

The Agricultural
EDUCATION
M A G A Z I N E

*March/
April 2014*

*Volume 86
Issue 5*



The Road Less Traveled

A Major Fork in the Road

by Harry N. Boone, Jr.

Agricultural education programs, along with the agriculture industry have evolved considerably over the past one hundred and twenty-five years. (Yes there were agricultural education programs in high schools prior to the Smith Hughes Act of 1917.) Many of these changes were gradual and there were no specific event/time that marked these shifts. However, a number of the steps in the broadening of the high school agricultural education curriculum can be traced to the National Research Council's (1988) *Understanding Agriculture: New Directions for Education*.

With the broadening of the curriculum 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? Those are the questions that will be explored in this issue of *The Agricultural Education Magazine*.

Let's look back at *Understanding Agriculture* as we explore "The Road Less Traveled." Among the recommendations were "the subject matter of instruction about agriculture and instruction in agriculture must be broadened" (p. 6). The authors also recommended that "exemplary programs in local schools that have broadened the curriculum and improved the attractiveness of agricultural education programs should be identified, studied and emulated" (p. 6). Recommendations were also offered about changes in the name of the FFA, its symbols, rituals, contests and rewards.

In an effort to identify and study exemplary programs that have been

successful in expanding the agricultural education curriculum and attracting non-traditional students into their programs, I dedicated this issue of *The Agricultural Education Magazine* to highlight their successes. While we have made tremendous strides in the implementation of these recommendations, I feel there is still plenty of room for improvement.

Increase Enrollment in Agricultural Education Programs

According to information supplied by the National FFA Organization, approximately five to six percent of all high school students are enrolled in high school agricultural education programs. How many high school students need an understanding of the agriculture industry (agriculture literacy)? I would argue that 100% of the high school population needs a basic understanding of the industry.

Everyone is a consumer of the agriculture industry through their purchases of food and fiber. In addition to being consumers, these individuals, through the political process, will make decisions about the agriculture industry. I don't know about you but I don't want an uninformed public making decisions about the food I eat.

My recommendation is that all agricultural education programs have two primary audiences. First, I recommend that we continue to serve students that plan to enter a career in production agriculture or an agriculture related area. Although it has changed, this was the primary audience for agricultural education program. The second audience is all students not preparing for a career in agriculture. This curriculum will focus on developing an understanding

of the basic principles of the agriculture industry such as why are certain livestock practices used, what steps are being taken to preserve the environment, and what is the source of many food and fiber products.

Continue to Expand the Supervised Agricultural Experience Program

The supervised agricultural experience program is the part of the curriculum that makes agricultural education unique. Changes have been made over the past few years to the experiential learning component of the agricultural education program, however, we must continue to explore new and innovative ways to improve the concept. The next issue of *The Agricultural Education Magazine* will be devoted to this idea.

I hope that you enjoy the issue and maybe take your program and students down "The Road Less Traveled."

Reference

National Research Council. (1988). *Understanding Agriculture: New Directions for Education*. National Academy Press, 2101 Constitution Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=ED338795>.



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Subscriptions

Subscription price for *The Agricultural Education Magazine* is \$15.00 per year. Foreign subscriptions are \$25.00 (U.S. currency) per year for surface mail, and \$40 (U.S. currency) foreign airmail (except Canada). Orders must be for one year or longer. We can accept up to a three year subscription. Refunds are not available. Please allow 4 - 6 weeks delivery of first magazine. Claims for missing issues cannot be honored after three months from date of publication, six months for foreign subscriptions. Single copies and back issues less than 10 years old are available at \$5 each (\$10.00 foreign mail). All back issues are available on microfilm from UMI University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. UMI University Microfilms telephone number is (313) 761-4700. In submitting a subscription, designate new or renewal and provide mailing address including ZIP code. Send all subscriptions and requests for hard copy back issues to the Business Manager: Jay Jackman, National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE) 300 Garrigus Building, 325 Cooper Drive, The University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky 40546-0215, Phone: (859) 257-2224, FAX: (859) 323-3919. E-mail: NAAE@uky.edu

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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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Publication Information

The *Agricultural Education Magazine* (ISSN 0732-4677), published bi-monthly, is the professional journal of agricultural education. The journal is published by The Agricultural Education Magazine, Inc. at 300 Garrigus Building, The University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky 40546-0215.

Periodicals Postage Paid at Lexington, Kentucky and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Agricultural Education Magazine, attn: Jay Jackman, 300 Garrigus Building, The University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky 40546-0215. Phone: (859) 257-2224, FAX: (859) 323-3919.

What Road Are We On?

by Ryan Foor

I grew up in Wapello, Louisa County, Iowa. Wapello is a town of about 2000 people and Louisa County has a population of less than 12,000, and a total area of about 418 square miles. Louisa County sits along the Mississippi River and the landscape is largely made up of fields of corn and soybeans. Swine production is also prevalent, mirroring the state agriculture commodity profile. According to Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, the average dollar value for farmland in Louisa County in 2013 was \$8,660, close to the state average. Louisa County is agriculture, evident by the grain elevator rising above Wapello.

My paternal grandmother lived on a farm outside Wapello early in life and my grandfather was raised in town. My grandma's father died when she was five years old and my great-grandmother moved her young family to town. Meanwhile, my maternal grandmother was raised on a

dairy farm in north central Wisconsin and my maternal grandfather was an FFA member in high school. Neither of my parents grew up on a farm.

I was born in 1980 and for much of my early life my parents owned a restaurant. I grew up in town. At nine years, I joined a traditional 4-H club, which was the only option. I never had an animal project, but once had a tomato project where I learned about nutrients and crop rotation. In eighth grade I had to take an exploratory agriculture course for eight weeks, along with home economics (family and consumer sciences), art, and shop (a woods focused industrial arts course). All but the art class took place in a building called the Trades Lab.

When signing up for classes for my freshman year, I signed up for agriculture, because one of my classmates (who did not grow up on a farm) did so, and because one of my older friends (who did not grow up on a farm) was an FFA member. During the first few weeks of class, Mr.

Irv Meier, my agriculture teacher, encouraged us to come to the FFA meeting. He asked me if I was planning to attend and I replied, "Why would I want to learn about growing corn?" I did not attend that meet-

ing; later my friends told me that it was a lot of fun. That was August 1994. By November, I had an FFA jacket and was in Kansas City attending the National FFA Convention. I don't remember what happened in the two months in between to change my mind, but I attribute it to Mr. Meier.

In the next four years I participated in many Career Development Events, including three state winning teams. I served as a chapter, sub-district, district, and state officer. My supervised agricultural experience program included my work at the local grocery store and grew into the skills I gained at the full-service meat counter. I earned the American FFA Degree. In some schools, I wouldn't have been in FFA or my SAE would not have been acceptable. The foresight of my agriculture teacher and of the state staff in Iowa changed that future for many young people in Wapello and Iowa.

People in town were proud of me for my accomplishments and often stated, "I can't believe you're in FFA!" It wasn't a negative comment; rather they were surprised. My dad attributed my involvement to Mr. Meier, noting that as a town kid he never would have been in FFA when he was in high school in the late 60s and early 70s.

After high school graduation in 1998, I went to Iowa State University, the land grant institution, majoring in journalism and mass communications. I was the only one of my classmates who went to Iowa State directly from high school. All of my friends were in the College of Agriculture. By November, I was an Agricultural Education major. I went to Agricultural Education because of FFA.



Combining tradition and non-traditional activities: Jefferson High FFA (WV) members preparing apple butter as a part of a fund raising activity.

As an Agricultural Education major, I knew I had less experience in production agriculture than most of my peers and sometimes felt inferior. I knew though, how Mr. Meier taught and who the agriculture students were in Wapello. Even though agriculture is prevalent in Louisa County, few of my classmates grew up on a farm. Most of the students in agriculture and FFA with me were not farm kids. I knew I could teach high school agriculture.

I was never “supposed” to be in FFA or a high school agriculture teacher, but I had a great experience as a student and as a high school agriculture teacher. I am a traditionally non-traditional agricultural education student, teacher, and teacher educator. But am I really? As a high school agriculture teacher in Glenwood, Iowa, on the opposite side of the state from where I grew up, most of my students did not grow up on a farm. Mr. Meier did not teach his students how to farm and I certainly didn’t. When I came to Arizona in 2010 as a teacher educator I immediately noticed that many of the agricultural education programs in the state are in the Phoenix metropolitan area. There are also programs in rural areas, far from Phoenix in distance and lifestyle. Many people don’t think about agriculture when they think about Arizona and I’m often asked to describe Arizona agriculture from people back East. We’ve got a lot of work to do with regard to recruiting and preparing young people to enter careers in agriculture and to teach people about agriculture. The majority of the students in our classes who will work in agriculture and be consumers will continue to not come from farms and will have increasingly less production agriculture experience. So, are they really non-traditional?

