what matters to you while also putting in place policy or thought processes to help make this other situation maybe not something that you like, but something that you can live with" (C13).

With the inevitable changes that producer associations have to respond to, Brook is always at the forefront to champion adjustments as required, even where others find it challenging. She noted that sometimes she gets cold calls from legislators or Congress and has to talk on behalf of and advocate for her commodity organization. Brook mentioned that she utilizes the media experience mentioned earlier in this chapter, which she acquired from NCTTFC ALDP, to conduct television interviews and provide commentary on issues that propel the commodity organization forward. She also ensures to engage her board members when seeking changes,

> I have navigated board members who, you know, have very different perspectives. Some who are very business focused and very engaged in various and several organizations related to the industry tend to be the ones who are less risk averse, you know they're open to hearing information, taking it in translating it, applying it. (B17).

Hank said participating in NCTTFC ALDP gave him the confidence to advocate and influence favorable policies for the agricultural industry. He stated,

> I'm comfortable with also a skill I got from the leadership programs, you know, talking to elected official, well, as far as the Political power. ….to do lobbying and stuff like that for the industry. (H11).

According to Waylon, the leadership skills from NCTTFC ALDP help him to positively impact [commodity] production farmers in the whole nation, and he believes he will continue teaming up with other leaders to help keep farmers farming. Waylon explained,

> It's what the ideas of the contributors and farmers in the State want, and I'm expressing those to other leaders in their states and so yeah, for without all these public speaking skills and leadership skills that I've learned and been able to experience on I wouldn't be in that position, wouldn't feel comfortable doing. We wanna help the [commodity] farmers in the State and all the farmers really cause as you know that North Carolina [commodity] farming is kinda it's the headway of a lot of negative stuff in this state, and if North Carolina did not fight back as we've done, they would trickle down, or still could but trickle down to other agriculture commodities, poultry, for example, cattle. So, leading that organization, I think it had a pretty big impact. (Wa12).

Participating in the NCTTFC ALDP pushed Dolly to think hard about who she wanted to be and the kind of influence she wanted to have on others. Since then, as a board member of the [Ag industry] Association, she sits on board meetings to direct the organization and ways to the future with a yearning for growth but flexible to change, and this thirst keeps her asking questions until she finds the right path. Her narrative reads,

> And so, it opened my eyes to how politics work, and what you have to do in order to talk to the right people and be there when they're there and make the appointments. I think everything that I did learn made me realize that I could be more active. And make a bigger difference, long term and so, I think it made me more aware of the opportunities that existed to be more active. (D9).

Strategic communication

To effectively communicate, we must realize that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others. Waylon acknowledges this and he ensures he crafts his message based on the diversity of his farming community and commodity organization, and he thinks he gained these skills and confidence from his participation in the NCTTFC ALDP. For example, he stated,

> I think the development program helped me learn how to talk to people better, not just people, I mean, these are leaders in the room and when you agree to join the leadership program, you're already somewhat of a leader to be willing to apply for that and put in for it. ……The biggest thing is kind of coming up with ideas of what to speak for each meeting, and what the group as a whole would benefit from. It can be difficult because of the diversity of the [commodity] in our county. It's a very few full-time farmers like myself that have a large [commodity], and it's a lot of retired people that have just a few [commodity] for their pure enjoyment, and so our needs are very much different to what we need to hear about. But I select topics for each meeting, and then, as well as leading the meeting on purely parliamentary procedures that I've had experience from previously. (Wa13).

Hank said, “I'm actually better at speaking and communicating than I was before” (H11). Hank added that boosting his communication skills has simplified his work and enabled him to enlarge his network to people who are out of his box. He continued that this has allowed him to contribute effectively to his organization,

> I would probably say another skill that improved was my communication skills and since there's so few people that are in Ag or directly and Ag related businesses, sharpening

> communication skills, it became a pretty critical as well, because you have to be able to talk to mostly people that are not farmers, being able to communicate with them, explain to them why you do a particular thing and that also expands your network. (H12).

Brook disclosed that participating in NCTTFC ALDP taught her "to be a good communicator and a good listener, how to tell your story like the 30-second elevator speech, and to really always be prepared" (B18). While she does not only apply communication skills when working with farmers or fellow board members, Brook assists her followers in using them, and this helps to foster understanding, which ultimately leads to consensus on issues that push the commodity organization forward. She shared,

> I think, restating what people say, so that they hear what other people understood, that just came out of their mouths, and then asking them to clarify. You know, if you've got that wrong, because sometimes, you know, in a room of 15 people when somebody says something and they have a bit of emotion to it, or you know they're a little agitated, or whatever there may be 14 different interpretations of what they said. So, somebody needs to restate it and say, is that right? You know, and that gives that person space. It also gives everybody else sort of a common understanding to then go from. (B19).

Dolly understands there is a lot that goes on with people, so to effectively work with them, she uses communication skills to constantly battle everyone's personal life and opinions, which has enabled her to solve problems that would otherwise deter the growth of the organization. Dolly narrated,

> There are ways to bring them down, you know, off their anger and or frustration, and then find a way to solve the problem. And I think that just being able to listen to them and communicate with them in a way that they understand, and then, being flexible, and

finding a way to change or remediate, or to compromise to solve problems is just the way that life works in these days and time. (D10).

Also, Dolly uses strategic communication skills to contribute to the significant educational objective of her organization through,

> …...being able to open the [agricultural operation] for tours to let people come here and see what we do to play a part in community college, and, like NC State, being able to go, speak to classes and do things to really teach others about what we do and why we do it. And I think that just staying relevant to people and being able to share what you do is something that's you speaking firsthand, doing it yourself, and then being able to show others what that means and what that does I think, is really important. (D11).

Impact on initiatives and goals

As a leader, Brook feels she has done an excellent job impacting several initiatives and helping her 'led' achieve through her overall contribution to realizing organizational goals. She shared that she has helped secure several grants that have led to developing specialized arms like the Southeast commodity initiative, currently in its sixth iteration. Brook and her colleagues use this arm to provide technical assistance and educational programs to [commodity] producers and processors across all 12 states in the southeast, including Puerto Rico. Brook prides herself in developing data-driven extension educational programs that contribute to her organization's goals based on the producers' needs; she elaborated,

> I have employed some leadership skills of deciding who is most motivated by what aspect of this project and started creating a network to effectively help the organization accomplish this goal of being where they want to be by the time [date] first rolls around. We've actually reviewed and gone back to say some of their original organizing

> documents, and we've said do you really need six goals? Is that what you're trying to accomplish here? So, we've initiated some surveys and some analysis and feedback, both internally and externally. And so, the organization, I would say, has become more streamlined, and more professional. So other than that, like on the farmers market side of things. Just that literal transition from being an amorphous group of people who did a thing, you know, growing into a real organization that, you know, has liability insurance, and that files taxes, and, you know, really becoming a real business. Those are definitely components that have changed, that I've been a part of. (B20).

Willie challenges himself to pursue his commodity organization's goals, and he noted, "That's something that I challenge myself to do, you know, in every meeting I have, but that's something the leadership program taught me to do" (Wi9). He referenced a commodity association in North Carolina with which he has the most tenure and how he has been a part of the leadership team that led to its effectiveness. He articulated,

> I think if you were to ask any commodity organization in the State or even the Administration, the Commissioner of Agriculture, I believe they would tell you that North Carolina [commodity] Producers Association is the most effective Commodity group in the State of North Carolina and while I'm certainly not the majority share of the reason why that's the case, I like to think I have contributed to that end which was the goal power (Wi10).

Willie's leadership within his organization has allowed him to contribute to the formulation of a fund that aims at putting good research in growers' hands so that they can farm more profitably on their phones and hopefully find some answers to production questions that they have, being pivotal in the organization's charitable arm and international marketing to

develop new markets and sell [commodity] outside of the United States and somewhere other than just China. Willie further elaborated,

> Since I've been on board we've done a couple of big things, and one is to form a political action Committee which helps support candidates that are friendly to North Carolina farmers. And then also, I was instrumental in developing the staff position of a research coordinator who is the liaison between our board and the researchers at NC State University, and also tasked with working alongside extension to get the research that we fund into growers' hands as well as educating growers on the benefit of the check off and the money that they are investing in this research. Over the years we have better defined what our goals are for the organization, we narrowed our focus to be more effective in a few missions, instead of having many missions that only go an inch deep and you're not making any impact and so we focused on research and policy and so that really helped the organization a lot and made it a lot more effective. (Wi11).

Hank asserted that with "all of those leadership skills I carry with me every day. …...I try to do everything achievable and measurable" (H13). He narrated that he has had the opportunity to be linked with a celebrity chef, [name], and represent the [commodity] board to help promote the [commodity] product. He stated,

> Say they link you up with celebrity shifts to do [product from commodity] recipes, and there I got to meet a bunch of new people, and some of them had never seen a farmer in person before, so that was very interesting (H14).

