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**MAINTAINING AN ADEQUATE SUPPLY
OF AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION TEACHERS**

An Adequate Supply of Teachers: The Future of the Agricultural Education Profession is at Stake

by Harry N. Boone, Jr.

The sky is falling.... The sky is falling. Just as in the tale of “Chicken Little” there are exaggerations and truths in the title to this article. Research conducted by the American Association of Agricultural Educators (Kantrovich, 2010) has shown an overall nationwide shortage of agricultural education teachers. This shortage has been exacerbated by efforts to increase the number of agricultural education programs. These are the truths. The future of the profession is at stake, at least in the short run, is the exaggeration. Let’s be clear on the wording: I said it was an exaggeration and not a false statement. One must remember that the profession cannot continue its current offerings, and possibly expand programs, on a dwindling supply of new teachers.

This issue is devoted to ways of attracting new individuals to the profession and, once they are in the field, keeping them there. Current agricultural education teachers have a major role to play in both the recruitment of new teachers and making certain that new teachers are successful and remain in the profession.

Identifying Potential Teachers

All agricultural education teachers must ask: Am I encouraging my best students to following in my footsteps? Good teachers have a tremendous influence on their students. I am where I am today because of my high school agricultural education teachers. Identify your best students and encourage them to follow in your footsteps. Before you can honestly encourage someone to follow in your

footsteps you must ask yourself if you are successfully balancing your professional career and your personal life. Are you devoting numerous hours to your students at the sacrifice of your family? If you have not achieved that balance it will be hard to recommend “your” profession to others because the students will see through the façade. “For I know the joys and discomforts of ...” Be honest with the students as you encourage them to enter the profession. Let them observe the “highs” and “lows” of the profession.

Encourage New Graduates

Studies have shown that between 25 and 50 percent of graduates who are certified, never enter the profession. First we must understand the reasons these students fail to enter the profession. Was it the availability of teaching positions, a bad student teaching experience, or the fact that we prepare outstanding graduates that can enter and succeed in other agriculture professions? We have little control over the availability of teaching positions except that teachers should always be looking for ways to expand their program and possibly add a new teacher. We can, however, encourage our students to look beyond community, county, and state boundaries for potential teaching positions.

As teacher educators we must take care to carefully “match” student teachers and cooperating teachers to ensure that all parties have a successful and fulfilling experience. A good experience as a student teacher will go a long way in encouraging a student to enter the profession. Agricultural education graduates are individuals with a comprehensive knowledge

of agriculture, good communication skills, and the ability to share their knowledge and skills in formal and informal educational settings. These are valuable skills desired by all employers. As teachers and teacher educators, we need to make sure that the teaching positions are as attractive as the manager trainee for the farm supply company.

Mentorship Programs

Once the prospective teacher enters the profession, it is the role of the profession, as well as state staff and teacher educators, to do everything possible to make certain the individual has a successful entry into the profession. Every state teachers association should develop a formal mentorship program for its new members. While a mentorship program provides a number of valuable assets to a beginning teacher, the biggest item is support. Just having someone to talk to and ask advice will guide a rookie through some rough situations.

There is no magical solution to the teacher shortage problem. Through a combination of good sound practices at all levels of the profession we can take strides toward insuring a continuous supply of agricultural education teachers.



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Front Cover:

West Virginia University Agricultural and Extension Education Students at their final “field experience” reflection seminar. The majority of the students completed a student teaching field experience and will be certified as agricultural education teachers. Photo courtesy of the Editor.

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How an Outfit Can Influence a Profession?

by Ellen Thompson

In December of 2008, as I stood in my closet to pick out the outfit I would wear on the last day of school before Christmas break, I had an idea. Since it was the last day before break I was thinking of wearing a t-shirt, a Teach Ag t-shirt, the one I had received from taking part in the NAAE Family Feud game at the 2008 National FFA Convention with my students. I was thinking about how wearing the t-shirt could be a catalyst for starting a discussion that day about how much I love being an ag teacher. Which started me thinking that maybe I could coordinate something like that in Minnesota, where all the ag teachers would wear a Teach Ag t-shirt and talk to their students about becoming an ag teacher. Well as you hopefully know by now that idea was the basis for National Teach Ag Day, the Teach Ag video, and ultimately the creation of what is now the National Teach Ag Campaign. I share this story with you because this simple act of outfit declaration led to a national initiative that is growing and multiplying to address the issue of agriculture teacher recruitment and retention.

It also serves to remind us all that one person can change the world. You can change the world starting with one student or one colleague. I am really proud of the National Teach Ag Campaign and it is not because I am biased. The National Teach Ag Campaign is actively engaged in the recruitment and retention of agriculture teachers while celebrating the contribution that ag teachers make in their communities. Who have you Tagged To Teach Ag in your own classroom? How have you contributed to local, state, regional, and national Teach Ag events? In what ways have you reached out to mentor a new teacher or help a veteran teacher who is struggling? It is within each of us and is our responsibility to ensure an adequate supply of agriculture teachers in all states. The more I am involved in the National Teach Ag Campaign the less I see borders. Borders, whether they are geographical or personal, only serve to limit the creativity and collaboration we should be utilizing.

I know some states are not experiencing a teacher shortage, today. What if for a minute we all take a trip into fantasyland where agriculture

education programs are identified by the masses as an effective means for teaching students about problem solving, leadership, and communication (think three circle model, CASE, and FFA)? And because of this distinction new ag education programs start popping up everywhere. Well I hate to burst your fantasy bubble but this can and will happen if we position ourselves properly. Do we have the people to fill these new positions? Do we have the diversity of people to fill these new positions? Based on my current anecdotal evidence I would say currently we do not.

Thank you to the article authors of this issue. I am continually humbled by the collegiality of this profession. This issue is packed with some incredible ideas for recruiting and retaining an agriculture education workforce. If you have not jumped on the Teach Ag bandwagon the time is now. I can think of no better reason to unite together than to work on this monumental issue of *Maintaining an Adequate Supply of Agriculture Education Teachers*. It affects program quality, program quantity, funding, job satisfaction, student success, and ultimately the survival and growth of ag education.

Upcoming Themes

November-December: Balancing Career and Family: Preventing Burnout

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Gotta Get ‘Em There First... Then, Let’s Worry About Keeping ‘Em!

by Becki Lawver and Amy Smith

Often, when the topic of “issues or challenges facing agricultural education” comes up in professional conversation, the phrase “recruitment and retention” is tossed about. We all realize that something needs to be done – but, it seems that too often we’re not sure where to begin our efforts, or if it is even our job. Actually, it is everyone’s job – we each need to do what we can to encourage our students to pursue careers in agricultural education and keep them in the profession. It will do little good for the profession if we get ‘em there, but can’t keep ‘em. As a profession, how do we do that?

Getting ‘Em

With regard to getting ‘em there, let’s consider the following proverb and its implications for our profession... *Each One Teach One*. This proverb originated in the United States during a time when African Americans were denied an education in an effort to keep them obedient. Those in power feared that if African Americans learned to read and write, they could no longer be controlled. However, some individuals, often considered esteemed members of their community, were able to read and write. These brave individuals risked their own lives to educate others in their community. They considered it their duty to teach someone else, thus generating the phrase ‘each one teach one.’

In today’s society, this proverb has been borrowed time and again to demonstrate the importance of sharing knowledge with others, and has

even developed into a teaching strategy used to encourage students to become a part of instruction by sharing their knowledge with peers. However, we propose that this proverb can have even further implications for agricultural education. Imagine if “each one” of us, as agricultural educators took the proverb to heart, and sought to “teach one” about the career opportunities available in agricultural education. Similar to those initial brave African Americans who considered it their duty to teach others to read, agricultural educators should consider it their duty to teach and encourage future agriculture teachers.

