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*Keeping the Home Fires Burning*

# Balancing Your Personal and Professional Lives

by Harry N. Boone, Jr.

For some time the number of agricultural education teaching positions available in the United States has exceeded the number of qualified potential agricultural education teachers seeking employment. Individuals leaving the profession is a major factor in this shortage. There have been a number of research studies on problems faced by agricultural education teachers and the reasons they leave the profession (Boone & Boone, 2007; Boone & Boone 2009). Teacher burnout is one factor that has received a great deal of research effort.

Croom (2003) in a three state study found that burnout was not a serious problem for agricultural education teachers, however teachers were experiencing some level of stress in their professional life. He found that teachers experience "moderate levels of emotional exhaustion in their work, low levels of depersonalization in relationships with students, colleagues, and others, and a high degree of personal accomplishment in their work." (Croom, 2003, p. 11) In a series of studies in Ohio, varying degrees of job satisfaction was found among agricultural education teachers ranging from nearly 90 percent expressing some level of satisfaction to teachers being undecided about their job satisfaction (Cano & Miller, 1992; Castillo, Conklin, & Cano, 1999; Newcomb, Betts, & Cano, 1987).

One of the factors associated with burnout is the conflict between personal and professional lives. As teacher educators we stress the ideal agricultural education program that

involves all three aspects of the total program (classroom/laboratory instruction, leadership through the FFA organization, and experiential learning through supervised agricultural experience programs (SAEs)). We talk about "all" aspects of each of these components. We sometimes fail to tell our students that it is impossible to implement all aspects of each of these three components without great sacrifice on the teacher's time. I WANT TO MAKE IT CLEAR: To offer a complete program all three components of the total program must be present. The key is to select activities based on the needs of the local community and students. Every student should have an SAE. The instruction should be based on standards set by your state and/or local school authority and developed around the needs of your students. A teacher should involve every student in leadership activities through the FFA Organization, however, it is impossible for a program to be involved in every FFA activity.

Now take this mission and balance it against the needs of your spouse and your family. For most of us the legacy we will leave when we depart this world is our children. Make sure that your best efforts go into the development and education of your children. This includes taking the needed steps to make certain that it is a joint effort with your spouse. Too often we think that we are the only one who can do a job, that the job has to be done, and that it must be done. I devoted nine years to my high school agricultural education program. I would say that in less than three years after I left none of the students knew who I was.

Normally we focus *The Agricultural Education Magazine* themes on professional issues associated with the agricultural education teacher. This issue will focus on ways to improve the personal side of an agricultural education career. Dr. Smith and her theme article authors have done a great job in suggesting ways that we can keep the "home fires burning."

I was single during the nine years I served as a high school agricultural education teacher. I didn't have to worry when I spent late nights and weekends doing my job. On several occasions after my sons were born I made the comment that if I was still teaching at the high school I am not sure how I could handle both my personal and professional responsibilities. My sons are now grown and I find myself reverting back to old habits from my high school teaching days: teaching four nights a week, working weekends, getting involved in activities that take me away from home, etc. The only advantage that I have today is that my wife occupies the office next door.

Enjoy the "Keeping the Home Fires Burning" articles and I hope

*continued on page 5*



*Dr. Harry N. Boone, Jr., is a Professor at West Virginia University and Editor of **The Agricultural Education Magazine**.*

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**Cover Photo:** Treynor Smith helping Dad (Clint Smith) sort fruit. (*Photo courtesy of Amy Smith*)

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**Article Submission**

Articles and photographs should be submitted to the Editor or Theme Editor. Items to be considered for publication should be submitted at least 90 days prior to the publication date of the intended issue. All submissions will be acknowledged by the Theme Editor and/or the Editor. No items are returned unless accompanied by a written request. Articles should be approximately four double spaced pages in length (1500 words). Information about the author(s) should be included at the end of the article. Photos and/or drawings appropriate for the “theme issue” are welcomed. Photos/drawings should be submitted in an electronic format (jpg or tiff format preferred – minimum 300 dpi). Do not imbed photos/drawings in the Word document. A recent photograph (jpg or tiff format preferred– minimum 300 dpi) of all authors should accompany the article unless photographs are on file with the Editor. Articles in the *Magazine* may be reproduced without permission but should be acknowledged.

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## Keeping the Home Fires Burning...

by Amy Smith

Welcome to the final issue of *The Agricultural Education Magazine* for 2013. If you are like me, this time of year finds you scrambling to wrap up one semester, prepare for another, celebrate the holidays, and contemplate resolutions for the New Year. Despite the hustle and bustle of the season, hopefully this issue, with the theme of “Keeping the Home Fires Burning,” will provide you with another reason to pause and reflect upon those who help keep your “home fires” burning.

### *It Takes a Whole Village –*

You are inevitably familiar with the well-known African proverb that states, “*It takes a whole village to raise a child*” (<http://afriprov.org>). The proverb implies that as a child grows up, many people influence him or her. In addition to a child’s parents, extended family members, community members, teachers and various others also educate, impact, and support the child’s development.



*Treynor Smith and his father Clint enjoying some family time during a citrus fruit sale.*

Similarly, I strongly believe that it takes a village to support an agricultural educator as well. Think about it... Being an agricultural educator requires you to wear a number of hats, often simultaneously: classroom teacher, FFA advisor, supervisor, recruiter, coach, fundraiser, chauffeur, parent, and *many many* more! One person cannot possibly juggle all those roles, for long, without the help and support of others. Without understanding, caring, and helpful “village people,” none of us could manage.

### *Look Around You...*

Growing up in a family that highly valued both agriculture and education, it should be no surprise that my love for agricultural education was established early on. My parents and older sister fostered my love for livestock, leadership and communication, and ultimately led me to a career as an agricultural educator. However, as I reflect on the many stages of my own journey in agricultural education thus far, I am reminded of how blessed I have been to have a supportive village at each stage. While several

articles in this issue of *The Agricultural Education Magazine* focus on the valuable role that a spouse or significant other may play, it is important to recognize that many others may play a role as well.

In my pre-service days, I was fortunate to have college friends and peers in a student teaching cohort who willingly shared, collaborated and commiserated with me. When I began my first teaching job in Oklahoma, over 10 hours away from where I grew up, two families in the community reached out to me and supported me as I began my teaching career. Because of their efforts, I not only made connections in the community quickly, but also felt “at home” so far away from my own family. Upon returning to Iowa to continue my teaching career, I was again fortunate to teach in a wonderful school district where amazing colleagues, administrators, students and families welcomed me and became valuable residents of my village.

In 2005, I made the decision to leave the secondary classroom to pursue my doctorate. Though I left behind an amazing village in Iowa, luckily for me I moved into a supportive village in Columbia, Missouri. Throughout graduate school, I relied heavily upon my fellow graduate students, faculty and staff to get me through.

Since completing my graduate work, I’ve taught at the university level; first at South Dakota State University and now, at the University of Minnesota. At each location, I’ve had a village that welcomed me and supported me through my endeavors. Currently, my village consists of a wide variety of individuals and some; particularly family, lifelong friends and colleagues have been a part of several stages of my journey. Others are relatively new to my life and my village. Regardless, all play a valuable role in my life and have contributed to my successes in agricultural education.

What about you? Stop and think about those who are a part of your village. Who in your life recognizes the value of what you do, picks up the slack at home during the busy FFA seasons, lends a hand whenever you need it, or just seems to “get it” without requiring a long explanation? Do you appreciate them? Of course you do! Do they know it? Maybe you better remind them just in case.

### ***I Should Know Better!***

When Dr. Boone contacted me regarding the opportunity to serve as the theme editor for this particular issue – I immediately said “Yes!” The theme simply struck a chord with me. As I began to recruit, receive, and review submissions, my enthusiasm grew! Now, it is with great excitement that I share with you the following articles, written by or for our agricultural educator village across the country.

Some might assume that since I’ve been a secondary agriculture

teacher myself, I’m a teacher educator, and I’m serving as the theme editor of this issue, I have this whole thing down... my “home fires” are always burning and my work/family lives are in perfect balance. Um, no. In fact, that’s almost comical to me!

Sometimes, I admit, I might get a little whiny when my husband, Clint (a secondary agriculture teacher whom I met at Ag Teachers’ Conference of all places!) has to be gone late night after night during CDE craziness, leave super early for FFA fruit delivery, or miss a family celebration because of an Ag Ed conference or FFA convention. In moments such as these, it’s not that I love agricultural education any less... it’s just that I love my family even more!

So, agricultural educators, here’s my advice... take it for what it is worth. We need outstanding leaders in the profession who are dedicated to making a difference in the lives of students and sharing the message of agriculture. But, don’t forget the im-

portant people you have waiting for you away from the school building. Whoever your “people” are (parents, spouses, kids or friends), make time for them too. Recognize their efforts, big or small, that enable you to succeed in your chosen career. Involve them in your Ag Ed life, but also have a life outside of Ag Ed too. Embrace the village you have built, so you are able to love your job and do it well!