Hank's efforts for the development of the [commodity] industry go beyond promoting the products to data generation through rigorous research that helps the industry make informed decisions in pursuit of its goals. Hank explained,

> We have to do almost 400 surveys annually and for the time when I used to do them, I did the most [commodity by-product] surveys one person in the State. So, we achieved that, and as far as measurable, there wasn't anybody in the State that could do 400 [commodity by-product] surveys you know, as one person. Oh, so it's highly efficient so I definitely think we achieved our goals there. …So, I take these leadership skills I learned from this program and then incorporate them into all the organizations I am currently involved with. I have a small operation, but I've done things in the State of North Carolina that impact and enhance not only my farm, but every farm in the State and beyond. (H15).

Like Hank, Cole stated, "These skills have allowed me to, you know, to help guide staff and to help work through situations" (C14). He added that he has applied leadership skills to identify employee gaps in his organization, designed a recruitment and retention plan, and used his advocacy skills to get buy-in from other board members. He prides himself on having impacted the farming community because the hired personnel have significantly addressed [commodity] farmers' challenges. This is just one of the many contributions he briefly shared,

> But I think what I have learned from this program has certainly allowed me to help move those objectives and those goals forward, you know, and some of them we've been able to complete some of them we're continually working on, and I think that's an ongoing process. ……...I would say the conversations over zoning with you know, or the [type of in-puts] and the [commodity section] community. I would say those con, those conversations and those relationships, and what was met, built, and came out of this program allowed me to help educate, you know our legislative, you know people and their staff, you know, open eyes and help them to see the impacts of this decision. (C15).

Waylon's relevant behavior and past experience qualify him to lead different agricultural teams. For example, he shared, "They've kinda designated me as one of the leaders because of my history and my experiences" (Wa14). Waylon stated that he is known for initiating talking points with other agricultural leaders from other parts of the country to find ways of solving agricultural challenges. For example, "Discussing and thinking about different ideas and ways to fund underfunded states, such as California, where they would have more money to address these issues early on or see them early on" (Wa15). He described,

> Being involved in North Carolina, and then, being a leader in North Carolina as a President, I got to go on a national stage and meet with all the other State leaders in the nation as well as I've been a delegate to vote on certain things with those 2 groups the past 4 or 5 years and as well as on a task force. I'm currently on a task force, a funding task force within those 2 organizations to decide how we need to fund other states, and other issues that might come up in the future. …So, for every [commodity] sold 40 cents would go towards a national board, and then it was a voluntary 5 cents that would go to the other one and we decided 2 years ago, to elect to make that 35 cents and then voluntarily raise the voluntary money to 10 cents. (Wa16).

Dolly has contributed to her organization in different ways, including ensuring the activities continued amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. She said they devised means as leaders and were able to come up with a plan to continue with the organizational education activities. She added, "I think we've made outstanding strides in keeping the education and the things that we provide pertinent to our members" (D12). Dolly expounded,

> And so, I think we've done a really good job over the last few years to make sure that we're educating people about all the new technology, and how great it can be and how

> much help it can be to us and to our businesses, and to share that with the members. And I think that continuing to push forward and make sure that we're giving all of that knowledge and information to the members so that they can make maybe more informed and better decisions about how best to move forward with their businesses is really important. And I think that a lot of the younger generations within the industry are making sure that we let everybody know about those opportunities, and make sure that everybody's aware of them. And so, I think people were more receptive to that type of communication than they were, maybe even 5 years ago. So, I think that's a win. (D13).

Building understanding and respect

While no tangible work can be done without understanding and respect for each other, the NCTTFC ALDP former participants know this, and they strive to utilize top-notch leadership skills to welcome different people's ideas warmly. For example, Cole stated, "What I'm proud of stuff in those conversations is helping come to a win-win situation" (C16). Cole described how it helps deepen your understanding of others' perspectives and noted that it can be a huge sense of accomplishment. He further exemplified,

> I would say, 'Hey, listen if you understand your side, and you understand what you believe. Have you stopped to put the same amount of emphasis on what the other side believes, and to look at it from how they're looking at it and you know, can you see where they stand and why they stand there and then,' you know, once you can do that then I think that puts you in that unique position to say, 'Okay you know I can respect where you're at.' I may not necessarily agree with it, but I can respect it, you know, here's where I'm at, here's why it brings this to a win-win - how can we make both sides, you know, comfortable with where we need to go. …and then, when we meet back together

> for quarterly meetings I would have a chance to share anything that I feel necessary that would help the Board members understand what issues are going on, or what we could do better in North Carolina for whatever reason it might be. (C17).

Waylon believes in understanding the potential of every person and gives each a chance to exploit their capabilities. He stated, “Lead in front like, don't sit back and demand them to give you answers or do certain things” (Wa17). Waylon’s understanding and respecting different perspectives makes him treat everyone equally; he narrated,

> …as a leader, I view everybody that I'm with as equals, and I'm just the one that’s tasked of like representing our group. So, you know, make it everybody's problem, not yours and then you're just there to share publicly the group’s assessment and solutions to those. (Wa18).

Dolly utilizes communication and problem-solving leadership skills to promote understanding and respecting other’s perspectives. She noted how she actively listens, remediates, and uses compromise to solve problems, as learned from NCTTFC ALDP. She highlighted that this approach has allowed her to give a chance to her team to execute and grow their leadership skills,

> I think probably one of the biggest things is trying to make sure that I'm a leader that gives my teams the freedom to make their own choices and lead their teams. Not like not to be a micromanager, to give them the freedom to do the things that they need to do, make sure they have the tools that they need and be available for assistance or questions. But really lets my team do what they do and give them autonomy. Just to let that happen, I think, is important to build a lot of trust so that I can just trust them with all the things that they do and not have to feel like I needed to do it. (D14).

Willie based his narrative on NCTTFC ALDP sessions that empowered him to learn about different personality traits; he stated, “During the first portion of the program we spent all this time identifying who were introverts and who are extroverts and all these personality traits” (Wi12). He added that looking into personality traits and using communication skills and emotional intelligence taught him to learn about himself and how to deal with others. He elaborated,

> I really enjoyed you know sort of digging down into personality traits and being able to identify people, and how to best work with them to achieve a goal. ….We have to be on the same page before we even start to talk about Congressional members about it. (Wi13).

While Hank makes use of his connections and network in pursuit of organizational goals, being able to understand and respect them helps him sustain the relationships. He is able to do this through, “Just in that conversation I could tell based on some skills I learned from the leadership program kind of get a feel of what your personality is like” (H16). Like Hank, Loretta’s ability to understand where multiple people’s and different groups’ stances on matters and the basis of their points of submission learned from NCTTFC ALDP enable her to respect everyone and their opinions. She reflected “I think there was just a lot of changes, anyway but I think in our tolerance level, in our ability to, you know, maybe handle people that were different from us, and I know that in our national dialogue it doesn't look like that (L10).”

To promote understanding and respect, Brook uses a holistic approach, entailing learning about the conditions under which her commodity organization operates, including serving a need of the greater community of the county to provide access to local food, fresh produce, etc. She added that these need representation to know what people don't have access to and their

perceived needs and, based on this, pitch to fellow leaders to understand the importance of meeting the community needs. She shared that this has been possible with the use of some of the leadership skills acquired from her participation in NCTTFC ALDP,

> You know that that's where I maybe have been able to take what I know about myself, and rather than getting frustrated by me thinking, well, I just they just can't see anything, you know. They don't understand. It's saying, okay, I like the process and I understand why processes are important. …I have tried over my career of working with this group the last 7 or 8 years. I have tried to, you know, intentionally figure out what are the shared values that we have in terms of within the industry? What are some common experiences that we have had that have allowed me to learn more about each individual person or their farm. And then how can I use that to say, okay, well I know this person is interested in this and they might have an opinion. Just being observant of people and being respectful of their differences and trying to figure out creative ways to get that contribution is something I think I have employed to make that happen (B21).

Allowing Space for Reflection

As influential agricultural commodity leaders, NCTTFC ALDP former participants recognize Marcus' claim. For example, Brook embraces reflection and learning and noted that her participation in NCTTFC ALDP allowed her to take the Myers Bridge self-assessment test, which helped her understand herself more and appreciate how she is different from others. Brook shared how she allows and benefits from reflection in her work as a leader,

> And maybe that can all be summed up in knowing myself better so that I can understand and work with other people more effectively, has probably been the biggest boost to me interacting with these organizations in a leadership way. …Well, part of that would be

> recognizing what my strengths are and what I can bring, and also recognizing what I'm not good at, and that I don't need to do unless I have help is probably the biggest contributor to what I've chosen to take action on, and what I've not or what how I've reached out to other people to help me do things, and I'm not good at, and I've done that probably more than anything. (B22).

Cole noted his view on the need to allow space for reflection; he said, "I think from an individual's perspective, you have an understanding of the issue …it comes down to you being willing to look at it from another angle and are you willing to take a step back" (C18). Cole added that reflection is everyone's responsibility and appreciated the NCTTFC ALDP, "programs like that helped us to see that at the end of the day, you know, we may look at things differently, but our goal, you know, should be the same or similar and we should help one another along" (C19). Cole further illustrated and said,

> I think part of it can be a slow process, because you can't expect always to have an immediate movement and so I think for me with that is having that understanding that, hey listen, we may have this conversation today, and we may talk through this issue and see where one another at but it may take some time where I have to go back and think about it, and you have to go back and think about it, and then let's have another conversation a little bit later. …we stepped back and then said, hey, listen I respect the fact that y'all look at it differently, and y'all make the decision you feel like is in your best interest, and totally I mean I can't say anything other than I support you in that and then after everything was over, that's when they actually came back, part of them came back and we were having a conversation and they're like, yeah, all things being said, we really

need to be looking at how we can find middle ground. And so, I think giving people the space to really reflect, you know, will aid in those situations. (C20).