In preparing for this issue of the *Agricultural Education Magazine*, I

decided to tell the story of Arizona agricultural education and FFA in the context of the theme of non-traditional students. Reading the stories in this issue, you will come to know who Arizona agriculture students are from current state FFA officers; graduate students who were in high school agriculture and weren’t, two of who have student taught. Most of the students went to high school in the Phoenix metropolitan area. You will also gain the perspective of a rural Arizona teacher and a new idea of non-traditional from the Arizona Association FFA Executive Secretary. Reading these stories, a common theme emerged, which I did not propose: technology. Perhaps the notion of non-traditional has nothing to do with skin color, ethnicity, or whether or not one grew up on a farm. Perhaps the notion of non-traditional has more to do with how today’s students engage and interact, and with their motives and values. I think you’ll find as you read these stories and come to understand the case of Arizona that the most important link for moving students forward is you, secondary agriculture teachers. Some of you grew up on farms and many did not. As time continues, most secondary agriculture teachers will not come from farms. Regardless, of where we come from or what our tradition was, our job is to make a positive difference for every student, every day.

While today’s secondary agriculture students may take a different road from what their parents, teachers, or school administrators think they might, they are in fact, today’s traditional student. As we think about what we teach and how we teach it, as well as what we do in FFA, and how we structure work-based learning, we must keep in mind who our audience is and not how we remember who they were. Perhaps we, as a profession, including teachers, stakeholders,

state staff, and teacher educators need to look at taking a less traveled road in order to ensure a prosperous direction for the future of secondary agricultural education. The well-traveled road may be the right road, or it may be the Road to Abilene. When I was in speech in high school, I recited *The Road not Taken* by Robert Frost. As you read this poem again or for the first time, think about how it applies to agricultural education, what we do, and who we serve.

The Road not Taken by Robert Frost

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler; long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;*

*Then took the other, as just as fair
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,*

*And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*



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Traditional View of Non-Traditional

by Tyler Grandil

The term *non-traditional* is one that is used frequently in educational circles as a means to track where we are versus where we have been in serving our “core” student population. Almost every educational discipline has a non-traditional class of students and agricultural education is no different. It seems to be a bit of a dichotomy for us though, as on one hand having more non-traditional students seems to indicate that we are losing our base and leaving our best

community (with an accompanying high school and agricultural education program) experiencing an all too rapid change in industry. What once were cotton and cornfields have turned into small factories and medium sized businesses. Perhaps the agricultural education program, seeing the change on the horizon, was reevaluated and curriculum needs changed from a field crop based program to landscape maintenance and design with a little bit of biotechnology sprinkled in. The farm has left the school, but the school is still teaching agriculture.

percentages of production students enrolled in agriculture classes have perhaps dropped over the years, but not out of proportion to the dropping number of farms and ranches in operation. The way non-traditional students are labeled and evaluated remains as it has for the past 20 years.

A more significant shift in the agricultural education environment in recent years however, is the teachers. In the past two decades we have seen a steady and inexorable decline in the number of teachers (especially in rural communities) who grew up on farms. Currently it is not uncommon to have young teachers from urban and suburban backgrounds taking positions in rural communities teaching agricultural education. Is this a problem for us? In recent history, what was taught in those rural schools would have mostly focused on the intricacies of more efficiently running a production agriculture operation. Now, the focus is on manageable classroom-based projects and the integration of biology into the curriculum. Still agricultural education, and in many cases still with a production twist, is not the way it was done just a few short years ago. The latest crop of teachers are at least a generation removed from the farm and their lessons are given with just a little less “been there, done that” flavor.

Surely though our students are changing. Surely, we are facing some sort of shift away from the agricultural education students we used to know. Indeed. But it isn’t necessarily in the way that most are thinking. In recent history non-traditional seems to want to take on a new meaning. The real non-traditional student is the one that was born in the Millennial generation. The phenomenon of a changed

We need to focus on what our students can be.

traditions behind us, and on the other hand we can be penalized (at least monetarily) if we are not serving what are considered to be our non-traditional students.

For us in the agricultural education community, the issue of non-traditional students was upon us before we really began. World War II catalyzed an already moving and morphing agrarian society to an industrial society and with it a downward population base of farmers (and farm students). With these factors alone, it seems rational to see why there has been a steady decline of production-based students in our agricultural education classrooms, there are just fewer of them out there!

Additionally, in states where *urban sprawl* is present, an all too common sight is a historically agrarian

In this case there are not issues of irrelevancy of the curriculum, poor teaching practices, or apathy towards the industry of agriculture. There is just a change in situation that caused the demography of students to change. In cases like this the advent of non-traditional students is not necessarily a problem. Just as the true educator teaches students and not the curriculum, our purpose and presence is for the students who are in front of us at this moment, not the memories of the ones that were here 10, 20 and 85 years ago.

The new non-traditional

There is really nothing new about non-traditional students in our agriculture classrooms. In the beginning of vocational education not all production students took agriculture classes or were involved in FFA. The



Agricultural education programs incorporate numerous non-traditional areas of study. Students from Cabell Midland High School (WV) maintaining their aquaculture project.

mindset that is held by this new generation is one that seems to have permeated all facets of socioeconomic status, demography, race and gender. Due in part to unprecedented access to the Internet and changing nature of television, today's young people are exposed to situations and thought processes that normally wouldn't introduce themselves until later (sometimes much later) in their lives. The exposure to this information creates an artificial sense of intelligence and false sense of wisdom among young people. Superimpose this paradigm shift into the classroom and we begin to see the real challenge that teachers are facing with regard to the non-traditional student.

The only real remedy to fixing non-traditional

Whether it is non-traditional the way we have traditionally viewed it or some sort of moving target version of the notion, it is safe to say that the work of the educator (and especially the agriculture teacher) is never done. In fact, the whole notion really could be renamed to the *non-interested*

student. So, what's the solution? Even though we have more access to more technology than we ever have, the solution is as "old school" as ever. Recruiting, retaining, engaging and supporting students from all walks of

life still (and ever will) lie with the responsibility of the teacher. Intense organization, passion, and drive are the things that attract students. True, there are more barriers and distractions than before. And yet, visits to the modern day classroom where great teachers have found a way to deal with these challenges, proves that the person at the head of the classroom can breach barriers and reach students across the spectrum.

Alongside the superior teacher's ability to manage the classroom and engage students is her or his ability to show sincere interest in students. Now more than ever students need the positive reinforcement from someone in authority. It is a great and grave mistake to accept the access to information that students have today with their ability to understand and incorporate it. This false sense of wisdom and maturity essentially puts students more at risk of making foolish mistakes if left unguided. Even though many times their personas indicate otherwise, today's youth are yearning for acceptance, guidance,

support, and love. The great teachers understand that a pat on the back and an arm around the shoulders changes lives in their young students.

Once we have control of the classroom, then we can focus on how to love and care for the students (and the resulting trust that comes from that). Then we can utilize this generation's non-traditional nature in our favor. Now more than ever students are ready to take the knowledge and information they have received and use it to help create their future. Students today want to be participants in their education rather than silent subjects in the classrooms of yesterday. With the teacher prepared and in control and with an eye completely understanding what today's student is about...that participation can happen.

Having non-traditional problems in education is not necessarily a problem. In fact, education quite often is at its peak when interested parties are in exploration of new solutions to changing problems. This is the nature of education, agriculture, and, let's face it, our own lives. As those interested in helping raise up the next generation of students, let's put aside what we think it *should be* and focus on what our students *can be*. In so doing, we will make the concept of what is traditional or non-traditional irrelevant.



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New Students in Rural Education

by *Davida Molina*

I was fortunate to grow up in rural America. My graduating class had 27 students and we knew everything about everybody. The high school was surrounded by quaint homes with well-manicured lawns. Farms, feedlots, and small cattle and horse ranches encircled our community.

That was 16 years ago. Thanks to the positive experiences that my agriculture teachers provided for my classmates and me, I now have the opportunity to teach in a similar small

much different from me when I was in high school. Students with various ethnic backgrounds can be found in the agricultural education classroom. Many of the students live on a farm or ranch; and there are students who do not appreciate the agriculture industry because they cannot see the direct benefits it provides to their community. There is a generation of students who are illiterate in agriculture production; technology has presented new challenges, students have a different perception of work, and their decisions are largely focused on themselves.

A few years ago a local Farm Bureau representative, who had judged our state public speaking contest, addressed our teacher organization stating that there were several false statements made in the students' speeches. As embarrassing as it was for us to hear, I knew it was my responsibility to become more proactive in addressing the misconceptions of agriculture with my students, even the rural ones.

The consistent use of technology has developed a generation of students who want answers now. For example, after our state Floriculture Career Development Event this past fall, my students texted me all weekend wanting to know the results. They did not consider that the event was held on a Friday; therefore, we would not receive the results until Monday. The various social media applications, such as Facebook, Snapchat, and Twitter, have created constant distractions for our students. It is too easy for students to waste an hour on Facebook, when they could be preparing for the national Extemporaneous Public Speaking event or updating their record books.

Even with the hurdles that progressions in technology have created, there are several benefits. When the students have a question about a breed of cattle they see on the way to National FFA Convention, they can complete the research on their phones. Technology has also fostered a different type of relationship between the teacher and students. Since the students have grown up with computers, cell phones and iPods, I frequently request their help with technology issues. Social media applications also offer a way for FFA members to connect state and nationwide, and serve as an effective recruitment tool.

