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The la joie de faire of Teaching--
Why We Do What We Do

Teaching--Why We Love It

By *Billye Foster*

Why do I teach? I'll bet I've asked myself that question at least 1000 times over the past twenty nine years. I haven't actually taught 29 years, only about 26 (time out for children and other things), but I've asked the question anyway. I remember being told as a new teacher, "If you teach for three years, you'll spend your life teaching." I don't think I believed it. I really didn't want to teach anyway. My Mother taught 5th and 6th grades in a small country school. My oldest sister taught high school English for one year, then moved on to more exciting things. My middle sister was teaching second graders when I started college. No, I definitely did not want to teach.

I confidently went to college and emerged with a degree in Animal Production. Reality hit like a 40 pound hammer. There were not too many jobs for women in Animal Production in Texas in 1974. So, I married, did a few odd stints here and there, and in 1976 we moved back to East Texas. Ira Black was the Vocational Agriculture Supervisor for Area 6 at that time. Not long after we moved back to my part of the world, Mr. Black suggested I might be interested in teaching agriculture. I thought this was hysterical, since they had not let me enroll in the classes in high school (due to gender). Of course, Mr. Black was older and much wiser than me. Soon he had Dr. Roger Arnold tag-teaming me with a carefully devised plan for completing my teaching certification. And before I knew what hit me, I was a student teacher. Funny how one or two key people can change the course of your life.

Since I only have one page, I won't go into the adventure of student teaching and finding my first "ag" job. Instead, I'll jump right to Danny King.

Danny King was a freshman at West Lamar School, just outside of Paris, Texas. West Lamar was my first job and Danny King was in my first hour class. I only had a total of 35 students at West Lamar, but the challenges and learning experiences gleaned from those three years will always hold a special place in my heart.

Danny's folks were working people. Like many of us, they kept food on the table and clothes on their children, but there wasn't a lot left over for "extras." Danny wanted to show a steer. Turned out his Dad knew a fellow that would make Danny a great deal on a calf. I'll swear that calf turned out to be a genuine dwarf! It looked like a reject from 1950.

We had about 12 students that showed calves, with about 7 steers in the group. The other calves were respectable enough. They might not win the County Show, but they would probably make the sale. I felt bad for Danny, but he was very proud of his calf and determined to feed and care for him to help him "catch-up" to the others.

That was late September. For the next seven months I visited Danny every 5 or 6 weeks. Danny and his calf should have been on TV. The animal would do anything Danny wanted. He never kicked or balked, and he loaded like a dream. When the other calves were causing trouble at one of the small shows we frequented, we would tie Danny's calf next to the trouble-maker and

he would calm down right away.

I think Danny must have slept with that calf. I truly don't remember ever having another student with an animal that well behaved. When the county show came around Danny was last in his class, but he didn't mind because he was planning on winning the showmanship class.

Danny King should have won showmanship, but he did not. A fancier, flashier calf won. However, he did receive an honorable mention. Danny held his head high and put his calf on the floor truck. When he came back tears were in his eyes.

The next year, with the help of some good citizens, Danny had a much better calf. But I don't think he learned as much or experienced as much love as he did with the first.

Why do I teach? I guess it is because of Danny King and all the Danny King's out there. What a gift to watch another person grow! I think you will find several other experiences of "growth" in the articles found in this issue. Read them all--you'll be sorry if you don't!



Billye Foster is an Associate Professor at The University of Arizona and is Editor of The Agricultural Education Magazine.

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Editor

Dr. Billye Foster, Associate Professor, Department of Agricultural Education, The University of Arizona, PO Box 210036--Forbes 228, 1140 East South Campus Drive, Tucson, Arizona, Phone (520) 621-1523, FAX: (520) 621-9889.

E-mail: billye@ag.arizona.edu

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Why Do Agricultural Educators Do What They Do?--I believe you know the answer

by Kyle McGregor

When asked to serve as a theme editor for the *Agricultural Education Magazine*, I was, admittedly, intimidated to say the least. However, when told about the theme, I was excited about the opportunity before me. The experience of conversing with agricultural educators about their joy and passion for teaching agriculture is one that I have thoroughly enjoyed. I know you will enjoy reading this issue because you have many of the same emotions and experiences. Agricultural educators are truly a family of passionate, caring and superb professionals.

So many great teachers exist in our American school system in a time when the teaching and learning process has been reduced to a cold, quantitative analysis of student achievement. Why do so many teachers stick? Who would want to remain in such a frustrating and demoralizing environment? Numerous authors of educational self-help and inspirational titles rely on research and experience to explain what the best teachers do to remain effective in such a climate. Consistently, the heart for service, passion, enthusiasm and relationships established are mentioned as characteristics of exemplary teachers. I truly believe agricultural educators innately possess these characteristics and couple them with a discipline that lends itself to an unequalled learning environment that engages all students in multiple ways.

Agricultural Education, and those who make-up its faculty, is so

special to so many because of the relationships we create and the care taken to foster young minds. Many times, our most influential curriculum is the life lessons shared with students at times in their lives that are the most stormy and exciting. No other teacher in a school has the time, tools and resources available to impact students' lives and learning, and create such an emotion for an industry many believe to be antiquated. Aaron Alejandro, executive director of the Texas FFA Foundation, tells a story about his agricultural teacher and experiences in agricultural education to potential donors who challenge him on what our programs do for students that others do not. His simple, yet powerfully true response to the question was taught to him by his agricultural teacher on a cold winter morning when livestock on the far side of a ranch needed water: "When agriculturalists do not do their job, something dies!" Many agricultural educators may not believe their role to be so profound, but it is impossible to ignore the sense of urgency and importance in the words of the authors in this issue. Such emotion and fervor can only come from deep within one's essence.

The articles in this issue express the wonderful joy agricultural educators have for their charge in life. Depending on your personal timeline, be prepared to reminisce on your career or to look forward to what great things await you. Also, prepare yourself for an upwelling of emotion and pride for the important work you do. Two of the most nostalgic articles come from a friendly outside perspective; Baxter Black, noted cowboy,

poet and humorist has graciously allowed us to print two brief, but special personal reflections on the importance of the agricultural educator.

Each of us has a "short list" of agricultural educators we believe to be the best of the best. As theme editor, I had the unique opportunity to approach a "short list" of individuals who, in my estimation, embody passion for our profession. Randy Vlasin, Hugh Mooney, Don Henson and Jimmy Key all share touching reflections on the "why" behind what they do. Look forward to conversations on life, lives changed, relationships, friendships, passions, the unique nature of agricultural education and the nobility of our cause.

As a sharp contrast to the insight provided by the years of experience offered by Vlasin, Mooney, Henson and Key, a special article from the profession's newest "rookies" is included in this issue. The article is composed of responses from student teachers in agricultural education from across the nation as to why they chose teaching as a profession, as well as from where their passion for teaching stems.

Finally, sage advice is offered from former secondary agricultural educators now serving in post-secondary institutions. Dr. Dwayne Pavelock reminds us of our ability to assist learners in finding that, "AH-HA!" moment, while Kattlyn Wolf and Jonathan Velez identify major components of Agricultural Education's arsenal that make teaching in the discipline so gratifying.

Who are we? What do we do? To

FFA LEGACY

simply say that we are teachers and we teach agriculture, reduces an agricultural educator's role to what outsiders might perceive our discipline to be. However, we truly know what it means to teach youth, to "have an inborn fondness" for an industry and ideals, "deeds and actions" we believe to be set to "the highest standards of citizenship for the community, state, and nation." We are, "agricultural educators by choice and not by chance."



*Kyle McGregor
is an Assistant
Professor at
Tarleton State
University*

Baxter Black, former large animal veterinarian, current author, poet, comedian, lives in Benson, Arizona, between the Gila River and the Gila monster, the Mexican border and the Border Patrol and between the horse and the cow---where the action is.



*by Baxter Black, DVM
taken from *On the Edge of Common Sense*, December 4, 2006*

They stood before me as I was signing books in my booth at the National FFA Convention this fall in Indianapolis. The man showed his age but was still holding up. "This is gonna be my last," he said.

I looked at him more attentively. "How long have you been teaching?" I asked. "Thirty-eight years," he said. There was a touch of weariness in his voice. We looked out over the sea of blue coats that surged through the huge convention hall. His wife took our picture. "That's a long time to be married to an agricultural teacher." I told her, knowing the commitment a spouse must make to accommodate the late suppers, kid's projects, county fairs, field trips, night calls, weekend practices, long hours and exhaustion that are an accepted requisite of the job description.

She smiled and touched his elbow. "It was worth it," she said and they walked away.

The very next person extended her hand. She had a broad smile. If I had not seen her advisor button it would have been easy to mistake her for one of the older students. "Hi," she said. She was excited, "Would you sign my book?" "How long have you been teaching?" I asked. "This is my first year, my first time as an advisor to come to the convention. I've been here three years before as a student. We've brought 23 kids, two in public speaking, a judging team..." she rattled on as I signed her book. "Thanks," she said, shook my hand

firmly and disappeared into the crowd.

A warm feeling slid down my back, I actually chuckled out loud.

I often have occasion in my travels to remind agricultural education teachers of the responsibility they bear. Maybe they know it already but I think their job is so hectic trying to balance teenage insecurities, practical real-life educational subjects, and personal obligations, that they don't have time to mull over the profound effect they have on their students.

I believe teaching school is a noble calling. And agricultural teachers take it a step beyond because they are in the position to shape the professional life choices as well as the character of pliable minds.

They say there were 50,000 attendees to the FFA Convention. 50,000 kids dressed nice, behaving responsibly, treating adults politely, not trashing hotels, yelling profanity or abusing the hospitality of our Indianapolis hosts. The locals noticed and commented over and over about what a great group the FFA was.

To you folks in Indianapolis, Thank you, but you can thank that advisor who has given 38 years of his life to that end. And you can expect that new first year advisor to follow in his footsteps.

That sea of blue coats is their legacy. They leave the world a better place. And they have a right to be proud.

Why Did I Stay So Long?