The most recent supply and demand study conducted by Kantrovich (2010) indicates that teacher preparation institutions are graduating fewer students in agricultural education than there are jobs available. Further concerns arise as another 25% of qualified graduates choose careers outside of teaching (Kantrovich). While we certainly can’t expect 100% of Ag Ed graduates to enter the teaching field, efforts to increase the number of students entering post-secondary programs in Agricultural Education would definitely help counteract the shortages we face. Across the nation many veteran agriculture teachers are reaching retirement age. If no suitable candidates are available when those positions are vacated, schools may be forced to shut down programs or fill the open positions with alternatively certified teachers.

Fortunately, we can do something about this situation! The solution begins in our own secondary classrooms and on our college campuses. We don’t necessarily need special campaigns or initiatives to solve

the challenges we face as a profession; we each need to be working on recruitment every day – through our words and actions. Consider the following:

- Make it a priority to **communicate** with every student, in every class, every day. Take an interest in and acknowledge the students in your classroom.
- Your relationship with your students sets the tone for the connections you will make with them. Is it **positive**?
- Make goals challenging, but **achievable**. In other words, don’t set completely unrealistic goals for yourself, your program, and your students. Success breeds success.
- Show your students that you care. When teachers **do something special** for or with their students, they notice. If these students, later on, are considering careers where they can make a difference – they’ll remember when you did.
- **Talk about yourself!** Share your history about how you got to where you are today and why you considered a career in Ag Ed. You are a great example and a link to the past for students; no one else can take your stories into the future unless you share them.
- **Share** the great things about being an agriculture teacher; **encourage** them to think about a career in agricultural education. Often, all it takes for students to consider a certain major or career choice is knowing that someone they respect thinks they would be good at it.



Jason Reeve and Hailey Haslam demonstrate the proper way to give vaccinations during an undergraduate teaching methods class at Utah State University. Jason teaches at Mountain Crest High School and Hailey teaches at Woods Cross High School. Both are beginning their teaching career this fall.

- Students may listen to what you say, but your **actions speak even louder** than the words you say. When you talk about the roles and responsibilities of your job, what do you say? On those stressful days leading up to conventions, banquets and other major chapter activities, do your students get to see a positive example of someone dealing with “job stress” or does it appear as though the job is too much?
- Don’t let yourself believe that the world is against you. Even if you are going through a rough spot, there will be **good times ahead!** Focus on the good times, think positive thoughts and it may help you see your situation in a better light.
- Plan and implement promotional activities for **National Teach Ag Day**, March 15, 2012! Teach a lesson about being an agriculture teacher to all your classes, provide opportunities for your students to “experience teaching,” and/or encourage them become a fan of the National Teach Ag Day Facebook page!

Individually, none of these simple approaches will fix the teacher shortage we face in agricultural education. However, if we each implement them – and work to accentuate the positive in our profession, we may be surprised at the results. These small efforts could generate an increased interest in teaching agriculture among our students and lead to a greater number of

students enrolled in agricultural education at colleges across the country.

Keeping ‘Em

Each year hundreds of student teachers are assigned a cooperating teacher and turned loose, to some degree, in the classroom. While they are supported by a safety net of sorts, they are still nervous, anxious and excited. Take a moment and think back to your own college experiences. Not the social experiences that involved going out with friends, but the academic experiences that helped shape you as an agricultural educator. You may reflect on the content courses you took, the student organizations you were a part of, or the field experiences you completed. Fast forward a bit now, to your college graduation... as you shook the hand of some university representative and were handed your degree, did you feel prepared to teach? Did you feel ready to get that set of keys and unlock the door to your classroom? If you were like most, you may have felt confident and prepared in some ways, yet ap-

prehensive and unprepared in others.

Many times, those about to embark on their first teaching position wonder...

- What content is the most important to teach and how do I effectively address it all?
- Do I really know the content well enough to teach it anyway?
- Am I ready to handle classroom issues and discipline problems?
- How in the world can I avoid missing important deadlines for FFA entries, reports, and activities?
- How do I even find out about the FFA deadlines?
- Will I have any time for myself, or should I just live at the school?

Of course, these questions are merely the tip of the iceberg when it comes to listing the concerns of new agricultural education teachers. How then, with that in mind, do our new teachers survive those first few years? Well, some just “buckle down” and do what they have to do on their own. Others utilize a buddy system, relying on other teachers to share resources and commiserate. And, unfortunately, some don’t survive – and decide to leave the profession in a hurry. At this point, it seems the question we need to ask ourselves is, once we’ve got ‘em, how do we keep ‘em?

For those more experienced teachers in the profession, on the front lines working alongside our new teachers, consider the following:

- What were the biggest concerns or challenges I faced when I began?
- What can I do to make the experiences of new teachers better?
- Am I providing the support and encouragement necessary?
- How can I be a mentor to new teachers?

In the recent issue of the *NAAE News & Views* newsletter, NAAE President, Greg Curlin, stressed the importance of mentoring. He stated, "In our profession, we have learned from other teachers and professionals as we ourselves become veteran teachers." Without a doubt, the benefits of mentoring and coaching programs for new teachers in any profession are many. However, in agricultural education, such programs are even more important. Given the programmatic differences that exist from state-to-state, additional responsibilities related to SAE program supervision, and ever changing and evolving degree programs, applications, and Career Development Events in the FFA, it is no wonder we have some overwhelmed new teachers.

You may be wondering, though, how to offer your help. First, you need to understand the perspectives of a new teacher. Specifically, there are many things new teachers in agricultural education want colleagues (in and outside of agricultural education) to know. The following list of statements was generated by first year agriculture teachers.

As a beginning teacher, I really need my colleagues to know...

- I am not your typical teacher.
- I am unique and do things differently in my classroom.
- Not to assume that I know anything! I'm still learning.
- I may seem to have it together, but it takes a lot of work for me to get that way.
- I am struggling to keep my head above water.
- I love and benefit from feedback, input, and guidance.
- It can be intimidating to work with awesome, experienced teachers.

- That I feel like I am a weak link on the team.
- I look up to other teachers for examples and advice, please share with me.
- I really benefit from teaching mentors and colleague support.
- I feel like I have far more to do than time to do it...please don't ask me to do more.
- I am less familiar with the content than more experienced teachers... please be patient with me as I learn.
- I have not yet learned to balance planning, grading, student interactions, professional development, organizing, etc.
- I have not learned how to balance my personal and work life.
- I take longer to teach a lesson than more experienced teachers.
- Sometimes I don't even know what I'm supposed to be teaching.
- There is a lot for me to remember and not to remember...please nicely remind me.
- This is my first year and I am still learning HOW to do it.
- I am human and will make mistakes, but I will learn from them.

Please consider these, and other, concerns that our new teachers may have. As you meet them and work along side them from time to time – genuinely take an interest in them. Check on them periodically, provide them with resources, share your stories, encourage and support them, become a quality mentor to them. In the process, they will feel more a part of the profession and have a better idea of where to turn to for help and you will grow as a professional, veteran teacher in agricultural education.

By learning, mentoring, and growing alongside our newest professionals, continuing to accentuate the

positive in our profession, and educating our own students about career choices in Agricultural Education, our profession will be strengthened. As a result, we'll recruit and retain more teachers than ever - proving we're a profession that cares about not only getting 'em there, but also is willing to do what we can do to keep 'em!

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Maintaining an Adequate Supply of Agricultural Teachers, What is Your Role?

by Shannon Lawrence and John Rayfield

Writing an article about sustaining the lifeblood of our profession seems easy at first. There are so many directions one could go and questions to be answered—what are teacher education programs doing to maintain the

As we look at the past, we see the good and the bad. However, we can't be too quick to try to live in the "glory days"—they are gone. The skills needed to navigate the perils and rewards of the modern classroom are not the same as they were 30, 20 or even 10 years ago. We are inducting a new type of teacher into the classroom, and in many instances, we don't do a very good job of welcom-

up at times. They want to be at home with their family and have some time to take care of some things outside of the school just like many of us do. Are we showing them how to balance family and career and be successful at both? How many ag teachers do we know now who are not burned out when or before they retire? Why do we wear 60-70 hour work weeks as a badge of honor? As long as we continue to model these behaviors, we will struggle to retain quality teachers. Our work is important. Agriculture education is not a job we clock in and clock out, but we need to continue to work to shift the paradigm into working smarter and not necessarily harder. The "how" part is something we must give a great deal of thought.