It is up to the students' role models to show them how to learn and educate others about the agriculture industry.

town, surrounded by picturesque homes with desert landscapes. Crops irrigated by pivots and cattle ranches can be seen as one drives along the highway. The 2014 graduating class has 25 students. Not much has changed, or has it?

Students in our rural schools face many of the same challenges they did 10 years ago. The active students struggle with time management due to their involvement in sports, band, student council, youth group, and FFA. When school is not in session, teenagers strive to find activities they can be involved in without causing trouble.

Today's rural agricultural education students do not appear to be that

The differences that have been perceived in today's rural agricultural education students are ones that may be similar to students who live in the city. Even though many of our rural students have some connection to the agriculture industry, they do not always have a personal association to agriculture. Economies of size have taken most of our small family farms away. Farms are very rarely passed down to the next generation, therefore there is a vast disconnect between the understanding of food production and our students. There are aggressive organizations that use the media to tell the public about the horrors of animal production and genetic engineering and many of our students believe these accusations to be true.

When I was in school in the nineties and a teacher asked a student to complete a task, they did it. Not because they wanted an A or to score brownie points with the teacher, but because the teacher was the boss. Today, many students only complete tasks that they want to finish. Teachers must relate the new content to the students' needs or interests in order for the students to want to learn and complete assignments that tie into the new knowledge. Many students today do not see the benefit of working outside, planting a garden, removing weeds, cleaning stalls or installing irrigation. In their minds, someone else will finish the task. It is rare to find a student who is self-motivated enough to turn in their best work most of the time. Students will typically do "just enough" to pass or to obtain an A. Often students will expect the teacher to give them a grade just for showing up. The students seem to feel that they do not have to work as hard for a good grade; by completing an assignment, they should receive an A, no matter how incorrect the information may be. Students also do

not understand that *equal opportunity* does not translate into *equal results*. Most teachers provide the same opportunity to every student to earn an A, to attend a field trip, run for chapter office, and participate in all FFA activities. However, only a few take the initiative to take advantage of those opportunities. Many believe they are entitled, instead of understanding that they must earn.

In a world that is better connected than it has ever been before, today's students do not understand a sense of community. Community service is an important aspect of our agricultural education programs, yet, in order to motivate students to conduct community service activities, the students want to know how it will benefit them. No matter what the decision may be, today's students do not understand that the decisions they make influence many of the individuals around them. I now tell my students that we must have at least six FFA members on a career development event team instead of four, even though the rules say a team consists of four individuals. Too often, one student will quit

the team because it is too hard to study, or because a baseball game is on the same day as the state event.

Many of these changes could be attributed to the changing family structure. According to the U.S. Census Bu-

reau, in 2012, 64% of children age 17 and under lived with two married parents, down from 77% in 1980. Now, even if the student lives with both parents, 60% of the mothers and fathers have full time jobs, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Students have less time with their parental figures and therefore lose the values that are taught at home. The school system is expected to educate children in proper manners, what is right and wrong, and how to respect others.

Even with the societal changes that our students have embraced, I do believe that they are the future leaders in the agriculture industry. Students today, just as I did, will rise to the expectations their teachers set before them. It is up to the students' role models, who often are their teachers, to show them how to learn and educate others about the agriculture industry, effectively utilize technology, develop a work ethic that will enable them to succeed in their careers, and to embrace a passion to serve and help those around them. As we continue to work with an ever-changing generation, consider this quote by Huston Smith, "The most powerful moral influence is example."



Agricultural education programs often include the opportunity for students to use their knowledge and skills in community service activities. Students from Tyler Consolidated High School (WV) working on a landscaping project.



Davida Molina is the Agriculture Teacher and FFA Advisor at Valley Union High School in Elfrida, Arizona.

The Power of Applied Connections for Today's Agriculture Students

by Andie Tanner

As a freshman entering high school, I had no idea what to expect. Everything before high school was laid out in a nice simple path. Up to that point all I had to do was get on the bus in the morning and leave on the same bus after school was through. In high school, I became responsible for choosing my own classes and deciding where I wanted my educa-

Development Events (CDEs), had multiple Supervised Agriculture Experiences (SAEs) and eventually held a chapter officer position. I love my high school because of the agriculture program and my agriculture teachers. They cared about me and the choices I made. They took sincere interest in my projects and education and were always there for questions, concerns, and support. The unfortunate consequence of having two great agriculture teachers was that I didn't see the

rafters. Writing a resume and writing thank you letters to sponsors required proficiency in English and writing. In my agriculture classes, the words "math" or "English" were never mentioned. Somehow, my teachers snuck the other class content into their own classes and I loved it all. I spent more time within the walls of my agriculture program than I did at home. I cherished my relationships, my growing knowledge base, and the unintentional fun of learning. FFA and my agriculture classes are what I remember the most about high school. My agriculture teachers helped build me into the person I am today.

One aspect of that sets agriculture classes apart from other classes is the application of knowledge.

tion to take me. After talking with my parents and consulting my high school academic advisor, I decided to take an introductory agriculture fabrication class. Within the class description was the promise of learning welding techniques and wood construction skills. I was sold. This class appealed to my inner desire to work with my hands and build stuff. Also, it was not biology. Taking the introductory agriculture class sparked an interest and led me down the path of taking every agriculturally related course that was offered at my school, including biology.

In addition to my agriculture course work, I was a proud and active member of the FFA chapter. I loved being around people who shared my love for both agriculture and working. I competed in several Career

point in my other classes or teachers. I wasn't using the knowledge from the other classes, so why should I attend them? My agriculture classes were all of the subjects wrapped into one. English was typically reading fiction and writing about my feelings, math was calculating how many cantaloupes I could buy for \$42, and gym class was just an excuse to throw things at other people.

Agriculture classes brought all of my classes together (except gym class). Calculating how much material I needed for a specific job or project required finding and comparing the pricing of materials and the use of algebra and arithmetic. Trigonometry became useful when needing to find angles for a project and the Pythagorean theorem made sense when squaring or finding the elusive hypotenuse when constructing doghouse

During my junior year of high school, I interviewed with a local electrician who was looking for an entry-level worker. He liked my attitude about work and my resume. Soon I was working 20 hours a week during the school year and 60 hours a week during the summer. I worked in various settings, using my leadership skills from FFA and career and technical education from my agriculture classes to excel in my position. After two years on the job, I had my own crew of eight people working together like a finely tuned machine. We were responsible for remodeling the electrical work in several Phoenix area resorts and motels. Once again, I found my passion was working with my hands and applying the knowledge I acquired from my boss's training and my time spent in the shop in high school.

After five years of electrical work, I decided that construction was not the career for me and decided to pursue a degree at the University of Arizona. Initially, I pursued a degree

in electrical engineering but after some reflection on my history and passion, I switched my major to Agriculture Technology Management and Education to become a high school agriculture teacher.

Last year, I completed my student teaching experience at Chandler High School in Chandler, Arizona, with a veteran agriculture teacher at a renowned agricultural education program. My course work throughout my undergraduate career was intense and in-depth, covering the practice of teaching, teaching and learning styles, and how to engage students. It also prepared me for classroom management, lesson plan writing, and student interactions, but it did not prepare me for the effect teaching would have on me. The experience altered the way I view education and the youth of this country. The never-ending curiosity and desire to learn from my students helped me appreciate their views, opinions, and their characters. I enjoyed teaching them and more importantly, I enjoyed learning from them. I constantly analyzed and critiqued my teaching style to better suite the learning styles of my students. In doing so, I built relationships with them and got to know many of them on a personal basis. I also traveled with the FFA chapter allowing me the time to get to know students who were in other agriculture classes that I did not teach. I loved their eagerness to learn and work and I couldn't help but reflect on my experiences in high school and remember how much of an impact my agriculture teachers had on me.

During my student teaching experience I thought of the dislike I had for non-agriculture classes. One aspect of agriculture classes that set them apart from other classes is the application of knowledge. The application is what sold me on agriculture

classes and I believe it is what brings students there today. There is more to teaching than simply standing in front of the classroom and talking or reading from a book. Students are not interested in hearing talk day after day. They want to be doing something and applying their knowledge. This application helps them bridge the content of text books and reading into something real and tangible, and eventually they will make the connections to everyday life. Without application, the knowledge will be lost. Helping students make connections between complex subjects and everyday life allowed me to witness "ah-ha" moments regularly. When the classes would go out to the land lab farm or into the shop and apply the knowledge from the classroom, it felt to me like it completed a circuit for the students. Watching those students learn from me and apply the knowledge was a great experience that I will never forget. I formed a great relationship with my cooperating teacher and learned things about teaching that can only be learned from a veteran teacher.

As a future teacher of agriculture, I hope to aid students in their journeys through high school and better prepare them for life. I also hope to expose students to the rich



Today's agricultural education programs are filled with opportunities to "apply" knowledge and skills in hands-on applications. Students from Cabell Midland High School (WV) applying their skills in floral design.

heritage and legacy of American agriculture. This can be accomplished through hands-on learning that will take place inside and outside of the classroom. Through FFA and agricultural education, I hope to aid my students in becoming successful individuals in whatever profession they choose to pursue.