Loretta stipulated that her involvement in NCTTFC ALDP made her realize how all farmers in North Carolina seem to know each other, and it made her reflect and think on how she could de-isolate her [commodity] association. Loretta shared a change in view following her participation in NCTTFC ALDP,

> Be involved, be present, be helpful, but don't have a hot and don't have a lot of expectation, so that I'm not frustrated in in that volunteer work. …….but going through the Ag leadership program made me realize that it is our state commodity group and even if I get frustrated with some things that I should still be a part of it. ……understanding that broader context makes me and helps me understand everything else within it better if I don't have that sort of sometimes that overarching sort of Meta narrative which I realize I only know part of it. I mean, there's always more that you can know, but it helped me at least place things a little bit better and I think it helped me to be braver and I think learning that, you know, being on a family farm is unique. (L11).

While Hank applauded the NCTTFC ALDP, "it also was a good plug for the leadership program because it open eyes to other people and other industries" (H17); he specified that it helped him become open-minded, an attitude that allows him to learn a lot from people that are beyond agriculture which broadens his understanding of others' concerns. Hank demonstrated:

> I really hate to lose but it has also helped dampen my ability to increase my ability to realize that you can't win everything so. ……but the leadership program definitely helped me sharpen my skills and then also one take away that I didn't realize was at first

introduced me to self-evaluation so you know the learning about yourself where introvert, extrovert things of that nature would help shape the way that I communicate with people and that was probably the skill that I had to work on the most. (H18).

Continuous Personal and Organizational Development

The NCTTFC ALDP former participants' reflection reveals how the program has helped them grow both at personal and organizational levels. This is observed in Cole's articulation,

> I think the program has been very effective in helping people to see both sides of where they're at and to, you know, to see strengths and to see areas for growth. ..…I think because of my experiences and what I've gone through. I was asked to serve on that advisory board and to help develop, you know, programs (C21).

Cole added,

> I would say that the organizations that I've been a part of, I think the experiences that I have had, you know, in my career and in I think, have allowed me to provide insight and help to, you know, guide some situations, you know in a different direction, and help to open some eyes and a lot of times this about making people think and helping them to see a different side that they may not have really thought about before. And so yeah, I would say that the programs that I've been involved in, like the leadership development program, you know, certainly gives you strength that you have to work with. …….and I think you know, going through the program allowed me to and challenge me to look at things differently. …...and I said, because of it, broadening my perspective and making me grow as a person. …….The opportunity, you know, to broaden my horizons to broaden my viewpoint, to gain a better understanding of areas of agriculture which wasn't something that I was a part of day in and day out. (C22).

Waylon commended his participation in NCTTFC ALDP and the experiences he gained; he said, “generally speaking, any experience that I get builds me better. It could go anywhere from a physical challenge that you overcome to speaking in public” (Wa19). He shared that he developed an attitude that allows him to continually learn,

> When I go to all these national meetings, I'll learn from everybody on how different states work. And I mean different [commodity] production, for example, is different throughout the nation and North Carolina has different issues. ……and so that gave me a lot of confidence on whatever I'm doing, and that has carried on to today. (Wa20).

Dolly shared her perspective on her current utilization of skills gained for personal and organizational growth, “just continuing to be aware of all the opportunities that exist out there that can make us be better at what we do and then joining in on those or being a part of those are important, moving forward” (D15). She narrated that knowledge and experiences position her to grab business opportunities now and later in life. She explained,

> And since I was able to purchase this company from [name], and we're not family, I was just an employee. I think that we learned a lot from that experience and have a lot of value to share to make other people be successful and moving their companies from one generation to the next. And so, I think that we've had lots of good conversations. Kind of regarding our success and our story and sharing that with others. (D16).

While Brook acknowledged continuous growth, she stated, “I certainly think that you improve with each one, so I don't think that I had a limitation beforehand” (B23). Brook shared,

> To both of the [commodity] organizations that I've worked with, that I have driven, you know, updating their bylaws to allow them to communicate electronically, just like

modernizing organizations that need it, which just requires, you know, going through the procedural requirements to update things. (B24).

Allan's leadership experience has enabled him to contribute to the growth and development of the commodity organizations he serves. Allan narrated,

> I think we've had some successes within the Farm Bill, and I can't say that I can take credit for anything specific. But there have been several changes at the national level that came from local North Carolina [commodity] producers, our small group of growers had very fruitful discussions and very good ideas and then we took those ideas to the regional meeting and some other folks said, hey, that is a good idea. We like that, and then we would take it to the national meeting, and we've had some successes and some changes in some legislation or direction within a Farm Bill related from things that started really locally and that was a credit to not just me, but to a lot of folks, but very tangible things that we can say. You know what that started at home that started in North Carolina and we're proud of that. (A6).

Hank shared that he associates part of his personal and professional growth with the NCTTFC ALDP, which enabled him to meet new people who eventually became people he keeps up with and could call on. On the other hand, Willie explained how the NCTTFC ALDP impacted him and how he utilizes skills gained to reach goals,

> I would say that the one that I'm most proud of is the fact that somebody told me the other day that they didn't believe I was an introvert and so you know, it kind of goes back to that maturity and confidence that came out of the program of you know, I've learned how to flex outside of my comfort zone and there's some days where I have to be out there so much that I'm absolutely exhausted at the end of the day just because I'm so far

> outside my comfort zone for so long. But you know, to hear somebody say I never thought you were an introvert that means I'm doing it right because even if I'm pretending, I'm doing a good job of it but to at least, you know, achieve the goals that I need to achieve. (Wi14).

Loretta shared, “I think that I understood the importance of the commodity group through the leadership program in a way that I probably would not have at all had I not been part of the leadership program and so, and then taking a long view of it versus feeling like, Oh, we've got to accomplish all these things in like a shorter time, or it needs to be this way” (L12). Loretta added,

> It gave me a better appreciation for at least North Carolina agriculture, I mean, I'd still say I don't know, you know, about agriculture and all of the United States, but it gave me sometimes when you go, and you experience somewhere else it may help you even better understand your own system. …...something that was very eye-opening. This is very relevant to our experience here as Americans and again, things about border issues that I just really didn't know and so I think that was really important for me to see and learn somewhere about that because it's a constant conversation here in the United States. ……But what the ag leadership program gave me was not only a better understanding of agriculture in North Carolina, because I think our commodity is really isolated there's not a lot of connections between our growers and our commodity group with the rest of the commodity groups in the State, or even North Carolina agriculture. (L13).

Opening doors to opportunities

Cole believes his participation in the NCTTFC ALDP challenged him to think outside the box, broaden his understanding, and open more leadership opportunities for him. Cole explained,

> I mean it opens doors like the leadership development part I mean, that was not something that I wasn't really aware of until my involvement in some of these other areas and then that sort of led me to that opportunity as well. ……I would just say that it means the leadership development program is truly a top-notch program that really does help folks get their feet under them and help them gain a deeper understanding of how to be an effective leader and an efficient leader and I think that's something that everyone could do more with and have more, you know, could spend more time with yeah, it's just so, I would say, continue doing what they're doing, you know and I would certainly, you know, encourage, and I have encouraged others to apply for that program, or to be a part of it, and that it's very well worth everything they put into it. (C23).

Participating in the NCTTFC ALDP not only honed Waylon's leadership skills but also widened and opened new business opportunities for him. Waylon shared,

> One of my cohorts runs a [commodity] brokering business, and so, after, you know, after graduating the class, we decided to broker our [commodity] through her business, and we've been doing that, and we've been in business together doing that for about four years now, I guess so. Those two direct bonds that I made changed the way potentially one person's leadership could become and how my farm does business. (Wa21).

Like Waylon, Dolly's involvement in the NCTTFC ALDP and serving on the commodity association's board exposed her to new opportunities, including marketing her business. Dolly said,

> And then as an exhibitor, we exhibit at the trade show. We have a booth at the trade show to showcase our plant material. So, I'll work at the booth and talk to existing customers and try to find and get new customers in that process and then walk the trade show floor

> to see other vendors and suppliers of mine, meet some of our competitors to kinda see how they're doing things and pick up new customers. So just pretty much being an active participant and the events that they held in order to better yourself. (D17).

Loretta said her participation led her into a leadership position, “I would say came after the Agricultural Leadership Development Program was that I agreed to be on the Board of the state commodity group because of my participation” (L14). For Hank, his leadership skills open doors for him and others; he shared, “I took the skill I got from the leadership program, and I think we had found a good person for that position, and it turned out to work very well, and it opened doors for him to go to bigger and better things” (H19). Hank added:

> I mean, that was how [name] was able to try to get some insight from me, and that's how we met and now if I have the issue or question about something in [foreign country] I have another friend, colleague or associate there, but I would say I could tie all of that back to leadership program, and I was [year] farmer of the year and my biggest selling point or even be considered a farmer of the year, is gained from the leadership program. ……our idea got the recognition of commissioner, Troxler for our group and myself, and it also afforded me opportunity to meet the president of the United States. I don't think I would have everything tie and work together. I think it was the success of what we have done in Tobacco Trust fund, and we got that accomplished and that led to other opportunities.” (H20).