By Randy Vlasin

Twenty-four years. Why did I stay so long? When I first started teaching, I thought I would teach for a few years then go into the world of agribusiness. I told myself, I would not stay in the classroom long enough to teach my own children. All three sons went through my program. So, why did I stay for nearly a quarter of a century? It's quite simple really, I loved what I did. I found joy in helping young people learn and develop as human beings.

To understand why I taught, you need to understand a little about me. I spent my first two years of formal education in a one-room country school house. I was the only one in my class, however there were eight other kids in that one-room school ranging from kindergarten to 8th grade. I was a poor reader, spent more time day dreaming than studying, and couldn't wait for lunch and recess. By the end of first grade, my reading had not improved much. That year, the district consolidated and I went to the "big school" in town. The class was mammoth in size – a total of twenty-four kids! Hey, when you were used to being the only one in your class, this was a huge increase. The upside, there was special assistance available called Title I that helped me with my reading. In the eighth grade, we took IQ tests. I found out later that I ranked the 3rd lowest in my grade. Fortunately, my teachers never treated me like someone with a low IQ score. I was an "A" to "B" student in every subject but math. To this day I tend to be skeptical of standardized testing scores.

I noticed early on there was a difference in teachers. After becoming a teacher, I often looked back to those teachers who made a difference in my life. There was Mrs. Carse, who took me under her wing when I first came to "the big school" and was terrified because I didn't know anyone. She helped to comfort me and give me confidence that first year. She also provided extra assistance with my reading. There was Mrs. Shafer, my fourth grade teacher. She taught Nebraska History by allowing us to build miniature Native American villages and paper mache buffalo. There was Mr. Humphrey in sixth grade, who selected one of my English papers as an example of creative writing. Even though my handwriting was poor, he focused on the story I created. I still remember how good that made me feel. Mr. Loose, my high school math teacher, effectively taught me to draw houses and floor plans. Mr. Fiedler, our band instructor, taught me what excellence looked like and why it was important.

All of these teachers and many others were beacons of light on the road to what would become my profession, even though it would be many years before I knew it.

My first serious thought of a career was in my senior year of high school and focused on farming. My dad was a farmer, most of my uncles were farmers and it seemed a natural choice.

I enrolled in Production Agriculture at the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture in Curtis, Nebraska with the idea of coming home to farm in two years.

However, I ran into a few teachers at NCTA who exposed me to a new possibility. These instructors seemed to really enjoy their jobs as teachers and it showed in their classrooms. I started to hear a whisper in the back of my mind – "Be a teacher." In fact, my high school guidance counselor had suggested this before I graduated high school. I thought she was nuts. Four years of college, are you kidding me? I am going to farm! Eventually, I listened to the voice and enrolled in Agricultural Education at the University of Nebraska. It was the best decision I ever made.

My first real teaching experience, like most instructors, was during student teaching. I was fortunate to be placed with an excellent supervising teacher named Dave Creger. Dave wasn't your "typical" agricultural instructor. He came into the profession later in life after farming and several other agricultural-related careers. I think one of the reasons Dave was such a great teacher stemmed from his life experiences before coming to the classroom. Those experiences enhanced his ability to relate to students. While Mr. Creger was an agricultural teacher by profession, I was never around anyone who was a better psychologist when it came to students. I watched in amazement how he would engage students, counsel them in educational and personal matters, and most notably, help them feel they were important. He taught with exuberance and joy. Quite frankly, it was contagious. After nine weeks with Dave, I was hooked.

During student teaching, I experi-

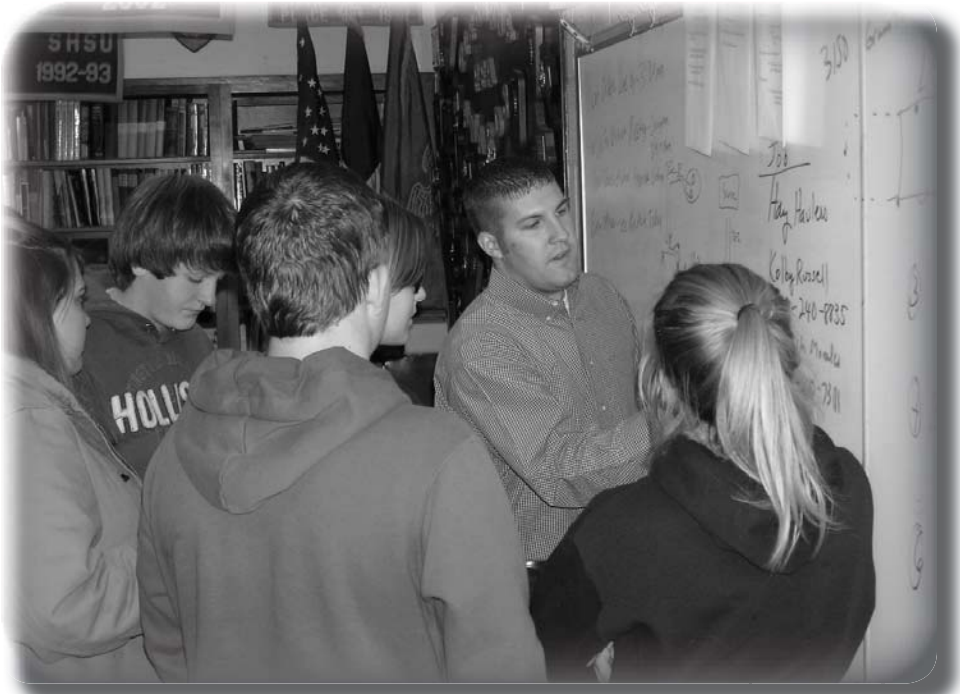


Photo courtesy of Kim Bella, Tarleton State University

enced one of the true joys of teaching - watching a student achieve success. He was a freshman and came from a background of limited opportunity. He was a shy boy with low self-confidence. I was teaching a unit on welding and this young man was struggling with welding skills. I would spend time with him after school, but I wasn't sure he was going to get it. One day after class, he was working diligently trying to get an "A" on a required weld and he finally laid that near perfect bead. You would have thought he had just won the lottery. The excitement in his voice and sparkle in his eye ignited the joyful type of experience that I found to be almost addictive and would keep me in teaching for the next twenty-four years.

Most of my twenty-four years as a teacher were spent at Chase County High School in Imperial, Nebraska. Like many veteran teachers, I had the opportunity to leave teaching for the world of agribusiness on several occasions. The money would have been

better, but I decided to stay with education. Often people would ask why. "I like what I do," would be my response. So what made being an agricultural education instructor a joyful experience for me? I will share a few reasons:

1. ***Creating Opportunities for Success.*** As a teacher, you have the opportunity to influence lives by helping students see things about themselves they may not notice. It was like being a miner after gold, or a diver after pearls. I believed that every student had a talent, but not all could see it. I liked helping students discover their talent and use it to create a successful experience. When a student would achieve success, the look on their face, the excitement in their voice and knowing you had a small part in that is an incredible feeling. It doesn't have to be something big, it could be finally figuring out how to solve a fertilizer problem, getting records to balance or surviving their first competi-

tive event. Each little success builds confidence and it is fun to watch. It is even more rewarding to watch the evolution that happens with students over the course of three to four years. I had the privilege of watching lives transform. It's powerful stuff!

2. ***The Relationships.*** The relationships created through teaching will last a lifetime. First and foremost, there are the students. One of the most rewarding things I have experienced is a former student coming back after being gone for a few years and sharing how they are a better person because of your program and what they learned. The relationships with parents as you partner with them in helping their child to grow. Of course there are also the business and community relationships that develop as you involve other people in various aspects of the program. These relationships help bring meaning to your life.
3. ***Professional Association.*** This really is another relationship, but I set it apart because I believe it had a profound impact on keeping me in the profession for twenty-four years. It also brought enjoyment and meaning to my career. My involvement with the Nebraska Agricultural Education Association was a positive experience and one that I will always treasure. It was like a family. Now, like families, we had our disputes and differences, but in the end you always knew where you could go to find answers and support. Ask some of the "core academic" teachers in your school about their professional association and see what types of answers

you get. Agricultural education teachers are bound together by a set of common experiences and central purpose – to help young people grow and succeed. The professional and personal camaraderie that exists among agricultural educators is hard to find in other organizations, and for me personally it was very gratifying.

Some people, even in my own community might say, “I bet part of why you stayed so long was because you had an award winning program.” Interesting thought, but not true. We agricultural teachers tend to be a competitive bunch; you only need to attend a Career Development Event committee meeting on the state or national level to find this out. We like competitions, many of our students like competitions and we like to win. It is very easy to get caught up in this. Let’s face facts – the plaques on the wall are nice and it is exciting to see your students receive these awards, however, as I look over the years, it wasn’t winning the competitions that made me stay. It brought great attention to the program, but it is not why I

stayed. I would have stayed that long without the competitions. In fact, there were times I wanted to chuck all of the contests, but I knew they did benefit students. The real reasons I stayed are the ones I mentioned earlier – helping students experience success, building relationships and professional

association. Each of these really add up to one main thing - what you do as a teacher makes a difference in someone’s life. How many other people get a chance to do that every day? ***That’s why I stayed so long.***



Randy Vlasin taught Agricultural Education at Wilber-Cla-tonia High School in Wilber, Nebraska from 1982-1983. From 1983-2006, he was instructor at Chase County High School in Imperial, Nebraska. He is currently on staff with the National FFA Organization.

July/August 2007

**Theme: “See me--See you,” well, not always--
Dealing with Differences**

What do you do to make your classroom a diversity empow-ering location? How do you prepare your students to interact with the myriad of humankind they will encounter? How do you deal with student handicaps? Is diversity something you weave into every facet of your program--or just something you do to keep the administration happy?

Theme Editor: Penny Haase-Wittler
Southern Arkansas University
Agricultural Education
PO Box 9418
Magnolia, Arkansas 71754-941

pshaasewit@saumag.edu

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My Job, My Joy, My Purpose, My Life!

by Jimmy Key

As I sat poised behind the wheel of Bus 11, waiting the arrival of my 5th and 6th grade passengers, the hot summer sun of late August engulfed me; the air thick and inescapable. I never envisioned driving a bus to supplement my income as a first year teacher; nevertheless I found myself in that very place. I suppose I enjoyed driving the bus, or at least I told myself that I did. We had been in school for three weeks and the relationship with many of my passengers had already taken root. I had all ages of kids, from kindergarten to seniors; a variety of personalities, along with a variety of socio-economic backgrounds.