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## ***Balancing Your ... Lives*** (continued from page 2)

that you find a few suggestions that will help you balance your personal and professional lives.

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# Keeping the Home Fires Burning Through a Balanced Life

by Tyson J. Sorensen & Shelby Sorensen

## **A** Wife's Account: Lighting the Home Fires Alone

We had been married five years when my husband started working as an agriculture teacher. I knew he was going to be busy as a first year teacher but I had no idea what I was in for. During the first few years as an agriculture teacher, we both worked part-time jobs to make ends meet. Additionally, I was trying to juggle my roles as a parent of two kids and a full-time nursing student. In his limited time at home, my husband managed to help me out with some chores around the house, but what I *really* wanted was quality family time.

I was patient during the first year thinking that the next year would get better; after all, that's what my husband kept telling me. After four years of wishful thinking, reality sunk in that I would be raising our kids by myself. After years of frustration trying to get my husband to free up some time on his schedule for family activities, I accepted his excuse that his school events were "really important" for him to attend. Although I didn't believe it, I accepted the idea that he cared more for his job and students than he did for his own family and I made a point to let him know that. Don't get me wrong, I am very proud of my husband's success as an agriculture teacher and I know he was a great influence on many students' lives, but I wondered if he realized that he could have that same impact at home.

Eventually my comments must have sunk in because things have greatly improved. He happily takes days off or rearranges his work schedules to care for sick children and to schedule in family time. He still works multiple jobs and spends many hours at work, but now I feel that we are working as a team to teach and raise our kids, make memories, establish a loving home, and keep the home fires burning.

strategies and suggestions helped me to strike a more balanced life.

## Rekindling the Home Fires

*1. Determine your values, priorities, and goals in life.* In Stephen Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, he invites readers to imagine themselves attending their own funeral. He asks readers to ponder what other people might say as a eulogy. He challenges readers to reflect and

Once you are determined to find balance in life, it will be easier than you think.

## A Wake-Up Call: The Home Fires Were Burning...The One Getting Burned Was Me

My wife told me, "You care more for your school students than you do for your own family!" I was hurt and annoyed. I told myself that she just didn't understand the nature of agriculture education and if she did, she would be more sympathetic. I would tell myself that young agriculture teachers *have to* work extra hours just to keep afloat, and to be a 'good ag teacher' more hours would be required. While justifying my position on the matter, her comment *was* a wake-up call; a shot across the bow. I began to realize the one person missing out on life was me. But how can agriculture teachers, especially early career teachers with young families, balance the overwhelming demands of career and family? The following

determine their values, priorities, and goals in life to put in perspective what is *really* important in life. What are your values and goals and priorities in relation to your family, faith, friends, community, and self?

Ask yourself, what use is it to win judging events if your family falls apart in the process? What sense does it make to spend all your time working to be a top program if your own children don't even know you? What use is it to spend so many hours at work each day if your health deteriorates as a result? I do not advocate being content with mediocrity in your job, but I do advocate balance. If you spend all day at work, you miss out on one of the most important works you can do in life, which takes place within the walls of your own home.

*2. Set a schedule that works for you, your family, and the needs*



*of your program; then stick with it.* Agriculture teachers generally have calendars that dictate their lives for at least a year into the future. Because school and FFA calendars are planned so far in advance, they tend to trump other family events that are scheduled later. Is your calendar so full that you can't get away to attend a child's field trip or ballet recital?

My work schedule didn't allow me flexibility to attend some of these monumental events in the lives of my children and family, so I decided to do something about it. I scheduled family events and family time before meeting with my officer team to plan our program of activities for the year. I created black out days and times that my job couldn't steal away from my family. I set a standard weekly schedule that my students and my family could follow. For example, Mondays were family night; I left school at 4 PM. Tuesdays were devoted to FFA officer, chapter, parent, and advisory meetings. Wednesdays were CDE practices until 5 PM. Thursdays were devoted to SAE visits and working with students' land lab projects. Fridays were reserved for date nights with my wife; I left school at 4 PM. I worried that the students would respond negatively to this rigid schedule but the students and their parents appreciated the structure. This schedule allowed me to accomplish my responsibilities at work but also helped me find time for my family.

**3. Plan Purposefully.** Refer back often and reflect upon your life's goals and priorities so that your weekly schedule reflects that. If you have a goal to run a marathon or learn a new language, does your schedule this week have time built in for exercise or language study? If your priority in life is to be a good father or mother to your children, do you have family time planned in your schedule

each day? Planning with a purpose means that you align your short term goals and activities with your values, priorities, and long range goals.

**4. Identify a support system.** Agriculture teachers should never do their job alone. Identify and utilize people that make your job easier. Let parents and local community members train your CDE teams. Allow students to take on more responsibilities in the agriculture department. Similarly, identify people that you can count on when work-family conflicts arise. Do you know a reliable person who can provide childcare for last minute emergencies? Do you know a colleague at work who would be willing to cover for you when needed? Having a support network can reduce much of the strain associated with trying to balance work and life.

**5. Be more efficient, effective, and productive with your time.** The more efficient, effective, and productive you can become as an agriculture teacher should translate into more time you can spend in other domains of your life. Ideas to be more efficient, effective, and productive at work include:

- Determine the most effective time of day and schedule to accomplish most of your work during those hours
- Eliminate distractions
- Set regular attainable goals, prioritize them, and make a to-do list to accomplish those goals
- Prioritize and plan week by week and day by day
- Stay organized
- Learn to say "No"
- Delegate as much as you can to students, officers, colleagues, and community members

- Take a day off occasionally to relax and recharge

### Keeping the Home Fires Burning

Early in my career, I envied my friends that were training for marathons and spending numerous hours each week with family and friends. I told myself that it was because they had an easier work schedule and if I had time, I could do that too. I have realized that I was wrong. John Lubbock stated it best, "People can generally make time for what they choose to do; it is not really the time but the will that is lacking." Once you are determined to find balance in life, it will be easier than you think. If you neglect to find balance between work and family life, you refuse yourself the lasting joy and warmth that comes from keeping those home fires burning.

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Shelby Sorensen is a wife, mother of three kids, and part-time student.

## And the Honorary Degree Recipient is...

by Megan Seibel

I can vividly remember, in the early years of my marriage to an agriculture teacher, the excitement and anticipation that went into planning details of the annual chapter awards banquet; both on the part of the students and the teacher. After sitting through the ceremony one year in a wooden auditorium seat I remember asking my husband about the community members who received the Honorary Chapter FFA Degree. “How do you go about selecting those individuals?” I said, “They seem fantastic.” As he talked about all the recipients had done to support the chapter that echoed the description read by the student officer before awarding them, I asked him if teachers’ spouses ever received that recognition. His reply was quick and sincere as he simply stated, “I never really thought about it that way since supporting the chapter is your job.”

And so it goes. The role of an agriculture teacher spouse means being an unconditional supporter of all it takes to support the best-of-the-best. Agriculture teachers are special. They don’t simply teach. They instill the value of education as an *experience* in a way that is invaluable in developing productive, young professionals necessary to keep our communities alive.

My husband’s career in agricultural education now spans 28 years. He taught high school for 16 years before becoming our state FFA Executive Secretary, a position he has proudly held since 2002. Countless students have crossed the threshold of his classrooms and offices, and through the gates to contest arenas and event sites. Although the pictures on his walls and drawers full of

thank you notes are a testimony to the insight and tutelage he offered over the years, the mark these young men and women made on his heart is truly indelible. Surely there were those that tried his patience and contributed to hair that seemed to gray more quickly at certain times than others, but the fact that he can tell you about almost three decades of students in full detail means there was something life changing in those interactions.

The life story an ag teacher tells is a truthful and colorful one. There are tears of sadness and joy scattered

spouse gone many-an-evening or overnight for yet another student event. It just seemed different somehow and perhaps easier to rationalize. I remember being told by the wife of a co-teacher that I needed to hurry up and “memorize the yearly event calendar” so I would be better at predicting what happened when and where and be prepared for just being expected to know. I tried to learn everything I could about what Andy did in his profession, at times to the point that it made my own career as a nurse seem more like a hobby with which to pass my free time. By the

An ag teacher’s spouse is an unconditional supporter of all it takes to support the best-of-the-best.

throughout it and even more stories of comedic happenstance that would cause the most uptight of us to crack a smile. A well-seasoned ag teacher is one that has many wrinkles, but close inspection reveals most to be from laughter and contented exhaustion. To be a teacher-of-teachers, a groomsman and guest to numerous weddings, and recipient of many a baby announcement is testament to the fact that an ag teacher forever becomes a part of his or her students’ lives. In truth, there were students with whom Andy spent more time with than their own parents. It was in these instances that the support and respect for both student and teacher was deep and mutual.