Suggested Changes Vary from Participant to Participant

Brook mentioned that as leaders, they have a lot to say on several occasions and suggested, “whatever these things are, sometimes we talk too much, and maybe some additional media, effective media training to help us be as succinct and as customer friendly, but also, you know, authentic as possible” (B25). Brook further suggested,

> Maybe in one of those sessions or as part of a session, it might be interesting to hear directly from a staff person that works with a commodity group as well as maybe a board member because, you know, a lot of our folks that come through this cohort aren't necessarily engaged every day with one of these commodity organizations. But on the flip side, some of them are either, if they're producers, you know, and they're not actively engaged in their own commodity group. It might be a good exposure that way to see, oh, what these things do! Why I should be a member of it, you know, etcetera, and then for those of us that work with farmers and with organizations that aren't necessarily commodity groups. (B26).

Brook added,

> I think it is really important for anybody coming through the North Carolina Ag leadership program to be exposed to as much of North Carolina agriculture as possible. I think it's also important to have that national and international perspective, but I think we want to make sure that we have all 3, because that was one thing that we did, several of us in our cohort who intentionally, you know, connected and try to keep up with each other and want to learn more about each other's home and farm…. I think our group went to California on the domestic tour, and you know North Carolina is such an agriculturally diverse state that one of the things I feel like we didn't accomplish during our session was

> really making sure we were all educated on every you know the diversity and the different types of operations within North Carolina. ……it's equally important for folks from you know, areas that are highly concentrated in farming to go to areas where you know are smaller cattle operation or are small nursery, that has a direct market, to an urban area that is agriculture, too, you know, and I think that might help with what can sometimes be divisive, full time farmers, and then, you know, non-full time farmers. So, you know somebody that grew up in the far western part of the state, it's eye opening to be down East, where, you know, there's huge operations compared to what we know up here. (B27).

Cole's suggestions revolved around equipping NCTTFC ALDP participants with effective business meeting management techniques and broadening their horizons to give them more opportunities. He suggested,

> I would say a lot of leaders that I see, and it's and it's in a lot of different organizations don't understand how really to run an effective business meeting. How to maintain control of a business meeting, how to make sure that all sides are heard, but done so in a respectful manner, and I think I would say that would be an area that they need to address. (C24).

Cole expounded,

> The only thing I could say would be helping to find ways for those particular folks to grow, would be you know, but that's unfortunately, that's also an individual thing and so there's not really something that as a program could put in place, but continuing to broaden horizons and give people opportunities if you're from a conventional production background, then challenge those to look at things from an organic perspective. If you're

> from a completely rural area, then challenge them to look at things from an urban perspective and I think once we do that, then it allows us to start those conversations. (C25).

Dolly reechoed her appreciation for the NCTTFC ALPD and pointed out how the program has improved over time. She said, “I think it was a really good overall framework of the things you need to know and need to be aware of. I've had some other friends go through the program since I have, and it sounds like some changes have been made just to update” (D18). Perhaps the NCTTFC ALDP updates and changes observed by Dolly meet some of the suggestions made by Brook and Cole.

Based on his experience participating in another leadership development program, Hank feels NCTTFC ALDP is encompassing and strongly encourages other agricultural leaders to join because “it expands your network and expands your thought process” (H21). Hank explained,

> Like I was saying, you know, I've been in the [commodity] Leadership Academy which was only focused on [commodity], which is a good first step to focus on, say, if you're tobacco farmer focus of the leadership program in tobacco was a good first step but then to being in groups where people in peanuts and cattle and swine poultry, that's the next step, and that's really good. (H22)

Besides appreciating NCTTFC ALDP's impact on her personal and professional life, Loretta feels there has been an under-representation of her commodity association members in the program and in general North Carolina agriculture. She requested, “we need to have somebody – somebody from the [commodity] industry needs to be in every leadership cohort, you know, going forward, we should have somebody participate” (L15).

Like Hank, Willie commended the NCTTFC ALDP for its in-depth cultivation of leadership skills compared to other related programs with which he has been involved. Willie said,

> I really do believe it was a well-run program the travel was great, yeah, I really don't know what I would add if I could go back through it again. (Wi15).

Like Cole, Waylon pointed out the need to hone NCTTFC ALDP participants' business meeting strategies. To effect this, Waylon suggested that the program adopt the Roberts rules of order, and his recommendation reads,

> So, I use a lot of Robert's Rules of Order, and I know we touched on some of that in the program, but I didn't really get a full grasp of how that works until I was really vice President of the [commodity] Council, and so I would say, one of the sessions there's and if they're interested I can give him the name. I'm trying to think of him right off the hand of [name]. [Name] is an attorney, a Robert's Rules of Order attorney in Raleigh. So he's accessible to a Raleigh session that I've got to meet him several times, and he's spoken twice to our commodity organizations on kind of a cliff, notes version of how Robert's Rules of Orders and how meetings should run, and I say that because most commodity organizations in our state and in the nation, in agriculture at least, are run on Robert's Rules of Order, and if anybody in the program of which there will be people that lead like I did. That could be invaluable and making them feel comfortable on how those meetings are supposed to be run and the different ways to do it, and he's extremely entertaining. And something that you would see is boring like Robert's order is kinda of drop dull. He makes it exciting and makes you able to follow along. So, I would say at all the things

that having him in for a couple of hours during one session, …….would be a pretty achievement to the program. (Wa22).

Chapter Summary

Four research questions directed this study to help achieve the overall purpose of exploring the influence of the NCTTFC ALDP on the leadership competencies of the alums from the 2006-2023 cohorts in leadership roles within commodity organizations in North Carolina. Data was collected from eight purposively selected former alums from which nine themes and eight sub themes were developed to help in learning about the leadership competencies they developed, their participation in leadership positions, contributions to commodity organizations in North Carolina and beyond and their training needs/ perceived areas of growth. The discussion of the themes was supported by the quotes and or relevant excerpts from the interviews and these are outlined below:

Theme 1: For the greater good of agriculture – One of the drivers that pushed the NCTTCF ALDP former participants to assume leadership roles is for the good of agriculture, which many associate with, and the desire to serve their communities. Theme 2: interpersonal skills with numerous subthemes including *the power of others* – although some participants shared that they were motivated because they liked what the organizations stood for, the power of others influenced them and helped them realize how relevant it was to lead commodity organizations. *Collaboration and engagement* – NCTTFC ALDP former participants identified various ways going through the program honed their engagement and collaborative skills, including enabling them to build lasting relationships and work in complicated environments. Additionally, NCTTFC ALDP former participants boast about being trained to add value to discussions by initiating 'crucial conversations.' *Handling challenges and seeking to a positive*

difference – it was revealed that participating in the NCTTFC ALDP honed former participants' ability to recognize and willingness to solve societal challenges, for example recognizing and reviving collapsing commodity associations. *Group dynamics skills* – NCTTFC ALDP former participants reported that they apply the skills gained from the program to elicit responses from fellow board members and promote dialogue for better representation of the farmers. Also, participants narrated that NCTTFC ALDP empowered them to put the agricultural community's ambitions before theirs and to ameliorate challenges that emanate from applying fixed technical solutions to every context.

Theme 3: Advocacy and influence – NCTTFC ALDP's former participants reported that they work towards moving their societies forward by applying the skills gained from the ALDP to advocate for their commodity organizations and the general agricultural industry. They employ several tactics to advocate and influence decisions that are in the best interests of the agricultural community. For example, they strive to know the perceived needs of the commodity organizations or the farming communities they represent and form a coalition with other leaders from other commodity boards and different parts of the country to be able to have a strong voice, advocate, and influence favorable decisions. They added that, to impact goals, they ensure to craft their messages based on the diversity of their farming communities and commodity organizations, and they associated these skills and confidence from their participation in the NCTTFC ALDP. This helps them to warmly welcome different people's ideas to building understanding and respect.