Joshua is a unique district. Joshua is a small town encompassing a large area, servicing students who reside in half-million dollar homes to students who live in pre-fabricated portable storage buildings with a toilet and a window unit. Regardless of status or situation - kids are kids - they all want the same things.

I sat eagerly awaiting school to dismiss so fresh air could be filtered through the bus window. I had no idea, however, of the profoundness of the situation that was about to occur - nor of the impact that it would have on me as a teacher and as a man.

The bell rang and here came the kids, in a single file line for a moment, then in a mob. Each rushed

to be the first on the bus to get that primo seat. The intermediate campus was my first stop--then on to high school, middle school, and then finally to one of our three elementary campuses. Getting a good seat at the rear of the bus and by a window was crucial. Sitting at the back of the bus was reserved for the older kids, but the younger ones wanted desperately to be *near* the back. They wanted to be accepted, wanted to get in on all the "stuff" that happens on the back of the bus, out of reach of the driver. On this day, as always, 5th grader Dakota was at the back of the group, the last one on. She seemed to have no desire to establish any sort of status with the group. She chose to sit in the front seat. She was a really big help to me, informing me of where all the stops were, who rode everyday and who didn't; who lived in which house, who was good and who was bad; a wealth of information from a typical 11 year old girl who beamed with enthusiasm and energy.

As we pulled away Dakota initiated conversation as she had done everyday. She asked how my day had been, if I was hot in "that tie," what I was going to do when I got home. She then asked me if I was going to the open house that was coming up in a few days. "Yes," I said, "I'm a teacher; I have to be there." She said that she was excited because her class made these really cool pictures and she wanted everyone to see hers because she thought that she had done a really good job. I said, "man, I bet your folks will be proud when they see what you've made!" Without

"Well, I don't know. My mom can't be there because she is in prison and I have never met my dad."

hesitating she said, "Well, I don't know. My mom can't be there because she is in prison and I have never met my dad." "We," (she has an older brother in 8th grade), "live with my grandparents. My grandpa is handicapped and doesn't get around very well and my grandma works at night so she won't be able to be there either. Will you come to open house and see what I made?"

"Well, of course I will - thanks for inviting me," I said. "It's sad about your mom and grandpa, but it's good that you do have grandparents that love you and give you a place to live." "Yes," she said, "we've lived with my grandparents most of my life. My mom has been in jail for about three years and is supposed to get out when I'm in the seventh grade. I just wish I had a dad. Mr.Key, will you be my dad?"

I went to her open house that year, as well as the next three years, until she got to high school and then we were there together. She was bound to career and technical courses through an extensive list of academic modifications

That day I realized my purpose was much greater and extended far beyond the reaches of the classroom.

That day I realized why I chose to teach.

through her individualized education plan. She learned to weld, knew the parts of a plant and all of the animal systems. Although she has graduated and is gone now, I still remember her enthusiasm and excitement and her desire for truly only one thing--a dad.

That day on Bus 11 changed my life because it changed my perspective. Not completing my degree until age 33 I had spent most of my life to that point in an adult world with only my own upbringing as a resource on life. I had envisioned teaching the curriculum that I so loved. Getting people excited about the history of the FFA and all of the different breeds of livestock and the neat places that they came from was all that I thought about. I never once questioned my students' potential thirst for knowledge. I knew they would be as excited about it as I was. That day in late August, 1999, I realized that school is a place for much more than state approved curriculum. It is a place for many children to find sanctuary, safety, security, and yes, even Dads. That day I realized my purpose was much greater and extended far beyond the reaches of the classroom.

That day I realized why I chose to teach.

Agricultural teachers are a truly unique group. People always seem to remember their agricultural teachers. Whether it was early morning practices for career development events, freezing cold days at livestock shows, filling out countless scholarship applications, or that connection to who people truly are, agricultural teachers seem to leave their mark on all those with whom they come in contact with. As a group we are truly blessed to be where we are in life. We serve a vast group of individuals that come to us for a variety of reasons. This to me is one of the most rewarding and gratifying benefits of teaching. Whether students have enrolled due to a desire for an extensive science background, or whether they were placed there because they

can't make it anywhere else--they are there and they are mine!

You see, I've come to realize that nowhere in my contract does it state that I get to teach only the "smart" kids or only the kids who want to be there. Nor does it say that I get to teach only the "clean" kids with strong moral fiber and good upbringing. It simply says that I am hired to teach. To me, that means anyone who walks through that door! In my classroom my students are entitled to the same respect that I myself demand, and by the same token they are required to exhibit a degree of behavior that is deemed acceptable outside the confines of the school walls, which we all know can be a much higher degree than we often see within our walls. It is not my job to identify who the rotten kids are and send them away for someone else to deal with. It is my job to identify that "thing" within each individual that makes them want to come back. In some, it is hidden away much deeper than others, but it is there nevertheless, and I will eventually find it.

My joy in teaching comes from getting to give a little bit of myself to each of these kids. In today's society, individuals who would capitalize on our compassion for students often threaten teachers. I am not afraid. It is my job, it is my joy, it is my purpose, it is my LIFE!



Photo Courtesy of Department of Agricultural Education, University of Arizona



*Jimmy Key
AgriScience
Teacher
Joshua High
School
Joshua, Texas*

We Teach Agriculture Because We Can

by Hugh Mooney

Growing up I had the benefit of a large extended family, all living nearby. It was not out of the ordinary to have forty or fifty people at a family gathering such as a birthday or holiday. Among this group there were a large number of farmers and teachers. Often, the farmers were married to the teachers. I can remember frequently hearing an old saying that would set people off, "Those who can, do; those who can't, teach." This phrase would often be followed by a heated discussion. I often heard the question asked, "Why do you teach agriculture?"

I think that from time to time we ask ourselves why we do what we do. In education, all we hear about are test scores. We are constantly told of the importance of these scores and how the success of our schools are measured by them. Many in education believe that the only way to improve test scores is through "seat time", book work and practice tests. When we have students who do not have success with that method, instead of trying something new, we double the amount of time that we have them in math and English classes. The theory is, if one hour a day does not work in a subject, then surely more of what is not working will do the trick. This, of course, leads to many of those students dropping out of school, which causes the test scores to increase. This shows those who support these ideas that they have a successful program.

When we have discussions about improving test scores at our

schools, how often do we talk about the individual needs of students? Heaven forbid we ask the students what they might want to do in the future! I remember in a staff meeting last year we had a presentation from one of the administrators on how to target students in order to improve the school's test scores. We were told to review our students' scores and identify those who were within ten to twenty points of being proficient. After identifying those students, we were to concentrate on them because they can help our overall scores the most. One of the agricultural teachers in our department asked the following question of the principal at this meeting. She said, "What would parents of our students say if they knew we were only going to focus on students who can help the school's scores improve." The principal scrambled to say, "That is not what was meant." After the meeting the agricultural teacher was attacked by other teachers who informed her that the only thing that mattered was that our test scores improved so we could be proud of our school.

Agricultural teachers realize that the needs of our students are most important. This is why we do what we do--we are proud of our students.

Many of us who are agriculture teachers today chose the profession for similar reasons. One reason often cited is that we were FFA members and were influenced by our agricultural teacher to join the profession. Some enjoyed the

many FFA activities they participated in as a member. Others never had the opportunity to become involved in the FFA. Everyone has a reason they became a teacher of agriculture. I have been an agricultural teacher for twenty-three years. One of my high school agricultural teachers continues to teach, and performs at a very high level. I teach in a neighboring school and continue to remind myself that I no longer need to call him Mr. Weaver. What is it that keeps teachers like Mr. Weaver around for thirty plus years?

As a FFA member I remember traveling to judging events and leadership conferences with my agricultural teachers. We often spent the night, ate together and sometimes we shared rooms with a teacher. We got to know them. This was something we never did with our other teachers. I remember showing at the Cow Palace as a secondary student. We would sleep on cots in horse stalls for several nights and would take cold showers. Our agriculture teachers were right there with us. The relationship we developed with our agriculture teachers was so much more than what we might have with a history or English teacher we enjoyed. That is why former students stop by to see the agricultural teacher when they come home. They know that their agricultural teacher will be around after school. In fact, if they do not find the agricultural teacher at school, they will just stop by their house. I don't believe I realized it when I first decided to become an agri-

cultural teacher, but this profession is much more than a job--*it is a way of life*. Teachers of all subjects have the chance to influence a student's future, but what makes agricultural teaching great is what happens after the bell rings, students could go home, but they don't. In what other job do parents trust you with their children to travel across the country? In what other job do parents allow their children to invest hundreds of dollars, sometimes thousands on the advice of their teacher? Other than agricultural teachers, how many teachers regularly give their home phone number to their students? In what other occupation are you invited to dinner because a family wants to thank you for doing something you consider to be part of your job? Agricultural teachers understand that nothing is more important than the relationships they have with their students. What other group of teachers know and interact with teachers in their discipline all over the state and even the nation?

You will not "make it big" or "get rich" teaching agriculture. The pay is not bad if you include the retirement and medical benefits you receive and there is job security that you do not find in industry. However, the greatest benefits are the intangible ones. What value can you place on a parent thanking you for making a difference in their child's life? If you have been in the profession a while, you have experienced the joy of having a heartfelt thank you from a parent. Students often thank us for what we do. They know something special is happening because their other teachers are not doing the same thing for them. I believe what many agricultural teachers value most is when a former student stops by, years after graduation,

to share what a difference you made in their life. Often, it is not one of the students who were active in the FFA. You may not have even realized that you had made a connection at all.

Back to the original question, why do you teach agriculture? We do it because we make a positive difference in the lives of students. We do it because we give students hope. We do it because we make students believe they can do what they want in life. We do it because we challenge students to think critically and solve problems. We do it because we teach students to take responsibility for their actions. We do it because we teach students to be sincere. We do it because we teach students how to have influence. We do it because we teach them to be involved in their community and help others. We do it because we teach them to work cooperatively. We do it because we teach them the value of a strong work ethic. We do it because we teach students to care. We do it because we teach our students to believe.

