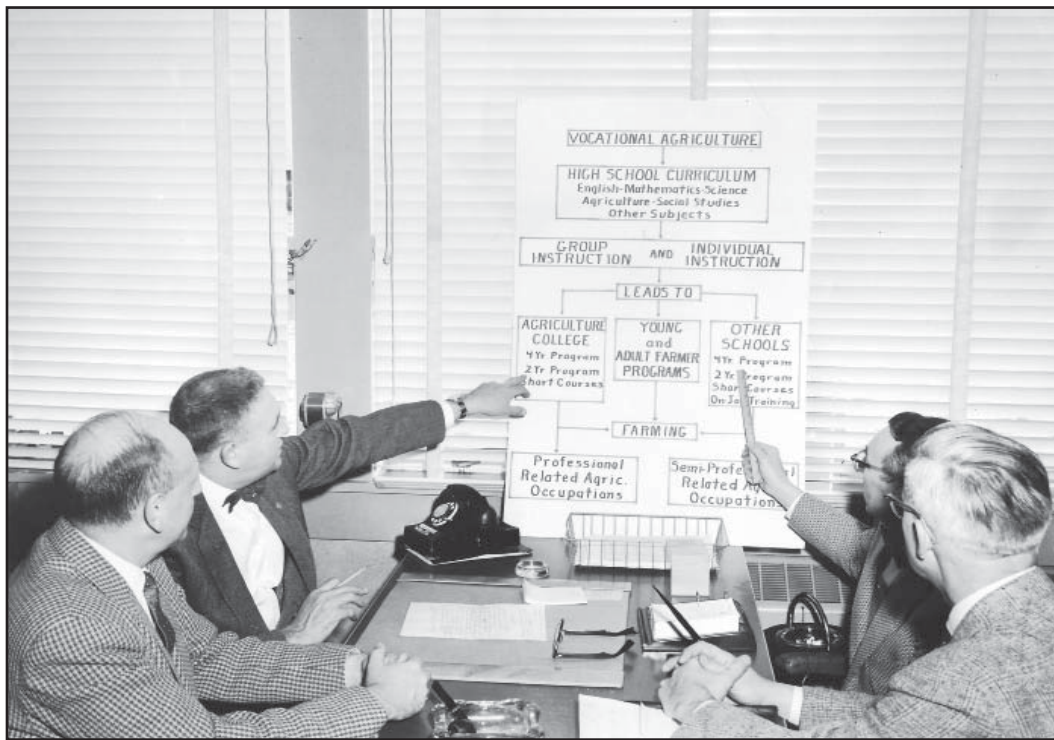


The Agricultural **EDUCATION** MAGAZINE

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*High School Teachers Reflecting on the Past
While Looking to the Future*

Standing on the Shoulders of Giants: Learning from the Past to Improve the Future

by Harry N. Boone, Jr.

Disregard for the past will never do us any good. Without it we cannot know truly who we are. - Syd Moore

A lot of thought went into the topic for the final three issues of my term as Editor of *The Agricultural Education Magazine*. From my earliest days as a student I was interested in historical events. I went to an elementary school where three grades were taught in the same room. The teacher rotated between the classes as she presented her daily lessons. While she was teaching the other two grades, students were instructed to study their upcoming lessons. I would finish my lesson and head to the set of encyclopedias to “find something to read.” More often than not I would read something on the Revolutionary, Civil or World Wars.

My love of history has carried over into my professional career. As a high school teacher I tried to keep track of officers and award winners and display that information to present students. As a teacher educator I have spent time researching supervised experience programs and problem solving teaching. I enjoy sitting down and looking through documents on the history of agricultural education in West Virginia. As a result of my passion I have learned a lot about the profession.

As I contemplated the retirement of Virgil Wilkins (see the article on page 10) after fifty-one years of service to the profession, my thought pattern went in a number of directions. First, think of the wealth of

knowledge these individuals possess. Secondly, these individuals have seen a number of milestones in the profession. Thirdly, the young teachers in the profession could learn a great deal from these individuals. That set the idea in motion for the next three issues of *The Agricultural Education Magazine*.

The current issue is devoted to veteran high school agricultural education teachers. I asked for nominations in a number of ways including publishing the request in *The Agricultural Education Magazine*, sending a request to State Teacher Association Presidents, and using my general knowledge of the profession. I found the profession reluctant to take the time to nominate individuals in this category. I also found that many nominees were too humble (a common trait in the profession) to talk about their experiences. I managed to twist a few arms and I think that we have a great issue to share with the profession.

We indeed are standing on the shoulders of giants. As I reflect on my years in the profession, there are a number of individuals for whom I have tremendous respect. One such individual is my former vocational director and mentor, Alvin Porterfield (see the article on page 18). He was a high school agricultural education teacher, vocational administrator, assistant superintendent, and friend who guided me through my tenure as a high school agricultural education teacher. Other individual that come to mind are my high school agricultural education teachers Glen McKeever and Danny Gray. I have the greatest respect for Nelson Dailey, a colleague who I worked with for nine

years. Moving on to my college days Dr. O. Claude McGhee influenced my professional philosophy and dedication to the profession. I can never forget the influence of Drs. J. Robert Warmbrod and L. H. Newcomb during my graduate school days at The Ohio State University.

I encourage you to read this series of articles and reflect on the lessons they have to share. Take this information and use it as building blocks for the future.

In my nearly forty years in the profession I have seen a number of changes: the admission of women into the FFA, the first female state officer in West Virginia, the first female national FFA officer, the first female FFA president, the number of female teachers in West Virginia moved from one to over fifty percent to name a few. My career has also seen the makeup of the students change. We have also moved from a majority of rural students who lived on a farm to a majority of students with no real “farm” background.

I have no way of knowing what the next thirty years will bring but I am sure that if we build on the past we will have a bright future.



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

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Editor

Dr. Harry N. Boone, Jr., Professor, Agricultural and Extension Education, West Virginia University, PO Box 6108, 2058 Agricultural Sciences Building, Morgantown, West Virginia 26506, Phone (304) 293-5451, FAX: (304) 293-3752.

E-mail: harry.boone@mail.wvu.edu

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The Circle Model - Past, Present, and Future

by Scott Stone

The date was January 2, 1998. A bone-chilling gust of air met me as I opened the front door. A white fluffy layer of snow, which fell overnight, covered the ground. I stepped out the door to make the short walk to school and begin my first day in the classroom as an agriculture educator.