In the early years of our family, when the children were very small, it wasn’t necessarily easy to have a

time we had been married for four years, we had three children and were two years into establishing a business on his parents’ farm in order to try to diversify it enough to keep it in the family another generation. He was offered the Executive Secretary position, which meant a move closer to the land grant university where it was housed, but also a chance to get closer to the farm, as we had literally been commuting every weekend for over two years to work the fields.

I openly encouraged Andy to consider taking the position at his beloved alma mater, knowing that it would also allow a move “home” as well, but knew it would be heart-wrenching for him to leave the chapter and facilities he had worked so hard to develop. An ag teacher’s shop and classroom are not simply four





*Chapter or community events can offer opportunities to introduce loved ones to your "Ag Ed family."*

walls and some equipment. They are a cadre of smells and sounds, voices and stories, which form the spirit of an FFA Chapter. Every picture, every plaque, every chip in the paint, every well-worn tool has a story and a face behind it. This intimate knowledge and affinity for a space is what is so often lost on school administrators and other teachers. I would like to believe it is understood by the community a school chapter serves, but may not be fully appreciated until it is gone. In Andy's new role in a state-level position, knowledge of chapters closing and teachers not being replaced across the Commonwealth wears at him...and I have a feeling now that the gray hair and wrinkles are from a deeper place in his soul.

In the years that have passed, Andy's love of all things agriculture has instilled in me a passion that spans our industry. It goes far beyond the knowledge I have gained managing our business and crops, beyond the relationships built to sell the product of our toil. I am now the inaugural director of our state-level adult agriculture leadership development program, which is an adventure in-and-of-itself. It gives us a chance to brainstorm together about agricultural leadership, to share ideas and resources, and work to build relationships with a vast assortment of stakeholders. We enjoy

the idea of impacting a spectrum of ag leaders - from youth under his guidance - to adults under mine. It has made supporting each other and raising a family under the awning of ag

ed even more challenging than ever. We each clock close to 80 nights a year away from home, and countless days on the road. We have both driven all night to return from things in order to get back to family and each other a bit sooner, but it is no easier now than before to find peace until everyone is safely at home. The years of supporting him in his career have resulted in him understanding that he now needs to support me, but it is truly more mutual than anything. With both of us embedded in ag ed as a part of who we are, the entire family must collaborate in life to make it happen.

Perhaps one of the greatest joys resulting from committing passionately to a vocation such as ag ed is seeing our children believe in it, too. At this past summer's state FFA Convention, a veteran teacher leaned over during one of the sessions to say that it was really exciting to see my children on stage and doing well. He shared that he was proud for us that our children had bought into what we believe in, that we had made it a family affair. He then shared that his own children had not been involved to the degree he had hoped. Although they are successful in what they are doing, I couldn't help but feel a pang of sadness for this gentle man and thought that it really must have been a sacri-

fice for him to commit to his students as he had.

There are plenty of times Andy and I feel we are sacrificing time away from friends and family, but more often it just feels like something we do as part of who we are. As our children become more active in their ag ed activities, we find ourselves thinking that it seems like an awful lot of nights, mornings, and weekends for various CDE practices and meetings. We have talked to them candidly about why they shouldn't complain about it; why none of us should. Their teachers are doing what is necessary to prepare them for life, just as Andy does for his students. The student development that happens in ag ed is truly unparalleled and we are blessed to be a part of it.

It has been a long time since I wondered about that Honorary Chapter Degree. Now, I proudly share that I have been recognized with an even greater honor: the Honorary American FFA Degree, awarded just this year - in 2013. The best part about this honor is the fact that the students in Andy's office nominated me; the students, not the adults. Wow, what an honor.



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## *Down the Rabbit Hole: Life with an Ag Teacher*

by Chris Nelson

**M**y wife Michelle and I are perfectly matched. The reasons why are really quite simple: she would be hard pressed to find any other guy who could put up with her unbreakable devotion to her profession and I would find it impossible to find any other woman who could put up with, well...me. The bond that really keeps us together though is a shared passion for agriculture. We channel that passion with different specialties; Michelle through teaching and FFA and I channel it through agricultural research and production. We often cross-over into each other's world, partly because it is the only way we ever get to spend any time together, but mostly because we work so well together.

We have both been told several times, "Leave work at work." While there is a great deal of wisdom in that statement it is a philosophy that does not often manifest itself in our home. It is not for lack of effort; it stems more from the fact that we think so much alike, that we have become each other's best resource for all things work or non-work related. We constantly bounce ideas off of each other, searching for that fresh perspective that in most cases generates a fairly simple solution. Michelle is my go-to gal for help with everything from vaccinating calves to shearing sheep to advertising the research farm field day (her job makes her rather well connected for such a task). I am her go-to guy for help with FFA events and general sanity maintenance (that one works both ways, I believe). Does this wear on us at times? You bet it does. That is to be expected. We

do our best to catch ourselves when it reaches that point though, and declare a night off from everything to relax, and just enjoy each other's company.

However, that declaration is rarely easy to make. Michelle's job requires not only long hours with extensive attention to detail (something she is well-suited for since she is the most detail-oriented, organized person I have ever met!), but it also requires her to spend a significant amount of time on the road – something that proves problematic at times. For example, when we bought our house, Michelle was at the National FFA Convention in Indianapolis. She had looked at the house with me the night before she left, but the paperwork for making an offer on the house was left to me. And since there were two other offers already on the house, time was not on our side. After our offer was accepted, there was more paperwork, and having never been through this process before, things were a little stressful. I had been told by my doctor before we even looked at the house that I was one day away from having pneumonia and needed to be admitted to the hospital. "Go home and sleep," my doctor said. Yeah...right. When Michelle came home from National Convention though, she was the best nurse/chef/everything ever. I think she felt a little guilty but I know that if she had been in my shoes, she would have powered on through too. I honestly think it was harder for her to be away than it was for me to do the paperwork and communications at home. She would have switched places with me in a heartbeat.

To simply sum it up, the time apart is difficult for both of us. Michelle grows weary of being away,

and I do not enjoy coming home to an empty house for several nights in a row. I do laundry, clean house, and yard work in the hopes that when she is home, we can spend some quality time together. I am not a great chef, but I can fend for myself; I think the pizza delivery guy knows Michelle's schedule as well as anyone. Often times, even when she is home, she is not really "home." Since she is in charge of all the major FFA events in the state of South Dakota, the phrase "break in the action" is not in her contract. "On to the next thing" is a more common phrase in our household. Her mind, if not her body, is always working because there is always another major event on the horizon. This wears on me, on her, and on our relationship. I really start to miss her and eventually reach a point where I have two choices; completely withdraw, or throw myself further down the rabbit hole and deeper into her world. Since she is my best friend, you can imagine what I choose to do. I would be lying if I said that it is always an easy decision though. Truth be told, there are times that I begin to resent Michelle's chosen profession, even though I believe so strongly in her and the mission she has committed herself to. I feel jealous of the events and people that consume so much of her time. Once I reach that point, it does not really matter how much I believe in what she is doing or how necessary it is for her to do it, I just know that I want my wife home and that I miss her.

I highly doubt that I am the only spouse of an agriculture education teacher that has ever had these experiences and felt this way. That is the one thing I think we all have in com-

mon, how we react to these feelings is where we differ. I am not about to tell you that my reactions are always right and if someone else does not react in the same way, they are wrong. I am merely saying, "This is a taste of how I deal with all of it, in addition to co-founding the 'Spouses of Ag Teachers Support Group.'"

We have all heard the saying, "If momma ain't happy, ain't nobody happy." I live by these words. I do everything in my power to make and keep Michelle happy. Am I afraid of her? Absolutely, but that is not my point. For those of you who may not understand my sense of humor, I am not actually afraid of my wife, but I will say this: I am 100% committed to my wife and nothing warms my heart more than to see a smile on her face. Most days this is easy to do, but sometimes putting that smile on her face proves to be an extremely difficult task. Times like these present me with that crucial decision; am I in or out? As luck would have it, I am all in. Need some help with the wording on that document? Well, you are in luck because I am an absolute wordsmith. Need someone to judge at State Leadership Career Development Events? I do not know anything about that event, but I will learn. Need a Career Development Event coordinator for State Convention? It sounds a bit involved, but if it will alleviate some of your stress, my dear, I will do it.