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Our profession must embrace the reality that we are becoming and will continue to become increasingly diverse in many ways.

supply? How do we keep current and future agricultural education teachers motivated? How do we educate the public about our profession? To answer the difficult questions on this issue, we as teachers should reflect on our past, look at our present condition, and conceptualize what needs to happen in the future.

R. W. Emerson once said "Do not go where the path may lead; go instead where there is no path and leave a trail." Our predecessors have blazed a trail that has kept us on top of the career and technical education world for decades. We still reap the benefit of many years of dedication and sacrifice from the pioneers of agricultural education. Introspectively, we look at ourselves as a teacher and often see a person emulating our own agriculture teacher at many levels.

ing them to the "family." Most of us expect the new teachers to be like we were. Imagine how many teachers we would have if we only accepted those who grew up on a farm or ranch or had worked in agriculture their entire lives! In order to maintain the supply of agricultural education teachers needed, our profession must embrace the reality that we are becoming and will continue to become increasingly diverse in many ways.

When we look at what we are doing in the present to maintain our supply of teachers, are we encouraging our students to become agriculture teachers? Are we presenting the profession in a positive light with our ethics and our time commitments? The Millennial Generation is a true phenomenon, and we should be cognizant that they see through some of the smoke and mirrors we may put



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Wisconsin Takes Pride in its New Teacher Programming

by Rachel A. Sauvola

It's not a secret that we need to maintain outstanding agriculture programs and FFA chapters around our state and nation so that students can continue to be afforded excellent opportunities that will help them be productive citizens in our country. Seeing a need for getting new teachers off the ground running, the Wisconsin Association of Agricultural Educators developed a teacher-mentoring program back in 2003. As one of the founding members of that program, I viewed it as an opportunity to give new colleagues what I viewed was missing when I entered the profession more than a decade ago.

It started out as most mentoring programs do - a neighboring teacher who was formally trained (by a professional trainer or the WAAE committee) helping the new professional. The mentor served as the sounding board for problems and issues that arose and helped the new teacher stay on track with deadlines and curriculum essentials. The new teachers would attend our professional development conference and sit in one room, while seasoned veterans came through one after another to offer them assistance and resources for whatever topic they were "experts" in for our state while other fabulous workshops would be going on around them that could give them curriculum ideas.

What we have today is a different version of that program, which we know is helping our new colleagues even more! Three years ago our committee realized that some major changes needed to be made

to enhance the help we delivered to our newest teachers. Members from our statewide committee, along with our new teachers, committed to coming to the Professional Development Conference a day early to learn from each other. Our program starts at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, with our regular conference taking place Monday through Thursday. We know it's a long time to be away from home and local programs, but the learning and growing that we do as professionals during that time is top notch and like no other we receive!

The Teacher Mentoring Committee members represent variety in our profession. From years of service to specialties to gender to geographical location, we gather a core group of agricultural educators who are passionate about helping others, especially those folks who are just joining the world of agricultural education! The committee has worked hard to develop an agenda that is helpful, but not too overwhelming.

Over the last few years, we have used our state's agricultural education listserv to pose questions and gather information from more than 300 people in all facets of education. We have asked for helpful labs and lessons, advice, ice breakers, scenarios that they have found themselves in as a professional, easy substitute teacher lesson plans, movie worksheets and more. Our colleagues are the best around and have willingly shared a plethora of materials that our Teacher Mentoring Committee has turned into valuable tools to teach our new folks. We have also asked each of our veteran teachers to identify themselves as an "expert" in an area of agricul-

tural education. We update and publish this list yearly so that all who have access to it can pose questions to those folks for helpful feedback. Even veteran teachers take advantage of this list to learn new things from time to time!

During our Sunday program, each new teacher gets a binder filled with the items we collect so that they have a hard copy. We compile a CD of goodies and the Ag in the Classroom material is free for the taking. Each year our committee selects a book that we also pass along to our new instructors. In past years we've used colleagues' recommendations or have found useful resources in the ACTE bookstore while attending the national conference.

Throughout the conference, we discuss the "stuff" described above, but it's really more about establishing relationships. We want these new professionals to realize that we have ALL been in their shoes. We understand the insecurities they are bringing into the profession. We understand the uneasiness about moving to a new community and not doing it the way that Mr./Mrs. So-and-So did it. We understand that they aren't totally prepared for the classes they will teach or the FFA events they will participate in. We want them to know that they can lean on us to get the help and support they need. It no longer matters that we might not be right next door to them, but we ARE an email, text or phone call away.

One member of our committee works to assign a geographical mentor. She asks the mentor at the professional development conference and then the two of them meet, mix

and mingle throughout the conference. We also know many new teachers will come to conference knowing they can count on help from their first mentors – their cooperating teacher – but sometimes there are extenuating circumstances. So we just want to make sure that we’re doing our best to provide any and all help that we can to get them off on the right foot.

Participants also meet and mingle with the WAAE Executive Director, the FFA and FFA Alumni Executive Directors, and the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Ag in the Classroom staff who all inform them about statewide initiatives and current things happening in each of their entities. For dinner, we join together with the WAAE Executive Board who shares helpful insights with the new teachers as they answer scenario questions provided by the new teachers. These questions are again gleaned from fellow professionals who have really had those things happen to them. The new teachers are often amazed by the situation and the answers they receive, but can catalog that information for use down the road.



Quality teachers are at the center of student successes. Dr. Larry Watson (right) and William Toothman discussing his State Equine Science Award with Marion County Technical Center (WV) Principal Matt Call.

Our evening culminates with fabulous door prizes, a social hour and much anticipation for an exciting educational conference. You’ll easily find people sharing stories and getting to know each other better because we set the tone that we’re a welcoming bunch! You’ll also see our new teachers neatly mingled with veterans as they attend the same workshops throughout the week – learning and gaining valuable agricultural resources to take back to their programs. They are infused into everything we do – from workshops to committee work – they are right there with the rest of us, asking questions, learning, growing and developing their professional network.

Since its inception, we have assisted more than 24 new teachers. We’re happy to report that only one of the 24 has left our ranks and that was due to extenuating circumstances. We used to have much higher turnaround than that because the support system just wasn’t in place to help those in need. For example, in my graduating class of 14 twelve years ago, there are only six of us still teaching high

school agriculture. Perhaps some of those may have stayed with us had they been given more initial support. This summer we’re again excited to have five to seven more new teachers

join our ranks.

As a side note, funding for our programming and resources comes from WAAE and the Department of Public Instruction. Our statewide Fundraising Committee also helps us out because all of the money raised from our silent auction at the professional development conference comes back into a fund for scholarships for our new teachers to come to the WAAE PDC to attend the program. We’ve also gotten very creative in adopting those new folks into our hotel rooms and carpooling to make sure they can get there within a limited budget.

Feedback from those going through our program has been wonderful. The one thing that sticks out year after year in the reflection are the new teachers talking about how open and honest we are about the profession. They are thankful for the candid answers to their questions and leave knowing that we will truly help them when they are in need.

Clearly, if you invest in your new people and develop positive helpful relationships, you too can have the success we’ve had in Wisconsin!



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Be a Hero, Be a Mentor

by Laura Hasselquist

Who is your hero? Is it Abraham Lincoln, Eleanor Roosevelt, Martin Luther King Jr., or your mentor? – If it is not your mentor it should be! Sometimes, it's easy to rattle off people who are famous for making a difference, their influence is everywhere, and their impact is undeniable. But, who has had that kind of impact in your own personal life? Think back to your first few years of teaching, who helped you through the rough patches, who gave you advice about classroom management, who was always willing to listen while you vented? It may have been your official "mentor" or maybe the teacher down the hall, or another ag teacher two schools over. Regardless of what position that person held, they were a mentor when you needed it most.