Traditional blue and gold paint covered the walls of my classroom located in the agriculture building. A large textbook for each class I taught rested on a huge bookcase on the west wall. A record book for

they took their seats, I called roll and hung the absentee slip on the door for the office to collect. The students removed their notebooks to copy down the study questions I had written on the board. They pulled out their textbook and began to read the corresponding chapter to find the answers. I stopped the students and said, "Instead of reading the textbook, let's have a discussion and see if we can come up with the solutions to our questions."

The look I received in return was sheer terror. I assured them it would be okay and had a discussion. The 45-minute class was over before we

hard data, as it was not the driving force of the time, but by my estimation the average age of the teachers in the room was about 40. During roll call, we were to say our years of experience. The room echoed with 25, 30, 19, 23, and an occasional 5. It was my turn, and I humbly said one week. There were five female teachers in the group and the remaining 60 were men.

The agenda for the evening included information about the 10 or so agriculture contests and 5 leadership contests we would have in the spring. We discussed the 13 proficiency areas in which students were eligible to apply. The curriculum committee representative said the committee members would be looking into developing a statewide Exploratory Agriculture Curriculum because of a concern about the decreasing number of farm kids. Then Dr. Steve Brown stood up to give his state department report. I do not remember all he said, but one topic stuck out to me. He said, "We will be losing about half of our teachers over the next five years due to retirement. We need to work to make sure we find qualified people to fill these positions." Soon after, the meeting ended and everyone headed home.

The date was August 20, 2015. A hot and humid gust of air met me as I opened my front door. The grass was green and lush as we had experienced one of the wettest summers on record. I jumped in the truck to make the short drive to town to begin my 18th year in the classroom as an agriculture teacher.

My classroom in our new Agriculture and Technical Science Building is painted white with an FFA

The future of agriculture education will be led by individuals who adapt to change and are willing to create the future based on a firm foundation of the traditional three circle model of classroom, FFA, and SAE.

each student occupied the other end of the bookcase. The front of the classroom was taken up by a large green chalkboard. The east wall had a few plaques from past FFA victories hanging on the wall. The Farm Bureau DTN monitor, which displayed the passing snow storm tracking due east, rested on a shelf. My desk was situated in the southeast corner of the room. A large computer monitor that weighed about 50 pounds and a large computer tower that only took floppy disks rested on the desk. A grow light with a few dark green plants decorated the north wall.

I took a deep breath as the students filed in for first block. After

knew it. The bell rang for the students to leave, and one student timidly asked, "How are you going to grade us? We did not turn anything in?" I assured him it would be OK. He quickly dashed out the door to his next class.

The week flew by and Friday came very quickly. After school I would be attending my first district agricultural educators' meeting. It was being held at our school. Thankfully, my teaching partner had organized the meeting and all I had to do was show up. I took my seat in the back of the room and watched in awe as the agriculture teaching legends filed into the room. I did not have

blue stripe around it. I have a dry erase board and a Smartboard that is connected to my computer on the west wall. Several banners that have been won by our students at various competitions hang on the south wall. Further down the wall sits a mobile science dissecting table that can be moved anywhere in the classroom. Our mobile laptop cart, which is charging in the corner, connects to the Internet via WiFi and can be used anywhere in the building. The east wall contains a fume hood where students can perform various agriscience experiments. The remainder of the wall is a science work area for students to explore the assigned topics. On one end of the work area, we have a stack of recordbooks for the students. The rest of the recordbooks can be found on flash drives or the iCloud. Computer tables and a small bookcase containing several sample textbooks that are used for references line the north wall. My desk contains a flat screen monitor connected to my desktop computer. To the south of my classroom is a state-of-the-art 30x60 foot greenhouse.

I took a deep breath as the students filed in for first day of the school year. Once all the students had been seated, I logged on to my computer and took attendance. The students pulled out their devices and entered the objectives we must master in order to pass the state certification at the end of the school year. They began researching the information from various websites that will be needed for them to complete their first learning outcome. The students shared information in real time via Google classroom and discussed the lessons.

Earlier this summer I attended our district ag teachers meeting. I took my seat in the front of the room and watched in awe as a new crop of agriscience educators filed into the

room. The average age of the teachers in the room was well below 30. During roll call we were to say our years of experience. The room echoed with 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. I was the oddball as I said 18. The females now slightly outnumber the males in the room.

The agenda for the evening included information about the 21 or so agriculture contests and 8 leadership contests we would have this year. We discussed the 52 proficiency areas students could apply for. The curriculum committee representative said they would be looking into developing a statewide curriculum for Agricultural Economics that would be developed in cooperation with business and industry partners who determine which skills and competencies our students will need to possess well into the 21st century. Then our state department employee stood up to give her report. I do not remember all she said, but one topic stuck out to me. She said, "We still have five remaining openings across our district and several programs will close if they do not find highly qualified teachers. We need to work to make sure we find qualified people to fill these positions."

The date will be August 30, 2027. I will step into my classroom for my last first day of school. My classroom will look much different than it does now. It will be designed to allow students to define, research, and solve complex world problems facing the food, fiber, and natural resource industry. My curriculum will be fluid and driven to meet the changing needs of students who discover problems that are yet to be determined. The majority of our students will have no first hand connection to production agriculture, yet they will have had the opportunity to experience it through social media. There is a good chance my students will not even physically be in the classroom



SAE supervision is as important today as it was when this photograph was taken. (Source: The Agricultural Education Magazine archives)

with me. Instead, they will experience my lessons through devices and a WiFi connection.

In January 1999, Dr. Rosco Vaughn, editor of *The Agricultural Education Magazine*, posed the following question: After 81 years of providing instruction and preparing individuals for successful careers in agriculture, can we say the job is done? The answer was no then and it is still no now. The future of agriculture education is bright. It will be led by individuals who adapt to change and are willing to create the future based on a firm foundation of the traditional three circle model of classroom, FFA, and SAE .



Scott Stone is the agriculture science instructor at Centralia High School, MO. He is also the NAAE Region IV Vice President.

Educating All for the Betterment of Agriculture

Editor's Note: Ms. Heishman asked for a list of questions to guide the development of her article. I included the questions to provide flow for the article.

by Sherry A. Heishman

1. *Briefly describe the teaching environment when you started. How has that changed over the past 30 years?*

Teachers must recruit and retain good people who will advance with the changes.