Andie Tanner is currently pursuing a Master of Science degree in Agricultural Education at the University of Arizona.

City Boy to Chapter FFA President

by Dalton Delia

I hopped off the bus and was greeted by a small group of high school students screaming and cheering in my face. I was an eighth grader and it was my first time visiting Highland High School. I was there for a field trip to visit the agriculture department. As I looked around, I saw all kinds of plants and animals, and even some students welding metal; there were stations set up all around the shop to give us a taste of agriculture. The eighth grade visitors, me included, were split off

down my classes for my first year of high school, I came across that paper with the agriculture classes listed that I received when I visited the program earlier that year as an eighth grader. One thing that caught my eye was I could get a science credit for taking the Applied Biological Systems class and a vocational education credit for taking the Agriculture Engineering class. As a freshman, I was the type who wanted to get out of high school as fast as I could, so I signed up in hopes that taking those classes would put me ahead of the game.

a Greenhand Conference. Then came the opportunity for me to compete in a Career Development Event (CDE). I was told all I had to do was memorize five paragraphs, say it in front of a few judges, and I'd be competing in the Creed Speaking CDE. On the day of the event I was a little nervous because I had never given a speech in public before. I went in to the contest room, and as I stood in front of the judges, I totally forgot the five paragraphs I spent so much time memorizing. I couldn't believe it; I could not remember the first two words of the FFA Creed, "I believe!" Disappointed after not being able to finish the Creed, I made my way to join my chapter for lunch. Once I met my fellow chapter members my attitude changed. Everyone was talking, playing games, and having a good time. I'll never forget the afternoon I spent after the Creed Speaking CDE because that is when I fell in love with FFA. I spent the previous few months dipping my toes in the water, but after that day I dove head first into the world of agricultural education and FFA.

The best way to understand is by going out in the field and learning from the mistakes and successes of your work.

into groups and herded from station to station. Each station had a different activity: planting plants, petting animals, agriculture trivia, and last a classroom where a few students in these blue jackets were telling us about this club called FFA. This was the first time I remember hearing about agriculture classes and FFA. I didn't even know they existed! When we left we were handed papers giving us the names of the agriculture classes to sign up for in our freshman year of high school.

I was your typical city kid, never having heard about agriculture before, and so initially, I was not interested in taking an agriculture class in high school. When it came time to write

Fast forward to the start of my freshman year. The first day I walked into my agriculture classes, we received a run down of what the year would look like and a persuasive speech on why we should join FFA. I remember my teachers saying how, "it is a great organization that teaches you about leadership, and prepares you for careers," but being a typical freshman boy, all I heard was that if I signed up I got free food and extra credit. Go figure, that's what got me hooked. A couple months down the road I was really enjoying my agriculture classes and being part of FFA. By that point, I had learned a lot about agriculture, went to a few chapter meetings, and even attended

That year I went on to become Greenhand President, attended every FFA event, and tried my hardest to learn as much about agriculture as I could. It was so strange to my friends and family, that I, the preppy city boy, became so interested in agriculture and FFA. The reason agriculture fascinated me so much was because of the way agriculture helps and provides for people. I never realized before how much agriculture affects everyone's lives and how much society depends on it. I wanted nothing more than to be a part of that effort to help people. I continued my career in agricultural education and FFA all

the way through my senior year of high school. Over the years I raised lambs, competed in multiple CDEs, went to the National FFA Convention twice for Agriscience Fair, found my passion for agricultural education, and served as Chapter President my senior year.

When I graduated, I wanted to serve FFA and the Arizona Association by becoming a State FFA Officer and took the opportunity to run for a position in the summer of 2013. Over the last eight months I have had the amazing opportunity to serve as a State Officer. I have been able to help students and be an advocate for agriculture in ways I could never have before. I've really had an advantage to see many different students and programs with many different interests in agriculture. It's always interesting to hear stories of how students got into agriculture and what their passions are. I find a lot of the time it starts with their agriculture teacher. I believe agriculture teach-

ers are the most important factor in the development of students in agriculture programs. I have noticed that some of the best agriculture teachers are those who really care about their students and approach their lessons in a unique way. When I was in high school, both of my teachers were firm believers in hands-on experience and so most days I was in the mechanics shop or at the land lab learning a new skill. Experience is the best teacher and the best way for students to really grasp what they need to learn from a lesson. I see value in learning in a classroom, but I think the best way to understand is by going out in the field and learning from the mistakes and successes of your work.

One of the biggest factors why I loved agriculture classes was the opportunity for application of what I learned to a real life situation. I believe that is what separates agriculture programs from other classes. My life as a suburban high school student took a different direction because of

taking an agriculture class, impacted by my high school agriculture teachers and how they taught.



Dalton Delia is the Arizona Association FFA State Treasurer. He was a student at Highland High School, in Gilbert, Arizona. Gilbert is part of the Phoenix metropolitan area with a population over 200,000 people. Known in the early part of the 1900s as the "Hay Shipping Capital of the World," today, Gilbert is a rapidly growing suburban community.

Upcoming Themes

July-August

Assessing Student Achievement

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September-October

Preparing the Next Generation of Leaders

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Introducing Today's Intrinsically Motivated Students

by Ashley Haller

As a recent student teacher it has become clear that the traditional agriculture student is changing. The start of each new year brings more knowledge, technology, innovation, and experience into the agriculture field. The traditional farmer has transformed into a GPS coordinate reading, weather app watching, marketing guru. Farmers now keep up on their Twitter feed in order to keep in touch with their clientele and keep track of trends. Ranchers, although many still cling to traditions, now have new technologies that help track their cattle and their grazing patterns.

tering heat and scalding sun. Many kids who were brought up in the rural lifestyle of hard work sought to find a different life than that of their parents. Often, as I observed in my recent teaching experience, you find that the rural agriculture lifestyle skips a generation. New technologies have brought new ways to accomplish difficult tasks. With the motto “work smarter not harder,” descendants of traditional agriculturalists are starting to get back to their roots.

It is surprising that in many rural towns, there remains a large population of students unaware of how much agriculture impacts their lives. The small towns are no longer solely com-

of the students, whether from a farm or town, had sufficient knowledge about greenhouses. Greenhouse and hydroponic agriculture knowledge is beneficial for all students to know. Projects can be extremely simple from a wick system in a bottle to a full-fledged greenhouse operation with an elaborate hydroponics system.

It is important as agriculture teachers that we are teaching subjects that are relevant to our students. For example, in southern Arizona there is less need to teach forestry and more need to teach hydroponics and dairy production. Units should tailor directly to community needs. In many classrooms there is a disconnect between what is being taught and what students need to know. When creating the curriculum for today's students ask yourself, “What does the community and surrounding area need in a graduate? What knowledge will make my students successful in the workforce?”

Teachers must be genuinely interested in the units being taught in order to spark interest in students.

Quads and helicopters are overtaking the original horsepower. Southern Arizona's rural agriculture is changing.

Students who once sat in Arizona's rural agriculture classes were completely immersed in all different types of agriculture from dairy to cotton farming. Agriculture has become more focused in recent years. Agriculturalists pride themselves on being at the top of their specialized field. Additionally, many families who want to stay in production agriculture need to have a secondary source of income.

Traditional Arizona agriculturalists spent many long days in the blis-

prised of students with background in agriculture. I had many students whose Supervised Agricultural Experience was watering the houseplants or mowing the lawn. Less than half of the students in my classes had extensive knowledge of the surrounding agriculture in the area.

New ventures in agriculture arose with the refinement of the greenhouse and hydroponic systems. These innovations shed light on how to bring new technologies into rural classrooms as well as city agriculture classes. This was the topic that sparked the most interest among my students. Despite having one of the largest greenhouse operations in the United States in our back yard, none

New technologies are the future of agriculture and our students; we need to make sure we are fully educating ourselves on all the changes happening around us so that we can build our agricultural education programs to their full potential based on our stakeholders' needs. As teachers we are leaders, we must take risks in our curriculum planning, be innovative thinkers and trustworthy. Along with our advisory board, we must review our programs to keep them on track with growing community needs. We must teach in a way that lets students apply their new knowledge. As agriculture teachers this comes easy for many of us. Helping students feel like they have a part in their learning is more taxing. Some call this gen-



Agricultural mechanics are a vital component of agricultural education. Students from Ravenswood High School (WV) are learning the setup of an arc welder from Trevor Cummings.

eration of students the “Millennials.” They move much faster than previous generations with the Internet at their fingertips and a device in their hand at all times. They carry around smart phones, tablets, and computers in class. One trait of this generation is they believe doing is more important than learning. They get satisfaction from results and actions, not necessarily from the learning of new knowledge. As teachers we must understand these characteristics and adapt to changing students.

If students need to see results in order to be satisfied, we need to follow suit. We can teach them the knowledge about plant growth and then successfully grow plants. We can teach them about concrete and then create concrete benches. Let students take ownership in their learning.