We are agricultural teachers by

deliberate choice. Being an agricultural teacher is not a job, it is a way of life. We love what we do. We do it not because we have to, but because we want to. Why do we teach agriculture? We teach because we can.



Hugh Mooney is an agricultural teacher and department chairman. There are six agriculture teachers and over five-hundred FFA members. He is the past president of the California Agricultural Teachers Association. He is the Region I secretary of the National Association of Agricultural Educators. He is in his twenty-third year as an agricultural teacher.



Photo courtesy of Kim Bella, Tarleton State University

Were You A Master Teacher Today?

By Dwayne Pavelock

Whether or not you've ever visited the Statue of Liberty at Ellis Island, you have likely heard the words inscribed at the base of the statue that welcomes our country's visitors:

*"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me.
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

Students who are more academically-able find much success in agriscience programs, but we are entrusted with educating all students, regardless of their ability. Agricultural science teachers may sometimes think that an inscription similar to that of the Statue of Liberty's is found somewhere outside their classrooms and laboratory facilities that beckons the less-gifted students to their "golden doors". Imagine what might be inscribed on something akin to a historical marker and placed at the primary entrance of your facilities:

*"Give me your failures, your economically disadvantaged,
Your huddled masses yearning to get out of bookwork,
The rejects from classes required for graduation,
Send these, the at-risk students, the non-college bound to me.
I'll have the chapter sentinel open the door!"*

Breaking Old Habits

Old habits are hard to break and

some things never end. The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917, in part, established "vocational agriculture" in high schools to "fit students for useful employment" and educate those who were preparing to enter work in specific fields. Many persons perceive the original language of Smith-Hughes to still be the rule nearly 87 years later. However, changes to the agricultural curriculum have been widespread and innovative as old courses have been revised and new ones added to meet the needs of a rapidly changing student demographic, global work force and emerging technology. College-bound students are no longer the exception to the rule and scholarship opportunities are available for those who want to pursue a higher education. Truly, agricultural science no longer exists to solely fit students for useful employment. How great it is to teach students with lofty educational aspirations and who have an academic gift!

Some constants do remain in the agriscience program. We still serve those students with minimal academic abilities and aspirations. The most honorable and gratifying aspect to this endeavor may be the agriscience teacher's commitment to meet these students' needs and build them up beyond their self-initiated goals (or lack thereof). Where another teacher sees failure, agriscience teachers see a need to encourage success. Where one finds a lack of ability, someone else sees potential. Where some see hopelessness, we see opportunity.

On one hand we have the student with low academic ability who

may possess a gift for hands-on activities or seeks a career that requires no postsecondary education. Yet there always seems to be a number of students in agriscience courses who aren't sure why they are there. The other hand reveals a high achieving student who embraces learning and aspires to a higher education. There have likely been times that all teachers have envied those who taught honors courses filled with students wanting to learn. Most agriscience programs have successfully recruited similar students. In a desire to build our program with high achieving students, most especially our FFA chapter, have we created a monster? Does this monster stretch our teaching effectiveness to the limits, due to the wide range of learning abilities we now have in the classroom?

Teachers struggle with classes that have a wide diversity of learning styles, not to mention those with a tremendous range of learning ability. An assistant professor of education once challenged the students in her graduate class to be master teachers. Asked what she considered a master teacher, she responded, "A master teacher is one who uses every teaching strategy possible to reach any and all students at any given time." Wow, what a concept! What innovation! What a challenge! How is it pos-

"A master teacher is one who uses every teaching strategy possible to reach any and all students at any given time."



*Photo courtesy
of Kim Bella,
Tarleton State
University*

sible to be a master teacher?

Agricultural science courses present many opportunities to use multiple teaching strategies to reach a range of students for almost any topic. A great number of teachers utilize hands-on experiences with ease, either after, or instead of, traditional classroom learning. We sometimes even fail to recognize the various teaching methods already being used—role play for teaching parliamentary procedure; cooperative learning to research a topic that may eventually be used for the Agricultural Issues CDE; inquiry-based learning to determine effects of various feeding programs in animal-based SAEs, etc. A key element to master teaching is to consciously use these models in existing teaching plans and recognize opportunities to apply them to other topics and situations.

Imagine teaching parliamentary procedure by using lecture as your sole approach. Maybe such a notion is difficult to comprehend, but isn't it done for many other topics? Now recall how you actually teach parliamentary procedure. You possibly lecture to establish the basic facts, have students read pertinent information, demonstrate the proper way

to make a motion, have students perform your demonstration, assign roles and conduct a mock meeting, and ultimately test their knowledge in some manner. What a tremendous number of learning styles you have addressed and a great variety of learning abilities you have reached! As previously mentioned, teachers need to make a conscious effort to utilize an equivalent number of methodologies in teaching other topics.

WHY DID YOU BECOME A TEACHER?

We sometimes give a generic response without ever knowing that deep down, we did so in order that we may do what others cannot. Agriscience teachers have a unique ability to help students reach that, "AH-HA!" moment. It is just as enlightening and rewarding for us as it is for the student. We also know that we can be a change agent through a means in which we have a profound belief. Schools are required to help students maintain a certain level of physical fitness, so physical education is taught. Students are required to learn about our government's mode of operation, so they complete a course in civics. And many graduation plans require our school youth to develop the ability to communicate in a foreign language, so such a credit is required.

At no point is there any worry about informing students how life is truly sustained – through a safe and stable supply of food. A wise person once said, "As long as there is food, the world will have many problems. When there is no food, the world has only one problem." Did you ever think you became an agriscience teacher because the world needed you in that capacity?

You are an agriscience teacher that makes learning fun and engages students. You help students establish a personal connection to the material and see its relevancy to their lives. You find a method that helps a student with attention deficit disorder to stay focused, and you search for ways to prevent the "English as a Second Language" student from becoming discouraged. You incorporate activities and questions that require the use of higher-order thinking skills while challenging the higher achieving students to look beyond what is known and uncover what is yet to be determined. You encourage the less gifted students to strive for excellence. So at the end of the day, when someone asks, "Were a master teacher today?" You will know that you were indeed. Not just a master teacher, but one of utmost importance. Tomorrow, someone will be well fed because you were a master teacher today.

Dwayne Pavelock is an assistant professor and teacher educator with the Department of Agricultural and Industrial Sciences at Sam Houston State University.



In 1982 I was pregnant with our second son, Chase. Having always loved history and reading, I came across a historical novel on the life of Quanna Parker, *Ride the Wind*. For those of you that don't know who Quanna Parker was, he was the son of Cynthia Ann Parker and Wanderer and was the last free war chief of the Comanche.

As it turned out the book really wasn't about Quanna Parker--it was about his mother. She was captured in a raid by the Comanche in Central Texas at the age of nine. The book began grabbing you by the throat and taking you through the explicit and graphic terror of the raid and subsequent treatment of the prisoners. Soon you are asking yourself, "Why didn't these people just jump off a cliff or something? Anything would have been better than what they went through! How could the Comanche be so cruel?"

Then you began to learn other facts. The Comanche people were very honorable and held tightly to their word as their bond. If any of the captives had known it, they could have simply asked any one of the raiders to become their protector and it would have been so. The real irony of the book comes when twenty odd years later Cynthia Ann is retaken by the whites, when their unwillingness to accept Cynthia or her four year old daughter, the child dies.

History teaches us that this is more common than we might like to think. One culture crashes into another and, because of poor or total lack of communication, people suffer. School is a form of culture. There are norms and expectations of all who walk the hallowed halls of learning. FFA brings yet another

culture to the mix and again we see norms and expectations. The world of agriculture is its own culture, is it not? Based on tradition and changing only through carefully researched and proven methods. Those who venture into our hallowed domain are expected to "fit in." But what happens if they don't? What happens if they can't fit in because of things beyond their control?

Childhood and adolescent obesity has become a major concern in public schools across the country. Junk food and the easy access and fascination of an expanding variety of technology toys is taking a toll on the health of our youth. What can be done?



- Remember, Kids Come in All sizes!

Making students conscientious of their weight is not the answer. This simply targets them and may result in dangerous dieting and eating disorders. Instead try these things:

- **Focus on fitness--not weight.** Get all students active. Encourage active entertainment for the social piece of an FFA meeting. Form hiking groups or a swimming club.
- **Accept students just as they are!** Acceptance will increase a positive body image for the student and hopefully encourage them to use healthier practices. Fat and thin stu-

dents need nurturing, not changing. They must learn to love and respect themselves and their bodies no matter what size they are.

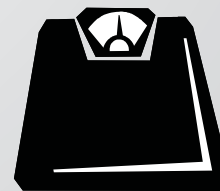
- **Question your own size bias.** Avoid negative self talk about your own body. Have you ever considered not using a student in a specific role because of their appearance?
- **Build trust with students who are heavier** so you are easily approached about bullying issues.
- **Do not use educational materials that have derogatory representations of fat people** or endorse size-based stereotypes.
- **Teach about diversity.** People come in all different shapes and sizes.
- **Celebrate individuality.** We are all unique with special gifts unique to each of us.
- **Work to show** every student you care about their health and well being.

For more information, check out the following web sites:

Body Positive
www.bodypositive.com

Council on Size & Weight Discrimination
www.cswd.org

Teaching Tolerance-- "Kids Come in All Sizes" Workshops--visit www.teachingtolerance.org/magazine then search for the workshop title.



Billye

By Kattlyn Wolf &
Jonathan Velez

A reflective agriculture teacher once wrote this synopsis of a typical day in the profession:

A Day in the Life of an Agriculture Teacher (author unknown)

6:30am - Got up, took shower. Can't find right shoe, dogs got it somewhere. Did feeding and tore hole in good pants. Late to breakfast, wife mad, breakfast cold. Truck won't start, battery dead. Jumped truck, headed to school.

8:00am - Arrived at school, forgot keys. Janitor let me in - said he would send me a bill. I laughed, he didn't.