I began teaching in 1985. Although there were women teaching before me, there were none in my county. Agricultural educators were overwhelmingly a male majority. Many of them were much older than me having taught 20 years or more, living in the “old school” world that women were not necessarily ag teachers. Although that was the mindset I never met one that was not supportive and willing to help the rookie. That mindset of “old school” was not only among the male teachers but also the principals and superintendents. I interviewed for a position in a rival school in my home county during the time I was student teaching. Virginia Tech was on the quarter system and I would finish my student teaching in March and could start the position at that time. There were not many openings for ag teachers during that time close to home. Ag teachers stayed in the career for life. The second question that came from the school principal during that interview was “Do you think you can handle a man’s job?” However true and honest in the meaning that question may have

been; my response for the time was “you will have to hire me now and find out.” The superintendent tried to smooth over the question but had no choice but to say we will give you a try. That principal told me before he retired from the high school three years later: “best bad question I have ever had the opportunity to ask.” That question provided the push and drive to prove I could do the job.

As young teenager I learned to artificially inseminate cows at the age of 15. Again that was a time when many farmers were not that comfortable with a teenage, let alone a girl breeding their cows. Again this made me want to do the best job possible and earn my spot.

2. *Relate some success stories – either personal and/or students.*

I have been very lucky to have (as other have too) many wonderful individuals I have watched mature into hard working and successful adults. We all know the three circle model and how important each area is to our program but more importantly to the development of the student.

With the push for standardized tests, there is a need for data and to explain how it measures what my students learn. I was told that the knowledge of the student was always reflected by data. I had a conversation with my principals and asked them to explain how to put this success in terms of data.

We worked with local food pantry to cut up deer as a part of the Hunters for Hungry program. I had a student who during her freshmen year would not enter the shop, her 10th grade year she peeked out the shop door, the junior year she cut up the deer, and her senior year she actually went through the whole process including skinning the deer.

She gained skills that will be with her for life! There was no standardized test to measure what she had learned; so I guess she really didn’t gain anything. The principal looked at me and said; “guess you got me on that one.”

One of the joys of teaching is watching a student that is quiet and withdrawn in other classes come alive when making a presentation or talking with a group of younger students about agriculture. Individual student’s successes might not seem huge to many but if they learn to be useful citizens then we have helped a little.

My FFA officer team was asked to facilitate an opening ice breaker and team building activity for the faculty at the beginning of the school year. The students were great kids but many shy and soft spoken. They developed an entire STEM lesson with a hook, outlined the day, planned an activity, developed a rubric for grading and conducted a debriefing of what the activity should have brought forth in the teachers minds. Students talked about being 21st century learners and wanting more hands on, inquiry based lessons. The developed self esteem and established a different rapport with teachers. Many teachers commented “wow how did you get them to do that?” My response, “it was easy. I just asked them!”

Thinking in terms of SAE I had a student start in 9th grade with two dairy heifers, and two beef cows. Today he has earned a college degree, owns over 100 acres and 100 beef cows, and markets and sells his livestock. This might not sound like much to huge farms out west but for Virginia this is not too bad for a 26 years old. He was an American Star Farmer finalist.

Another student's SAE went from three sheep to over 120 head. He shows competitively on the national level. He too was an American Star Farmer finalist.

I have another student who started with one small agriscience fair project and was Finalist for Agriscience Student of the Year. The student completed science projects every year in high school, did research in agriculture as a part of the undergraduate curriculum and is currently getting his masters in non ag field. He is using the skills he learned with those agriscience projects to do his current research with strength and conditioning.

A few students started out mowing lawns and now own turf and landscape businesses

I have seen students establish college career plans. After competing in CDEs such as food science they change their entire career path to that area.

I had a very shy student with low self esteem. She was really good at livestock judging. I encouraged her to do meat judging to get the connection and understanding of the end product. As a senior she wrote an essay on her most influential teacher. She wrote about her meat judging experience and how hard meat identification was for her at first. Because I kept pushing her (as all ag teachers do their stu-

dents) she was able to be successful in the CDE earning high individual in the state. She visited a college in another state and choose her career path. Not to mention she began to believe in herself.

3. *What are some of the situations/conditions that have "evolved" over the past 30 years?*

Technology - Computers are the first thing that comes to mind. We had the old apple IIc but the applications for FFA were few. Communication was actually talking to someone on the phone not email or texting.

4. *What words of advice would you have for a beginning teacher? A teacher in their first seven years?*

Many student teachers have asked how do you do this. I like the quote by Mark Twain that said "The key to success is to make your vacation your vacation." This resonates with me and it so true: Do what you love and love what you do. Educating young people about agriculture is what my life has always been about. Raised on a farm, marrying a farmer, raising three boys on the farm, the joy from watching a ewe give birth, growing a garden, reaping the crop, knowing you had a small hand in all those miracles is gratifying. Why would you not want to share that feeling with everyone you know? Using our farm for an educational site has helped give my students and many in our community valuable hands on experience. We host pre - K farming fun day each spring with over 50 children and take animals for petting zoos and Food for America. For several years before we had a school farm, I took our ewes to school. We housed them in the school shop and lambd them out. We set up 4 pens and rotated 20 plus ewes in and out during lambing season. We invite all schools on campus to come see.

Students watched the ewes lamb, observed and performed all health care and management. Without this experience many students would not have the opportunity for hands on experience that motivates and encourages them to want to learn and do more. Our farm is used for field trips and teaching labs for all my classes including horses, pigs, cows, sheep and dogs.

As a young teacher begins his/her career there are so many obstacles and hoops you have to jump through to satisfy school requirements. Today it seems like there are so much more than I had to do. My philosophy is to use those obstacles as stepping stones to get where you want to be. Getting to know the community and gaining that support is much needed aspect of developing the long lasting successful program. It is also key to the teacher's survival By relying on community resources you can offer more opportunities for students.

Utilizing all three phases of the program: class/lab, SAE, FFA in an even balance helps to move the program forward.

Use the mentors that are at your school. All teachers need to collaborate and never stop learning or loving to learn Young folks have great ideas but don't try to reinvent the wheel.

continued on page 13



Sherry A. Heishman is the Agricultural Education Teacher at Central High School, Woodstock, VA

A “Back to the Future” Moment

by Krista Pontius

Twenty-five years ago, I was a sophomore at Greenwood High School in Central Pennsylvania enrolled in Agriculture 2. When I was asked by my agriscience teacher, Dr. MeeCee Baker, to represent the Greenwood FFA Chapter at the National FFA Convention, I was thrilled for the opportunity to travel to Kansas City, MO, meet new people from across the United States, learn information about the agricultural industry, and

and social media may not have existed but success was measured, as it is today, by student growth.