Theme 4: Allowing space for reflection – former participants embrace reflection and learning, and some noted that their participation in NCTTFC ALDP allowed them to take tests like the Myers Bridge self-assessment test, which helped them understand themselves more and

appreciate how they differ from others. Theme 5: Continuous personal and organizational development – participants shared that they developed an attitude that allows them to continually learn which allows them to contribute to the growth and development of the commodity organizations they serve. Some of them believe the knowledge and experiences gained from their participation in NCTTFC ALDP position them to grab business opportunities by challenging them to think outside the box and broaden their understanding which opens more opportunities for them. Theme 6: Suggested Changes vary from participant to participant – participants noted that they have a lot to say on several occasions as commodity leaders and suggested incorporation of additional media, and effective media training to help them be as succinct and as customer friendly and authentic as possible. They further suggested that NCTTFC ALDP should strive to equip its participants with effective business meeting management techniques and broadening their horizons to give them more opportunities. One participant spotted an under-representation of her commodity association members in the program and in general NC agriculture and requested NTTFC ALDP to ensure at least one member from her association to be included in every cohort.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

This chapter's goal is to give a synopsis of the study by restating its purpose, research questions, design, and methods for gathering data. Additionally, this chapter will include a discussion of findings, conclusions and suggestions for further study and application. Agricultural commodity leaders and NTTFC ALDP former participants who took part in this study were asked to talk about their experiences participating in the leadership program, perceived skills gained, their contributions to commodity organizations and perceived areas growths. Interviews were used for data collect and deductive and inductive codding resulted into the following six themes and eight sub themes:

1) For the Greater Good of Agriculture
2) Interpersonal skills
    - *Power of others to Participate and Lead*
    - *Collaboration and Engagement*
    - *Open Conversations*
    - *Networking*
    - *Handling Challenges and Seeking to Make a Positive Difference*
    - *Group Dynamics Skills*
    - *Adaptive Leadership*
    - *Team Building Skills*
3) Advocacy and Influence
    - *Strategic Communication*
    - *Impact on Initiatives and Goals*
    - *Building Understanding and Respect*

4) Allowing Space for Reflection
5) Continuous Personal and Organizational Development
    - *Opening Doors to Opportunities*
6) Suggested Changes Vary from Participant to Participant

Summary of the Study and Procedures

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to explore the influence of NCTTFC ALDP on commodity organization leaders in North Carolina. Assessing the perceived leadership competencies gained by the former participants and how they apply these skills to positively impact commodity organizations allows program leaders and stakeholders to assess overall results, recognize areas for improvement, and make required modifications (Njah et al., 2021). With this kind of information, the NCTTFC ALDP leadership team and stakeholders can improve the quality and usefulness of the program and align their efforts to achieve excellence in leadership development beyond graduating participants to making lasting positive impacts in commodity organizations and the entire agricultural industry (Lamm, 2023). Additionally, Njah et al. (2021) suggest that leadership development programs that benefit individuals, organizations, and communities are more likely to be sustainable over a long period. However, intended program beneficial effects beyond the individual level cannot be established without a thorough study. This observation emphasizes the significance of establishing the influence of the NCTTFC ALDP on its graduates, not only concerning individual achievement but also in promoting commodity organizational development.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1) What motivates NCTTFC ALDP former participants to engage in commodity organizations leadership roles?
2) What leadership development competencies are credited to the NCTTFC ALDP by the former participants?
3) What are the perceived contributions of the NCTTFC ALDP former participants to commodity organizations?
4) How do the NCTTFC ALDP former participants overall perceive the benefits of the program and what are the perceived areas of growth?

Procedures

This study used a case study approach to thoroughly understand how NCTTFC ALDP influences the leadership competencies of the 2006 to 2023 former participants in leadership roles within agricultural commodity organizations in North Carolina. This allowed the researcher to offer a contextually rich explanation for the collected data. Based on Harkiolakis (2022), this approach reveals the holistic and meaningful attributes of the NCTTFC ALDP's former participants' application of the leadership competencies learned. In particular, a multiple case study was used to establish the application of leadership competencies across various cases to yield comparable or differing results. As guided by Hunziker and Blankenagel (2021), this approach allowed scrutiny of numerous cases to achieve profound insights into the influences of the NCTTFC ALDP on the former participants' contribution to the commodity organizations in North Carolina.

The population for this study was the former NCTTFC ALDP of 2006-2023 cohorts that have held leadership positions or are currently leading agricultural commodity organizations in North Carolina. Eight former participants were purposefully selected with the assistance of the NCTTFC ALDP directors, and for this study, "someone who participated in NCTTFC ALDP program and has led or is presently leading a commodity group in North Carolina" is referred to as a former participant. The participants are all from North Carolina and represent different agricultural commodity organizations.

Semi structured interviews were utilized to collect data and the data collection process was broken into two, each interview lasting for an average of 1hour and conducted via Zoom video recording with the participants. Interviews took place between 8 AM and 9 PM, throughout November and December, at the convenience of the participants but within the study timeline. Interview questions were prepared and employed to guide the interviewing process, and interview questions were adjusted based on the participants' input to effectively investigate the leadership skills developed by the former participants and their application in agricultural commodity organizations. Adjustment of the interview questions was done after the pilot study which was conducted with one of the former participants currently leading a commodity organization other than the eight that participated in this study. All interviews were recorded using the recording feature provided Zoom and the transcript, audio and video recording were saved on the zoom cloud of NC State University only accessible by the researcher and program director. Although Zoom includes a built-in transcription option, some transcriptions were erroneous. Therefore, the researcher followed up with each of the transcripts from the eight cases that were interviewed twice except one interviewed once, making fifteen transcripts, which created initial familiarization with the data. Data was coded both deductively and inductively

producing shared patterns across cases, which resulted in identifying themes and the resulting themes are reported collectively in chapter four of this dissertation. Lastly, this study used triangulation through document analysis to provide additional insight and evidence of the data collected through the interviews. Cohort directories, magazine articles highlighting participants, and websites served as document analysis. These sources highlighting the research study participants assisted in triangulating the data.

Summary of Results

Table 4

Summary of results

Research Question	Theme	Subthemes	Illustrative Quotation	Discussed by
What motivates NCTTFC ALDP former participants to engage in commodity organizations leadership roles?	For the greater good of agriculture		It's made clear that agriculture, you know, touches every one's life in in different way, in many different forms and fashions, and that you know the idea and the understanding that yeah, We have to be present, and we have to be involved and we have to fight for what we believe in and that you know [Agricultural Organization] certainly does that and provides that opportunity. 'I think I would definitely be interested in being a part of this,' and I mean, it's you know it was certainly a learning curve, and I wouldn't trade it for anything (C1).	6 of 8

Table 4: (continued)

What leadership development competencies are credited to the NCTTFC ALDP by the former participants?	Interpersonal skills	Power of others to participate and lead	And so they waited a couple of years before they came back to me and asked me if I was ready and willing to serve, and so I don't think they pushed me necessarily, but they definitely wanted me to be part of it, and they asked a couple of years prior and it was just one of those things that it was the right time. It worked, and I said ‘yes’ to taking on that so currently, in my second year of a 3-year term on the board. (D3).	7 of 8
		Collaboration and engagement	So it was a lot of very like a lot of differences and I'd say that I believe the program once again helped me understand and find commonalities between people that are different from you and so the ability to try to find common ground is probably one of the things that I learned and then, just I think it re-emphasized the sense of responsibility as a leader	7 of 8

Table 4: (continued)

		and that again encouraged me to be part of my commodity group where I hadn't really planned on participating on the statewide level. (L5).	
	Open conversations	I think the easiest thing to do is just be non-confrontational and just let it be and most everyone was going to gloss over the issue, and I just said, look, guys, you know, we've talked about budget constraints. Why don't we talk about the number of delegates each state is allowed and at the end of the discussion everybody was glad it was brought up but no one else wanted to bring it up and I just thought, well, we traveled a long distance to meet in person we need to at least discuss the difficult topics whether we want to or not. (A3).	5 of 8
	Networking	One of the most important things I felt in my career was networking with other people in the industry	6 of 8

Table 4: (continued)

		and getting out of the box and experiencing new things. Another example of a leadership skill was one through networking because, you know, I became more popular so that you can look me up on social media and see some of the things I've accomplished in the past. So, I get approached by people without pitching ideas. It's like a family atmosphere... I have friends at NC State, NC A&T. I have friends in extension and friends all across the country. (H5).	
	Handling challenges and seeking to make a positive difference	We're geographically in different locations or different departments. But we're all serving the interest of [commodity] in North Carolina. So, we try to meet and work as a somewhat cohesive team; it's not always cohesive. We have people who contribute, we have people who contribute very	6 of 8

Table 4: (continued)

		little, we have people who show up and work really hard, and probably take on too much responsibility, and we have others who don't show up. So, I think there's been situations, you know, just in sort of daily work and or seasonal planning, you know, looking at the year to see what activities we're all gonna be engaged in and trying to split those up so that one or 2 people aren't carrying the most weight, etc. (B11).	
	Group dynamics skills	The least favorite tactic of mine is I would call someone by name and ask their opinion and nobody liked that, because nobody wanted to be called out. But you know sometimes you have to do what you have to do. It's a board, it's not a one-man's ship. …...I don't care, but it doesn't need to be my	6 of 8

Table 4: (continued)

		decision alone. So, you just have to draw those opinions out of people. (Wi6).	
	Adaptive leadership	…...For growth and for what's right for people, and you know being part of organizations you meet lots of different people from lots of different backgrounds. And you have to be able to, you know, have something for everyone and make sure that everyone has the ability to participate, and that you hear, and they feel heard when they bring things to your attention (D8).	6 of 8
	Team building skills	One of the exercises we did was toward the end of the trip. We were up in the Redwood Forest and they had us go through …you pick someone that you know. Yeah, that you really admired, and you told them why you admired them, you know, what characteristics and I think that's one of those things	6 of 8