In my sophomore class, I had one student in particular who had very little interest in agricultural mechanics. He only wanted to be in agriculture classes so he could be an FFA officer. We were a week into our plumb-

ing unit and were learning materials and tools. He didn't have a care in the world about the content knowledge I was trying to teach him. He did not see how it could impact his life in any way. Finally we were in the shop and everything started to

fall into motion. First we cut and glued PVC, then we soldered copper, and by the time we got into the third material he was hooked. He took the most interest in threading steel pipe. He was a strong kid but also had finesse. He was able to start the thread and easily remove burrs. He then moved on and taught all the girls how to thread pipe. Soldering copper went very well also. All the students were so excited to see what this subject knowledge could do for them. Shortly after that unit, the same student who initially had no interest came into class one day thrilled. A water pipe at home broke and he fixed it for his mother who was proud of him for what he could do. These students were able to see results from what they learned in class and that made the information important to them. This creates a more intrinsic desire to learn.

Students who are intrinsically motivated are said to be more successful learners than extrinsically motivated learners. Let's tap into their internal motivation by giving

them responsibility. For example, if you have a greenhouse, managers are important for successful greenhouse operations. A task, such as testing pH balance, may be given to an extrinsically motivated student. Over time, as the greenhouse manager, the task will become important to the student and integrated into their daily work. The student manager will recognize the importance of the task. Now the task has become intrinsically driven. In my class, students were given the responsibility of watering plants. In the beginning it was a chore and they did it to avoid consequences. By the end of the unit, they watered the plants because it was their job and they took pride in it; the task was integrated into their daily lives.

Once we understand how students and generations are evolving, we can adapt our agricultural education programs to them. Also, with the understanding of stakeholder needs, we can have more successful programs. Teachers must also be genuinely interested in the units being taught in order to spark interest in students. Southern Arizona's agriculture and students are changing and programs need to keep up with new trends. I bet this is true across the United States. With all these new tools at our disposal, we can prepare successful well-rounded, up-to-date agricultural education students.



Ashley Haller is a Master of Science student in Agricultural Education at the University of Arizona. Her student teaching experience was at Willcox High School, which is in Cochise County.

Tips for Working with Today's Students from the Student Point-of-View

by Taylor Rogers

I am Taylor Rogers, a freshman at the University of Arizona studying Agribusiness Economics and Management. This year I am serving as an Arizona Association FFA State Officer. Over the past six months, I have traveled across the state helping high school students discover the opportunities of being an FFA member through

If a student is passionate about wanting to pursue an idea and they have the support of their advisor, they can succeed.

leadership conferences, events, and chapter visits. Serving as a state FFA officer has been very rewarding and a growth experience that will last a lifetime. Through my facilitation experiences, I have seen how students learn as I help them discover their leadership potential. These experiences have given me a chance to see the classroom from a different point of view and helped me realize what works when working with students. From visiting many high school classrooms, I have also been able to see successful agriculture teachers at work. Throughout the year I have compiled a few tips as a facilitator and from observing teachers. These tips, written from the student perspective, can be useful for teachers when working with today's agricultural education students.

Tip #1: Be relatable and get to know your students.

Throughout the year, you will be traveling all over the state and country with many of the same students. If you have somewhat of a personal relationship with your students, then you are going to get along a whole lot better. Participating in FFA during high school, I was able to go to numerous state and national FFA ac-

tivities with my advisors. They were the only teachers I ever had in high school whose phone numbers I had in my phone. This was necessary for going on trips in case I was separated from the group. My advisors knew my family and who my friends were. I felt comfortable enough with them to ask them for advice with anything I needed related to FFA or school. By them taking a little bit of interest in my life, my trust for them immediately grew.

Tip #2: Show You Care.

One of my wonderful professors last semester, Dr. James Knight from the University of Arizona, always says, "Students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." While going to different high schools as a state officer,

I present to students about Arizona FFA. At first, most students were very hesitant to speak and answer the questions we ask during leadership activities. However, it seemed that as soon as I took interest in what they were working on, offered my help for an idea, or asked them a little bit about their SAE project, they opened up and were much more engaged and friendlier towards me. It still amazes me what taking a little bit of interest can do.

Tip #3: Be approachable.

As a high school and college student there are always a couple of teachers and professors who seem intimidating. Even when I am struggling with a certain class, I feel like I cannot talk to them. One professor I had last semester came up to me almost every day of class, gave me a handshake, and said, "Hey Taylor, How's it going?" By him saying hello to me automatically made me feel more comfortable asking him questions, speaking up during class, and not being afraid to ask him for extra help on projects during his office hours.

Tip #4: Think outside the box: Make learning about agriculture exciting and adventurous.

This task may be hard to accomplish at times. There are some lessons that require a textbook and note taking. But here and there, it is ok to spice things up. In high school for the first six weeks of school we had "FFA Friday" where we played Minute to Win It type games that incorporated agriculture facts, FFA knowledge and FFA opportunities, during the class

period. These activities excited my classmates and me about FFA and helped us look forward to Fridays in agriculture class. One of the perks of being an agriculture student is engaging in hands-on activities in class; see where you can engage students in different ways.

Tip #5: Give students incentives.

If students are given an incentive, they are much more likely to do something for you, as I am sure most teachers know. For all of our chapter meetings, activities, fundraisers, and state and national events, students were rewarded with leadership points depending on the activity. At the end of the year, the students who earned at least 500 leadership points were able to go on an expense paid camping trip with the rest of the chapter. For fundraisers, the class or student who raised the most money was either rewarded with gift cards or a class food party of their choice. Not only did it raise student morale and create a little bit of friendly competition, incentives also helped my advisors by seeing that their students were engaged and willing to help out the chapter.

Tip #6: Make the rules clear so there are no questions about expectations.

By setting clear expectations, there is less chance anyone will be surprised by anything that you do. As far as grading or classroom rules, it was always very frustrating for me to have an inconsistent teacher. I always knew what the rules were in my agriculture classes. My agriculture teachers made very clear the safety rules, cheating, and absence policies. This allowed me to know exactly what I was getting myself into. It made it easier and a little more stress free for my teachers to enforce their rules because my classmates and I

were forewarned about the consequences for almost all scenarios.

Tip #7: Make sure you have a good support system from your school staff, parents, and local community.

Some of the best and most thriving agriculture programs I have visited were not the biggest and most popular programs but were the programs that had outstanding support. The only way that members from my home FFA chapter were able to attend the National FFA Convention all the way across the country was because our school principal and administrators understood the value of FFA and what it did for us as students. Another example where community support really came into play was when our chapter hosted our annual Homecoming Steak Fry Fundraiser. Nearly everything from the food and decorations to the student workers' time was donated. On top of that, there were always nearly 1,000 people who purchased a ticket because they, too, understood the importance of keeping our chapter going and what it meant to our students. If you have a strong support system standing behind you, you will be surprised at what you can accomplish.

Tip #8: Support ideas that are student driven.

I know that a lot of student-generated ideas cannot be supported because some are completely unrealistic. But even if there is an idea that is just a little "out there" or different than what is normally done, give it a shot. If a student is passionate about wanting to pursue an idea or project within the chapter and they have the support of their advisor behind them, they can succeed. In high school during National FFA week, we normally planned the same few events for that week. When it came time to

plan FFA week one year, a new idea was thrown out that we host a Special Olympics Rodeo. Some of the chapter officers were very skeptical about working with students from the special education program. With the support and encouragement of our advisors, we were empowered to follow through with the new idea and coordinated a day that ended up being a huge success. Not only did we get the chance to share FFA and Arizona agriculture to a new group of students, we were also able to make new friends and form a bond with another program on campus. It was an FFA Week event to remember in our school.

My FFA advisors are the people who inspired me to study in college. Out of all the teachers I had over my high school career, I know that I will always remember the names of my agriculture teachers. They personally made a huge difference in my life. My hope is that agriculture teachers understand how much their students look up to and admire them. Let these tips serve as a reminder for how wonderful agriculture teachers are to the future generations of agriculture students.



Taylor Rogers is an at-large Vice President of the Arizona Association FFA. She attended Gilbert High School in the Phoenix metropolitan area. While Taylor grew up around and went to high school in a suburban area, her family is actively involved in production agriculture.

Because of Teachers

by Lilly Webb

For many college students, social media can be a major distraction when trying to finish a homework assignment or when studying for an exam. While I am not an avid “social mediaist,” Pinterest is a site that you can spend hours. There are many aspects to Pinterest, where you have the ability to “pin” different items to virtual bulletin boards that you can create. These pins include different recipes, crafts and projects, places to visit, and quotes and sayings. A quote that I recently stumbled upon on Pinter-

In taking the road less traveled, members create a bright path for FFA.

est was, “Some things cross your path and change your whole direction.” Originally, I pinned the quote because it sounded philosophical, but after spending a couple of minutes reflecting on it, realized that this quote was extremely relevant to certain choices in my life; with one in particular being the decision to take an agricultural education class my freshman year of high school.