I am sure if you are still actually reading this, you are thinking, "This guy is a total sappy pushover." Well, I have just one thing to say to you: you are absolutely right. I love my wife. She is my best friend. I love spending time with her, and it does not always matter where we are. I go to several FFA events with her because that is often the only way I will get to spend time with her. My other option is to

watch her leave for a few days and settle for the occasional phone call or text; not a real popular alternative in my world. You know what I find as I help her out with all of these events? I find that I learn. I learn from the agriculture education teachers. I learn from the students. I learn from the other volunteers helping out at the event. I learn things that make me better suited for my chosen profession. I learn things that make me a better person. Also, (and I have no verification of this), I hope that others learn from me at these events. I do not know for sure that I have any gems of wisdom to pass along, but you never know. Even a blind squirrel finds a nut once in a while. My point is, by embracing the experiences that are available to me because of my wife, I have become a better person. I have gained a new understanding and appreciation for what agriculture education teachers do, what they do for their students, what they do for their communities, and what they do for the agriculture industry as advocates. I admire them all because they give so much of themselves and yet ask for so little in return, an arrangement that would drive me to the brink of insanity. They do not measure success in the economic sense; they measure it by the number of lives they positively impact. Witnessing this concept with my wife and other agriculture education teachers has made me understand that no matter how much they give of themselves; they cannot do all of it alone. The relationship is a two-way street. They need my support, they need the support of their school and community, and they need the support of the agriculture community because strength comes from like-minded people who band together for a common cause; my wife and I are stronger because we have each other. The future of our way of life and our world depends on this concept, and when I think of the big picture in

this way, it is much easier for me to continue on in support of the things Michelle does. I know that the profession that she and so many others have chosen makes it easier for me to do my job. When it comes down to it, if I participate with her, I get to spend time with her and that makes both of us happy.

My time with my wife is precious and I cherish each moment with her. To quote Frank Buffay, Jr., from the popular television sitcom, *Friends*: "...being with her is so much better than, like, not being with her." I am sure each of you has someone in your life you feel this way about, whether it is a spouse, child, parent, friend, or someone else. You might express your sentiment in a slightly different manner than Frank but the basic concept is the very same. You do not care what the circumstances are surrounding the time you spend with them, you just know you are glad to be there in the moment with them. My advice to you is this...go all in. You never know what you might learn as you go deeper into the rabbit hole and the experience is so much better with your best friend at your side.



*Chris Nelson is the farm manager at the USDA-ARS North Central Agricultural Research Lab in Brookings, SD. His wife, Michelle, is the Executive Secretary for South Dakota FFA.*



## Want to Find Balance? Plant a Tree

by Seth Heinert & T. Grady Roberts

When are you going to have time for...us?" For many of us, this is the cry of our significant others as they reconcile a relationship that may seem unbalanced. See if any of these sound familiar – "Should I stay late and work on proficiency applications or be home when I said I would?" "I'll be gone every Saturday the month of June and July for camps and clinics. Who will help my son/daughter get their own projects ready?" "I don't feel like I've seen my wife/husband for two weeks because I've been so tied up getting ready for state convention. I hope they're doing OK...."

There is little doubt the life of an agriculture instructor is busy. Teaching, advising, coaching, applying, traveling; they all exact a fee on our time. Unless we are intentional about it, this seemingly harried lifestyle can render ill effects on our relationships



*Involving your own children in activities with your chapter officer team can provide lifetime memories for all involved.*

outside of the work arena. We see evidence of a poorly balanced schedule in our profession far too often. This imbalance of work and home may lead to stress, burnout or simply missed opportunities with the ones we love. It is time to find a balanced approach to managing our time between work and everything else that

happens outside of that arena.

To use an agricultural metaphor, let's imagine a well-manicured fruit tree: Its branches are full of ripe fruit. The leaves show evidence of care. Its roots extend deep into the earth anchoring it to the ground. This tree

is well fed, well watered and functioning just as it should. This fruit tree provides us a visual reference for how we might begin to build a well-balanced life. First, we must envision a balanced life. We must

then purposefully plan our time. Finally, we should be encouraged to live inspired. These thoughts are based loosely on the book *Renovation of the Heart* by Dallas Willard (2002).

### Envision a Balanced Life

Planting trees is difficult work.

To lead a balanced life we must begin with a clear vision of what our life will look like with balance.

One seldom goes through the effort without some idea of the end result. Fewer things require more vision than planting a tree. However, it is with a great degree of optimism that we carefully place that sapling in the ground, believing that with the proper degree of care and time it will yield shade, fruit, beauty and many other benefits.

When striking a balance between time at work and time away from work, it's important to begin with a vision of what your life will be like with balance. When working to create a vision for a life more balanced, we should ask ourselves some key questions: *What would it be like if I struck a balance between work and home? What might I get? What might I have to give up? What will life look like five years from now if I was actually able to strike that balance?*

When creating your vision, some key points to consider are:

- A clear vision of a balanced life

is important. Great time and effort is given to creating and implementing professional vision statements. Equal efforts should be given to the vision for life outside of work.

- Seek advice from mentors or others you respect who have managed to lead a life balanced between work and personal life.
- Work together with the most important people in your life to create the vision. This vision is not for you to create by yourself then force upon the other party.
- Appropriate balance may change as our lives change. Getting married, having children, illness of a loved one, etc., may all affect our long range perspective. Be flexible to change while keeping the outcome of a balanced life central to your planning.

To begin envisioning a balanced life, reflect on your thoughts after reading the previous section. Then, write a statement or paragraph that describes your vision for the life you will live when home becomes fairly balanced with work.

### **Purposefully Plan Your Time**

Now that our sapling is in the ground, do we walk away and hope for the best? Probably not. Chances are, that if we want to see the day that this sapling reaches its full potential as a tree, we will be very intentional with the way we care for it. Pruning, watering, mulching and fertilizing are all critical to the life of the tree. Further, the timing of these events has to be right in order for the positive effects to take effect.

The time we have to balance between work and home is very similar to the time spent with a young tree. We must plan our time purposefully

to balance many aspects of life, not simply work. Ask yourself: *Working backwards from your vision, in what ways might you need to rearrange your schedule to turn your vision into a reality? How can you be intentional*

*with key times such as evenings, weekends and holidays? What resources (i.e. student workers, alumni, etc...) could you tap into to free up some of your own time? What do you need to let go of in order to create a more desirable schedule?* During the time of planning for intentionality, it is advisable to revisit your personal statement of vision. Keeping this vision of a balanced life squarely in focus can help create a very intentional schedule.

With our vision firmly in mind, begin becoming more intentional with your time. Here are some things to consider when working on becoming more intentional:

- Schedule planned activities with family and friends that are unrelated to school.
- Set time limits on tasks and become disciplined in holding yourself to them.
- Don't make a habit out of working late. If you must, however, limit it to one night per week.



*Who's teaching who? Agricultural education students and Ag teachers' kids at a "kiddie" barn.*

- Plan ahead. When you know things are going to get busy, communicate this to the people it may affect.
- Limit work correspondence from home. Answering e-mail, text messages and phone calls while trying to spend time with loved ones may send the message that to the loved ones that they are not valued.

Now, use your personal time management system (i.e. calendar, planner, phone, etc.) to more intentionally schedule the time available to you. Set a regular block of time every week for this planning session. This intentional use of our time to balance work and home life may be difficult, but it is the only way to make your vision come to fruition. So far we have set a vision and planned intentionally to make that vision become a reality. Now, what are we to do when the inevitable storms of life come along?

### **Live Inspired**

It begins with the hue of the sky shifting from blue to more subtle hues of grey. The pressure changes; A few



Often, your children will develop special relationships with your students/FFA members.

drops of rain fall from the sky. Then the wind begins to pick up. Soon, it's a full on storm complete with thunder, lightning, and a torrent of rain unmercifully pelting the ground. Will that little sapling make it? It just may if the roots are deep and strong enough to help it hold fast to the ground.

We know challenges will happen. We know there will be times which feel insanely busy and times of relative peace. We know that we will get sick, or perhaps there will be financial troubles, or...fill in the blank. In these times do we abandon hope and forgo our vision of the life we intend to lead? No. To succeed in these difficult times, we must sink deep our roots and find a source of inspiration to help us through. Ask yourself: *How will I stay on track with my plan, even when it's difficult (i.e. its convention time and everything is due.)*. Historically, *when are times that I am normally up? (i.e. the world is my oyster!)* *When are times that I am normally down? (i.e. the world is piling up on me)*. *In what ways might I shift my focus from challenges that are happening in the here and now to that of a more long-term perspective?*

When finding an anchoring point to live inspired, it is important to:

- Talk to someone (a friend, a counselor, a mentor) about challenges you may be facing

- Address obstacles you are

facing, whether they stem from work or home, with the important people in your life in a non-confrontational way

- Keep a journal – reflection helps you find patterns about yourself and your own behaviors

Something that may help you to stay inspired during difficult times is a token. This token can be a picture, an object, or a mantra. It should serve as a reminder of a longer term vision that can help get you through a more immediate difficult time. Refer to this token any time the storms of life come your way.

We have explored some practical steps to leading a more balanced life. Much the same as planting a sapling helps us envision a large beautiful tree; we must begin with a clear vision of what our life will look like with balance. Then we explored how intentionally caring for that tree can help it flourish. By being intentional with our time we can also see our vision of balance come to fruition. Finally, deep roots help our tree to stay grounded even in difficult conditions.