Table 4: (continued)

			where it's good for the person to hear it. But it's also good to express that to someone, and I think that helps to deepen relationships and to build those bonds. (C12).	
What are the perceived contributions of the NCTTFC ALDP former participants to commodity organizations?	Advocacy and influence		I have navigated board members who, you know, have very different perspectives. Some who are very business focused and very engaged in various and several organizations related to the industry tend to be the ones who are less risk averse, you know they're open to hearing information, taking it in translating it, applying it. (B17).	7 of 8
What are the perceived contributions of the NCTTFC ALDP former participants to commodity organizations?		Strategic communication	I would probably say another skill that improved was my communication skills and since there's so few people that are in Ag or directly and Ag related businesses, sharpening communication skills, it became a pretty critical as well, because you have	4 of 8

Table 4: (continued)

		to be able to talk to mostly people that are not farmers, being able to communicate with them, explain to them why you do a particular thing and that also expands your network. (H12).	
	Impact on initiatives and goals	And so, I think we've done a really good job over the last few years to make sure that we're educating people about all the new technology, and how great it can be and how much help it can be to us and to our businesses, and to share that with the members. And I think that continuing to push forward and make sure that we're giving all of that knowledge and information to the members so that they can make maybe more informed and better decisions about how best to move forward with their businesses is really important. And I think that a lot of the younger generations within the industry are	6 of 8

Table 4: (continued)

			making sure that we let everybody know about those opportunities, and make sure that everybody's aware of them. And so, I think people were more receptive to that type of communication than they were, maybe even 5 years ago. So, I think that's a win. (D13).	
		Building understanding and respect	I really enjoyed you know sort of digging down into personality traits and being able to identify people, and how to best work with them to achieve a goal. ….We have to be on the same page before we even start to talk about Congressional members about it. (Wi13).	6 of 8
What are the perceived contributions of the NCTTFC ALDP former participants to	Allowing space for reflection		Be involved, be present, be helpful, but don't have a hot and don't have a lot of expectation, so that I'm not frustrated in in that volunteer work. …….but going through the Ag leadership	4 of 8

Table 4: (continued)

commodity organizations?		program made me realize that it is our state commodity group and even if I get frustrated with some things that I should still be a part of it. ……understanding that broader context makes me and helps me understand everything else within it better if I don't have that sort of sometimes that overarching sort of Meta narrative which I realize I only know part of it. I mean, there's always more that you can know, but it helped me at least place things a little bit better and I think it helped me to be braver and I think learning that, you know, being on a family farm is unique. (L11).	
	Continuous personal and	I think the program has been very effective in helping people to see both sides of where they're at and to, you know, to see strengths and to see areas for growth. ..…I think because of my experiences	7 of 8

Table 4: (continued)

	organizational development		and what I've gone through. I was asked to serve on that advisory board and to help develop, you know, programs (C21).	
		Opening doors to opportunities	And then as an exhibitor, we exhibit at the trade show. We have a booth at the trade show to showcase our plant material. So, I'll work at the booth and talk to existing customers and try to find and get new customers in that process and then walk the trade show floor to see other vendors and suppliers of mine, meet some of our competitors to kinda see how they're doing things and pick up new customers. So just pretty much being an active participant and the events that they held in order to better yourself. (D17).	5 of 8
	Suggested Changes vary		I would say a lot of leaders that I see, and it's and it's in a lot of different organizations don't	7 of 8

Table 4: (continued)

	from participant to participant	understand how really to run an effective business meeting. How to maintain control of a business meeting, how to make sure that all sides are heard, but done so in a respectful manner, and I think I would say that would be an area that they need to address. (C24).

Conclusions

This study's findings align with the interests of NCTTFC ALDP in identifying and training future agricultural leaders for leadership positions. This is apparent in participants whose aspirations to take on leadership roles are motivated by "the greater good of agriculture," which coincides with the need to be ready to close the divide between rural and urban interests, actively engage in matters impacting agriculture, and promote unity among the agricultural communities considered by NCTTFC ALDP during recruitments of new cohorts (Brown, 2014). This is also consistent with Kaufman et al.'s (2010) focus group findings from leadership planning needs assessment, where participants felt that the agriculture sector needed leadership development. Similar to this study's findings, Kaufman et al. (2010)'s participants were concerned about getting program participation from those who stand to gain the most.

Additionally, this study's results demonstrated evidence supporting Humphrey et al. (2023)'s findings that conversations and building friendships among leadership participants constitute significant takeaways from LDPs, fostering relationships with individuals that one calls on and work towards impacting initiatives and achieving personal and organizational goals. The results further show that NCTTFC ALDP meets what Kaufman et al. (2010) terms as most leadership programs have three common elements, particularly facilitating networking opportunities, access to diverse information sources, and personal and professional mentorship. Additionally, this study's findings on NCTTFC ALDP's enhancement of participants' ability to handle challenges are consistent with Campos et al. (2020) and Kaufman et al. (2010), who asserted that leadership development program participants developed creative and innovative skills to solve problems, enabling them to navigate industry changes, resource constraints, and conflict resolution expertly. Furthermore, findings under the group dynamics skill theme mirror

the findings of previous studies (Campos et al., 2020; Kaufman et al., 2010; Kelsey & Wall, 2003), highlighting the importance of recognizing individual characteristics within teams to maximize productivity. Kaufman et al. (2010)'s findings that adept group dynamics empower leaders to effectively manage challenging team dynamics, fostering collaboration to address issues collectively further relate to this study.

Similarly, this study's exploration of adaptive leadership aligns with Campos et al. (2020) observations, stressing the role of leadership in motivating participation, optimizing individual contributions, and embracing situational and shared leadership approaches. These findings underscore the importance of fostering understanding, collaboration, and motivation within teams to achieve collective success. Furthermore, the study concurs with Hughes et al. (2021) regarding the efficacy of agricultural leadership programs in providing networking opportunities and access to information essential for organizational development. The team-building activities reported by the participants are also seen in Kelsey and Wall (2003), but, unlike this study, Kelsey and Wall (2003) found a gap in fully integrating team leadership beyond the program's confines, suggesting a need for greater transparency and community involvement to enhance program accountability.

Also, the current study concurs with Kelsey and Wall (2003), who stated that participants in leadership development programs felt equipped to pursue advocacy influence at the national level. This is also in line with Kaufman (2010), who stressed the role of leadership programs in developing graduates as industry advocates. This is significant because, as Allan (A1) highlighted, farmers are highly affected by decisions made without considering their input. In contrast, this study contradicts Gordon et al. (2012), who observed that participants in non-technical skills training programs tended to overestimate their communication effectiveness and

recommended reflective practices to address this discrepancy. However, the current findings are consistent with Kaufman et al. (2010)'s assertion that effective communication is paramount, as many participants highlighted its importance in fostering understanding among team members and ultimately achieving shared goals. This emphasis on communication skills is essential for preventing misinterpretations and the negative consequences they cause on goal attainment.

It should also be noted that this study's results align with Dodson (1996), who found that more active leaders tend to perceive higher levels of decision-making ability, communication skills, self-understanding, and group work. Moreover, the findings of this study corroborate with those of Humphrey et al. (2023), in which participants demonstrated increased open-mindedness, shifted perspectives, and embraced organic and regenerative practices, moving away from conventional farming beliefs. However, the results of this study contrast with some of Kelsey and Walls' (2003) results, where one interviewee felt less engaged in leadership roles post-program compared to before. This differs significantly from the present study, exemplified by Loreta's increased involvement in leadership roles following participation in NCTTFC ALDP. Conversely, participants in other programs also expressed specific needs, echoing the findings of Kelsey and Wall (2003), who recommended including community development needs in ALPPs. This parallels the findings of this study, where participants suggested the involvement of commodity board members as guest speakers and urged for regular visits to farm operations across different regions of North Carolina. These findings resonate with Kaufman et al. (2010), who emphasized the importance of carefully selecting guest speakers and program activities to cater to participants' needs effectively.

Connections to Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by Vroom's (1964) Expectancy Theory of Motivation, which is founded on four assumptions, including 1) that individuals join organizations with preconceived notions regarding their previous experience, needs, and goals, and these factors impact how individuals respond to the organization. 2) The second assumption is that an individual's behavior is a product of intentional decision-making. 3) The third assumption is that individuals have varying preferences for what they seek from organizations, such as a competitive wage, job stability, opportunities for career growth, and challenging work. 4) The last assumption is that individuals will select from different options to maximize results for themselves. These assumptions yield three elements on which the theory is premised: expectancy, instrumentality, and valence.

Valence

Valence refers to the value people place on a specific outcome. This is linked to the reality that this study's participants participated in the NCTTFC ALDP intending to be provided with the knowledge and skills to lead commodity organizations. This is also explained by the motives of the participants in this study to assume leadership roles within commodity organizations. For example, findings indicated that one of the drivers was for the greater good of agriculture conceived within the desire to serve their communities by being part of lobbyists that pursue favorable policies to keep the farmers farming and develop the agricultural industry. Other participants reported having a strong bond with the agricultural industry; therefore, their participation was crucial due to many misconceptions about agriculture and the general farming industry, which they needed to defend and address.