The first few years of teaching can be summed up in one word: overwhelming. The guidance and support from a mentor can be the difference between a "one and done" teacher or someone who chooses to make education their profession. Between curriculum writing, lesson planning, classroom management, FFA trips & fundraisers, and countless meetings; simply surviving that first year is a daunting experience for young teachers. With all the unknowns out there it is easy to understand how a new teacher could throw their hands up in disgust and defeat. With the help and guidance from a mentor all of that can be avoided.

Mentors can be a powerful force in a young teacher's life. I know - mine stopped me from making the worst decision of my life: leaving the teaching profession. In Wisconsin,

all first year teachers are assigned a mentor through the Wisconsin Association of Agricultural Educators (WAAE). I was lucky enough to have Brenda Scheil as my mentor. Brenda teaches just up the road from me, so we were, and still are, fortunate enough to see each other at many different functions over the course of the year. The first time I talked with her she assured me that I could do it, I was what the program and kids needed, and above all I could face the challenges ahead. Amazingly, she told me exactly what I needed to hear. I had recently gone through ten different interviews in two states only to be told, I was so close, I didn't have enough experience, I wasn't what they were looking for, etc. Needless to say, my self-confidence had taken a royal beating. I finally landed my first job (one week before the school year was to start) and was sure the district had just settled and hired me instead of a long term substitute. After that first phone call, I knew I could also count on Brenda to answer any questions, offer advice, or just to talk when a listening ear was needed.

Traditionally, after the first year the WAAE mentor program usually stops. However, it was not until my second year that I came to realize how important a mentor truly was. My first year had been challenging, but no more than normal. During my second year of teaching, I had "the class." All teachers have "the class," the one that makes all teachers reconsider their career, the one that when the assistant principal walks in for an observation, he draws a sharp breath in and at the end of the period he tells you, "That is an interesting group of students. I see just about all of them on a daily basis." That class was the last class of the day. A constant battle

with the students is not how I preferred to end the day. As the semester progressed I began to dread that class, it became like a black cloud hanging over my head. After a particularly bad day of feeling completely inept and incompetent, I came home and typed my letter of resignation. Before I signed it, I decided to call Brenda. After all, she had invested so much time in me and I felt she should know about my impending choice.

I will never forget that conversation as long as I live. I was sitting on my couch watching the rain on my window, when she answered the phone. "Brenda, I am going to quit. I can't do this anymore. The kids deserve a better teacher." Her response was simple, but so powerful. "No, you're not." Two minutes of discussion and reassurance was all it took. I hung up the phone and tore up my letter of resignation. That was over three years ago, and the thought of leaving teaching has never crossed my mind again. No matter what type of obstacle I encounter, I always hear Brenda's voice, "ride the waves, we all have to ride the waves. Be the surfer, sometimes we are on top of the wave, sometimes we get completely knocked off, the trick is to always get back up."

Regardless of how long you have been teaching, you still have valuable gifts, talents, and advice to share with young teachers. You don't have to be an official mentor to make a difference either. Next time you are at an FFA event, sit and introduce yourself to the new teachers. Take time to get to know them and ask how things are going. This creates a feeling of belonging and gives the young teachers another option when they are searching for guidance. You don't have to be an expert in anything or every-

thing; you just have to be willing to help. Sometimes, our most painful struggles can be the things we use to help others the most. Sharing what we know and what we experienced with someone who is just beginning to go through the same exact thing can be a tremendous reassurance. Knowing that someone else has endured that experience can be all the encouragement others need. You never know how powerful and influential one conversation or relationship can be.

Mentors are defined as a wise and trusted counselor. They come in

many forms: classroom management expert, curriculum writer extraordinaire, the FFA application wizard, and in my case, career savior. Are you willing to make the difference in the life of a young teacher? Can you volunteer your time to be mentor? We all have something to share with new teachers. While they may not be faced with a professional crisis, guidance is always appreciated as they try and make it through those first few overwhelming years. In the words of Josh Shipp, you don't have to be the best to make a difference; you have to be willing to make a dif-

ference. Are you willing to make a difference? Are you willing to be someone's hero?



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Maintaining an Adequate Supply of Agricultural Teachers, What is Your Role? (continued from page 8)

Looking to the future, what are our individual roles in maintaining the supply of agricultural education teachers? Teacher education programs at the university level must continue to provide the foundation for success. The programs responsible for training our up and coming teachers must reinforce the concepts of strong classroom instruction, leadership development through involvement in the National FFA Organization and strengthen our experiential learning opportunities through supervised agricultural experiences. Teacher educators must also serve as a support mechanism for new and early career teachers. Having someone to lean on or to bounce ideas or frustrations off of is sometimes the difference between continuing to teach and leaving the profession.

Agricultural education program directors at state and regional levels within states also have a role in maintaining the supply of quality agricul-

tural educators. Staying connected with early career teachers should provide a sense of encouragement and responsibility. It also conditions these teachers to a climate of accountability within the educational system that is mandatory to ensure constant funding.

In conclusion, agriculture teachers in middle and secondary schools are our first line of defense in maintaining the supply of agriculture teachers. They are the first point of contact and exposure future teachers often have to the agricultural education profession. Agricultural education teachers should serve as role models in their community, should perform at a high level in the classroom, and should provide opportunities for their students to excel regardless of their background or area of interest. When we have conversations with our students about teaching agriculture, we should be positive and just as quick to encourage teach-

ing as we are a career in medicine or law. Furthermore, as we interact with the leaders of our communities and states, we should showcase all the things the students are doing. It will amaze some leaders as well as lay the foundation for expanding programs.

These are simple suggestions from two former agricultural education teachers who have seen our profession through several different lenses. We are grateful to be in the profession. It is our hope that we not only maintain the supply of agriculture teachers, but that we can increase, both in quality and quantity, the supply of agricultural education teachers in our country. However, as society continues to change, our profession will have to change with it or we will see just how bad being complacent can be. Our families and students need us to continue to be the best we can be and continue to blaze a new trail.

Half the Battle...

by Becki Lawver

Recruiting students to teach secondary agricultural education is a critical component in maintaining and growing agriculture programs across the country, but it is just half of the battle we face. As high school teachers, teacher educators, and stakeholders in agricultural education we need to begin looking more closely at what draws students into the agricultural education major, and then into the profession.

To begin, we need to first identify factors that influence a student's decision to become a secondary agriculture teacher in the first place. A 2009 research study sought to identify the beliefs, attitudes, and intentions of 145 senior agricultural education majors at 19 institutions in nine states throughout the Midwest. The following summarizes the findings of that study.

Who are they?

The majority of these students (college seniors, majoring in agricultural education) had been enrolled in high school agricultural education for four years, were members of the FFA, had an SAE project, and were members of 4-H.

• What do they believe about teaching agricultural education?

These students' beliefs about teaching reveal that they consider teaching agricultural education as a highly skilled occupation that has a high social status. Additionally, they perceive it to be a career in which teachers have high morale.

• What is their attitude about teaching agricultural education?

These students' attitudes about teaching agricultural education indicate that they view teaching as a way to make contributions to society, they have had positive prior teaching and learning experiences, they believe that they have the ability to teach, they enjoy working with adolescents, and find intrinsic value in the career.

• What is their intention to teach?

These students, typically, are satisfied with their choice to become an agriculture teacher, and the majority plan to pursue a career in teaching after student teaching and graduation.

Because the majority of the current agricultural education majors come from high school agriculture programs, efforts should be made to continue to recruit students from these tried and true sources. However, as agriculture continues to grow and change, we should begin to explore recruiting from other populations including urban, suburban and rural areas where there is a high need for agriculture teachers and programs specifically where there are currently no programs in place. Recruiting agriculture teachers from the other sciences such as biology, environmental science or physical science could be explored as an alternative recruitment approach as well.

We need to begin looking more closely at what draws students into the agricultural education major.

• Does their background play a role in their attitude, beliefs, and intent to teach?

NO! No difference was found in students' intent to teach and their gender, how long they were enrolled in agricultural education courses, how long they were members of the FFA, participation in SAE, or their years of 4-H membership.