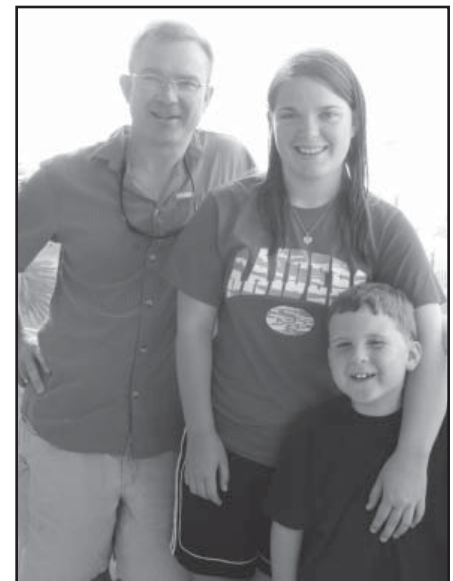
We should also find a source of inspiration to help us stay “rooted” in difficult times. The fruit of these sorts of efforts may be felt in rekindled relationships, renewed internal vigor or retirement to home-fires that have never been allowed to burn out.

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Seth Heinert is a graduate student of agricultural education at the University of Florida. He taught high school agriculture education in North Bend, Nebraska and Tanzania, Africa.



Dr. T. Grady Roberts is a professor of agricultural education at the University of Florida and a former agricultural education teacher in Plant City, Florida.



## *Friends, Family and the FFA: Making it Work*

by Val & Paul Aarsvold

**L**ike many others in this profession, our relationship goes back to, and should be credited to FFA. As seniors in high school, we headed off to National FFA Convention as part of a regional group of chapters. Little did we know that we would meet our “special someone” on this trip.

At just 18 years of age, we didn't have our career path identified, but we both loved and appreciated FFA and agricultural education. While pursuing our agricultural education degrees at the University of Minnesota, we got engaged and decided to get married before our senior year. We knew we wanted to make our career decisions together and would look for agricultural education programs near each other. For four years we taught at schools located 10 miles apart from each other. During this time we shared curriculum, ideas, and most of all support for each other during these learning years. Although we enjoyed

these schools, an opportunity for us to teach at a school closer to family opened up and we quickly applied for the positions. This was an incredible and unique opportunity. We would be able to grow an agricultural education and FFA program together. Just as the excitement for this opportunity was building, so did the realization that we needed to think this through carefully. We would be spending our personal and professional hours together. During the school day we would be sharing office and classroom space, making decisions on FFA activities while at the same time taking care of our growing family. We enjoyed teaching together and continued to do this for three years until the birth of our third child. It was at this time that we decided that it would be good for our family to have more flexibility with schedules and Val looked for something part-time that could be done from home. An opening with the Minnesota FFA Foundation provided the flexible schedule, while at the same time allowed her to stay

involved with agricultural education and the FFA. So in 2001, Val left the classroom to become the Executive Director for the foundation and, just as important, the spouse of an agricultural education

instructor. Paul continued as an agricultural education instructor and the second position was again filled with a licensed teacher.

As we consider the years we've been involved in agricultural education, we identified areas that we feel are important to making our personal and professional lives work in harmony. These areas include:

### **1. Build an understanding of the value of Agricultural Education and the FFA.**

We were fortunate with this one because both of us had benefited greatly from our own experiences as students in agricultural education classes and the FFA. We continually work to share with each other what programs and events we are working with, including the value to our students and donors, as well as to our own professional development.

Frequently we discuss broad agricultural education topics. Val is able to share information on state-wide programs, while Paul brings the questions and enthusiasm that a busy instructor would have as new programs are introduced. The key to these conversations is our willingness to listen to ideas and incorporate the parts that fit with our vision for the program and event. There are many times where the initial idea is tweaked as a result of our conversation and many challenges are avoided.

### **2. Include each other in activities as much as possible.**

There are a number of events throughout the year that are fun to include our entire family. These include FFA meetings, recreation, movie



*Paul Aarsvold and family with his 2013 Advisor of the Year Award.*

night, and the annual banquet. Our family comes out in full force to support each other at the banquet. Paul's comments which include, "thank you to my wife and kids for their support to the FFA program this past year" are always appreciated. We include our kids in these activities for a couple different reasons; first, so that they can see and enjoy FFA activities just as much as we do and second, because we want to model to FFA members a family that works to balance family and professional obligations.

An annual-can't-miss activity for our family is the summer Ag Instructor Conference. To our five kids, this is like a bonus vacation. They have developed friendships with other kids and look forward to seeing them each year. The conference is designed to allow family time as well as professional development activities. We use this as a way to visit with other instructors and re-energize ourselves.

### **3. Strive for personal and professional balance.**

Early on in our careers, we became involved in almost all of the programs that were offered. We busily assisted with curriculum, writing projects, chaperoning the state fair, attended camps and conferences, and took on leadership roles within our profession; truly enjoying all of these opportunities. As our family grew and our time became sparse, we realized a better plan moving forward was to spread out future activities. We continue to participate in programs, but have a longer range plan so that our time with family is not neglected. This was especially important to us when our kids were very young.

Although hard sometimes, we also work to say no to some requests. Sometimes the opportunity would require a lot of time away from our kids and would put additional pres-

sure on our family's schedule. When an opportunity is just too good for our chapter or the Minnesota FFA Foundation to miss, we look to others to assist. Although many times we have the attitude that it would be best if we did it ourselves, we also know that others are more than capable and willing to assist and in the long run, our chapter and foundation will benefit from the involvement of others.

### **4. Separate from Agricultural Education activities and the FFA.**

This has probably been one of the most challenging areas for us but we continue to work toward the goal of some separation. FFA is often discussed at our dinner table and during rides in the car. Although our kids have not objected to this frequent topic of conversation, we know it's good to discuss other topics and areas of our lives.

Although important, sometimes it's hard to separate the two areas that we are most passionate about. We both grew up on farms and recall little to no separation when discussing personal and professional topics-which wasn't a bad thing. We work to put our family first but there is no doubt that we believe in our chosen professions and enjoy sharing that with others. As our kids get older, it is very rewarding to have them join in conversations and share ideas for the local chapter and state programs that we work with. It is our hope that as they choose their own profession that they have learned from us the value of serving others and being passionate about one's chosen career.

As we reflect upon the past 20 years, we know that we would not be able to be as involved in our profession if it wasn't for the support of each other. When the kids were little, we had our share of stressful moments trying to balance parenting

and work. As our kids get older, we still have our share of stressful moments, but we work really hard to put our family first, confident that we are better in our profession as a result of balanced personal and professional lives. Our oldest children, now in high school, participate in the FFA with excitement, not resentment that their parents spent a lot of time working for agricultural education and the FFA. Our youngest kids, with a smile on their face, playfully try on FFA jackets and share that they can't wait to be an FFA member. This is truly rewarding; after all it is about friends, family, the FFA and Making it Work!



*Paul and Val Aarsvold from Plainview, Minnesota, have been involved in agricultural education for the past 20 years. Paul is currently a secondary agriculture teacher at Plainview-Elgin-Millville, while Val serves as the Executive Director of the Minnesota FFA Foundation.*

# How to Survive Parenting as an FFA Advisor

by Lori Tonak

**A**s a single parent with no family living in the community where I taught, I learned some valuable lessons. Some of these ideas I received from childcare providers who saw my daughter struggle in my absence, some were learned from observations after returning from a long trip, and some I gleaned after enduring a survival mode episode. It is my hope to share my parenting experiences and expertise with current and future agricultural educators – and in the process, provide some light-hearted humor as well!

## Tonak's Tips:

- When traveling away from home, write a note card for every day of your absence. Give a brief rundown of what is going on and how much you miss them. Enclose a small gift such as stickers, tattoos, etc.
- When you return home from a trip, expect your child to be naughty for the same number of days you were absent. This is their way of letting you know they missed you.

- If parents of your students offer to watch your children while you are on the road, take them up on it. I have found that if someone offers more than one time, they are seriously willing to watch your children. I have developed good friendships in a community because I let someone watch my daughter while I was on the road with students. If parents trust their children with us, can't we, as advisors, trust parents?
- On mornings of early practices, make breakfast for the team. This assures that your own child will get a nutritious breakfast. Dinner for an evening practice works well too.
- Keep an adequate amount of toys, coloring books and kids' videos in the classroom to entertain your child when routines don't work the way you want.
- Try not to force your child to take your classes; they will come to it naturally. Believe it or not, they may take the class just to spend time with you.
- If your child becomes an FFA member, try to treat them as any other member. It is easy to take advantage of the situation be-

cause a member lives in your house.

- Being the child of an FFA advisor has some benefits, such as learning the value of hard work, community service, and independence. These lessons will take them far in life.
- There will always be trade-offs with any job but, as an FFA advisor, we may be lucky enough to spend time every day with our own children and give them the same skills we have given countless others.