8:15am - Prepared for class; got references, got handouts, got transparencies. Can't find grade book! Found grading book in welding booth, with new slag finish on cover! Also found chip-ping hammer welded to table and welder left on.

8:40am - Bell rings, first period. Called roll, one student missing, student owes fruit money. I made announcements to class. Phone rings; tool salesman wanting me to buy more tools. Said I didn't have time to talk, hung up. Got class settled down, ready to teach. Phone rings again; tool salesman again. Got mad, told him where he could go to sell his tools. Got class settled again. Principal knocks on classroom door. Asked why I wasn't on bus duty this morning. Told him I didn't know, but was glad he brought it to my attention.

I taught a unit on soil testing. End of class, two kids in a fight. I sent students to office. Bell rings, first period over.

9:45am - (Second period) Bell rings, called roll, made announcements. Things going like clock-work, shop work today, all students get safety glasses and head to shop. Phone rings, speaker for tonight's Young Farmer meeting can't make it. Thanked him for advance notice and hung up. One sawing pipe with coping saw, one drilling hole in workbench, one being tied up with welding electrode cables, don't see three others. Called students back to classroom, chewed them out good. Told them someone would be killed with that kind of horse-play. One asked why that would bother me, had second thoughts. Tool class back in shop, performed a small engine demonstration. Worked all period but couldn't get engine running. Clean-up time, half-inch wrench missing. Back in classroom, janitor stops by to borrow pipe wrench. Bell rings, class ends.

10:40am - (Third period) Called roll, made announcements, and collected homework papers. Phone rings. Extension agent wants to meet to plan livestock show. All dates full, suggested Sunday afternoon. I laughed, he didn't. Class in uproar, threatened to give quiz, class laughed harder. Told them if they settled down I would show a film. Phone rings. Young Farmer wants to bring boards in to plane. Told him to come at 2:00pm - (planning period). Back to class, class in uproar. Gave class quiz and set up movie projector. Film

breaks, projector bulb shot. I sent a student for a bulb, spliced film. Student returns with bulb and note saying I better not let another student out of class without a pass, signed principal. Started film, fire alarm goes off, fine time for a fire drill. Closed windows, turned off lights, marched kids outside for roll. Left roll book inside. Return to class, bell rings, class ends.

11:35am - (lunch) Peace and quiet, finally. Phone rings, didn't answer. I decided to get engine running. Set down on stool, found half-inch wrench missing in second period. Checked points, checked plug, can't figure out what's wrong. Janitor returns saying P.E. boys broke pipe wrench. Said that he was sorry, told me engine would run better if I had some gas in the tank. He laughed, I didn't. I gulped down lunch.

12:10pm - (Fourth period) Bell rings, fourth period begins. Called roll, made announcements. Young Farmer comes with boards to plane, said he got around early today. Told him he would have to plane them himself. Phone rings, didn't answer it. I settled class down again. One student throws up. Said school lunch program needs improvement. Sent student to janitor to clean up mess, janitor and student arrive. Student hands me a note asking whether I received a note earlier about not giving students passes, signed principal. Young Farmer interrupts class to tell me he found a nail in one of the boards. Told him where the hammer was. Said thanks to the planer he didn't need it now. Asked what he owed me. Gritted my teeth

Why Do We Do What We Do?

and said nothing. I taught a lesson on breeds of livestock. Close class, bell rings.

1:05pm -(Fifth period) Called roll, made announcements. Class in shop, students working on wood-working projects. Phone rings, decided to answer it. Wife on phone, been trying to call me all morning; really hot about me not answering the phone. Said I had a steer at home really sick. Said agricultural teachers shouldn't have sick steers. Reminded her I couldn't walk on water yet. Suggested she call a vet. Back to shop, students working well. Phone rings, answered it, may be wife again. Fair manager wants FFA members to help pick-up trash on fairgrounds after school today. Said it was too short of notice but would try to help. I convinced three kids to go. The kids in shop are still working hard. Something looks wrong. Two kids making "billy clubs", sent them

to office. One kid bugs me, asked why I teach. I told him I did it for the money.

2:10pm -(Sixth period) Planning period. Time to get things done, phone rings. Alumni member wants to pay dues that were turned in two-months ago, told him to send me his money. Made test up for class. Emptied trash barrels, found paintbrush left in paint can. Welder left on and window left open. Cleaned-up paintbrush, turned welder off, shut window. Phone rings. Area supervisor asks why two reports are not in yet. Told him mail is awfully slow nowadays and worked on reports for the rest of the period. Bell rings, school over.

3:00pm - Phone rings. Young Farmer calls and says he's got a real sick cow and wants me to run over to look at her. Grabbed coat and went to see sick cow. Cow looks real bad, suggested that he start digging a hole. Returned to school, the Principal is on bus duty. Boy, oh boy! Told him I forgot again and asked what he would like for his birthday. He said a new

agricultural teacher. I laughed, he didn't. I headed home.

5:00pm - Got home, wife mad. I got green paint on good pants. Vet bill for \$30. Said calf was sick and would probably die. Wife said vet got stuck in yard and left big ruts. She wants them fixed. Also said that fuse blew and drain plugged. Filled in ruts, replaced fuse, unplugged drain, did feeding, wife happy. I sat down in good chair with dirty clothes on. Wife mad again. Phone rings. Fair manager says students never showed up, really mad about it. Told him if he needed anymore of the same kind of help let me know and hung up. I gulped down supper.

7:00pm - Back to school for Young Farmer meeting, late. Got shop opened up. Unlocked door, turned on lights, swept floor and cleaned chalkboard. Sheriff shows up, then janitor shows up, then principal shows up. Said burglar alarm was set off and all were called to report to school. Told them I forgot to report the night meeting and invited them to stay for the meeting. All declined the offer. Had Young Farmer meeting and showed film that I didn't show to kids. Film over, woke up Young Farmers. Guess they're not too interested in films on tree identification, meeting over. Locked up department and started to go home. Truck tire flat. Fixed flat tire, battery dead again. Called janitor back to school to jump me - he did. Said my bill was growing. I laughed, he didn't.

11:30pm - Got home late. Forgot house keys, rang doorbell, and woke up wife. Wife mad asks who I was. Told her I was devoted husband. Wife asks for identification. I laughed, she didn't. Go to bed. Phone rings. Student tells me that



Photo courtesy of Kim Bella, Tarleton State University

his sow had nine pigs. Congratulated him and hung up. Bed at last. Wife tells me that steer died. Told her that Young Farmer program probably did too. Closed my eyes and felt thankful that today went real well.

Did You Relate?

Almost any agricultural educator could have inserted their name into this day. Hopefully you read it and thought, "That's me!" and smiled. With days like this, why in the world would anyone want to teach agriculture? Why would someone work that hard and long for a relatively small salary? What is it then that keeps agricultural educators in the profession?

1. Students

As agricultural education instructors we have the opportunity to impact the lives of students. Everyday we go to class where eager eyes and open minds await, some-

times impatiently, for the day's lesson. The diversity of students and their various personalities make teaching agriculture fun. Agricultural teaching allows us to interact with students under a variety of circumstances. We, possibly more than any other teachers, are able to teach, coach and mentor students as we engage in the mutually enjoyable pursuit of agriculture. It is exciting to see students' faces light-up when we comment on their SAE or show particular care and concern for a pet. Students appreciate and respond to personal interaction.

As teachers of agriculture, we are able to give students a degree of personal attention, which shows them we care. There may be no other person present in their lives who recognize, respect and care for them as a unique individual. When you see their faces and hear their excited voices, it is a reminder that this is a job worth doing. Sometimes the rewards are immediate, yet often, they lie



Those little side comments, the student that makes you laugh in the middle of a lesson, the shy freshman who develops into a state officer, and the students who go from immature teenagers to professional, responsible, active members of the community are all reasons this job is so worthwhile.

unseen for years. When a former student approaches you years after high school and thanks you for the impact you had in their life, it is a reminder that our profession offers something more valuable than money, more secure than awards and more lasting than a letterman jacket. We offer purpose, direction, self-worth and the belief that success is grounded in hard work and developed through commitment to honesty and integrity.

Above all, remember to enjoy working with students. Those little side comments, the student that makes you laugh in the middle of a lesson, the shy freshman who develops into a state officer, and the students who go from immature teenagers to professional, responsible, active members of the community are all reasons this job is so worthwhile.

2. Collegiality

There are around 11,000 individuals in the U.S. who teach agricultural courses. Among these 11,000 there is a unique, indescribable connection that is rare among teachers of other subjects. We are a family, brothers and sisters-in-arms, united in common goals and purposive in striving together to improve agricultural education. Agricultural teachers relate to one another, they hear one of their fellows telling a story and it often feels strangely personal, possibly something that may have happened to them last week. When agricultural educators meet there is an instantaneous recognition of, “you are just like me,” and “you are one of us.”

What can explain this uncanny sense of camaraderie among such a large group of people? Perhaps it is the caliber and character of individuals who choose to teach agriculture; individuals who have decided their calling in life is to give to others through education. Perhaps it is their agricultural heritage, founded upon a belief in hard work and a commitment to personal success. Perhaps it is both of these things. From the friendships developed at conferences, to friendly competition at FFA events, there is a kinship between agricultural educators. Working with like-minded individuals who share similar values and beliefs is one of the most enjoyable aspects of teaching agriculture.

3. Contribution to Agriculture

Does chocolate milk come from brown cows? How do chicks get inside the egg? Where does food come from? Students will ask some of the most sincere, thoughtful, and often uneducated questions. As agricultural teachers we have the opportunity to create

an awareness and appreciation of the importance of agriculture. Our job enables us to creatively explore agricultural topics and engage in hands-on application. Students enjoy the chance to experience applied learning as they seek to understand agriculture. Developing and shaping a properly educated understanding of agriculture is a powerful aspect of this profession.