What does this mean for teachers, teacher educators, state staff, and other stakeholders interested in recruiting the next generation of agricultural educators?

1. Keep recruiting from high school classrooms.

2. Provide students with opportunities to teach, early.

These students believed that teaching agricultural education was a highly skilled career and that they possessed the skills to be successful. Most likely, these beliefs developed from positive teaching experiences and interactions with children and adolescents throughout 4-H and FFA involvement, community activities, or employment. High school teachers should continue to capitalize on agricultural education SAE, PALS, and other informal teaching opportunities and provide high school students with the chance to test the waters. Teacher educators should concentrate on enhancing early, positive field experi-

ences to maximize students' knowledge of teaching agriculture prior to student teaching. Finally, agricultural education majors need the opportunity to take quality courses in technical agriculture that will enhance the content area knowledge they desire before they get to the classroom.

3. If you love your job, tell your students!

These students believe that agriculture teachers have high teacher morale. All of us need to promote the positive aspects of teaching agricultural education, including working with kids, job security, and getting to teach something you really enjoy. As a profession, agricultural educators should continue to create programs and promote the profession as a career that teachers truly enjoy and as one where teachers are well-respected.

4. Visit with students who seem to have a passion for teaching.

Continue to endorse agricultural education as a career that is a match for students if they have a passion for teaching, wish to work with adoles-

cents, want a job that offers a steady career path, and can give them the opportunity to remain a lifelong learner of agriculture and teaching.

5. Don't sell it as a fallback career!

These students **CHOSE** to major in agricultural education and **WANT** to teach when they are done. It was not considered a fallback career for these students, and should not be promoted as such. Continue to support students' confidence in their career choice and encourage them as they develop.

Looking toward the future...

Recruiting agricultural education majors is an essential component in our teacher education programs. Teacher educators should continue their recruitment efforts in the traditional arenas, such as the high school classroom and FFA activities. Yet, they should also be open to finding other areas for recruitment, such as high school science classrooms and urban schools with no agriculture programs. Secondary agriculture teachers must work hard to sell their job. When teaching a careers unit, why

not incorporate your job as an agriculture teacher? Teachers could also provide opportunities for students to experiment with teaching younger students and then identify those who

have an interest and talent for teaching.

We seem to have a reasonable supply of agricultural education majors across the country. In fact most students are completing their student teaching successfully and graduate on time. Yet, we should be aware of a current national study of the supply and demand for agricultural education that reports that almost half of new graduates chose careers other than teaching. This is something we need to start thinking about for the future as it can become problematic for current agricultural education programs. Especially, if we have qualified graduates choosing to do something else. If a career in agricultural education is not seen as a fallback career, why are qualified graduates choosing to do something else? If they believe that they have the skills and ability to teach, does industry offer them something better? Even though they believe that teachers have high morale and can make a positive difference, is it not all it's cracked up to be? Does student teaching change their mind? Are they place bound? These, among others, are all questions we need to start thinking about. We've got students graduating as qualified agricultural education teachers and most accept their first teaching job, yet we still have some that choose to do something else. The next question becomes, how do we get more of them into the profession, and better yet, how do we keep them?



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David Bourgeois, Agricultural Education Teacher at Ripley High School (WV), plays a major role in the success of his students.

Maintaining the Balance and Keeping the Sanity

by Cherie Rogier

First week of April: Farm Bureau Youth Conference on Monday-Tuesday, District Public Speaking on Wednesday, Ag Safety Day Camp on Thursday, Section Dairy Cattle CDE Friday, and interview an American FFA Degree candidate on Saturday while he's home for the weekend.

Second week of April: Section Ag Business Management CDE and Section Ag Mechanics CDE on Tuesday, host Section Horticulture CDE on Wednesday, another American FFA Degree interview on Thursday, and Section Livestock Judging CDE, District Dairy Cattle CDE, and District Horticulture CDE on Friday. Oh wait, the National Chapter Award application is due on Friday also.

"Hey, Principal Daniels, we have five FFA field trips this month; one for Ag Safety Day Camp, three for Career Development Events, and a conference. Yes, I'm taking several juniors. Yes, I do realize that the ACT and state achievement tests are at the end of the month."

I think I've forgotten about what the majority of my paycheck comes from: teaching students about the importance of agriculture. So, in addition to the above list, I also need to teach six classes a day, make substitute plans, and go to an IEP meeting or two.

Is it any wonder why agriculture teachers get burnt out? I feel like I'm juggling seven bowling balls while standing on a glass floor above a pool of hungry sharks. I can't even remember how many nights I was still at school at 9:00 p.m. during those two weeks. Three of my closest

friends are also agriculture teachers. I know I'm not alone in this.

Are we crazy?

No. We are agricultural educators, by choice. Why? We realize the importance of agricultural education and want to ensure the future of agriculture to the best of our abilities. Agricultural education is not a career,

profession.

In Illinois, 85% of the agriculture teachers (271 of 318 schools) are members of the Illinois Association of Vocational Agriculture Teachers (IAVAT). While the IAVAT is not the only group that works to keep people in agricultural education, it does play a big role. The IAVAT provides numerous activities to support new and

We must continue to decrease attrition rates of agriculture teachers.

it is a passion. Do what you love, love what you do.

But what do we do when that passion overwhelms us? Consumes our lives to the point that we don't have a life outside of agricultural education? Hello, agriculture teacher retention problem.

The future of agricultural education is dependent not only on recruiting quality teacher candidates, but also retaining those teachers once they are in the classroom. As all agriculture teachers know, while university coursework helps to train us for a teaching career, in no way does it fully prepare us for the vast amount of work, responsibilities, and roles that we have as agriculture teachers and FFA advisors. This can be overwhelming even for the best of teachers. In order to maintain an adequate supply of agriculture teachers, we must focus on two things: encouraging Ag Ed majors at the university level, and offering adequate support services during the first 5-10 years of teaching when agriculture education teachers are most likely to leave the

upcoming agriculture teachers in its association, with the Ag Ed Teacher Recruitment and Retention committee at the helm of most of the work. This committee coordinates the IAVAT Student Branch for college agricultural education majors. Additionally, the committee helps with the Beginning FFA Advisor's workshop for first year teachers, and in 2010, conducted an Unconference for 3rd-7th year teachers, focused on agriculture teacher burnout. The IAVAT also offers a special workshop for 1-5 year agriculture teachers in conjunction with its annual conference. Outside of the IAVAT, the Illinois State Board of Education offers two graduate classes to agriculture teachers in their beginning years of teaching that focus on specific issues and activities that beginning teachers may struggle with.

As this article continues, I am going to focus on a few events that I feel improve the recruitment and retention of quality agriculture teachers in Illinois and nationwide.

Student Branch

Student Branch is for any community college or university student considering a career in agricultural education. It is a two-day, one night conference designed to provide additional curriculum, FFA, classroom, and human resources to future agriculture teachers. There are three Student Branches each year. Two are held in the fall and spring, with the location rotating between the four agricultural universities in Illinois. The other one is always held during the IAVAT Annual Conference.

Each Student Branch offers workshops in curriculum, classroom management, and FFA. CDE training has been popular, and offers hands-on practice in both popular and lesser known CDE's. Often times, agriculture teachers who have been successful at the CDE have presented this workshop. Other popular workshops in recent years have included teaching agricultural mechanics, SAEs, professionalism, and so on. One of the most popular segments of Student Branch is the "teacher discussion panel." At each conference, a panel of agriculture teachers is brought in to discuss various topics, such as first year challenges, how to work with parents and community members, the process of student teaching, and so on. Conference participants are able to ask questions of the panel and get a variety of answers and solutions to concerns and questions they may have.

There are multiple benefits to Student Branch. Besides the obvious benefit of gaining new information, one of the benefits is that it is organized and presented by current agriculture teachers. This provides participants with real life solutions and ideas that have been proven. Additionally, it gives future agriculture teachers familiar faces and resource-

es to turn to while they are student teaching and in the beginning stages of their career. I know that for several participants, it has helped them find the agriculture department that suits their needs for student teaching, allowing them to have a more positive experience. Finally, by holding the summer Student Branch in conjunction with the state agriculture teacher's conference, these future agriculture teachers are able to get a better understanding of the purpose and benefits of the professional organization.