Lori Tonak is the Central Region Instructor for the South Dakota Center of Farm/Ranch Management at Mitchell Technical Institute. Prior to her current position, she taught secondary agriculture in Kimball, South Dakota.



Future agricultural leaders develop from an early age.





# *Agricultural Education: Through the Eyes of the Teacher's Daughters*

by Carissa Osland & Jessica Yost

**J**essica: “My sister and I would like to share our perspectives on the life and impact of agricultural educators through our eyes – the daughters of an ag teacher. As we reflect on our dad’s younger years, agricultural education was about fun, fundraising, and FFA.”

Carissa and I spent many hours in the Ag room. I recall the powder soap at the half circle sink, the too-big chairs that obviously the high school students could fill but looked so large to me, and the fact that my dad was called Mr. Schloesser. Memories are also of the concession stands where dad and students would make popcorn and sell it along with candy and soda to raise money for the FFA activities. I can still smell the sweetness of the large round lollipops on the stand that we would sit by as students and fans would scurry around making and buying refreshments.

Agricultural education to us was waiting all year long for the summer ag teacher conference. We couldn’t wait to see our buddies one year older and spend our days playing in the pool, going on tours and staying up late. In the younger years the conference was all about fun, but as we grew older, we started attending sessions and learning about agriculture from wonderful presenters. Going to the summer conference opened our eyes to the efforts of the educators but also to the various fields within agriculture. One session that sticks out for me was on floral arrangements. As we grew into our teens we progressively started to realize that these great educators were adding such value to so many schools,

but unfortunately our own school lacked such a program. You see, our dad transitioned from high school to post-secondary education. We lived in a great community and it was surrounded by lush fertile soil, but the seeds of high school agriculture had been uprooted in the past and no watering seemed to bring it back. This takes us to the next view of agricultural education as we found a way to be involved in agricultural education and FFA on our own.

After my freshman year in high school, I spent a week at Greenhand Camp and the fire was lit inside me to become more active in FFA despite not having an agricultural education program available in my hometown. Luckily a neighboring town had an active FFA Chapter where we became members. I participated in the poultry judging CDE, job interview CDE, and completed a land management SAE. Going to all the FFA events was an “old hat” for Jessica and me.

Through knowledge gained in agriculture classes “we” are educating the world about the importance of agriculture.

I recall having conversations with dad about why there wasn’t an agriculture program in our town and how I wished there was. One fall day dad invited two of the state officers to visit our school to talk with administration and plant the seed for an agriculture program. I watched the two walk out of school wearing their blue FFA jackets and thought “that is what I want to do some day.” The journey that followed wasn’t easy without our own program but it was one of much learning.

*Carissa: “Speaking of learning...you need to learn to share, Jessica. Now it is my turn to contribute some perspective as we were getting older and starting to desire being active in FFA.”*

Previously it seemed like our dad just had fun at all the events – hanging out in the advisor room and hanging out with the students. Now that I was a participant, I realized more of the work that goes into all the contests: getting the students prepared, having all the equipment and supplies ready for the events, and the grading and awards.

My appreciation for educators continued to grow throughout high school. Mr. Tim Larson was my advisor who joined our FFA group on the 13 hour bus trip to Louisville for National FFA Convention. Mr. Kim Myer was my region officer team advisor who spent a weekend retreat with our officer team as well as several hours of traveling to multiple regional FFA meetings. Mr. Jim Ertl spent every day of the Minnesota

State Fair advising and assisting FFA Barnyard attendants. The one aspect that is the most impressive to me in all these experiences is the involvement of the ag educators' family. I recall Mr. Ertl's sons helping do chores at the Barnyard and talking to the public about animal agriculture. Instead of going to Walt Disney World, Mr. Myer's and Mr. Larson's families enjoyed the weekend retreat and National Convention trips for family bonding time.

My experiences in FFA stimulated my desire to continue being involved in agriculture as a food animal veterinarian in Southwest Minnesota. In this role, it becomes even more clear the importance of agricultural education. As a food animal veterinarian, I appreciate that ag educators are a "driver" to students becoming interested in crop production, livestock production or other areas of agriculture. Since I work with livestock every day, I realize the value of ag educators teaching students about new technologies, livestock genetics, animal nutrition, and health.

*Jessica: "OK, sister! My turn again!! I would like to share about*

*what I learned in the education field as I taught kindergarten."*

It was always fun to include agriculture in my classroom as so many kids don't really know where their food comes from. This touches on the point that through our knowledge gained in agriculture classes "we" are educating the world about the importance of agriculture. Now as I work with the University of Minnesota at the Dairy Education Center, I work more closely with agriculture on a daily basis. I see the value of the lessons learned and the connections that I continue to make with wonderful people.

To sum it up, from our experiences and current agricultural fields, we have learned that Agricultural Education and the involved instructors shape the agricultural world and beyond. We want to especially thank those who have played a role in our successes. To our best teachers ever, Brad and LuAnn Schloesser...thanks for sharing the importance and influences of agriculture with us, and the rest of the world.



*Carissa Odland (right) is a veterinarian in southwest Minnesota at the Pipestone Veterinary Clinic. She graduated from the University of Minnesota, College of Veterinary Medicine in 2009.*

*Jessica Yost (left) is a graduate from Gustavus Adolphus College in Saint Peter, Minnesota. After teaching kindergarten four years, she now enjoys working part-time for the University of Minnesota.*



*Aarsvold family at the 2013 FFA Banquet. Read the full article on page 15.*

## The Answer is Always ...Yes

by Cristin M Conner and Nathan W. Conner

Being married to an agricultural educator, I get asked many questions, including: (a) Will you help with an upcoming cookout?, (b) can you drop me off at a high school at 5 a.m. so I can get on a bus to go to convention?, (c) how would you like to go to Macon, Georgia to the state FFA Convention to serve as a female chaperone?, and more recently (d) how would you like to write an article describing what it is like to be an agriculture educator's wife? The answer is always the same: "Yes."

### Learning to Support your Agricultural Educator 101

We were in college at Murray State University in Kentucky. Nathan was working on his Masters degree in agricultural education. He was finishing up his student teaching at a rural high school during the day and working at a call center in the evenings. We could see the end in sight and it felt amazing. What you have to understand about student teaching is that it is stressful. Nathan, being only human, became worried over many things that took place during his student teaching. He even brought the concerns and issues home with him. However, the key to supporting your husband is to always be there for him no matter what happens. Now, my advice is not to say "don't worry everything will work out." Instead, the role of an agricultural educator's spouse is more like a pit crew. You must change his tires, clean his windshield, and let him roll on.

Nathan asked me the oh-so-important question, "Will you marry me?" Easiest question that I have ever

had the pleasure to answer, "Yes." Of course, if you're going to marry someone, you have to live with them after you get married. That means moving where he gets a job. Nathan had applied for different jobs in two

ing an agriculture teacher's wife had many perks. Holding all of the adorable critters and getting first pick of the flowers before the plant sale was just icing on the cake!

A spouse is more like a pit crew.

different states. One day he received a job offer from a high school in Miami, Florida. He made the challenging decision to decline his first job offer. We both knew that Florida was not a place we wanted to go at that particular point in time and it eventually became apparent that we were not going to end up close to our childhood homes. A school in Hampton, Georgia called offering Nathan an interview. He asked me if I was willing to move to Georgia. I told Nathan that *Gone with the Wind* was a pretty good movie and I loved peaches. Nathan got the job!

### Learning to Support your Agricultural Educator 102

Getting to know the students through helping my husband with meetings and events was a great experience. Nathan taught in Hampton, Georgia for three years and during the three years, Nathan's classroom felt like home. I would stop by after work to help clean the animal cages and water the plants (help is such a strong term; I really showed up to love on the guinea pigs!). All the while students would be buzzing around the classroom happy to help. We would even go up to the school on breaks to check on animals and plants. I ask you, how many wives get to spend so much time with their husbands? Be-

### The Take Home Message

The answer is always yes, not because I feel an obligation to my husband. No, I say yes because we are partners. If you have heard this statement once you have heard it a thousand times, "Behind every good man, is a good woman." For an agricultural educator's wife, the saying goes a little differently, "Beside every good agricultural educator, there is a crazy wife!" Embrace the crazy, say yes and have fun!



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## On Marriage, Family and Agricultural Education...

by Amanda and Curtis Bowling

So, when do you guys see each other?" That simple, short question is often asked to my husband and I; we sometimes feel like we have to answer it all the time. Our response is always the same: "Well, when we are not at FFA activities we make it a point to find time for each other and our family." The reason we get asked this question so often is because we are both secondary agriculture teachers. In fact, the two of us teach agricultural

sunk in until both Curtis and I started working in the profession. With each of us wearing all of these "hats" from time to time, we risk losing sight of our most important "hats" in life, being a spouse and parent.