4. Challenges

Agricultural education instructors are a competitive group of people. We revel in competition, the pitting of ourselves against others in a struggle for supremacy. While most of the competitive events are FFA related, it is often overlooked that merely surviving in the profession and making an impact on the lives of students is an achievement. One of the greatest joys in teaching agriculture is overcoming seemingly insurmountable obstacles. When someone says “It can’t be done,” to an agricultural educator, it is like waving a red cape at a bull. Success is our drug of choice; we are spurred-on through achievement, whether it be our own or that of a student. While competitiveness can be taken to extremes, it embodies the essence of pushing oneself to the limit, and reveling in accomplishment. Agricultural teachers use their competitive nature to improve the education of their students. The daily opportunity to be challenged and subsequently overcome is one of the joys of teaching agriculture.

5. FFA

Many agricultural teachers would confess it was the FFA component of agricultural education which motivated them to become teachers. When utilized as a portion of the complete agricultural education program, FFA is like the icing on a cake. It allows students to enjoy the full flavor of the agricultural education experi-

ence. The opportunities available to young people in this organization are extensive and when reinforced and supplemented through good classroom teaching, the sky is the limit for our students. The opportunity to educate and provide experiences that equip students with life-long skills is one of the unparalleled joys of teaching agriculture. The sharing of experience and insight with young people who are both malleable and impressionable is a labor of love. The opportunity to develop a students’ self-worth is remarkable. Long trips to National Convention are worthwhile when we see our students recognized for their efforts and hard work.

Most agriculture teachers would agree that the love of this profession is not rooted in financial and material benefits, rather in the unseen rewards of magnificent moments found buried deep in the routine chaos of the average day. We do what we do because we care about students and long to make an impact in the lives of others.

Kattlyn Wolf is a veteran agriculture teacher and graduate student at the Ohio State University.



Jonathan Velez is a graduate student at the Ohio State University and a former agriculture teacher.

Here, By The Owl

A while back I was asked who has had the greatest influence on my life. I hadn't ever given it much thought, like most folks, I guess. After considerin' for a while I came up with five people that I could say actually affected the direction of my thinkin'. My dad, Doc Brimhall, John Basabe, Red Steagall and Rupert Mansell.

Mr. Mansell was my agricultural education teacher in Las Cruces, New Mexico. "Here by the owl. The owl is the symbol of knowledge and wisdom..." It's hard for a 16-year-old kid to evaluate wisdom. I remember Rupert, as we referred to him behind his back, tryin' to teach that rag tag bunch of boys anything (it was all boys back then). Lots of us really didn't have much in the way of money. Our projects included 4 or 5 scraggly sheep, or a couple of steers, some pecan trees, rabbits or whatever. Sure, there were a few boys whose folks were good farmers and had impressive projects but most of us didn't. Rupert treated us all the same.

What we all had was a love of agriculture and the optimism of youth. That was what Rupert had to work with. He taught us that dirt was under your fingernails and soil was what you tilled. He tried, often in vain, to teach us how to weld and work on machinery. How to block sheep, fit a steer, castrate a hog, and how to tell a rib steak from a chuck. It was not until much later that I came to realize how much an agricultural educator has to know.

I said Rupert treated everybody the

same. That's not quite true since he made me feel like I was special. But, if the truth were known he probably made each one of us feel that way.

He wasn't impressed by politics so when we decided to invite the governor to be the speaker at our local FFA banquet he said to go ahead but don't advertise it in case the "guv" didn't show. We sent out invitations to all the school board, principal and other dignitaries. Most declined; they had other things to do. The day before the banquet the governor confirmed. It came out in the paper. Suddenly the local dignitaries were calling trying to get tickets. Overnight they had developed a sincere interest in the FFA. It was one of Rupert's finest hours.

For all you dedicated agricultural education teachers, I salute you, but I remind you that you are in the position to shape young peoples' lives. It is no small responsibility. And to Mr. Mansell, from all of us ex-reporters, vice-presidents, Greenhands, secretaries, state farmers, soil judges, blacks, browns and whites; if we ever amount to anything, you had a hand in it. Yep, you. There by the owl.



by Baxter Black



Baxter Black, former large animal veterinarian, current author, poet, comedian, lives in Benson, Arizona, between the Gila River and the Gila monster, the Mexican border and the Border Patrol and between the horse and the cow---where the action is.

by Don Henson

In December of 1966, Dyslexic Don and two of his buddies sat at the front of Mr. K's Algebra I classroom in Rogers, Texas trying desperately to make-up enough points to pass the first semester. Classmates with higher grades played board games at the back of the room and made preparations for the upcoming Christmas holidays. Single variable equations were killing me, and despite his best efforts, Mr. K's explanations were ricocheting off my little brain like BB's off of a battleship. Subtracting three from each side, or dividing both sides of the equation by negative twenty-seven, only served to confuse me until that day I finally asked my teacher, "Do

you mean I can do anything I want to as long as I do the same thing to both sides?"

"Well, I guess that's right", he said. "Why the heck didn't you tell me that in September?" I thought silently. From that day on, Algebra I was pretty much a piece of cake. My academic problems didn't stop that day, but what did happen was my resolution that if I could ever get the large desk with the big can of pencils on it, I would not take the indirect route to teaching. I'd just tell 'em. Through high school and college I studied the "explainers" charged with teaching me, both the good and the bad. Those who could help students "find a trail" of understanding through difficult material

simplified the complicated, instead of the other way around. I wanted to be, and still strive to be, a good explainer.

I have been asked to articulate why I have stayed a teacher of agriculture all these thirty-two years. Right outside the main building of that same, small, central-Texas high school was the agricultural building, domain of Mr. J.H. Merka. A mountain of a man, he opened the door to agriculture and the FFA to a little shrimp of a kid who had never "been to town." He had me memorize the FFA Creed and parliamentary rules. He took me places like the State Fair, college career days, contests and the state FFA convention. He helped me get into Texas A&M University and wrote letters of encouragement while I was there. He was a card carrying, sure enough, American hero to me, and I wanted to help kids like he had helped me. In college, men like Dr. Herman Brown, Dr. T.D. Tanksley and Dr. Murray Milford, to name but a few, proved that very complex material could be mastered if you could only find that magic "trail of understanding." Many other teachers were clearly masters of the material, but were ill equipped to help others find the "trail."

Having been raised on a family farm by farmers, the study of agriculture allowed me to explore what I wanted to know



Photo Courtesy of Department of Agricultural Education, University of Arizona

anyway. Attending college classes in agriculture, summer short courses, workshops or reading journal articles didn't seem like work to me. Those were the skills I wanted to develop and the concepts I sought to understand. While not a popular idea in modern agricultural education today, I still feel the first thing it takes to make a good agricultural teacher is a knowledge of basic agriculture. Modern trends hold that if young teachers know how to download an attachment about beef cattle, they can be effective beef cattle teachers. This approach has very seldom shown to provide the depth of understanding necessary for teachers to help students find the "trail." I have yet to quench my thirst for answers to deep questions like, how a black cow could eat green grass and give white milk.

Another reason teaching high school agriculture seemed a good fit for me was the opportunity to help kids learn the art of competition. Again, I seem to step across the line of political correctness in a day where we don't want to name winners for fear of offending the rest. I have never apologized for teaching youngsters to compete. Our political system selects our leaders at a most competitive ballot box. Our judicial system depends on both the prosecution and defense going all out to win. In our nation's capitalistic economic system, winners survive and losers do not. No other youth organization can come close to the FFA in providing a wide variety of activities where students measure the level of their skill against peers from across the county or across the nation. From leadership to livestock, science fair to agricultural mechanics, economics to crop production, I have yet to find a student who couldn't find some

niche in which he or she could be successful competitively with hard work and perseverance. By the same token, I have yet to teach the youngster to master all areas of our discipline. I believe there is value in teaching students that everyone can be good at something, and equal value in the knowledge that no one is good at everything. We all know it is easy to let the competitive spirit get "out of control." Taken too seriously, competition can make Grade-A jerks out of students, parents and we teachers. I would have to say that some of the most unpleasant experiences of my career sprouted in the soils of competition, but always as a result of an adult who lost focus on the fact that it was to be a "kid contest." In the same breath, seeing students try hard and succeed in an FFA event jumps to the top of my list of positive memories. On the whole, I am quite confident that preparation for FFA events has made me a better teacher and my students better professionals and citizens.

Chemistry, biology and algebra make a lot more sense to most of our kids when used to balance a ration or calculate a herbicide application rate. Select the wrong verb tense in a public speaking event and you'll get beat by those who don't. If students misspell a word or miss a math problem, they have to do it over, but no one catches on fire. Nowhere else in the schoolhouse does following instructions have such real consequences. For most of our students, agricultural class is the first time they must be truly disciplined or little animals can die, expensive equipment is destroyed, or people can be hurt - seriously hurt. I believe the reality of our curriculum draws people to what we teach. We enjoy the ability to draw on both the logic and mystery of nature as agricultural

Another reason I love my job is because we get to teach something "real." The first time the hypotenuse of a right triangle actually is important is when it becomes the length of a barn rafter.

teachers. Count the times Jesus chose to use agricultural examples in his parables. I find it impossible to argue with that.

My wife is a high school math teacher and an excellent one; she is a lot tougher than I am. Being an agricultural teacher allows me a variety of tasks, which helps the agricultural teaching shoe fit my foot. Were I confined to a classroom, a textbook, and a dry-erase board, I have every confidence I'd do a header off the gymnasium before the end of the semester. Not unlike farming, agricultural teaching in Texas and across the nation is seasonal - leadership in the fall, judging events in the spring, livestock shows, conventions, laboratories, the classroom - I love 'em all. Not having to do any of them all the time sure makes them easier for me to love all of them. Our students reap the same benefits. No different than we teachers, they might choose to focus only on their favorites, but you can really only do that at

“Disneyland FFA.” Teaching our students to plow through the tough stuff, to get to the good stuff, is a life lesson necessary to grow from punk to adult. I would sure rather be in the lab helping sophomores learn to use the oxy-acetylene cutting torch than writing lesson plans or grading papers, but I have yet to find a campus principal open-minded enough to let me just do those tasks I like. I often tell my students that a job where you only do the things you like is not a job - the word for that is “vacation.”

