Forward Progress: Solving the Agriculture Teacher Shortage

The National Teach Ag Campaign

Since its launch in 2009, the National Teach Ag Campaign has brought new awareness of the need to recruit and retain quality and diverse agriculture teachers, encouraged others to consider a career in teaching agriculture, and celebrated the positive contributions that agriculture teachers make in their schools and communities.

Although there are still serious deficits in the number of qualified agriculture teachers, the past year has seen great strides being taken by stakeholders across the United States to lessen the shortage. The National Teach Ag Campaign is proud to have played a critical role in those advances. From updated shortage data to piloting the State Teach Ag Results (STAR) program, 2014 was a successful year in agricultural education.

The Shortage

Currently, more than 30 states are experiencing a shortage of agriculture teachers. During the 2014-2015 academic school year, there was a deficit of more than 400 agriculture teachers. These positions were either left unfilled or filled with alternatively certified teachers. Causes of this shortage include:

- Agriculture teachers retiring (approximately 200 each year)
- New agriculture teacher positions opening due to growth and expansion of programs (253 new positions)
- Agricultural education graduates accepting jobs outside of teaching (232 in 2014)
- Agriculture teachers leaving the profession for other opportunities (739 in 2014)

“People need to understand the important role agriculture plays in our daily lives,” said Ellen Thompson, Project Director for the National Teach Ag Campaign. “Agriculture teachers are absolutely essential to make sure this message is clear and available to all.”
Teach Ag Programs
A newer initiative of the National Teach Ag Campaign is the State Teach Ag Results (STAR) program. This program is for states who are interested in developing concrete, sustainable and effective recruitment and retention strategies to address the teacher shortage in their own state. Participating states sign a two-year commitment and convene a team of stakeholders. The team, with guidance from the National Teach Ag Campaign, develops a plan based on historical data and real-time events. Each STAR state receives support and resources from the National Teach Ag Campaign, including in-kind design services for promotional materials and access to grant money to implement their recruitment and retention strategies.

States currently involved in the STAR program:
- Arizona
- California
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Louisiana
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- North Carolina
- New York
- Pennsylvania
- Oregon
- South Dakota
- Virginia

This year, the campaign will also celebrate the sixth annual National Teach Ag Day with a live event in Washington, D.C. The event will consist of a future agriculture teacher symposium, stakeholder dialogue, and a live webcast — a part of the celebration since 2012. Students and teachers are encouraged to participate in National Teach Ag Day with their own celebrations and events across the country, many of which will be highlighted during the live webcast through social media.

“National Teach Ag Day is a special time for us to say ‘thank you’ to all agriculture teachers for everything they do to inspire students and positively impact communities each and every day,” said Thompson.
In addition to these initiatives, each year the National Teach Ag Campaign selects 12 agricultural education majors from across the United States for its Teach Ag Ambassador program. Students involved in the ambassador program work at the Teach Ag booth at the National FFA Convention, where they interact with more than 1,000 high school students who are interested in a career in agricultural education. The ambassadors are also responsible for taking the Teach Ag message back to their home states after the National FFA Convention, by conducting workshops and presentations for high school and college students interested in pursuing a degree in agricultural education.

Teach Ag Support Resources
To complement its extensive programming, Teach Ag has a comprehensive website filled with tools and resources for those interested in becoming agriculture teachers or learning more about the national agriculture teacher shortage. The website has interactive planning tools, videos, lessons, games, and activities for various audiences to use. It also has best practice models, supply and demand data, and promotional materials for those who want to learn more about the agriculture teacher shortage or to spread the message and importance of teaching agriculture.

Support for the National Teach Ag Campaign comes from leaders in the agriculture industry. The campaign is currently funded by the CHS Foundation (since 2011), DuPont Pioneer (since 2014), and Growth Energy (since 2014) because they understand that investing in quality teachers is the best way to help students succeed. Together, these companies have contributed more than $900,000, through the National FFA Foundation, to the National Teach Ag Campaign since 2011.

For more information about the National Teach Ag Campaign, please visit www.naae.org/teachag.

The National Teach Ag Campaign is an initiative of the National Council for Agricultural Education, led by the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE). It is funded by the CHS Foundation, DuPont Pioneer, and Growth Energy as a special project of the National FFA Foundation.

*Figure 1, Figure 2 data from National Agricultural Education Supply & Demand Study, 2014 Executive Summary http://www.naae.org/teachag/Nationwide%20Profile.pdf