Because we are still relatively newlyweds (*only married for 4 years*), many people assume we can keep the home fires burning without much effort. In reality, that isn't exactly true; it is still really difficult. With us both gone here, there, and everywhere for FFA activities; CDE

other. Even if it's just a few minutes at night watching TV or a movie, Curtis and I find time to be just husband and wife; taking off our agriculture teacher hats. We also make time to play with Casey, even if one of us comes home a little late from a school or FFA activity. We've created a routine that works for us as a family; I generally take her to daycare, so she and I have time together in the morning. Curtis takes a few minutes to play with her before he leaves for work.

Fortunately, we both also know that some days it is better to leave school, walk away from the work on our desks, and come home to our baby girl. During our busiest FFA season, which is the spring when we are in Career Development Event mode, we both have practices almost every night. Because of this, we set one night each week where we both come home after school and forget about CDEs. Curtis and I also try to set a date night once each month, where we get a sitter and have a quiet dinner together.

Keeping the stress of our school days away from home is a key to balancing work and family. One way that Curtis and I do this is by helping one another at home or at school, when needed. At home, I help Curtis with farm work when needed and he helps with the housework. We both go to each other's FFA activities when we can to help out and provide support (personal and professional) for one another. We also try to process our bad days and bad attitudes by talking about them, venting a little, and seeking advice from each other. We discuss family concerns we have and work through them calmly. Just like

Taking time to spend with the key people in your life will provide you comfort...and allow you to continue.

education at rivalry county schools in Missouri. I teach at South Callaway High School and my husband, Curtis Bowling, teaches at North Callaway High School. Besides the chaos of being agriculture teachers, we also have a toddler-aged daughter named Casey Jo, whose favorite hobby lately seems to be destroying our house.

When Curtis and I were going through our agricultural education classes at the University of Missouri, our professors always told us about the different "hats" that agriculture teachers must wear. These many hats include being a teacher, curriculum developer, accountant for chapter fundraisers, coach, counselor, and sometimes parent to all our "FFA kids". However, this concept never really

practices, conferences, and conventions; some days it is a struggle. Fortunately though, the commitments that we initially made to one another when we first got married have kept our marriage strong. These commitments include: always make time for each other, have at least one date night a month, help each other out, and never fight – ever. While these may seem unreasonable to some, they work for us. Additionally, once we had our daughter, our list of commitments to one another expanded to include always making time for family and putting our child's needs first.

Busy schedules can limit the amount of family time we have. One way we manage is by setting aside time every day to spend with each

when working with students, if you raise your voice or argue, no one wins and nothing positive is accomplished.

The hardest transition we have had throughout our young marriage was adding a new set of little boots to our house. As all new parents do, we faced the typical struggles; lack of sleep, being buried in diapers, and wondering how rice cereal ended up on the ceiling. We also struggled with arranging our schedules and working with childcare providers around our FFA activities. We found that we relied a lot on family and friends to help when we both had activities on the same day. We also found planning a couple weeks ahead ensured we would have someone to watch Casey. However, the stress brought on by these typical parenting issues failed to compare to the stress from an unexpected fight our little girl and our family went through early in her life.

When Casey was born she was diagnosed with a rare birth defect; a tethered spinal cord. Because of this, she had to go through countless MRIs, tests, and doctor visits within the first six months of her life. After receiving bad medical advice from one neurosurgeon, we found the most amazing neurosurgeon in Chicago. This meant we would be making a six-hour drive to and from Chicago several times for tests and surgery. Casey ended up having a successful surgery at six months of age and we spent a week and a half in Chicago while she recovered.

While we would never have asked for this challenge, this is the one life event that has taught us the most. Although we love our careers as agriculture teachers, no chapter or member success is more important than family. If you must sacrifice time with your agriculture program or FFA chapter to be with family from time to time, do it. Throughout Casey's med-



ical journey, we both missed several days at work and a handful of FFA activities. Even so, our classrooms were still there when we got back and FFA events had rolled on without us. While we were in Chicago we were lucky enough to have a great support system back home. Each of us teach in a two-teacher program. Our teaching partners held down the fort when we were gone and other faculty and staff sent thoughts and prayers our way. Through this experience, we also realized the value of our Missouri agricultural education family. While our little girl was going through endless tests and surgery, our fellow teachers were sending thoughts and prayers our way, and helping us out financially through a relief fund established by the state agriculture teacher association.

We recognize that every agriculture teacher across the country has a different situation. Every family is different. But, no matter where you teach, the life of an agriculture teacher is hectic and difficult at times. Supporting one another – and having support from those around you – will help you work through the craziness. Regardless whether you are an agriculture teacher yourself, the spouse of an agriculture teacher – or both,

like Curtis and I, taking time to spend with the key people in your life will provide you comfort... and allow you to continue on even on those days when the work piles up and the stress seems to be too much.



*Amanda Bowling is an agriculture instructor and FFA Advisor at South Callaway High School and Curtis Bowling is an agriculture instructor and FFA Advisor at North Callaway High School.*

# Time Thief: Combating Teacher Time Consumption with Useful Evaluation

by Trent Wells, Lindsay Calvert, Josie McQuillen, & Katelyn Warin

Where did my day go?" "My prep period is consumed by responding to emails." "It's already 8 PM and I'm still working." If these statements sound familiar, you are not alone. Researchers (Chenevey, Ewing, & Whittington, 2008) have found that agricultural education teachers don't have enough time in the day to complete all the tasks required of them. These stresses and

value-added segment of the industry. The AgMRC website and its content have been developed in conjunction with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and various universities across the country, particularly Iowa State University. A portion of the website is dedicated to curriculum worksheets developed by agricultural education graduate students at Iowa State. These worksheets are designed to allow agricultural education teachers access to pre-developed, pre-formatted worksheets that are de-

able through the website, as well as opportunities to help agricultural education teachers, graduate students at Iowa State have been solicited to work with AgMRC to develop worksheets that allow teachers: A) to assess student knowledge of the content and B) access to a free supplemental curriculum resource. These worksheets utilize agricultural commodity content as a context through which teachers are allowed free and open access to assessment worksheets that emphasize critical- and higher-order thinking skills. These supplemental resources provide students with additional opportunities to utilize technology-based resources to complete useful and relevant assessment tools and learn about the agricultural industry in the United States and abroad.

Saving time helps to save a little sanity and improve teaching.

work pressures can negatively affect teaching performance and student learning (Croom, 2003). However, it doesn't take research data to illustrate that teachers are often compromised in their daily time allowance. First-year agricultural education teacher Trent Wells said that, "I only have so much time to complete all of my daily tasks that range from teaching lessons to grading papers to dealing with other typical school issues. Frankly, if there is anything that I could request as a first-year teacher, I would say that I would like just a little more time each day." It is certain that Mr. Wells' request is not lost amongst other teachers as well. Perhaps a partial answer exists with assistance from the Agricultural Marketing Resource Center (AgMRC).

The AgMRC exists as a web-based resource for agricultural commodities, particularly those in the

signed to engage students in relevant activities and, as the old adage goes, "keep them busy."

To aid in keeping the content of these worksheets relevant, the entirety of these worksheets are based on subject matter found in the commodities and products section of the AgMRC website. The subject matter is quite broad in content, ranging from aquaculture to grains and oilseeds to vegetables. This broad swath of content represents the diversity of the agricultural industry while indicating to users the wide range of commodities, careers, and opportunities within the associated industry segments. Additionally, this provides users with multiple avenues of information collection pertaining to agricultural commodities.

To take full advantage of the content distribution opportunities avail-

Because these lessons are broad in their expanse and diverse in their content, the learning strategies employed in the worksheets reflect this assortment as well. These lessons require students to go beyond simply looking up information on a webpage. Instead, students must be able to use their critical-thinking skills to address much of the required content. For example, in the grain and oilseeds unit, lesson worksheet number five, "*Genetically Modified Crop Production Debate*," students are given two class periods to address the worksheet's guiding question: "Genetic modification versus "original" plant production: What are the risks and benefits, and are they worth it?" After the teacher divides students up in the traditional debate format, students are expected to use various resources (primarily the AgMRC website) to locate information that supports their arguments. Students would then have





to organize their information into a logical and coherent body that is used to frame their opinions. Afterward, each side would present its ideas in the moderated debate format. As a final result, students would have had to research the appropriate information, analyze it, organize it, present it, and defend it. With all of this action and learning taking place, the teacher allowed students to complete the worksheets in a timely fashion without having to frame the entire learning experience, thereby saving the teacher a significant amount of time.