Expectancy

Expectancy is the belief that one has the capabilities to produce the outcome. The possession of leadership skills by this study's participants enhances their certainty to positively contribute to the development of the commodity organizations and the agricultural industry at large. For example, this study found that participants had leadership skills, including 1) collaboration and engagement that enables them to build lasting relationships, work in complicated environments, and add value to discussions by initiating 'crucial conversations.' 2) Skills to handle challenges that capacitate them to recognize and solve societal and commodity organizations' challenges. 3) Group dynamics skills, among others, allow them to elicit responses from fellow board members and promote dialogue for better representation and generating solutions to farmers' diverse needs.

Instrumentality

Instrumentality refers to whether people believe they have a role to play in the predicated outcome. Based on the findings, participants believed in either playing a role in agricultural leadership or other people with no agricultural knowledge made unfavorable decisions for them. This is best illustrated by one of the participants' perspectives on the need to be part of the people who *tell that story* and the need to be a voice of reason. He added,

> Dad always said, growing up, it's like people are making decisions that are gonna affect you, and in our farm every day, you might as well be one of those people making those decisions rather than just sitting back, letting somebody else make them so I enjoy being part of that discussion, and working on those problems, thinking outside the box and working with folks and trying to compromise and come up with solutions (A1).

Implications

This study highlights the outcomes of the NCTTFC ALDP by exploring the perceived leadership skills acquired by program participants, their practical implementation in agricultural commodity organizations, motivating factors that push them to assume leadership roles, and their needs or recommended areas of growth.

One of the primary implications of this study lies in the leadership skills acquired by the NCTTFC ALDP former participants, indicating how leadership development programs hone commodity leaders' skills. The notable training activities and sessions underlined by the participants can be strengthened, and the NCTTFC ALDP and related programs can capitalize on these to produce vibrant agricultural leaders who can champion and agitate agricultural development. This also serves as feedback on the program's modules and instruments for their efficacy and possible areas of improvement to ensure they impart the intended leadership skills.

Another possible implication is premised on the practical application of leadership skills in agricultural commodity organizations by the former participants. NCTTFC ALDP and other agricultural leadership programs intending to impact commodity organizations by sharpening their leaders' skills should empathize with the competencies that have aided the participants in pursuing organizational goals and impacting initiatives. In addition, participants reported leadership skills, which are central to handling organizational challenges, fostering group dynamics, networking, advocacy and influence, and collaboration and engagement. These can inform the curriculums of ALDPs, whose areas of interest include contributing to developing agricultural commodity organizations through nurturing competent leaders to empower them with the knowledge, experience, and skills to succeed in their pursuits.

This study revealed the motivating factors that encourage commodity leaders to assume

leadership roles in the form of two themes, including for the greater good of agriculture and the power of others. These findings can help adult and grassroots ALDPs by directing them on how to grow the desire for leadership in intrinsically motivated current or future leaders and emphasizing *the power of others* to attract and nurture extrinsically motivated organizational leaders. Also, participants pointed out future training needs, implying they know the necessary skills to lead commodity organizations. The highlighted areas can guide ALDPs to ensure that the curriculums meet the participants' needs and ultimately help them reach their personal and organizational goals.

Recommendations for Future Practice

The recommendations below are based on this study's research questions, respective findings, and conclusions. These recommendations apply to NCTTFC ALDP and related agricultural leadership development programs. Nevertheless, the researcher provided thick and detailed descriptions of the study participants (cases), which may allow recommendations to have implications for other leadership development programs in related contexts.

Based on the findings, NCTTFC ALDPs and other ALDPs should incorporate media training activities into their curriculums because participants reported being extensively involved in talking on several occasions, necessitating them to have the skills and experience to engage with media effectively. Catering to this would help nurture succinct, customer-friendly, and authentic agricultural leaders.

ALDPs should have some of the sessions guest lectured by a person who works with a commodity group or commodity organization board member because participants indicated that some leadership participants aren't actively engaged with any commodity organizations. Because some participants are producers who are not actively engaged even within their own commodity

groups, it is necessary to expose and allow them to see the need to be active members. Additionally, people should be invited from other organizations working with farmers that aren't necessarily commodity groups to allow participants to have a diverse perspective. This would help NCTTFC ALDP and related ALDPs achieve part of their mission of helping the participants appreciate diversity in all its forms, gain the ability to communicate with a wide variety of audiences, and understand the impact that effective leadership can have in strengthening families and farms.

ALDPs should work with commodity leaders in recruiting participants to ensure equal participation from all commodity organizations because some respondents reported an under-representation of their commodity association members in the leadership program and general NC agriculture. In addition, this would ensure agricultural leaders get exposed to as much North Carolina agriculture as possible during in-state agricultural study tours organized by the leadership programs and bridge the gap of limited knowledge of NC agriculture noted by some respondents.

NCTTFC ALDP and related ALDPs should strive to equip participants with effective business meeting management techniques. This would address the challenge observed by the respondents, who say that most leaders they see don't understand how to run an effective business meeting, maintain control of a meeting session, and have no idea how to ensure that all sides are heard respectfully.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was limited to commodity leaders who reported perceived training needs and areas for future growth, which calls for encompassing research. A broad study involving the end-users, those they serve and lead, and the broader farming and agricultural industry would reveal the leadership training requirements felt across various segments. By studying these stakeholders, NCTTFC ALDP and related ALDPs can gain valuable insights into the specific training needs essential for enhancing effectiveness and productivity within the agricultural sector beyond commodity organizations. Such a study would address current gaps pointed out as training needs and inform the development of tailored leadership development modules that meet the evolving demands of the agricultural industry.

This study utilized a multiple-case qualitative research design. It used interviews as a data collection method, which had less corroboration against the subjective experiences of NCTTFC ALDP among former participants and the application of leadership skills in commodity organizations. A study that utilizes data collection methods to supplement interviews with focus groups and participant observations would capture hidden insights into the perceived leadership competencies developed and how they are applied. This would unveil attributes that participants might not have highlighted due to social desirability bias, wherein respondents might have provided answers they believed would be viewed favorably by the researcher and NCTTFC ALDP leadership team.

Some participants reported participating in leadership development activities like media, specialized mentorship through coaching, team building, and experiential learning. Future studies could investigate the dynamics and impact of mentor-mentee relationships, the effectiveness of team dynamics, and experiential learning activities on developing leadership

competencies and the transferability to real-world agricultural challenges.

This study investigated the leadership skills developed by the commodity leaders from their participation in NCTTFC ALDP and how they are applied in their roles to contribute to the commodity organizations. It would be imperative to shift focus towards those they lead and work with. Exploring how the followers perceive the development of leadership competencies among their leaders and identifying the transformations observed could provide deeper insights into the efficacy of the NCTTFC ALDP. Additionally, such a study would unveil organizational developments attributed to the leaders' participation in the NCTTFC ALDP and discern the impact observed by their subordinates, fellow board members, and superiors. This avenue of inquiry could further unearth valuable perspectives that former participants may not have articulated due to the subjective nature of the responses received, shedding light on unexplored dimensions of leadership development and NCTTFC ALDP’s impact on commodity organizations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Agricultural Commodity Organizations and their Roles in North Carolina

Carolina Farm Stewardship Association	Strengthen Local Food Systems through provide farmers and food hubs with the tools, resources, and technical assistance they need to be resilient, profitable, and productive
Equine/Horse Associations	
Eastern North Carolina Christmas Tree Growers Association	Dedicated to the advancement of the production of high-quality Christmas trees east of the mountains
North Carolina Agritourism Networking Association	Promotes networking and works to grow the agritourism industry
North Carolina Apple Growers Association	Provides support, information, advice, and fellowship for apple growers in North Carolina
North Carolina Blueberry Council	Supports initiatives that produce better blueberries, build a stronger blueberry industry and create consumer blueberry awareness through building partnerships between blueberry growers and the services they need
The Corn Growers Association of North Carolina	Helps farmers in their business of growing and marketing corn
North Carolina Cattlemen's Association	Coordinates the promotion of beef and the beef industry in North Carolina, assisting cattlemen in legislative, regulatory, and production issues
North Carolina Christmas Tree Association	Promotes "real" Christmas Trees through marketing and education

Appendix A (continued)

North Carolina Composting Council	Dedicated to the development, expansion, and promotion of the composting and compost use in both the domestic and industry setting
North Carolina Cotton Producers Association	Dedicated to improving the welfare of cotton farmers in the state
North Carolina Egg Association	
North Carolina Fisheries Association, Inc	Works to increase awareness of commercial fishing and fishermen, support existing sustainable fishing practices and help commercial fishermen communicate their contributions – economic, cultural and environmental – to the state and its citizens.
North Carolina Green Industry Council	Establishes unity among the diverse segments of the North Carolina Green Industry in regard to common issues and concerns and to provide an umbrella of legislative advocacy, promotion of the industry and represent the green industry as a steward of the environment and an advocate and leader of environmental stewardship
North Carolina Greenhouse Vegetable Growers Association	Provides members the opportunity to communicate with other growers, building knowledge and strength in the industry, helping with NCDA and C.S. Marketing Assistance

Appendix A (continued)