Coming from a family background that revolves around the sheep and cattle industries, agriculture was not unfamiliar; but the idea that it was taught in a class was. I was the type of student who could, for the most part, memorize information the night before a big test; however, in my new agricultural education class,

it became evident that strategy would not work. As a freshman in Introduction to Agriculture, we quickly approached welding in the curriculum. I was so nervous to weld in class because I was so used to memorizing material, not doing anything with it. It was in learning how to weld that I, along with several of my classmates who had similar learning styles, discovered that we really hadn’t been learning up until to the point of taking this agricultural education class, but simply memorizing. Those feelings of being nervous because I couldn’t simply memorize the material were washed away once my agriculture

teacher, Mrs. Montgomery, explained and demonstrated how to weld. Today, at the age of 18 and out of high school, I still remember how to weld better than any of the other material that I learned my freshman year simply because of the encouragement of my advisor to actually *learn* the material rather than my typical way of memorizing it.

Looking back on my freshman year, never could I have imagined that one class could change my whole future. Besides learning how to actually *learn* in my agricultural education class, that class and the opportunity to experience FFA began to start molding my future. It was then that I began to become involved in my FFA chapter—raising sheep, beef,

and rabbits, attending chapter activities, and competing in several Career Development Events in FFA. By participating, there was the opportunity to meet people who had similar passions, yet very different backgrounds, and to grow as person.

Eventually, through becoming a chapter officer for Millennium FFA, I realized that being involved in FFA wasn’t just for *me* to benefit from, my role was greater. My involvement as an officer was to engage other members in my chapter so that they could embrace all the opportunities that FFA offers. Another realization I had is that it only takes one person to get members more excited about agriculture and FFA—just as my FFA Advisors, Mrs. Montgomery, Ms. Gage, and Mr. Stevens did for me. And so, I decided I wanted to be that person for members within Arizona FFA.

Traveling to all corners of Arizona as a current state FFA officer, it has been incredible to observe the different agricultural education programs and the students within them. Visiting these numerous chapters, although the chapters have many contrasting aspects, the FFA members are all in the FFA for a common purpose, to experience growth, learn premier leadership, and prepare for career success. It is so refreshing to get to know students who either already embrace FFA, or are relatively unsure about becoming involved, mainly because both can relate to how I felt about FFA during my time in high school. No matter if students embrace the FFA or are just getting started, agricultural education teachers from around the state of Arizona and the nation, have a substantial impact on all students. Whether it is a simple “I think you would really en-

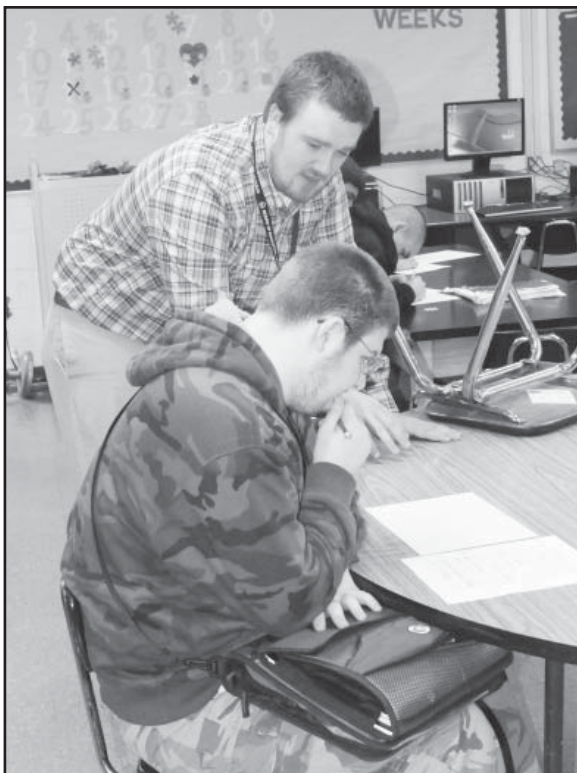
joy this” or “You should give this a shot,” agricultural education teachers have the ability to truly influence and involve FFA members and students. After hearing these simple phrases countless times while visiting FFA chapters across Arizona, I have seen more and more FFA members (both those with complete dedication and those with complete uncertainty) dive into becoming involved in FFA. What is even more heart-warming than hearing these phrases from agricultural education teachers, is what agriculture students ask their teachers, “Hey can I try this?” and the responses like, “We can definitely give it a shot.” Arizona FFA members are so inspiring when it comes to becoming involved and trying new things, and I began to realize throughout visiting chapters that they were inspiring me more than I could ever help or inspire them.

From someone who is prone to worrying about the future, whether it be what I want to do when I am older, or if I am going to do well on my next English essay, I have complete faith in today’s FFA members in continuing their enthusiasm, handling adversity, and serving as a new generation of leaders. While beginning something new or joining a program completely foreign may be daunting at times, members continually step up to the plate. FFA members step up to the plate thanks to the support and wisdom of current and past agricultural education teachers! Even though members may be intimidated to journey into activities they have never done, or talk in front of a roomful of classmates, they continually take the road less traveled by many who are too scared to venture out. In taking this road, members create a bright path for FFA. I cannot wait

to see where this path takes these students and the future of agricultural education next.



Lilly Webb is a freshman at the University of Arizona, majoring in microbiology. She went to high school at Millennium High School, in Goodyear, Arizona. Goodyear is part of the Phoenix metropolitan area. Webb serves as the Arizona Association FFA Secretary.



Teachers have an influence on their students in a number of ways. Caleb Smith (Ravenswood High School, WV) and Dylan Johnson (Taylor County Technical Center, WV) are learning the finer points of teaching during their twelve week student teaching experience.

High School and Beyond!

by Amber Hruska

After graduating high school in 2007, I have come to realize that many high school students may not have had the opportunities that I did in high school. I went to a high school in a small rural town in Arizona where we were fortunate enough to have an agricultural education program. Before moving to this small town, I lived in the city and was heavily involved in 4-H. I had a strong interest in becoming a large animal veterinarian because I knew I wanted my career to be centered around horses and that is the only career I knew of that would allow me to incorporate that interest. I was unaware of other animal-related careers until my high

the industry, which led me to earning a Bachelor of Science degree in Animal Sciences or, as some of my city friends like to call it, a degree in cows. My plan of becoming an equine veterinarian changed because of my fascination of cattle which started in my high school agriculture class. Without high school agricultural education, my educational path would have been a lot different.

As a high school student, I knew there was a need to prepare for the future, but actually applying that to my life was very difficult. It is a turning point in life when students are asked to become more responsible, but are still adolescent and don't understand why certain requirements are expected of them as they go through high

public speaking skills, I learned about working hard and doing a good job; I was exposed to an industry that I am now more passionate about than any other, and I learned the importance of having a support team to guide me along my path. In college, I developed the skills of time management, prioritizing, learning how and where to find information I don't know, and how to reach out to people to get more involved. I was able to further develop my skill set in college based on the skills I developed in high school agricultural education. The challenge for teachers is incorporating the development of all those skills while teaching the curriculum of the course. To me, there was more opportunity in other high school classes to teach all of these skills to help make me successful after high school. Agricultural education is one avenue for all of those skills to be developed while participating in various projects and meeting course requirements.

In my opinion, most students are not being prepared for the real world in all high schools. We all have the core class that are a must, math, English, and science, to name a few, but we are not taught how to manage our time, prioritize tasks, and develop basic communication skills. In other words, we often don't learn life management skills in high school classes. It wasn't until I enrolled in an Organization Management course as an undergraduate that I learned how to properly prioritize and manage projects and people. If I had developed more of these skills in high school I believe the struggles I endured would have been minimized.

College gave me the knowledge that I need for my career choice but it also taught me valuable skills that I

Don't just give them the tools,
show them how to use the tools and
watch as they soar.

school agriculture teacher helped me open the door of possibilities.

Like some high school students, I had somewhat of an idea of what I wanted to do with my life after high school, but the maturity to do it was not there. I was active in extracurricular activities but I was also interested in spending time with friends, as most teenagers want to do with their time. Having the support from my family and teachers helped me stay on track to graduate high school and go to college.

Through high school agriculture, I learned about different aspects of

school. After I graduated and continued on to college, I felt very much unprepared. I didn't understand the concept of prioritization of tasks and lacked time management skills. I did so much in high school that I didn't realize at the time it was probably too much and other aspects of my education were suffering. I tried to carry that over to college and participate in as many activities as I could. Then I soon realized in order to be successful in college I needed to focus on the important activities that geared more towards my future goals.

Through agricultural education in high school, I was able to develop



Quality instruction takes place in various forms. J. D. Repp preparing students from South Garrett High School (MD) for State Career Development Events.

think need to be taught in high school, specifically through high school agriculture. Agriculture is full of people who are raised to work hard, multi-task, and do good work. So who better than agriculturists to teach high school students these real life skills?

In general, teachers are responsible for providing students with an education and skills that can be used beyond high school. Teaching young students time management is probably the most valuable tool that can be given. Not only is it important to teach how to efficiently complete tasks in a particular industry but also how to critically think about different situations and overcome various struggles. Students need to experience these types of struggles and have someone guide them through these struggles before entering the real world.