As a final product of these worksheets, students are allowed the opportunity to engage in assessment that challenges their critical-thinking skills while further educating them in the broad field of agriculture. Teachers are allowed the chance to provide students with opportunities to use technology to find solutions to real-world issues and problems. In addition to use *with* (as opposed to *instead of*) current curriculum, these worksheets can also be used when normal class sessions are disrupted (i.e., a substitute teacher is present or other school-related functions that interfere with normal class sessions occur). It should be noted that the AgMRC worksheets are designed to *supple-*

*ment*, not *replace* any curriculum that teachers already have in place. The worksheets are, in principle and practice, another tool in the agricultural education teacher's toolbox. Just like other tools, this one is

designed to make the teacher's life just a little easier through saving a little bit of time at the end of the day. Saving time helps to save a little san-

ity and improve teaching. Shouldn't that be the purpose of a teaching tool?

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# *Be More Like a Glow Stick: The Seven Cardinal Rules*

by Meghan M. Wood

**G**low sticks are truly a phenomenon. When cracked, they give off a brilliant light that is created from a catalyst of reactions that mix with chemiluminescent molecules. Agricultural education is and can continue to be the shining glow stick of many schools and communities. As students are faced head on with challenges of the world and a demanding workforce, the programs of agricultural education must continue meeting the needs of students in preparation for college and career readiness. When compared to a simple glow stick, agricultural education should take note.

In 1918, the National Education Association developed a report called the “Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education.” It described the goals and outcomes of secondary education during the education movement of the twentieth century. The report outlined seven objectives and was one of the most influential documents in the field of education in its day. What follows are the suggested Seven Cardinal Rules for agricultural education.

1. **The Unlit Glow Stick:** Agricultural education must continue to serve a purpose through meeting student and community needs.

Unlit glow sticks do not shine; they do not glow. Their molecules have not been excited therefore they serve no purpose. Agricultural education has a purpose it has lived by for nearly a century. Educating students about agriculture while providing leadership and personal growth opportunities should continue to stay

at the forefront of its’ mission. Agricultural education curriculum should be directly linked to the needs of the community in order to meet the needs of the students. Instruction and programs should be expanded to respond to a growing global economy and agriculture industry marketplace. Agricultural education must also continue to build industry, business and college partnerships that will allow students greater networks for success after high school. It cannot be the unlit glow stick which serves no purpose.

2. **Break the Glow Stick:** Agricultural education must educate the whole student.

When we compare agricultural education to a glow stick, the first thing we must do is “break” the mold of stereotypes. Agricultural education is a valuable part of the whole school environment and the community. In turn, it should educate many parts of a student not just one piece. Students come from a diverse world of backgrounds and homes. As we educate the student as a member of the community agricultural education helps the student become a more diverse learner. Through educational and leadership opportunities, students develop confidence, citizenship, integrity and other beneficial interpersonal skills. Along with academic content of high school classes, students receive leadership and soft skills through agricultural education. In addition, students connect concepts from their core academic classes to a real world application that builds a deeper understanding of the content.

3. **Shake the Glow Stick:** Agricultural education should help students develop higher order think-

ing skills in order to have deeper understanding of content knowledge and skills application.

In order for the glow stick to shine brighter, it must be shaken. With each shake, molecules inside mix together and become brighter. Students can shine brighter when they “shake” their knowledge of math, English and science and mix it with the application of agriculture concepts. With each activity and application of content knowledge, students develop higher order thinking skills that are harder to develop without this reinforcement. These higher order thinking skills help students develop a deeper understanding of not only academic content but also real world application skills. When a student can apply, analyze, synthesize and evaluate content knowledge, they are utilizing higher order thinking skills which will help them be successful learners in the future.

4. **Be the Catalyst that Generates Excitement:** Agricultural education provides experiential learning opportunities in order to reinforce core academic concepts that are necessary for high school success and career readiness.

A catalyst is a substance that causes a chemical reaction in a glow stick. Experiential learning is the “catalyst” for agricultural education. Through experiential learning, students can grasp key concepts taught in the classroom. When this catalyst sparks a reaction in a student, connections are made and students develop critical skills necessary for employment. Agricultural education utilizes Supervised Agricultural Experience programs to engage students through

“learning by doing.” The relationship between skills learned and career readiness has a direct implication for the success of agricultural education and its’ students. Agriculture industries and businesses seek leaders to guide their companies in a competitive global market. Students who possess these real world application skills with an understanding of current technology and developing resources will be highly recruited in an increasingly competitive job market.

5. Be a Chemiluminescent Molecule to Reflect Light: Agricultural education is a place for every student no matter learning ability, race, gender or skills.

Chemiluminescence is the emission of light as the result of a reaction. When a glow stick is broken and shaken, catalysts mix with molecules to reflect light. The core molecules of any agricultural education programs are the students. No matter the abilities of students, all have the ability to be “chemiluminescent.” Students often find a sense of belonging in the FFA student organization. The implications of this cardinal rule are that students can thrive when they are able to fulfill their learning needs. A student cannot learn without having certain needs met before others. In Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, the level of belonging comes before esteem but after safety. Once a student feels safe in their learning environment, they can then seek to meet their belonging needs. Agricultural education is viewed by many as a “family.” Because of the many opportunities there are for students to become involved in competitions, meetings, conventions and activities a student develops a sense of belonging as they feel they are a part of something much bigger. Agricultural education programs become the home of many special needs students as well as under-achieving

students looking for a place they can belong. This is where many students begin to shine and take on a light of their own.

6. Stay Lit: The light of agricultural education must continually stay lit by seeking improvements in methods, standards, resources and technology and by being flexible when change occurs.

To be effective, we want glow sticks to stay lit as long as possible. In our ever changing world, we must never be stagnant. The agricultural education profession must also stay lit by continuing to seek updates to provide students with viable career options after high school. In order to continue to provide students with relevant hands-on instruction, agricultural education must strive to stay current in all aspects of the profession. Instructional methods along with student learning needs will continue to evolve in an ever-changing society. Industries and businesses who seek leaders from agricultural education students will continue to develop their technologies and update their standards of performance. The light of agricultural education comes from partnerships within each community that helps to serve students.

7. Glow Sticks get Dimmer: To continue shining, agricultural education must promote lifelong learning.

Glow sticks can give off their chemiluminescence for 8-12 hours and then go dim. Unlike a glow stick, agricultural education can give off its’ light for a lifetime. Teachers and students are the future of agricultural education. We must continue to keep their light shining. Through the experiences and educational opportunities, students learn a lifetime’s worth of valuable lessons. Agricultural education must stay faithful to core values

and not be led astray. As agriculture industries and global markets change, agricultural education can be a foundation for knowledge and information. The profession must keep up with the changing needs of communities and students in order to stay current. Teacher preparation programs in our colleges and universities play a pivotal role in keeping the profession current by producing high quality teacher educators for the classroom. Successful teachers will help keep the light of agricultural education from going dim.

For agricultural education to remain a viable part of today’s education system, we need to keep our glow stick shining. By following these seven principles, agricultural education can continue to educate the whole student about agriculture while meeting the needs of our communities, student, industries and businesses. If our glow stick goes dim, the philosophy set forth by our agricultural education founding fathers will be the only light left shining from our history.



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# *The 2014 Agricultural Education Magazine Themes*

## **January February** *Agricultural Education* *Magazine Potpourri*

Many times potential ideas for articles do not fit the proposed themes. In 2014 you will have another opportunity to submit an article that does not fit one of the themes. **To have your article considered for this issue, please submit a 100 word abstract to the Theme Editor that summarizes your idea for an article.** Based on the abstracts submitted, the Theme Editor will select seven to ten topics for development into full articles for potential publication in *The Agricultural Education Magazine*.

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## **March April** *The Road Less Traveled*

As agricultural education programs have evolved over the past twenty-five years, the types of students involved in the programs have changed as well. Who are these non-traditional students, where did they come from, and where are they taking us?

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## **May June** *Experiential Learning in* *the 21st Century*

The 2014 National Ag Ed Summit in Indianapolis, Indiana will highlight research and approved practices for supervised experience programs. This issue of *The Agricultural Education Magazine* will build on the issues discussed during the Summit.

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## **July August** *Assessing Student Achieve-* *ment*

Agricultural education has not been exempt from the “accountability” movement in education. Programs are expected to implement practices that will provide data to evaluate student performances and overall program quality. This issue of *The Agricultural Education Magazine* will explore ways the high school teacher can use to assess student achievement.

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## **September October** *Preparing the Next Genera-* *tion of Leaders*

Many individuals attribute their leadership skills to participation in agricultural education and the FFA. What are the techniques used by agricultural education programs to develop leadership skills? How have these techniques changed over the years. A series of personal examples will be used to explore the techniques.

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## **November December** *Utilizing School* *Laboratories*

The development of psychomotor skills is a crucial component of career and technical education programs. In order to develop these skills, laboratory activities are essential. Agricultural educators utilize many laboratory settings to provide skill development opportunities for its students. A number of practitioners will share ways they use laboratories in their agricultural education programs.

### **Theme Editor:**

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