Today, the faces in the agriculture classroom are diversified, technology abounds, and agriculture teachers are using cutting edge delivery methods to instruct a variety of agriscience curriculums. As I look to the future, I see great things for our profession in the next twenty-five years. I am envious of the individuals who have recently graduated from college and are at the starting line of the mara-

are a year older. As educators, we need to prepare for the future, stay on the cutting edge of education and agriculture, and be open to exploring technology in the classroom to deliver the type of education that our students deserve. The challenge is to remain grounded to the principles of agricultural education in the midst of the constant change.

So, the question is, how do we do that?

1. Classroom Instruction must remain in the driver’s seat of the program. Technology has changed the face of education. Twenty five years ago, the Apple IIe was on the cutting edge. Today in our Google classrooms we are creating quizzes on Google Forms which are automatically graded with Fluburoo. Teachers are unlocking learning potential with the game-based platform Kahoot! and educators are connected across the United States with the National Association of Agricultural Educators’ Communities of Practice collective learning social domain. Agriscience educators are, and will continue to be, challenged to deliver instruction which increases intellectual engagement and fosters a deep understanding of curriculum through hands-on, minds-on, research-based teaching. Finally, quality curriculum is essential. The Curriculum for Agriculture Science Education (CASE) provides curricular materials for agriculture programs that provides a high level of education experiences to students which enhances the rigor and relevance of subject matter in agriculture food and natural resources. Aside from advancing rigor, CASE provides purposeful enhancement of science, mathematics, and English language understanding. In order for us

Agricultural education students are able to gain skills such as communication, teamwork, collaboration, problem solving, and conflict resolution that will give them an advantage in their careers.

bond with my fellow FFA members. I never realized how this one trip would impact my life. At the conclusion of that adventure there was no doubt in my mind that I wanted to follow in Dr. Baker’s footsteps and become an agriscience teacher. Looking back, agriculture classes were, for the most part, filled with traditional ‘farm kids,’ the curriculum was strongly production oriented, and technology was non-existent. Although, at the time, I was unaware of the 3-circle model for agricultural education the circles were all equally proportioned; students were receiving high quality instruction, were actively engaged with quality Supervised Agriculture Experience programs and opportunities for success in the student organization were prevalent. Phrases such as digital footprint, inquiry-based education,

that is their careers in agricultural education. These individuals have trained for four years for this race, which will certainly be a battle of endurance and tenacity, rather than a sprint to the finish line. Looking ahead as an educator I feel that we all need to realize that the only constant in our future is change. Technology, curriculum, delivery techniques, and the faces and backgrounds of our students....change is inevitable and necessary for survival and growth in the future. Last year during our in-service days prior to the beginning of the school year, our principal reminded us that every year we get fresh new classes of essentially the same students sitting in front of us. (In my case, that is 14-18 year old students, middle-class, rural background, etc.) Unfortunately, each year when that school bell rings on a new year, we

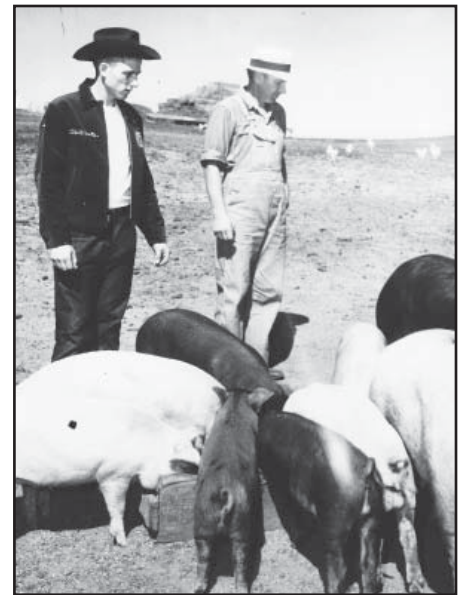
to remain relevant in our districts, we need to provide high-quality education, focusing on principles of STEM education. Currently, of the agriculture education programs across the country, 92% offer agriscience and 71% offer advanced agriscience and biotechnology, which proves the willingness of our discipline to make appropriate program improvements to remain relevant and rigorous in our ever-changing society.

2. Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) is what makes agriculture programs unique. Providing students with an experiential learning opportunity which enhances career success is something that is touted in agricultural education and “SAE provides the students the opportunity to consider multiple careers, develop workplace behavior, develop specific skills within an industry, and are given opportunities to apply academic and occupational skills in the workplace.” Various types of SAE’s are recognized by the National FFA Organization including entrepreneurship, placement, research, exploratory, school-based enterprises, and service-learning. Most agriscience teachers are fluent with traditional entrepreneurship and placement programs; however, in order to meet the needs of our changing clientele, agricultural educators need to familiarize themselves and become comfortable administering the latter four options.

3. The National FFA Organization is an integral part of agricultural education by helping make classroom instruction come to life through realistic, hands-on applications. FFA members embrace concepts taught in classrooms, build valuable skills through experiential learning and demonstrate proficiencies in competitions that showcase real-world agricultural skills. Today’s FFA has evolved in response to expanded op-

portunities available in agriculture and its needs to hire skilled and competent employees for more than 300 careers. The organization helps students prepare for careers in business, marketing, science, communications, education, horticulture, production, natural resources, forestry and many other diverse fields. The continual review and enhancement of career development events, connections to National Agriculture, Food and Natural Resource Career Cluster Content Standards, and inclusion of the significance of service-based learning will frequently change the National FFA Organization; however, the mission remains constant. FFA makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for Premier Leadership, Personal Growth, and Career Success through agricultural education.

Twenty five years later at the beginning of the 2015-16 school year, the backpacks have a fresh new style, students have traded in boomboxes for iPhones, and some of the Ford trucks may have been replaced with the Ford Focus, but the job of the educator remains the same...preparing students for career success. Industry professionals are constantly remarking that students are graduating without the soft skills necessary for high levels of achievement in the workplace. Agricultural education has always been a model for education where students are able to gain skills such as communication, teamwork, collaboration, problem solving, and conflict resolution that will give them an advantage in their careers and in some cases, prepare students for occupations that may not even exist. As agricultural educators embark on the adventure that is agricultural education, we need to look back to the future! Looking back to keep our foundation strong in the principles of the 3-circle model that has succeed-



SAEs have always been an integral part of agricultural education. (Source: The Agricultural Education Magazine archives)

ed since 1928, working towards the exciting future that will prepare our students for the careers and most importantly remembering why we chose to join the profession. After returning from the National FFA Convention last year, one of my students was positive that she wanted to choose agricultural education as her career path. She said she was mesmerized by how much agriculture teachers love their jobs. This was a true “Back to the Future” moment for me as she made the decision to Teach Ag!