Agricultural education is a great way to teach students these tools. For example, operating a cattle ranch requires a lot of time management. There are specific times of the year that certain tasks need to get done no matter what. When working with

animals there is always something that comes up and throws off the timing of other chores. This is when time management and prioritizing comes in to play. Balancing the workload efficiently can easily be taught through

agriculture courses. Agricultural education has the natural ability to involve animals, plants, mechanics, and other types of industry to teach life management skills.

When I volunteer at FFA Career Development Events in Arizona, I see many different types of students. Over the course of five years of volunteering, I have seen students ranging from those who were raised in the city and the only exposure to agriculture is through an agriculture class, and those who grew up on a farm or ranch and have been involved with agriculture their whole life. These events allow students to have the opportunity to learn something new and develop new skills. However, I have observed some students who were not prepared for the event, which caused fear and disappointment in those students. Students need to be set up for success. Exposing them to different industries is not really helping them develop skills.

Giving students the tools and materials to build a bat box is exposing

them to the project, but teachers also have to show them how to use those tools to build the box. It is important to ensure that the students are being fully involved with the project and are prepared to complete the task. That is how students grow and develop into successful adults, by doing and figuring out what is the best way to complete the task.

Set students up for success by providing them the know-how to do the task and then allowing them to complete it. Allow them to take ownership of their work and provide guidance for how they could have done that better, not just in the task but also in managing their time and energy spent on the task. Begin the development of life management skills in high school and more students will excel with their plans after high school. Students will have the confidence to strive to do better because they have the skills to make it better. Don't just give them the tools, show them how to use those tools and watch as they soar beyond high school.



Amber Hruska is pursuing a Master of Science degree in Agricultural Education at the University of Arizona. She went to high school in Snowflake, Arizona, a rural community, and Gilbert, Arizona, a suburb of Phoenix.

An Administrative Perspective for the New Agricultural Education Teacher

by *Richard Jenkins*

I currently serve as the Principal of South Jefferson Elementary School in Jefferson County West, Virginia and have been in this position for the last nine years. Prior to coming to South Jefferson, I worked for five years as an Assistant Principal at Jefferson High School, one of the largest high schools in the state at the time. Both of these administrative positions have given me a prospective of how the school system functions as a whole, from kindergarten through high school.

When I left the comfortable confines of WVU and entered this strange new world of teaching agricultural education, my blood was running “National Blue and Corn Gold.” All through my junior high and high school years, I was an active FFA member and served as president of my local chapter (Jefferson High School), regional president and the WVU Collegiate FFA chapter president as well. As a high school student, I participated in all judging events and attended any FFA trips I could. Needless to say, upon graduation from WVU, I was confident

the prospective new agricultural education teacher that will assist you in earning respect and building a positive working relationship with your school administration. I am sharing my “top ten” suggestions for the new teacher from my perspective as a principal and public school veteran with 29 years experience. These opinions and suggestions are based upon no formal research, only my life experiences.

My personal “top ten” key points for the new agricultural education teacher or helpful hints to build a positive working relationship with your school administration:

Always be a life-long learner and continue to sharpen your skills as you move forward in your career.

Always keep the lines of communication open with your administration. Please--no surprises!

I am sure you are asking yourself, “How does this pertain to me as a prospective new Agricultural Education teacher?”

Prior to these administrative jobs, I was living my dream as an agricultural education teacher in Berkeley County, WV. Upon graduation from West Virginia University (WVU) in the spring of 1986, I interviewed and fortunately was hired to teach agricultural education at both Hedgesville and Martinsburg High Schools. I thoroughly enjoyed fifteen years in the classroom and gladly accepted and enjoyed the challenges of building a solid agricultural education program and a respectable FFA program at Martinsburg High School.

and aspired to make my mark on the world!

I still cherish the fulfilling and life-changing years I spent at WVU. Those years were spent sharpening my skills in the content areas of animal production, agriculture mechanics, plant science, classroom management skills, teaching methods and strategies, leadership skills, etc. However, no amount of university course work can prepare you for the daily rigors of the “real world” of a public school teacher and the challenges and demands you face as an agricultural education classroom teacher or FFA advisor.

In this article, I want to share my thoughts and personal opinions for

It is imperative that your supervisors are aware of the activities and events you have planned for your program and/or the FFA chapter. This, of course, is above and beyond the daily lesson planning and delivery of instruction you were trained, certified and hired to teach.

I speak from experience, as a principal, when I say I am not a big fan of surprise phone calls or inquiries from parents or board office officials about something I was totally unaware of in the first place. A brief e-mail or hand written note sent to your principal as a “heads up” is always appreciated and will go a long way in building trust and support for the program and you personally and professionally.

Always bring positive public relations to your school. Make your program known in the school and community. You can never have too many articles in the newspaper of the good things your students are doing. Remember: When you look good, the school looks great.

First and foremost, you must remember that your agricultural program is just one small branch on a big tree. Although we all know in our hearts that our agricultural education program is the most important life-changing program in the school system, please keep in mind all other teachers, coaches, etc. in your school feel exactly the same way about their subject matter and curricular and/or extra-curricular programs. You will quickly learn you are competing with the sports teams, fine arts department and other organizations for students in your school.

Therefore, it is imperative that you are visible in the school, that you are a spokesperson and salesperson for your program. You must be proactive and an active staff member and participant in your school's decision making processes. If you don't sell your program ...who will?

Earn the respect of your students' families. This will help you through the tough times.

From an administrative perspective, this applies to all teaching disciplines. When the parents and guardians of your students respect you as a teacher, everything you do in your job is so much easier. All veteran teachers have learned and mastered this technique. As a new teacher, you will want to model your behaviors after those former teachers you respected and admired. When the bad times

come, and they will, this respect you have earned will help.

Start your first day with good classroom management skills. You are their teacher, not their friend. You are the professional.

This can often be a tough task for the new young agricultural education teacher, but is very important. Students look up to you as their teacher, not their friend. Please be very careful that you do not "blur the lines" of this relationship. Always treat your students fairly and equitably. Students will never forget the one time they were treated unfairly and it could take years to rebuild their trust. It is also very important that you look and act the role of the teacher. If you want to be treated as a professional, act like a professional! Your walk, your talk, your attitude and your appearance are the impressions others will have of you and your program.

If you want it, teach it! Teach everything and never assume the students know what you expect.

Many first year teachers make the assumption that the students in their classes know their expectations. This often leads to confusion for the students, which leads to frustration for you as the teacher. Unfortunately, this often leads to unwanted administrative attention. If you begin the school year by teaching everything you expect, the rest of the year will fall into place and the administration will feel comfortable with you as the teacher. If you can follow this one simple step, you will have a fruitful career.

Be careful with social media.

In my personal opinion, this may be the number one concern for the new agricultural education teacher or any school employee in today's society. We no longer live in a world of complete privacy and, therefore, you

must be careful with your social interactions and acquaintances on the internet. It only takes one picture or inappropriate post to ruin the budding career of a new teacher. Social media issues can lead to stress and heartache for any teacher, young or old. I would advise you to not communicate on social media sites with students. I would also caution you to be very selective and limit your friendships with the parents of current students on social media as well. These interactions cloud the lines of professionalism. School administration will not tolerate teachers who act unprofessionally on social media sites. You have a higher standard to live by when you accept the job of teacher.

Treat your students with respect and they will treat you in the same manner. "Students don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care."

From day one, you should treat all of your students with respect. Show them how much you care about them as an individual and they will reciprocate. Protect their privacy and pride and NEVER reprimand a student in front of their peers. How would you feel if you were the recipi-

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Richard Jenkins is the Principal of South Jefferson Elementary School in Jefferson County West Virginia. He served fifteen years as an agricultural education teacher before moving to school administration.

Student Teaching: A Life Changing Experience

by Karli Feicht

Driving forty minutes to Kingwood, West Virginia, was not how I pictured spending my last semester in college. I thought I would be taking easy classes and boosting my grade point average. I never imagined that a mere forty-minute drive would take me to a new world in Preston County. I am from a small town in rural Ohio and went to a small private school where academia was highly valued. I played sports, was in the band, and never heard of an agricultural education program. My grandparents owned roughly 200 acre pastured raised beef operation and this was my only experience with production agriculture.

reduce their shop time. Nevertheless, the smiles on their faces when they laid a perfect bead or polished a melt strip were so worthwhile. This ornery group of boys turned me into a true teacher. They challenged my professionalism and my technical skills.

Working with a class of freshman and junior students for Agricultural and Natural Resources I was difficult. The skill levels varied immensely and their agricultural background were extremely diverse. None of the students had true production backgrounds or developed mechanics skills. I struggled to gain student interest and I didn't gain respect until we started the MIG welding unit with shop safety. Students began to realize that to work in the shop they needed to be a team, a well oiled machine

The Stockman's Contest was the first after school activity I was involved and I loved working with others who shared a similar passion for production livestock. I was a member of the 2012-2013 WVU Livestock Judging Team and I'll forever credit Dr. Bowdridge for preparing me for the animal science and judging portions of agricultural education. I learned quickly that giving a set of reasons to a judge is a lot like teaching a group of very critical teenagers. I honestly think that I now want to pursue teaching because of the skills I learned from my time on judging trips and contests. This experience changed my life and getting to change student's lives by helping them to learn the skills I developed through livestock judging was a great way to pay it forward.