North Carolina Herb Association	Promotes the production, marketing, and use of herbs and herb related products through education and research
North Carolina Nursery and Landscape Association	Interested in the welfare of North Carolina's green industry, with emphasis on the nursery and landscape industries Provide essential value to our members through education, marketing and advocacy & promote and protect the interests of the North Carolina Green Industry
North Carolina Muscadine Grape Association	Represents the state's growers, wineries, processors, marketers, and suppliers to the industry
North Carolina Peach Society	Supports improvements in all aspects of peach production through research at N.C. State University, and helps growers expand their local markets
North Carolina Pecan Growers Association	Encourages and promotes research and education in all phases of the pecan industry, to interact with others in the interest of pecan growers throughout the region, and to promote pecans as a commercial crop in North Carolina
North Carolina Peanut Growers Association (Virginia Carolinas Peanuts)	Spreads the word about peanuts grown in the Virginia Carolinas through marketing and promotions partnerships
North Carolina Pine Needle Producers Association	Maximizes the mutual benefits of pine needle production from the landowner to the consumer
North Carolina Pork Council	Provides meaningful leadership for the state's dynamic pork industry through public policy and advocacy efforts, as well

	as consumer information programs and services
North Carolina Potato Association	Promotes North Carolina potatoes throughout the United States and Canada
North Carolina Poultry Federation	Provides a united voice for the industry with government, media and the general public
North Carolina Small Grain Growers Association	Promotes applied research in production, efficient management practices, and variety development and educational programs for the progress of small grains and work with individuals, organizations, and governmental agencies toward the achievement of increased profits from small grain production
North Carolina Sod Producers Association	Represents sod growers in N.C. that produce quality turf grasses to meet a wide variety of needs
North Carolina Soybean Producers Association	Maximizes the profitability of North Carolina's soybean farmers in an economically and environmentally sound manner
North Carolina State Beekeepers Association	Encourages better beekeeping methodology, promotes cooperation among the beekeepers of the state and nation and improves purposes relating to honeybees and beekeeping exclusively for its members and the general public
North Carolina State Grange	

North Carolina Strawberry Association	Promotes strawberry production and marketing and speaks out for strawberry growers on issues of common concern
North Carolina Sweet Potato Commission	The sole purpose of the commission is to increase sweetpotato consumption through education, promotional activities, research and honorable horticultural practices among its producers
North Carolina Tomato Growers Association	Brings together a group of growers, industry representatives, extension personnel, and university researchers interested in the improvement and promotion of the tomato industry in North Carolina
North Carolina Vegetable Growers Association	Improves and promotes the North Carolina vegetable industry
North Carolina Wine Growers Association	Fosters cooperation between member wineries and vineyards in an effort to increase the knowledge base of all our members and advocates to support the needs of the industry in North Carolina
North Carolina Watermelon Association	Protects and promotes the interest of the N.C. Watermelon industry from production to consumption
Tobacco Associates	Promotes U.S. flue-cured tobacco internationally
Tobacco Growers Association of North Carolina	Advocates for success in farming tobacco through the promotion of sound policies, scientific research, strong advocacy, education and marketing for its farm members

Appendix A (continued)

	Promotes the turfgrass industry in North Carolina through continuing education, support of N.C. State research and extension, environmental stewardship, and governmental advocacy
Turfgrass Council of North Carolina	Source: (North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, n.d.)

Appendix B: IRB Approval

NC STATE

Andrew Waaswa <awaaswa@ncsu.edu>

Fleming - 26588 - IRB Protocol assigned Exempt status

1 message

IRB Administrative Office <pins_notifications@ncsu.edu> Tue, Nov 14, 2023 at 10:50 AM
Reply-To: ncsuirboffice@ncsu.edu
To: awaaswa@ncsu.edu

Date: November 14, 2023
Study Title: Leadership Development in Agriculture: A Multi-Case Study of NCTTFC ALDP Graduates in Leadership Roles within Commodity Organizations in North Carolina
NC State eIRB #: 26588
Funding Source: NCTTFC Agricultural Leadership Development Program

Dear Joy Fleming,

The research proposal named above has received administrative review and has been approved on November 14, 2023 as exempt from the policy as outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations (Exempt d.2). Provided that the only participation of the subjects is as described in the proposal narrative, this project is exempt from further review.

This approval for this research study does not expire, but any changes must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation in accordance with the NC State university regulation and IRB unit standards.

NOTE:

1. This committee complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NC State University projects, the assurance number is: FWA00003429.

2. Any changes to the research must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation in accordance with the NC State university regulation and IRB unit standards.

3. If any problems occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days.
4. For information regarding study closure or post approval monitoring activities, please refer to the NC State University IRB website.

To request an official, signed approval letter on NC State letterhead, please submit a request on our website under "Request a Letter"

Sincerely,

Jennie Ofstein, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board (IRB) Director
North Carolina State University
irb-director@ncsu.edu
919.515.8754

Appendix C: Invitation of Participants for Voluntary Participation in the Study

NC STATE

Andrew Waaswa <awaaswa@ncsu.edu>

NCTTFC ALDP question

1 message

Andrew Waaswa <awaaswa@ncsu.edu> Thu, Nov 2, 2023 at 3:52 PM
To: [redacted]
Cc: Joy Morgan <jemorga2@ncsu.edu>

Dear [redacted],

I hope you are well and that this email finds you in good health. My name is Andrew Waaswa, and I am a doctoral student under the direction of Dr. Joy Morgan. During my doctoral program, I have had the privilege to work with the NCTTFC Agricultural Leadership Development Program alongside Dr. Bill Collins, Dr. Blake Brown, and Dr. Morgan. Because of my interest in starting a program similar to this in my future career aspirations, I am focusing my dissertation research on the impact (if any) the program had on participants' involvement in leadership positions within commodity organizations. Your name was given as an alumni member who potentially served or is currently serving in a leadership position (officer or committee member) within a commodity organization. I am contacting you to inquire whether you are or have been in any leadership position within an agricultural commodity organization in North Carolina.

If yes, would you be willing to potentially be interviewed about your involvement in the program and in the commodity organization? Any identifiable information will not be shared. Also, just because you say "yes" to this email, it does not mean that you will be selected. All of the "yes" individuals will go into a pool and then be selected at random. Those selected will then receive a follow-up email with additional details. The goal of this research is to provide the NCTTFC ALDP with an opportunity to further serve our commodity organizations and prepare future agricultural leaders.

We appreciate all you do for NC agriculture and representing NCTTFC ALDP! Please do not hesitate to reach out should you have any questions.

We look forward to hearing from you by Friday, November 10th.

Thanks,

Andrew

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Andrew Waaswa (he/him/his)
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Appendix D: Series of Interview Questions – *The Interview Protocol*

Questions for the First Interview

1) Tell me a little about what got you interested in Agriculture.
2) What do you currently do for a career?
3) Prior to your participation in the program, describe your leadership involvement in your community, commodity associations, etc., if any.
4) Can you please describe the agricultural commodity organization you currently lead or have led in the past, if any, and your primary roles and responsibilities?
5) How did you become involved with this particular agricultural commodity organization?
6) Could you provide some background on the organization's history and mission?
7) Why did you apply for the NCTTFC ALDP?

Questions for the Second Interview

1) My last interview question asked why you applied for the NCTTFC ALDP. Tell me about the program and your participation.
    - Was there ever any hesitation about applying for the program? If so, why?
    - When you reflect back on your experience in the program and knowing what you know now, would you do it again?
2) What aspects did you enjoy most, if any?
    - What sessions did you find most enjoyable?
    - Which trip was your favorite and why?
3) In your opinion, what are the key leadership skills/ qualities you developed as a result of participating in the NCTTFC ALDP, if any?

- During the last interview, we discussed your participation in community and other organizations prior to your participation. Do you feel that your involvement in those organizations prior to the program were impacted because you did not have these leadership skills? If yes, can you elaborate?
- What skill are you most proud of that you further developed during or after your participation in the program? Do you see it impacting your personal and professional roles? How so?

4) Can you share specific examples of how these leadership skills/ qualities have been applied in your role as a leader or former leader within your agricultural commodity organization?
5) How have these competencies, if any, contributed to your effectiveness as a leader in your organization?
6) What do you see as your most significant contributions, if any, to your agricultural commodity organization as a result of your participation in the NCTTFC ALDP?
    - Can you provide examples of projects or initiatives, if any, where your contributions were particularly noteworthy?
7) How have these contributions, if any, impacted the organization's goals or objectives?
8) Can you describe any specific instances where your leadership skills/ qualities, if any, directly contributed to the success or growth of your organization?
9) What specific leadership skills/ qualities acquired from NCTTFC ALDP, if any, do you believe helped you navigate a specific challenge in the commodity organization?
    - What was the challenge?

- This is very interesting, in the event that I ever experience a similar challenge, can you talk me through how you handled it?

10) In reflecting back on your experience in the program and your role as a commodity organization leader, what additions would you advise the leadership team to make to the curriculum?
    - Were there things that you were not prepared to handle that the program could build into the sessions to assist?
11) If a new commodity member were to ask you whether or not they should participate in the program, what would you say to them?
12) Is there anything else that comes to mind that you would like to share related to the program and commodity organizations?