Krista Pontius is an agriscience educator at Greenwood High School, PA. She is also the NAAE Region VI Vice-President.

I Became a Vocational Agriculture Teacher by Chance and by Choice

by Virgil Wilkins

As I begin this writing, at least three things are quite obvious in my mind. First of all, I may say very little which someone in the past has not referred to either in written or spoken word. Secondly, I will not be negative in my comments because this profession has provided my family and I with the material resources necessary for a good life and the enjoyment of seeing young people succeed. Thirdly, methods and procedures must have been correct or I would not have successfully completed 51 plus years of high school teaching. I say this not boasting but as a factual observation.

I became a Vocational Agriculture teacher by chance and also by choice.

I am not sure you can separate these two variables. I was fortunate to have been born to parents who earned their livelihood from the land. My siblings and I were taught obedience and the work ethic. This was how we grew up and successfully survived on a small family farm of 153 acres.

By chance, my high school education was influenced by a wonderful Vocational Agriculture teacher, Mr. Lacy Cochran, who not only taught me about agriculture and the FFA but encouraged me to become an agriculture teacher like himself.

I chose to attend West Virginia University for my post-secondary education. However, it was by chance that Dr. R. C. Butler, Dr. Claude McGhee, and Dr. Warren Kelly forged my foundation by joining the many pieces together to help make for success after graduation.

By choice and by chance, I started teaching under the guidance of a great principal, Mr. Pat Cosgray, then married my supportive and caring wife Kaye, and successfully raised a family of three girls all of which are very successful in their chosen professions.

So let us acknowledge the fact that we become what we are by a strong bond of choice and chance only one of which we have control over.

I have seen many changes in our profession since the early sixties.

Production agriculture was the largest part of the curriculum. Students were taught best production practices to help ensure a profit. Many classroom hours were spent explaining how to produce quality plants and animals. These practices were itemized in a *Job Plan Book*. Remember those green colored lined sheets? This all led to fruition in what we referred to as a Supervised Farming Program (enterprises) where the student put into practice what was learned in the classroom. What a splendid idea!!! We did not spend a lot of time on marketing what was produced because the student mainly sold to their neighbors, at auction sales, or used it as part of the family food supply.

Record keeping was a very important part of the SFP. However, it was all done by pencil and we even had a sheet to record hours working on each enterprise. Students took a lot of pride in knowing production agriculture and record keeping.

I taught a number of years with only boys in the classroom. How misunderstanding and biased our society was in those days. I remember the first two girls I had in Vocational Agriculture and FFA and how embarrassed I was when it came to studying animal science and we had to talk about castration.



Virgil Wilkins receiving an award from the WVU Collegiate FFA for 51 years of service to the agricultural education profession.

A major turning point in my teaching came when our administration added a meats lab, two greenhouses and a co-op garden to enhance the training of our students. I cannot over emphasize what positive educational value this added to the curriculum. Each year, I could see the increase in knowledge and skills and the excitement of learning. However, these labs required more time from me to properly organize, promote safety practices, and evaluate student progress.

FFA has long been based upon the promotion of leadership development and student participation. It has been an organization to give Vocational Agriculture students an avenue to walk beyond their present limits. FFA is no longer only Future Farmers of America and word changes in the creed. It remains a motivational “arm and leg” of Vocational Agriculture.

After teaching my first three years, I was fortunate to attend the University of Maryland on a National FFA Fellowship sponsored by Massey Ferguson. Three other Vocational Agriculture teachers in the United States were also chosen including Coleman Harris from Indiana, who later became National FFA Executive Secretary, Jerry Davis from California, and Charles Skeens of Oregon. As a part of our education to achieve the Master’s Degree, we worked in the National FFA Office in downtown Washington, DC.’ under the guidance of William Paul Gray, then National FFA Executive Secretary. Not only did we get to assist with various activities in the National Office including working with the National FFA Officers but flew to Kansas City and helped set-up facilities for and conduct the National FFA Convention. I mention all of this because it was at this point in my life that I truly decid-

ed to become a successful Vocational Agriculture teacher and FFA advisor.

Sometimes, we in this profession do not realize how fortunate we are to be teaching and molding the future of young people who will eventually replace our present generation. We are

Help others so that they may walk successfully and unfailing in the footsteps of successful warriors.

teaching how living plants and animals can best fill the needs of 7.3 billion people upon this earth and how we can correlate it in a compatible relationship with our environment. Should this be exciting? It is our responsibility to make and present it in this manner.

Motivation in my mind is the starting block in the education of students.

It is contagious. It can be seen. It makes those eyes shine as they look at you. It returns to you a satisfying grin. It produces winners. It leaves a lasting positive impression. It makes the days go faster. It does not create stress. Enough said!!!

I understand that since American agriculture is now global, Vocational Agriculture education and training is much more complex and is on a broader scale. We are dealing with educational areas unheard of in the first thirty years of my teaching.

However, I ask of you to consider this one thought. What one section of this complete agriculture picture, if it should fail, would cause a collapse of most of the remaining related areas of employment? Would it not be production agriculture?

So what may be our major calling? I am often amazed what little knowledge our students have about the fundamentals of animal and plant production. Just ask juniors and seniors and I feel you will be amazed. Just ask many adults who try successfully to grow garden crops. Use

Sevin to control blight? What is a 5-10-10 fertilizer and what is it used for? We do not have time to give more examples, but I hope you get my point. What percent of our total class and laboratory teaching hours are assigned to learning the basic fundamentals of production agriculture? This may merit a problem study. Production agriculture is the foundation upon which all other sectors stand and survive. Without this foundation, very little of the remainder is required.

Your teaching years will go fast. Enjoy them, but help others so that they may walk successfully and unfailing in the footsteps of successful warriors. It is hoped that one day you will have time to live and reflect upon pleasant memories of the past.



Virgil Wilkins retired in 2013 after 51 years as a high school agricultural education teacher at Hundred High School (WV).

Two Brothers Views on Agriculture Education

by Dean Swafford and Dan Swafford

Dean and Dan Swafford compiled a list of questions to express their views on agricultural education. Their answers are presented below.