No small part of my attraction to our profession is practical. While an agricultural teaching position might not be the highest paying job in Dallas, it sure might be one of the best paying jobs if you choose to live in Mayberry. Twenty-nine of my thirty-two years teaching agriculture in public schools have been spent in very small towns where I was not knocking the top out of the pay scale, and I wouldn't change one minute if I could. While in those rural communities, I had the chance to cultivate profitable and enjoyable hobbies, for my family, and myself, which would have been very difficult to pursue in a more urban setting. Teaching agriculture has been very good to me.

My career has put me in contact with the best folks in the world. I consider it an honor to have rubbed shoulders at agricultural teachers' conferences, pig sales and career development events with the very best men and women in education. Many masters of the agricultural teaching craft have gone far out of their way to help me--the old masters who broke me in, and the pups of today who never seem to tire when the old man needs some help with the computerized grade book. It is a good thing that this is

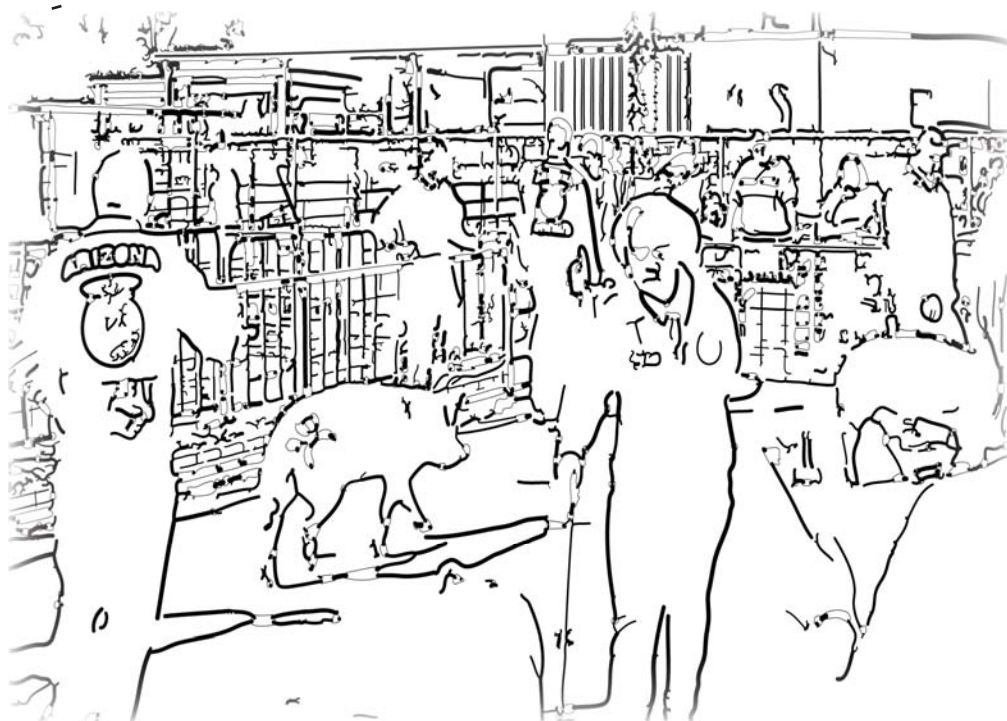
written and not spoken, or my voice might crack right here, and if I were to start naming names--well, I'll not go there. Getting to work with parents who want the extra boost of the FFA for their children brings a flood of positive memories. Their support and encouragement have been tops. I like my students and have surely been blessed with some great ones to teach, and count many former students among my best lifetime friends. They have been respectful, caring, willing, excited about learning, funny and at all times challenging. They have taught me a lot. You are who you run with, and my professional life has yoked me with teachers, parents, and students who made Darrell and Mary Catherine Henson's baby boy a lot better than he might otherwise have been.

Call me crazy! If I were rich I would teach agriculture in public school for free. I would most surely charge the heck out of the school district to fill out the paperwork, but I would teach

kids for nothing. All that FFA Creed stuff - I really believe it! I think it was good for me to memorize it and that it is just as good for today's students as it was when E.M. wrote it. Aside from those who spend their lives to protect our freedom, there is no more noble or rewarding profession than teaching the people who feed the world to find “the trail.”



Don Henson teaches Agriscience in Goldthwaite, Texas



What Agricultural Education's Fledglings Have To Say!

The la joie de faire of Teaching—Why We Do What We Do!

collected by Kyle McGregor

The following article is composed of responses from student teachers in agricultural education from across the nation. Each were asked the following questions:

- 1) Why do you want to be an agricultural educator?
- 2) Where did your passion to be an agricultural educator come from?

There was an overwhelming response to this project, resulted in approximately twenty-five pages of single spaced responses to the questions. Our newest teachers consistently and overwhelmingly cite their primary reason and source of passion for teaching agriculture as their own agricultural educator. So many heart-felt accounts of relationships, successes, pride and concern for our industry were submitted. Unfortunately, all responses were not able to be published, however, all have been posted online. Feel free to travel to http://cals.arizona.edu/desert_roses/aed_mag.htm in order to read every response we received. Enjoy!

Life is all about the opportunities you are given, and there is only one place where opportunities are endless and that's in the agricultural classroom. The chance to provide these opportunities is a chance for agricultural teachers, including myself, to change lives and make a difference in our world.
Kyle Gilliam - Texas Tech University

I had agricultural teachers in high school, some who were not even at my school, who devoted time, encouragement and mentorship to me. They opened many doors of opportunity I never knew were there. They helped in-

still in me leadership skills and abilities that made me who I am today. I feel it is my duty to pass that on to others.
Lisa Parker - Texas Tech University

Because being in agricultural courses taught me a lot about responsibility. For me, it would be a privilege to help a student find direction.
Jerrod Kerr - Texas Tech University

I want to be an agricultural educator because I believe it is vital for youth to know about the opportunities and importance of agriculture in our society.
Sandra Priest - Texas Tech University

Life is all about the opportunities you are given, and there is only one place where opportunities are endless and that's in the agricultural classroom.

I want to be an agricultural educator in order to teach students how to be leaders and productive citizens of a community.
Shannon Chambers - West Texas A&M University

The reason I want to teach - The kids. My passion - It's always all about the kids.
Sarah Luthman - The Ohio State University

My passion stems from wanting to impact more than one person everyday, being a teacher allows me to tackle 50 to 100 minds a day. I thought of being a doctor, but I would rather be the guy teaching the student who will become

that doctor.
Ryan P. Curtis - The Ohio State University

I used to stay in at recess to tutor the other students, so I knew being a "teacher" was what I wanted to do, but I only found out that I wanted to teach agriculture when I met my high school agricultural teacher. He was the man who was my surrogate father when I had none, the one who was always there for his students, and the only person who taught me life skills because they WANTED to, not because they were supposed to!
Misty J. Wunder - The Ohio State University

Being an agricultural educator will put me in a situation to share and transfer my passion for agriculture, leadership and service with young and inspirable minds of tomorrow.
Ed McCann - Virginia Tech

I want to be an agricultural educator so that my students can say "Wow, I didn't know there is agriculture in the city!!" My passion to become an agricultural educator came from living in the busy streets of Philadelphia. Yes it's not the typical agricultural setting, but there are many agricultural motivations in the city I believe I can teach in urban communities.
Tiffany Turrentine - Virginia Tech

I chose to be an agricultural teacher because the career will put me in the best position to inspire the uninspired. My passion comes from the thought of knowing I can help an individual find a their future.
Travis K. Koether - Texas A&M University

I want to be an agricultural science teacher because I want the chance to influence students' lives in a positive way. I also would like to help them realize their full potential and introduce them to the world of agriculture. I have wanted to teach since I was a young girl.

I realize now that it was teachers like my first grade teacher and my agricultural teachers that truly inspired me to make a difference in students' lives like they did for me.

Crystal Machacek - Texas A&M University

I want to be an agricultural science teacher so I can positively affect the lives of young individuals, and share the wonders of agriculture with them. My passion to teach came from my grandfather, who taught agriculture for forty-five years. I aspire to impact the lives of my students on a daily basis as he did.

Wendy Steele - Texas A&M University

I chose to be an agricultural educator because agricultural education is more than just teaching students in a classroom.

We are able to see students grow as individuals through the classroom, SAE and FFA throughout their high school career.

Jennifer Nicely - North Carolina State University

I want to teach students something that will be of meaning to them in their future. Even if they don't choose an agricultural occupation, they will be knowledgeable consumers and be aware of how much agriculture is a part of their every day lives.

Tiffany Dickens - North Carolina State University

I would like to be an agricultural educator because I would like to have the positive influence on students, just as my agricultural educators had on me. The bond that most teachers build with students will never compare to that of an agricultural student and their advisor.

Bradley Lindsey - Tarleton State University

Agricultural education is a way of life. It involves helping others and working in a field of science I enjoy. My passion comes from wanting to make a difference in the world.

Bryan Chisholm - Tarleton State University

I wanted to become an agriculture science educator in order that students would have every opportunity to increase their knowledge of the vast world of agriculture. I want students to



Photo Courtesy of Department of Agricultural Education, University of Arizona

see that agriculture went beyond the field and barn; into communications, leadership and any career that they put their minds to.

Brady Rasco - Tarleton State University

When I was young and needed the guidance, there was a teacher I that really helped me out and taught me not only things I did, but gave me the confidence to do anything. My love for all kinds of agriculture makes me want to share the things I have learned, which makes me hopeful that one of my students might do the same someday. It's a chain that goes on forever and its open to anyone with an interest, anyone that has a drive to achieve and learn by doing.

Andy Davis - Tarleton State University

The reason I want to be in agricultural education is that it gives me the opportunity to work with younger members of our society in order to teach them that agriculture has such a huge impact on our lives. To get students interested in this lifestyle will help sustain and improve agriculture for years to come. They are the future of agriculture and I want to help to plant that seed with my students in this profession.

Tiffany Guptill - Utah State University

I love the agricultural education program. Upon graduating high school I

was having a hard time dealing with the fact that my FFA career was over. I decided to be an agricultural teacher in order to teach future generations about agriculture, and most importantly, to help them develop their own leadership skills.

Joshua B. Evans - Utah State University

I want to be an agricultural educator because I believe it is one of the most important jobs that anyone can do.