Unconference – Surviving Agriculture Teacher Burnout

The idea for the Unconference came about after a discussion between several agriculture teachers in their 3rd-7th years of teaching – not quite a beginner, but not a veteran either. The discussion had included the various frustrations and challenges this demographic of teacher continued to face, how some were experiencing burnout, and how others could see it coming. After realizing there were not any resources to help them through it, the Unconference was born. The name Unconference was selected based on the purpose of the event. Instead of being yet another formal, lecture-type conference to attend, the idea was to be an informal, interactive discussion of problems and solutions felt by agriculture teachers worried about becoming burnt out.

Organized by Jay Solomonson of Orion High School and conducted by Dakota High School agriculture teacher Heather Obert, the Unconference was marketed specifically to teachers in their 3rd-7th year of teaching. Participants broke into pairs and interviewed one another, offering everyone a chance to reflect on both successes and struggles in their teaching careers thus far. After the interviews,

participants then compiled a list of the issues that continued to burden them and the group discussed each issue, its importance, and brainstormed solutions.

Besides the typical frustrations of time constraints, having a large number of commitments, and determining levels of achievement, other common themes were identified. Some of them included:

- Playing well with others – how do we deal with agriculture teachers we do not respect?
- Balancing professional and personal lives – feeling guilty for putting one before the other.
- How do you define success – do we measure success based on the classroom or the FFA chapter?
- Achieving success – you've achieved success, what's the next challenge? Or, how can you ever be successful when you are always up against the best of the best?

Several of the struggles that the participants experienced were in line with what research has found about why teachers get burnt out – workload, recognition, and personal characteristics (Walker, Garton, Kitchel, 2004). Unfortunately, there isn't an easy, one-size-fits-all solution to each problem. While participants were able to discuss solutions that had worked for them and others, each teacher must figure out what is best for them individually. Overall though, some general ideas on dealing with burnout were reinforced:

- Set limits (i.e. say that you are leaving school at 5:30, and do it). What doesn't get done today will still be there tomorrow.
- Find ways to reduce your workload. Give fewer assignments, or

evaluate the CDE's you compete in and eliminate ones that provide similar skills to students.

- Have a hobby (mine is truck and tractor pulling). Make time for that hobby, even if it is a week before the quarter ends, or if you have to take a personal day in the middle of getting record books ready for proficiencies.
- Accept that some things take years to change. Do your best, everyday.

Graduate Classes & Workshops

Offering graduate classes or workshops designed to provide additional support to beginning agriculture teachers is an excellent idea that many states participate in. The Facilitating Coordination in Agricultural Education (FCAE) is a special project of the Illinois State Board of Education that works to promote and develop agricultural education and provide assistance and resources to current agriculture programs statewide. Through FCAE, two graduate classes are offered in Illinois that provide new teachers with the necessary resources and support needed to get through the first years of teaching. One class is aimed directly at first-year teachers. The other class is intended for 2nd-5th year teachers. Because these classes meet four times throughout the year, continual support is provided as it is needed, rather than a one-time workshop either at the beginning or the end of the school year. The biggest challenge to these courses is coordinating everyone's schedules to allow for four days of class spread throughout the school year.

One of the best resources that an agriculture teacher can use is their fellow agriculture teachers. Things that have worked for one agriculture teacher can be tailored and adjusted

to work for another.

Others

Mentors – formal or informal. It is pertinent for every newer agriculture teacher to have not one, but multiple teachers they can turn to for guidance, assistance, and a role model. Find a teacher you really admire, and watch them to see how they maintain a balance. I am blessed to work with an agriculture teacher with 26 years of experience. Additionally, there are two female agriculture teachers that I greatly admire in Illinois. Both have successful agriculture programs (classroom and FFA), and are managing to balance their professional lives while also raising young children. When I am at that stage in life, I hope that I can be as balanced as they are.

Colleagues - I have an outstanding teaching partner that I work with every day. Three of my closest friends are agriculture teachers. In addition to them, I have a great group of teachers in my section and district that are supportive of each other, and always willing to lend an ear or a hand. Have people you can talk to, commiserate with, and bounce ideas off.

Professional organizations - Get involved with your state agricultural educator's association. You will meet some great individuals from your state and other states, which will help you stay motivated and excited about agricultural education.

Resources - Don't reinvent the wheel. Use the NAAE Communities of Practice or other curriculum and instructional services out there. While you often will need to customize things to your own specifications, it will make your life easier. Additionally, share your resources to make someone else's lives easier. The wheel rolls both ways.

As agricultural educators, we must continue working to decrease attrition rates of agriculture teachers. With the number of agriculture teaching jobs that go unfilled every year this is a major hurdle that must be crossed. Each and every state needs to continue to offer resources and assistance to newer agriculture teachers, in order to keep them in the profession and help advance agricultural education to the best that it has ever been.

Resources

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Bridging the Gap... Connecting Secondary and University Programs to Grow the Next Generation

by Allison J. L. Touchstone

Recruiting new teachers. Recruiting students. Rigor and relevance in the classroom. Dual credit and post secondary connections. If it's not one thing, it's six others, or so it seems. All of these issues and topics are vital to the continued success and growth of agricultural education nationwide. So which one to choose, prioritize? The next question is, do we have to?

In a small state with relatively few agricultural education programs and even fewer teacher educators, Idaho has had the opportunity to be creative in student recruitment and retention at the secondary and post secondary levels while addressing state and federal requirements to maintain high quality programs. Idaho implemented a Teach Ag workshop in conjunction with the State FFA Leadership Conference in 2007 as a recruitment activity (Touchstone, Swan, & Riesenberg, 2009b) similar to the efforts going on across the country. The next school year, the University of Idaho, in conjunction with the Idaho Vocational Agriculture Teachers' Association and the State Division of Professional Technical Education established a Dual Credit program that directly linked our land-grant university with the secondary agricultural education programs in the state. As a part of the Dual Credit program, one class is Survey of the Expectations and Responsibilities of Teaching High School Agriculture, otherwise known as The Bridge Project (Touchstone, 2010; Touchstone, Swan, & Riesenberg, 2009a). The purpose of this course is to bridge the gap between high school students

considering becoming agriculture instructors and a teacher educator in the University of Idaho Department of Agricultural and Extension Education.

Although these three activities may seem to have little in common except the time of their inception, they are integrally connected in their implementation and meeting state and national goals related to education and teacher recruitment. Idaho's Team Ag Ed has been directly involved in the development of each of these programs and their long term success. The Teach Ag workshop is conducted annually by the teacher educators from the University of Idaho. However, it is an invitation only workshop at State FFA Leadership Convention. The local instructors are asked to submit the names of two high quality students who might be interested in becoming ag teachers. These students receive a personalized invitation to participate in the workshop

where university administration, faculty, students, IVATA Leadership, state staff, and FFA members discuss the need for quality agriculture instructors and the long term

benefits related to being a secondary agriculture instructor. Students are encouraged to consider the profession by all of the presenters and are expected to ask questions of the professionals in Idaho Agricultural Education.

The Dual Credit program offers coursework in animal systems; plant systems; agribusiness systems; power, structural and technical systems; as well as agricultural education, which align directly with the national clusters project and state and nationally recognized pathways ("Career Pathways," 2010; Touchstone, 2006). Secondary instructors **MUST** be affiliated in one of the technical agriculture areas to teach those courses, but all instructors are eligible to enroll students in agricultural education coursework. The Bridge Project is designed to allow potential agriculture instructors to get a taste of the profession while still in high school, allowing them to make more in-



High school students are nominated to attend the Teach Ag Workshop by their agriculture instructor as likely candidates to major in agricultural education and become the next generation of agriculture instructors.

formed enrollment decisions. Previous research has shown that students attending the University of Idaho with an initial major in agricultural education have the highest college degree completion rate of any initial major in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (Braun, 2004; Touchstone & Riesenber, 1997).