1. *What was agricultural education like when you started teaching? The brothers had similar views on this question.*

When we started teaching in Virginia in 1974, there was a heavy emphasis placed on agricultural mechanics in the agriculture educa-

I think we must continue to develop new programs to attract students to agricultural education. We must develop ways to keep young teachers in the program.

tion program. Almost half of the instruction at both the high school and middle school levels centered around agricultural mechanics. The curriculum at the high school level was taught through courses named Ag. I, Ag 2, Ag 3, and Ag 4. At that time there were very few females in agricultural programs. Most of the females were in courses such as horticulture. At this time there were very few female teachers.

2. *What do you think has been the biggest changes in agricultural education since you started teaching? The brothers also had similar views on this question.*

One of the biggest changes that have taken place was that there was NO technology in the classroom

when they started teaching. "You might have a 16mm movie projector, a film strip projector and maybe an overhead projector. There were no computers, no copiers, no smart boards, no tablets, no multi-media projectors." "You had to rely upon yourself to be a good teacher to keep the students engaged."

3. *What do you think the future of agricultural education will be like? The brothers have different views on this question.*

Dean - I believe that there will be an increase in the number of students

in agriculture education and thus a need for more agriculture teachers. I feel that the future is bright for agricultural education.

Dan- I must say that I worry about the future of agricultural education. At the present time with the teacher shortage, I worry that many programs will close because of the lack of a teacher(s).

4. *Why did you spend your whole careers teaching agricultural education?*

Dean- I stayed in agricultural education because I really enjoyed the job! Teaching, visiting students, and all the other things that go along with teaching, they were great!!

Dan- First, we enjoyed teaching, my brother and I both agree that we are the happiest when we are teaching. "More importantly we are at peace when we are teaching." Next, we enjoy helping our students.

5. *Why do you think we have a shortage of agricultural education teachers?*

Dean- The hours are long and the low pay compared to other agriculture careers.

Dan- I believe part of this shortage is due to high cost of college and the relative low salary level of teaching. Many college students believe if they are going to run up a great deal of debt going to college, they are going into a career where the financial return will be greater.

6. *What was your best experience in teaching?*

Dean- Seeing my students succeed at what they do in life.

Dan- The feeling you get after you have taught that "really good" class.

7. *What fellow teacher do you most admire?*

This was not a hard question for the Swafford brothers. They each put the other at the top of their list. Even though, they taught over a 1000 miles apart most of their career the brothers still collaborated on many activities. They are especially proud of developing and teaching the small animal curriculum which serves as a model in Missouri and Virginia.

8. *How do you think agricultural education can improve?*

Dean- We must develop ways to keep young teachers in the program. We must think of teaching as a career not just something to do for a few years until something else better comes along.

Dan- I think we must continue to develop new programs to attract students to agricultural education. Dean and I were the first teachers to teach small animal care to students in our respective states. This program over the past 20 years has attracted thousands of students to the agricultural education programs.

9. *What would you tell a young teacher about to get into the business?*

Dean- I would tell a young teacher that by becoming an agricultural education teacher, they would have a great group friends who are fellow agriculture education teachers.

Dan- The first thing I tell them is that teaching is an honorable profession. They will not get rich in the terms of money, but if they do it right

they will really enjoy it.

10. *What do you think you would have done had you not become an agricultural education teacher?*

Dean- I think I might have gone into wildlife conservation work. For most of my career I lived near a national wildlife reserve. During this time I got see the important work that takes place on the reserve.

Dan- Looking back, I think I would like to have become an instructor at the community college level. I have taught at the community college level as adjunct instructor from time to time and really enjoyed it.



Dean Swafford



Dan Swafford

Dean and Dan Swafford, twin brothers, taught agriculture education a combined total of over 80 years. Born and raised in Missouri, they both began their teaching careers in 1974 after graduating from Central Missouri State University. They later both received their Master's degrees from the University of Missouri. Dean retired from teaching in Missouri and has spent the last several years teaching in Kansas. Dan recently retired from teaching in Virginia and now works in the State 4-H Office at Virginia Tech.

Educating All ... (continued from page 7)

Teachers at seven years: I was told by the physical education teacher when I first started: you will get the itch to change career paths at 7, 12, and 20 years – but if you do think about the reason(s) you went into this career in the beginning – to mold the minds of youth, to teach about agriculture – you will see the benefits of staying. Never lose sight of why you became a teacher!

5. *Where will agricultural education be in 15 years? In 30 years?*

What agriculture will be like 15 to 30 years from now seems like a

lesson in science fiction. Imagine how extraterrestrial today's agriculture would be to the same question in the 1980s. Agriculture has dramatically changed in the last 15 to 30 years and will continue to move leaps and bounds. Technology has influenced so much over the last 30 years but that will be nothing compared to the future. Some of the changes will be:

- STEM- science technology engineering and math
- Think globally but be community based and supported. Less pro-

duction agriculture will be taught and more communication, technology, horticulture and urban agriculture.

- There will be social concerns. Think about driving down the road with a driverless tractor.

Teachers need to stay abreast of agriculture changes, they must recruit and retain good people who will advance with the changes. We were founded on helping the farm boy gain skills but today as in the future we need to educate all for the betterment of agriculture!

The Changing Roles of a High School Agricultural Education Teacher

by William C. West

When I began my agricultural teaching career in 1974 the agricultural teacher was the hub of all agriculture knowledge. In the community the agriculture teacher served as the resource person

Remembering that I was teaching students that can be molded made my decision to stay in the profession easy.

for information, such as agriculture pamphlets, bulletins, slide programs, and special adult classes and contact was made with specialist at West Virginia University. Your students, parents, farmers, and community leaders were hungry for new inventive ideas, methods, and chemicals to make their farming program better and more successful.

Today the agriculture teacher is the filter for this mass of agricultural information that is available to everyone. This information has an overpowering impact on students and farmers' directions for success. The information web of the Internet, YouTube, RFD-TV and special programs such as the Angus Report make decisions difficult for all farmers. The agriculture teacher is an advisor rather than the information.

During my career the computer became the new technology in agriculture. Students in my program were leaders in computer skills and knowledge. This became very evident at the career show during the National FFA Convention. A computer company

set-up a problem solving activities for students to complete with prizes awarded each day. My students won the prizes the first two days. The company asked if I would tell my students not to go through the activity again. These students were very confident and happy with their computer skills.

In the early 1980s development of the Charleston Farmers Market and the Ripley Farmers Market were new marketing ideas. One student, Tom, raised mainly tomatoes with a splash of other vegetables and profited \$45,000 as a junior in high school. This was more than a salary of many teachers at the high school. Tom obtained the American FFA degree and continues to farm today. During this time my students sold potatoes to the Jackson County school systems and many local families.