The Ham, Bacon and Egg show was a new experience for me. Being from Ohio we don't have this contest, but now I truly think we should. Not only does this event help students to earn money it also allows students to follow a long-term project and gain a new appreciation for the meat industry. I am still floored that you can sell a dozen eggs for four hundred dollars. The experience of seeing a community work with the FFA chapter will follow me for the rest of my career.

Training an Envirothon team of five boys was the most exciting and productive time of the week. Maybe not in a purely educational stance but from a life-skill and development class we made significant strides. These students and I bonded over pizza or McDonalds at practice, and worked away the hours of the evening on forestry, aquaculture, wildlife, and soil skills. We developed our fifth topic BMPs and worked out a

I hope that I made a positive difference in the lives of my students by teaching them valuable skills.

My first week with my agricultural equipment and repair class, a class of twelve junior and senior boys, I realized my college agricultural mechanics classes were worth their weight in gold. Even though I was well prepared I learned daily from the students in this class. I had never used a plasma cutter or conducted basic trouble shooting for MIG welders, but I learned to pinpoint frequent problems. This group of students was the hardest group to teach but yet the most rewarding. I've never seen a group of students get so riled up about a simple five question worksheet, because it would

that works together to create a safe environment for all. Students enjoyed being able to work in the shop.

I was also able to work with an Agriculture II class composed of 10th, 11th, and 12th graders. This class challenged my own knowledge of animal science and developed a need to continue my own education. This group of students also pushed my disciplinary boundaries and did their best to deny me the satisfaction of a lesson completed. This class was my biggest disciplinary challenge while student teaching.

professional presentation. The experience of working with students on a long term project and having such positive results, even through a tumultuous stay at the 4-H camp, was extremely rewarding.

All these things set aside, the most valuable moments of my student teaching didn't occur at school. I had a member of the Envirothon team, a student who's farm I had visited, call me late one Saturday evening. I almost didn't answer because I thought it was strange a student would call that late, but I'm ever so thankful I did. He had rolled his truck, completely breaking the frame and rendering the truck totaled. I had never been so scared in my life; he walked away with a few bumps and bruises, but no lasting injuries. I was able to

talk to him for a few minutes, calming myself down about his condition, and perhaps helping him a little too. In that moment I realized that I had developed such strong relationships with these students that I needed to do this for the rest of my life. Knowing that a student decided to seek out my voice in a terrifying time honored me more than that student will ever know.

My life truly changed during my student teaching experience. I've never cried so much and laughed so much. I truly believe that God has called me to be a teacher and I never would have realized His plan without this placement at Preston High School. I would never say that my experience was perfect. There are many components of the program

that I would change, but in my twelve weeks there I hope to have made a positive difference in the lives of students by teaching them a valuable skill or two and making life long relationships that I will never be able to replace.



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An Administrative Perspective... (continued from page 23)

ent of a public reprimand by an administrator? Stop and think about if someone were to speak to your own child in that manner. Administrators admire and respect teachers who nurture and care for their students, not scream and yell at them. Teachers should never be demeaning.

Be self-sufficient.

Please do not assume the school system owes you anything. You were hired as a professional to make your program work with what you have in place. This is not to say you should never ask for teaching materials or big ticket items on occasion. If your school administrators notice that you work hard and use your resources wisely, you will be rewarded with the material things you need to make your program grow and you won't have to ask.

Keep your authority as the classroom teacher when it comes to discipline.

When you are hired as a professional teacher, it is an expectation that you can manage your classroom. One of the worst things you can do as a new teacher is to send every minor discipline issue to the main office. This discipline strategy will do several negative things for you as a new teacher. First, it will give students a ticket out of your room whenever they want. It will also lesson your authority and give the authority to someone else. Lastly, it puts you squarely on the watch list of your administration as a potentially weak teacher. Maintain your authority and handle the minor disruptions and you will be taken seriously when the major things need administrative attention.

Know your school policies and follow your school policies!

When you are hired as a new teacher, you are expected to know everything about your school. Truthfully, it often takes months or maybe even years to learn all of the policies of the system. Be sure you have a strong mentor you can talk openly with and learn from when it comes to school policy. It is always smart to ask before doing.

In closing, I hope these ten "common sense" points will help you as you enter the exciting and rewarding career as an agricultural education teacher. Always be a life-long learner and continue to sharpen your skills as you move forward in your career. Always strive to be the best teacher you can be in your profession. The rewards are great when you can reflect back on those students that you hopefully made a difference in their lives.

Student Teaching: From Lesson Plans to Blow-up Tyrannosaurus Rexes

by Katlin Thorsell

Who knew that fitting a member for an FFA jacket could be so challenging? I was fortunate as a member to only have to buy one FFA jacket that fit me from my years in middle school until I received my American FFA Degree. Apparently the times have changed and during my time at Washington High School, I became the “go-to”

I tell you this because something that seemed small at the time has created an excitement within the Washington FFA Chapter. The students ran with the idea and wanted to have chapter t-shirts made next year that incorporate Titus. Mr. Cunnien’s classroom is now filling up with t-rex models. We even awarded a member at the parent-member banquet with the Titus Award, which will be given annually to a member who displays enthusiasm for the FFA and bleeds

first career choice when I graduated from college. I played college softball and earned a degree in Recreational Sports Management, but during the fall of my senior year I received my American FFA Degree and it was during my trip to Indianapolis that I realized I was not ready to say goodbye to the organization that had helped make me who I was at that moment. I talked to Dr. Boone, enrolled at West Virginia University and the rest is history. Like everyone else I was nervous about student teaching, but that nervousness lasted about two days into my placement at Charles Town Middle School. Seeing the enthusiasm that Mrs. Friend had about the subject matter she was teaching and the love she had for her students ensured me that I had made the right choice. As I began teaching my little 6th graders I faced the frustrations that most teachers face with behavior and the students that do not really care at all what you are teach-

Student teaching’s frustrating days are outweighed by the great days.

for measuring students for FFA jackets. Let’s just say we have Pam at the National Office on speed dial. While we have had successes in ordering jackets that fit our students, we have struggled with one student in particular in getting her the perfect fit. Throughout several attempts to get the correct measurement, we ended up with a jacket that could be worn by many as a dress with three-quarter inch sleeves. Upon seeing this jacket for the first time, many students commented that the jacket would be a perfect fit for a tyrannosaurus rex. This sparked an idea in Mr. Cunnien’s head and we began to search for a t-rex that could fit the jacket. We kept the students out of the loop and one day when they walked into class there was a t-rex peering at them from the front of the classroom. The students instantly loved the idea and the Washington FFA now has a mascot: Titus the Tyrannosaurus Rex.

National Blue and Corn Gold. There is even a friendly war being waged between the penguins at Jefferson High School and the t-rexes at Washington High School. I am glad that in the short time I was at Washington High School that I could experience a small idea that has grown like wildfire.

I feel the same about my student teaching experience. Agriculture education was not my



Student teaching also involves preparing students for competitive events. A student demonstrates his skills in the operation of a lawn tractor under the watchful eye of Kevin Oakes.

ing. However, I was able to see the so-called light bulb come on and the students began to feel more comfortable with me. By the end of my time there they had me watching Bubble Guppies (which is a cartoon similar to SpongeBob – the new “it” show for middle-schoolers). I taught lessons on animal science, plant science and agriculture mechanics and I was amazed at how students transformed from being in a classroom to going into the shop and working on shop projects. They began teaching each other and in my final days at Charles Town you could visually see the learning that occurred.

I then went to Washington and the legend of Titus the T-rex was born. I faced many challenges there, with one class in particular, but on my last day there I know that I had impacted those students. I told the students we were going to have a pig show on the last day of class so when they walked in the classroom it had been completely transformed. We had flipped the tables so that the tops served as the arena wall and we placed chairs behind them to serve as the crowd. I divided them into two groups, placed some extra credit up for grabs and released the pigs, which were really balloons. I had a fan blowing that simulated the random bursts of energy that a pig has during a show and all of the students had a pig stick. They absolutely loved this activity and we had a very extreme showmanship competition between the two groups. Af-

ter we had put all the pigs away and put the classroom back together we had a small discussion on what they had learned and in a very rare occasion, every student had something to contribute.

Student teaching has not been easy. There have been long days, tons of lesson plans and journals, and several frustrating days in the classroom; but those days of frustration are far outweighed by the great days. The days where you knew you had made a difference in the life of a student. What may have been an idea I had for a lesson or FFA activity sparked the interest of a student, which then spread to another and eventually created a whole class of students who were excited about agriculture. I had a wonderful student teaching experience and I owe that to the students and my cooperating teachers. Thanks for the words of encouragement and wisdom through this experience.



Student teaching is a learning experience for the students and student teacher alike. Here Jessica Ware (Barbour County Technical School, WV) directs the dissection of chickens as a part of her educational activities.



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An education isn't how much you have committed to memory, or even how much you know. It's being able to differentiate between what you know and what you don't. Anatole France