When participating in the Bridge Project, students are required to tutor other students, teach a lesson (or portion of a lesson), conduct a research project and write a paper, assist in coaching an FFA CDE team, as well as attend district teacher meetings or activities. These experiences allow students a first-hand look at the responsibilities of a local agriculture instructor at the time when they are making life decisions and can be involved on the teacher side of the podium with direct supervision from the local instructor and guidance from the teacher educator.

Michelle Ball, a senior agriculture student in Idaho participated in The Bridge Project in the 2010-2011 school year. Michelle states:

I LOVED the class. As a high school agriculture student who spent most all of my time in the agriculture department, this class gave me another reason to be there. It was also a benefit as it allowed me to further explore what an agriculture instructor did aside from teaching in front of the class which helped me direct the other classes that I took in high school to better prepare myself for college. My Ag Ed 160 instructor and local agriculture advisors worked together to help me capitalize on the knowledge that I gained from this experience. They included me in a lot of discussions and decisions to let me be a part of real situations and issues that will come up in my future career as an agriculture instructor. My advisors allowed me to fill a 'Jr. Advi-

sor' role. All three aspects of agriculture education were fulfilled both through the Ag Ed 160 class as well as at the local chapter level; from assisting in training Career Development Event teams, helping students brainstorm and create plans for their Supervised Agriculture Experience, and the many hours of tutoring and even teaching a lesson or two here and there, this experience was amazing. Through my interaction with actual students in real situations, I was able to gain so much experience. The hands on interactions are things that simply cannot be learned from a book. It was an amazing class. You would do hands on activities at the local level, and follow up online with the class and reflect on what you learned. If it weren't for the journals, I wouldn't have ever realized how much more I actually learned. The set up of the class was great too. All the assignments and projects were given at the beginning semester with all the deadlines so you could arrange accordingly. The instructor was so wonderful as she would grade, return, and give feedback on assignments in a very timely manner. This was my favorite class in all four years of high school. It gave me the most useful and meaningful experiences that will benefit me in my further career pursuits.



Developing positive relationships with faculty, administration, and staff is also a vital aspect of the Idaho system. Dr. John Foltz, Associate Dean and Director of Academic Programs of the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, is taking the opportunity to meet potential students as he participated in the workshop.

As a direct result of her participation in the class, Michelle was a presenter in the 2011 Teach Ag workshop, letting other students know about the course and its benefits to the high school student. She is also attending the University of Idaho in the fall of 2011 as an agricultural education major with her Ag Ed 160 instructor as her undergraduate advisor.

Senioritis seems to afflict more and more students each year, and the need for increased rigor and relevance in the senior year has been demanded nationwide (Kruegar, 2006). Students gain needed college

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Look Where You're Going, Not Where You've Been

by Kimberly A. Bellah

Budget cutbacks, furloughs, layoffs. In the educational world, these are some of the most frightening words and phrases teachers, parents, and students will hear. In this “last hired, first fired” economic time, the agricultural education profession is placed in an even more precarious position when considering recruitment and retention of highly qualified, motivated, student-centered new professionals.

Nationally, the profession began experiencing a shortfall of teachers in the early 1990s. Some states avoided the tragedy of programs closing or filled with long-term substitutes until much later, but now, it seems no state has a bullpen of backup teachers scrambling to take up the challenge should someone fall short, retire, or open a new program. Rather, the pendulum is now swinging in the direction of programs desiring the best

teachers scrambling to advertise positions early to get those few “top tier” teachers who will make programs grow and prosper.

No offense intended, but the agricultural education profession, as is seemingly true across the career and technical education spectrum, is...ahem...shall we say... an aging profession. Approximately one-third of the current agricultural educators will retire in the next five to ten years. For states that already leave positions open or close them indefinitely, this leaves an even greater gap for those few graduates who choose to enter the teaching profession.

Curriculum changes across the nation reflect the awareness of agricultural education to shift from an elective-based delivery context to one that meets the growing list of high school graduation and college entrance requirements in science, mathematics, language arts, social studies, and others. The trend began in the early



Student success is the result of a cooperative effort between student and teacher. Joe McDougal (right) and Catherine May informing Shady Spring High School (WV) Principal Danny Moyer of Catherine's upcoming American FFA Degree.

states who cultivate the fine arts concepts in welding and floral design.

Agricultural educators at all levels have long been aware that what we teach gets to the root of what students need in terms of actively learning and anchoring concepts related to math and science, but through a concrete, experiential mode of delivery. As a result, we have more students in our secondary programs than ever before.

So why are we facing such a gap in teachers entering, and remaining in, the profession?

The teaching profession does not have an “entry level” mode. Once they graduate and receive certification, teachers are handed the keys to the classroom and are expected to teach; and coach teams; and manage budgets; and advise student organizations; and drive buses; and oversee Supervised Agricultural Experiences; and attend faculty and site-based committee meetings; and communicate effectively with parents; and report suspected instances of child abuse; and ensure students eat breakfast; and; and; and.....

Now, teachers must also take content from required core classes for the undergraduate degree and incorporate it into lesson plans and learning activities connecting the agricultural curriculum to student learning outcomes. Students who meet academic requirements through agricultural classes are expected to know and pass the same standardized examinations as students who take a traditional set of courses.

All of this can be intimidating and overwhelming to even the most seasoned teachers. Imagine standing

in the shoes of a new teacher. But wait... imagine standing in the shoes of a new teacher.

One may be reminded of the adage: They don't know what they don't know. A new teacher's frame of reference is comprised of only that which is modeled for them. What if they learned from the start what is expected of them in today's agricultural education climate?

While change is never something undertaken with ease, it is certainly a manageable process if structured with assistance from key stakeholders. If retention of outstanding agricultural educators is the goal, then teacher education programs are encouraged to use tools about which they teach. An advisory council comprised of teachers who are innovators, yet whose careers are well beyond those tentative years, can help restructure curriculum and experiences for preservice teacher success. Such a council will provide an objective eye and triangulation for program evaluation.

Agricultural teachers entering the profession today enter with the reputation of their predecessors as teachers who involve students on both ends of the learning spectrum, but are also saddled with the magnified expectation of teaching to more rigorous academic standards tied to test scores. More than ever, teacher education programs must take that "learn by doing" philosophy to the next level by ensuring preservice teachers experience modeling, coaching, and feedback opportunities directly reflecting all areas of a balanced agricultural education program.

Preservice teachers should learn about and experience SAEs in the traditional sense, but should actively engage in research and exploratory SAEs as well.

Preservice teachers should learn about and engage with FFA activities in the traditional sense, but should actively understand and experience the FFA in terms of global and non-competitive opportunities as well.

Preservice teachers should learn about the traditional agricultural content, but should be challenged and held accountable for incorporating the required state and national standards into the lesson planning activities from the beginning.

Teacher education programs must take that "learn by doing" philosophy to the next level.

Preservice teachers should learn about the traditional agricultural content, but should be challenged and held accountable for teaching that content in a variety of ways using a variety of methods to engage all learners.

Retention of highly qualified, motivated, and capable agricultural science teachers will require we do more than simply turn out high numbers from postsecondary agricultural education programs. Rather, much like our secondary counterparts have already done, we must spend significant time and effort in redesigning the postsecondary experience as well.

Some may argue that preservice teachers should not be expected to shoulder so much responsibility while they are completing certification requirements. Why? Will they not have to shoulder all of the responsibility once they are hired for their first teaching position? Shouldn't they have as many tools as possible

at their disposal to move beyond a sense of survival and disillusionment and into anticipation and excitement? How can we send a teacher into the profession with a clear conscience if we fail to fully prepare him or her?

That isn't mentorship; that's censorship.