The agricultural profession has changed

but the components of agricultural education; SAE programs, FFA, and contests are still interlocked for student success. A solid base of agricultural knowledge in the classroom with realistic SAE programs allows the FFA and contests to highlight the skills developed by the student. The delivery component in teaching the knowledge went from blackboard to the computer screen, paper records to computer records with spreadsheets and individual success in contests to team simulation activities with scores.

The FFA leadership component has remained the hallmark and showcase for the agriculture student and local agricultural programs.

The advice I would give a beginning teacher would be summed up in one word "proprieties" (on a personal note: faith, family, job (teaching), program of study - look at needs of your students and community



William West continues to share his expertise with the profession. Here he is demonstrating the proper steps in preparing bacons for the State Ham, Bacon, and Egg Show and Sale.

and fulfill their needs). FFA - examine your strength, the knowledge of your students, and find contests and awards that showcase their success. (You cannot do it all) any teacher worth his salt, must decide between the 3rd and 7th year whether or not to remain in teaching (this is a normal challenge that all agricultural teachers must decide). I can say without a doubt remembering that you are teaching students that can be molded made my decision easy to stay in the profession.

Agriculture programs in the future will include change. Programs will be teaching the use of drones in the classroom and cell phone links for plant identification, insect, and disease control. The production of animals for human consumption will be based on "all natural" and humane methods. The new program will be

water development, quality and efficient use. Programs will be developed for intensive small plot agriculture for home use with surplus being used in the local community food banks.

The FFA program will still be elevated on leadership development of our youth but handicapped by a great shortage of agriculture teachers across the nation.

In summary, I enjoyed my years teaching every day because it was fun. Today the rewards are great when past stu-



William West has not lost the love of the agricultural way of life since his retirement. He is still actively involved in farming as well as serving as President of the WV FFA Foundation.

dents want to give you a hug rather than a handshake.



Mikala Armstead, Glenna West Armstead, and William C. "Bill" West recently celebrated three generations of national blue and corn gold.



William C. West retired as a high school agricultural education teacher with 31 years of service to the profession. He taught at Valley High and Ripley High Schools, as well as served as a Agricultural Education Coordinator for the WV Department of Education.

The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative.

John Dewey

“All I have is a \$100 bill,” and Other Reflections from an Ag Teacher

by Cory Wedel

My journey in agricultural education began in the fall of 1990 as a sophomore at Burlington High School in eastern Colorado. Mr. Korsovold (a.k.a “Mr. K”), my ag teacher, tried to get it started a year earlier, but sports were a bigger priority for me and I choose to take weight training class instead of ag class as a freshman. Well, Mr. K didn’t give up on me and I finally enrolled in agricultural education as a sophomore. I didn’t really grasp how big and significant FFA was until I attended the

mie High and Rock River Schools was nearly perfect in preparing me to become Stratton High School’s first ever certified ag teacher and FFA advisor. I had the privilege of starting a brand new program in July 1999.

As I reflect back on my career, it has been very gratifying to help students earn successes in many different areas, build a quality educational program, and develop professional connections with teachers in Colorado and across the country. But instead of sharing about success and awards, I’d much rather tell you about some of my experiences over

until the alternator died in the school suburban, leaving us stranded in the middle of nowhere, after dark. Out of about 20 people on the trip, only one cell phone had service in this remote part of east central Colorado. Luckily we were able to call the school transportation director, who reminded me, “that’s why we don’t take the back way.” A quick 95 minutes later we got picked up. We probably could have gotten a ride most of the way home from the four to five other FFA chapters who also took “the back way.” It wasn’t funny then, but it is now!

Small Engines Rule #1 – It seems like every year I (we) learn a different lesson during the small engine unit. My first year teaching the local COOP donated some old five horsepower engines to our program. I had a group of junior boys in my 7th period ag class and every one of them knew “exactly how to disassemble and re-assemble any engine they had ever set their eyes on.” Yet the “rule” we learned that year, especially when installing the piston, was: **DON’T HIT IT HARDER**. If you’ve ever taught the small engine unit, you probably know what I mean. It wasn’t funny then, but it is now!

Small Engines Rule #2 – Properly install the valves. Some of the best and brightest students that have walked through the door of the Stratton Ag Shop have struggled to correctly re-install engine valves and tappets. Justin was a student who, during an SAEP visit, taught me how to operate a tractor with GPS and auto-steer, and he was a state gold individual in the Ag Mechanics CDE, twice. During his junior year, he was the first student finished with engine

One thing will remain constant; the positive influence ag teachers and FFA advisors have on students.

1991 State FFA Convention in Pueblo. Mr. K told me I was going to be an official delegate for our chapter. I didn’t really know what that meant, but I learned pretty darn quick!

From that point on, I was hooked on Ag Ed and FFA, except for one thing. My senior year I decided I wanted to become a teacher, but in math or science. So, Mr. K started working on me again. He convinced me to declare my major as agricultural education and said I could always change my mind after a year if I didn’t like it. I never changed, in fact, every experience I had with agricultural education at the University of Wyoming further convinced me that being an ag teacher was the perfect fit for me. My student teaching experience with Mr. Corson at Lara-

the last 16 years that weren’t funny then, but are funny now.

Electrical Safety – My first year teaching I discovered that there was a “bad” electrical outlet in the shop. So I told the students not to use it, until we can get it fixed. Yet, the kid who was “paying the most attention” proceeded to use it anyway, with a brand new 50’ extension cord. Luckily the only thing that got “fried” that day was the cord. But I did “grill” the kid about following instructions a bit better. It wasn’t funny then, but it is now!

Bad Alternator – On our way home from the State FFA Convention in Pueblo in 2006, we took the “back way” with less traffic and civilization. The trip home was just fine

assembly, but he then spent the rest of the class period wondering why his engine wouldn't run. After he removed the engine head to trouble shoot the problem, I realized he inadvertently switched the intake and exhaust valves. The engine started easily after the valves were installed correctly. Come On Man!