Bridgette Wilde - Utah State University

I want to become an agriculture educator to make a positive difference in students' lives through agriculture. My passion came from being involved in my school's agricultural program. I saw all the opportunities it gave me, and I want to be able to give my students those experiences and opportunities.

Aimee Smith - Oregon State University

Agricultural education gives me the opportunity to reach a diverse group of students and instill in them the knowledge and skills necessary for success after high school. My passion for being an agricultural educator is a direct result of the positive impact ag-

ricultural education has had on my own life. Through agricultural education, I was able to develop knowledge and skills that otherwise wouldn't have been presented to me. Just as my high school agricultural educator prepared me for the challenges of life, it is my passion to do the same for today's youth.
Nichole Scholz - Oregon State University

Agricultural education provides a diverse and evolving platform for teaching the principles of language, mathematics, science and technology in a contextual format. I am fascinated by the opportunity to 'sneak up' on an opportunity to convince students (let the students convince themselves?) that they can become far more than they'd previously believed possible. I have been taught to believe in success, and the success of others. I would hate for this message to stop, even for an instant, as a result of my silence.
Keith Frost - Oregon State University

I want to be an agricultural educator because I want to influence the lives of youth, by engaging them in agriculture. I want my students to enter the classroom ready to learn, and leave ready to serve.
Kaleb Kromann - University of Minnesota, Twin Cities

My passion came from my parents, my grandparents, my peers and my coworkers. I have immersed myself in the world of agriculture and have been steeped in the principles and values that agriculturalists live by.
Christopher J. Ovrebo - University of Minnesota, Twin Cities

I believe that the most important career in the world is to give students a reason to feel accomplishment. Agricultural education provides the widest spectrum of opportunities for students to find something that they are good at and that they can feel pride in. The source of my passion is two-fold: my passion for agriculture came from deep roots embedded in me by my dad, while my passion for education came from the single most influential person in my educational career, my agricultural teacher and FFA advisor. Eric Sawatzke - University of

Minnesota, Twin Cities

Agricultural educators guide students through life-like situations and prepare them for life and not just academic success.
Amy Konradi - University of Minnesota, Crookston

Agriculture Education gave me a home when my family was falling apart. It was because of agriculture educators like my high school instructor that I have this chance.
Shell Franks - University of Minnesota, Crookston

I care about the future of agriculture and strive to keep the energy of education alive. To accomplish my goals, I realized I needed to teach the leaders of tomorrow. I have a zeal for California agriculture along with a love for students. I wanted to find a career that combined my two passions.
Katie Reid - Chico State University

I want to make a difference, work with students, and be a part of the awesome agriculture industry!
Robin Bailey - California Polytechnic State University

I want to make sure students are educated in the life sustaining industry of agriculture, and hope to make them better citizens and consumers that promote the future of the industry.
Heather Borgia - California Polytechnic State University

I have always enjoyed working with students and believe in the values and life skills taught to students in agricultural education.
Ginnie Bushong - University of Arizona

To give students added possibility and opportunity in life. My passion for agriculture comes from my heritage and the day-to-day interactions with other agriculturalists. My passion for education comes from its potential for leadership and positive influence.
Dee Wear - University of Arizona

I joined my high school agricultural program freshman year and fell in love with all the aspects of the program. It helped

me grow intellectually as well as personally. My high school agricultural teacher was probably the biggest influence in my decision to join the profession because he was someone who always had faith that I could achieve anything I desired.
Michelle Garcia - University of Arizona

I believe strongly in the future of agriculture and believe a large majority of our nation's population is not well educated on its importance. I also believe Agricultural Education provides many opportunities & various content delivery systems that address all students' different educational needs.
Holly Schindler - University of Arizona

I want to be an agricultural educator because it is my calling to give students an opportunity of a lifetime, and teaching is my way of doing so. My passion for being an agricultural educator came from the encouragement and support that I received from one of my high school agriscience teachers.
Lindsey Hill - Sam Houston State University

I was raised in an agricultural background and community. I worked for several years outside of the agricultural industry and quickly realized how much I missed it. I am drawn to teaching America's youth about the importance of the continuance of agriculture in the world.
Jennifer Council - Sam Houston State University

*I believe that
the most
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feel
accomplishment.*

Why I Choose to be an Agricultural Educator

by Alison Gentry

The responses I received from my parents when I made the big announcement that I wanted to major in Agricultural Education did little to encourage my decision. “Why would you want to teach agriculture?” followed by, “Why couldn’t you teach another subject? Why teach at all?” At the time I couldn’t justify my choice with concrete or specific examples of why I wanted to teach because I had only taken one agricultural education course during high school. I just knew that when I was a student in that class, wearing my FFA jacket, or even attending chapter meetings, I felt a sense of pride and motivation to do my best. Agricultural education was something I truly enjoyed being apart of and wanted to pursue.

After having a great student teaching experience during the Fall of 2006 and many other opportunities within college to interact with younger students, I knew that I chose the right professional path for career success and personal fulfillment because of the following reasons:

Student-Teacher Interactions

As a student I knew agricultural educators regularly spent many hours after school and on weekends working with students. I never realized *how* regular it actually was! Because of this extra time spent with students, I have had a chance to see the real personalities many students hide underneath a “mask”

during school hours. Stacy, a sophomore I had an opportunity to work with during my student teaching, was a perfect example of this. During class time, Stacy seemed disconnected, uninterested and lazy. She rarely answered questions and always had excuses for why she couldn’t attend after school activities. Many of her classmates were frustrated with her attitude, and we all encouraged her to attend parliamentary procedure practice after school.

When Stacy arrived at practice later that afternoon, her peers greeted her enthusiastically and a sense of excitement filled the room. During that practice, members were nominated for officer positions. To my surprise, Stacy was nominated to be secretary. She tried to reject the nomination, but failed miserably and was later elected by the other students to the position. Since that afternoon, Stacy did not miss a practice, came into our classes smiling, asked questions during lessons and was interactive with her classmates. Outside of class interactions like this one example can mean the difference between a lackluster student and an energetic learner.

Challenges Abound

Curriculum, students, Career Development Events, SAE’s, fundraisers, community interaction, and adult education, are all examples of challenges faced by agricultural educators. These challenges within an agricultural educator’s career can and should be seen as a positive

motivator for having a successful program, not only for the benefit of the students, but also for those who will be impacted by our students in the future. Developing creative ways to tackle these challenges should require educators to involve students as often and wherever possible. As stated by Carrie Fritz (2006), “Teachers who provide opportunities for students to be involved in their learning, create a new and fun environment, and make learning fun will engage the student.” Ultimately, challenges can be the gap between agricultural educators and students making a joint impact in society and within one another.

Opening Doors and Opportunities

Students are offered premium opportunities to learn, achieve and excel within the extracurricular activities of the agricultural education program. As educators, coaches and advisors, we are presented with many opportunities to assist in the growth of our students *and* ourselves. Through workshops, tours, conferences, meetings and conventions, organizations such as the NAAE and state-level associations for agricultural educators assist us in building upon knowledge and practices required for success within our discipline. *Made For Excellence*, *COLT* and other leadership conferences that provide students with leadership training, are also beneficial for agricultural educators. Be sure to take advantage of networking opportunities, sharing of successful

ideas, and motivating yourself and others toward making a difference in the lives of students. “Not only will participation in these workshops help improve our teaching, but it will also develop life-long connections with other teachers. Often these fellowships alone can keep the fire burning for teaching.” (Mueller 2006).

Warm and Fuzzy Feelings

The way a person feels during memorable situations is hard to forget, especially when these memories occur during the teenage years of development. My favorite FFA memory occurred when I was in high school, during a chapter banquet. I was awarded a plaque for outstanding service to my chapter and recognized by my advisors for receiving the Greenhand degree. The accumulation of pride, self-worth and overall satisfaction in what I had been able to achieve in one year of membership is still present to this day.

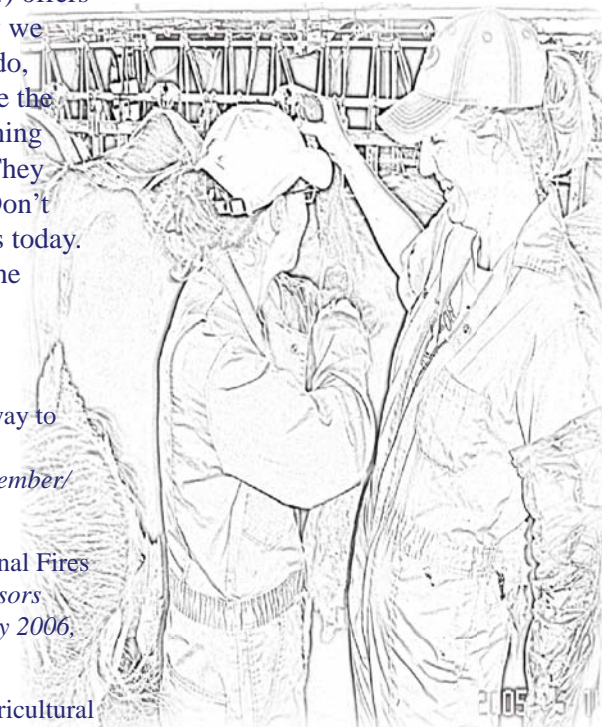
How can one continue to maintain and build upon these memories for future encouragement? A previously mentioned example is involving members in the local program! The satisfaction of seeing a student do well in competition or even accomplishing a personal goal through our programs is like no other. The smile on students’ faces and the excitement they generate from these types of achievements has given me positive reinforcement and helps me to remember why I continue to feel so strongly about these associations years after experiencing my own FFA activities.

My comments in this article, much like a balanced agricultural

education program, are interrelated, symbiotic and unrealistic without each other. Though there are many other reasons why I consider agricultural educator as a premiere occupation, I believe Jason Davis (2004) offers the ultimate reason for why we should believe in what we do, “Most students don’t realize the value of what they are learning when they are learning it. They realize the value later on. Don’t expect to reap your rewards today. They’ll come years down the road.”

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Alison Gentry is a senior in Agricultural Education at The Ohio State University.