With graduates who must step into the classroom and teach core content using an agricultural context, it is incumbent upon agricultural teacher education programs to em-

brace those changes and assist preservice teachers long before they step into a classroom of their own. Only in that sense will teachers enter the profession knowing what is in front of them, able to hit the ground running, and change the paradigm of administrators facing funding cuts because their new agricultural educators give them more return on the district's investment. Only in that sense will we retain those outstanding agricultural educators and ensure the future of the program.



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Sifting for Teachers - New Practices for an Old Problem

by Justin L. Killingsworth, William A. Bird, & Michael J. Martin

A few of us were discussing our past efforts in recruiting our students to become school-based agricultural educators. An alarming question was consistently asked. Did we do enough to encourage students to pursue careers in teaching secondary agriculture? While recruiting potential agricultural educators requires the effort of all of those involved in secondary agricultural education, as high school teachers, had we been sifting out the top students in our programs? Effective sifting should target all students with the potential to be great agricultural educators. Coordinating our recruitment programs at the local, regional, state, and national levels can ensure that we not only sift through our students for great potential educators, but also successfully recruit future agricultural educators into the profession. The national program, Teach Ag Campaign (NAAE, 2011), lays the ground work for recruiting future agricultural educators. So, let's discuss two effective programs at the state and regional level in Illinois and Tennessee, and then propose a unique local level activity for teacher recruitment.

State Level Initiative - Elite Conference in Illinois

Illinois agricultural education stakeholders have designed a day-long workshop for juniors and seniors in high school who are interested in teaching agriculture. The Elite Conference is coordinated by Mrs. Mindy Bunselmeyer, District Director of the Facilitating Coordination in Agricultural Education (FCAE) in Illinois,

to encourage students to enter Career and Technical Education (CTE) teaching. The conference is an all inclusive experience in high school agricultural education. The Elite Conference features university and college representatives, presentations from agricultural education organizations, and high school teachers. The event has even stretched beyond agricultural education. Starting with the 4th year of the conference in 2009, five CTE areas have been included in the event: agriculture, business, family & consumer sciences, health occupations, and industrial technology. The conference has grown to 67 students attending the workshop in 2010 for the agriculture section alone.

The Elite Conference is a six hour long event and the location has rotated throughout Illinois. Students meet with university and junior college representatives about the educational requirements needed for becoming an agricultural educator. Breakout sessions allow students from the different CTE areas to meet together. Agriculture students learn about Illinois's Agriculture in the Classroom program and listen to current educators about the joys of teaching. They even have the chance to do teaching activities and talk about their experiences. A lunch is provided and snacks are offered during the breaks. Door prizes are also given out at the end of the conference.

The conference is by no means a small project. Mindy has to worry about facilities to host the ever growing conference and funds for hosting the conference. She has to organize representatives and speakers from a variety of places. Agricultural edu-

cators and students must be able to take a day off from school and find transportation to the event. But, the impact that the Elite Conference has on students is great. A student who attended the conference said, "Everything was amazing; it really continued to give me the punch to keep going; the teacher panel was the best – to see real life situations" (Facilitating Coordination in Agricultural Education, 2010). These types of events are valuable tools needed to recruit every possible future educator of agriculture.

Regional Level Initiative - Teach Ag Rally in Tennessee

Agricultural educators and university teacher educators in Tennessee are taking it upon themselves to recruit potential agricultural educators. For the past two years at the Tennessee State FFA Convention a small group of agricultural educators have organized the Teach Ag Rally. The Teach Ag Rally is a workshop aimed at educating and recruiting students interested in becoming an agricultural educator later in life. The workshop introduces students to the "big picture" of what it means to be an agricultural educator. The workshop is held between convention sessions and generally lasts about an hour. During the workshop, students are actively involved in learning the many dynamics of what it means to be an agricultural educator: university degree requirements, challenges and rewards of working with students, day-to-day lesson planning and teaching in a classroom, managing an FFA chapter, supervising student SAE projects, coordinating livestock exhibiting programs, gen-

eral stresses and rewards of being a teacher, and many more. Students participate in a question and answer session to gain insight from agricultural educators who have teaching experience ranging from one to more than thirty years.

Ms. Ann Johnson—a sixteen year teaching veteran at the Munford High School Agriculture Department and president of the Tennessee Association of Agricultural Education—is the person responsible for starting this workshop intended to fulfill the demand for agricultural educators in Tennessee. Prior to state convention, Ms. Johnson sends an email to all school-based Tennessee agricultural educators to tell them about the workshop—its purpose, location, and time. The email is an invitation for advisors to send one or more student(s) of any age to the Teach Ag Rally. Teachers are encouraged to send students to the workshop who have expressed an interest in becoming an agricultural educator as well as any student(s) the teacher believes to have potential to become a successful agricultural educator.

A workshop such as this one—targeting some of agricultural education’s finest students—is desperately needed, especially in Tennessee. Over the past several years, Tennessee has experienced a shortage of agricultural educators resulting in numerous positions going unfilled. Although the true impact of this workshop cannot yet be measured, it has proven to be quite popular with high school students during its first two years of existence. In 2010, approximately 75 students attended the Teach Ag Rally. In March 2011, the student attendance increased to over 100 students eager to learn more about what it means to be a part of a truly rewarding and challenging profession—a teacher of agricultural education.

Local Level Initiative - Job Shadowing Agriculture Teachers

While the two previously mentioned recruitment programs have produced positive results, we offer one other option for introducing students to careers as agricultural educators—a one-day exchange program for a student to shadow an agricultural educator at another high school. Such an experience would afford the student the opportunity to see firsthand how agricultural educators differ from the one another. Undoubtedly, there are multiple details to iron out beforehand; a few to consider include:

How do you select which student(s) is offered the opportunity? We contend that you should target the heavily-involved FFA members and students who have not been as active within the program but exhibit the potential to be an excellent educator. The number of students you identify depends primarily on the resources of time and availability. We suggest limiting the experience to one student for the first year as to not overburden yourself or the cooperating teacher—the number of participants can then be increased in the future.

What logistical details should be considered? To start with, transportation to the cooperating site will be needed. Depending on your school’s protocol, transportation may be provided by you, the student, or a parent. If you are intending to accompany your student, then the incurred costs will include a substitute teacher’s daily wage and the planning entailed from the absence. Time requirements incurred from letting a student from the cooperating program observe you should be minimal.

What grade level would be the best time for a student to experience this exchange program? One major

factor to consider when selecting students for the shadowing experience is their level of maturity. Maturity will vary by student, but we contend that students need to take the experience seriously and be capable of handling this responsibility. As a general rule, the junior year of high school would be ideal—maximizing the student’s maturity level while still allowing flexibility to revise their post-graduation plans.

Which agriculture programs would be “ideal” for the exchange program? While good rapport with the cooperating teacher is preferred, the primary focus should be to partner with a program that is both effective and varies from the experience a student would know as their “home” program. A secondary concern would be to target a program that is nearby to minimize travel costs.

How do you obtain administrator support? With the ever common limitation of school budgets, it is critical to communicate the limited monetary expenses that will be incurred to school administrators. In contrast, you must also clearly define the potential benefits of career-planning for the student.

Programs to Develop an Adequate Supply of Agriculture Teachers

Improved recruitment of future agricultural educators is the way that we keep our profession alive and vibrant. These types of initiatives can more effectively sift through our student populations for future agricultural educators. We close with a note about our personal attitudes—we need to focus on developing habits to discuss what we love about our jobs, rather than letting the students that are closest to us see our frustrations and hear our complaints. Recruiting future generations of agriculture teachers is our responsibility, so let’s

coordinate those efforts to efficiently sift through our students in a manner that highlights the positive attributes of what it means to be an agricultural educator.



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experiences through dual credit, dual enrollment, and advanced placement coursework which adds both rigor and relevance into the senior year of high school. The Dual Credit program, in general, increased student likelihood to attend the University of Idaho from 74% to 81% (Touchstone, 2010). With programmatic partnering in Teach Ag, Dual Credit, and The Bridge Project, Idaho Team Ag Ed has developed a system of recruitment for new agriculture teachers that reaches into the high school classroom and sets students on a career path before they ever reach a college classroom.

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