All I have is a \$100 Bill

This past spring at State FFA CDEs, Marshall, my best sophomore livestock judge "forgot" his clipboard and paper in the classroom, or so he thought. He realized this at 7 am as we are unloading the bus and going to the event. He knew I was not pleased. I asked him what he was going to do and he said he would try to make the best of it. Wanting to help, I offered to walk him by the bookstore in the student union at Colorado State University and try to buy a notebook. We checked the lower level entrance and it wasn't open for another 30 minutes. We tried going upstairs to the main entrance and it was closed too, but there was a person inside and he came over to us. Now in a begging mode, we asked to buy the cheapest spiral notebook they had for sale. The gentleman informed us that the cash register clerks and money were not there yet and we couldn't buy anything. We offered to pay cash with no change back, so he went around the corner to look for a notebook. Meanwhile, I asked my student if he had his wallet. Reluctantly, he said yes, "but all I have is a hundred dollar bill." "What?!?!? Why is the only money you have a \$100 bill," I exclaimed. I could tell he didn't want a notebook that bad, so I looked in my wallet and the smallest thing I have is a \$10 bill. And I didn't really want to buy a \$10 notebook since I wouldn't be getting any change back. Just then up walks the state director of Ag Education carrying a heavy box of CDE

supplies. I ask Mr. Womochil if he can make change for a \$10 bill and I have a student who would love to carry that heavy box all the way up to the CDE meeting. It was a good deal for both parties, so now I had change for a \$10. Before we knew it, the man in the bookstore came back with a fancy looking CSU notebook and we asked how much? He said, "Don't worry about it, just take it." Wow! We got a notebook for free, Mr. Womochil had a student to carry his box, and at the end of the day my student ended up being a silver ranked livestock judge at state! Good thing we found a notebook! And guess where his clipboard was . . . on the bus. His teammates loaded it for him, but he thought he forgot it in the ag room. It was kind of funny then, but it is really funny now!

The Next 25 Years

No matter how long you've been an ag teacher, I'm sure you have stories like mine that weren't funny then, but are funny now. Those stories are really just problem solving learning experiences that make being an ag teacher fun and really important. Teaching students how to solve problems will continue to be very important, because our problems won't go away, they will just get more challenging. SOLVE PROBLEMS.

In the years to come ag education will continue to see the development and integration of computer technology. When I applied for my state FFA degree in 1993, the application was on two floppy disks (the ones that were actually floppy) and we printed it on a dot matrix printer. This past year we generated a state degree using web based AET at the touch of a button, and if we wanted to, we could have submitted it digitally without ever printing or mailing it. Across the country many schools utilize a one-to-one laptop or iPad

program. In the future, perhaps traditional 3-ring binder ag notebooks and FFA Scrapbooks will be historic artifacts and the new format will be 100% digital, not just at the progressive schools, but at all schools. UTILIZE TECHNOLOGY.

Look for science to continue being emphasized in all areas of ag education, but especially in natural resources. As population and demand for food continues to increase there will be an ever increasing demand on the resources of land, water, and energy. American agriculture must be the leader in preserving, sustaining and efficiently utilizing natural resources. SUSTAIN RESOURCES.

Although certain areas of agricultural education have and will continue to change with the times, like instructional content and instructional methods, at least one thing will remain constant - the positive influence ag teachers and FFA advisors have on students. I'm sure we have all benefitted from the positive influence of another ag teacher, but we also need to be a positive influence to others with our unique set of knowledge, skills, and experiences. If it wasn't for the influence of Mr. Kerry Korsvold, my ag teacher at Burlington High School, I would not have been able to influence hundreds of students as the ag teacher at Stratton High School. So, as you continue along your journey in ag education: INFLUENCE POSITIVELY.



Cory Wedel is the agricultural education teacher and FFA advisor at Stratton High School, Stratton, CO.

Agricultural Education in Greenbrier County (WV), Specifically at Lewisburg High School

by William Alvin Porterfield

I came to Greenbrier County in July 1, 1947. It was probably the best decision in my career. I was offered the position at Renic, Greenbrier (Ronceverte), or to start a new program at Lewisburg. Lewisburg had a shop program before World War II but the Ag program was the school's first as well as my first job. The school's Vo Ag program had been started in the 1930's on a very small scale and no one was sure of anything.

Ag ed will be stronger if we take a look at where we have been and educate the masses that we are still growing food and training young men and women to be useful citizens.

My principal was very interested in the program and he gave me all the help I needed to start a program. No program can be successful without help from the administration. He provided me with a list of the boys that has expressed a desire to enroll in the Vo Ag classes.

At the time we had excellent help from the State Department of education and my supervisor was Guy Cain. He knew our problems and would come up with many suggestions. I know time has changed but how many times has a supervisor visited your program?

I went to work on July 1, 1947 without a classroom or a shop. It was all mine. My first job was to visit the home and get acquainted with the boys and their parents. At that time

we did not have girls in Vo Ag. I still think that a good Vo Ag program is made by visiting the parents and getting to know the background that a student presents.

The most important thing to me in a successful Vo Ag program is to get the respect of the parents. Let them know that you are interested in their boy or girl. Today I have many former students come up to me and make me feel that I have been a part of their lives.

I know that there are many programs of study today in Vo Ag but in my day it was Production Agriculture and in Greenbrier County you had better know your subject.

One of the first days on the job I was visiting one of the boys whose name had been given to me. I met a man who started questioning me about what I knew about farming. After a period of time, he said I am President of the Board of Education.

For a beginning teacher I would suggest that if you want to have a successful program, get out in the community and learn the background of your students. Time spent here will be more valuable than winning a state contest.

If you are to be a successful Ag teacher you must be willing to not be

an eight to three teacher. I feel that what has made many programs succeed are the extra hours that teachers spend with their students and their families. I will never forget going home with a student who lived back up a hollow on a small farm. We went in the front door and he introduced me to his mother. He was so embarrassed that he went out the back door and I was left alone with his mother. How many teachers have had this experience? I think a good Vo Ag teacher has the opportunity to not only teach the student but his or her parents. In other words get to know the backgrounds of the student. You will find that you may be spending too much time with your "A" student because it makes you look good.

I was lucky to have the job at Lewisburg High School. I have many American Farmers, State Farmers, and the Chapter won its respectable place in the lives of its members. When you have a student that was honored as the best instructor at North Carolina State, it makes all the hard work appreciated.

If I was starting out as a Vo Ag teacher today I would change a few things but I would still get to know the background of my students and the background of the parents. You will say that you don't have time to get to know your students at that level which tells me that you have not learned one very important aspect of being a successful teacher. Teaching Ag is a full time job and when I started you were told to teach Ag or get another job. How many of those jobs will you be remembered as the teacher that made me what I am today.

I know that Ag Ed is changing. We must change but we still must remember that we are teaching young men and women at a time in their lives when you are making them productive citizens. Do not change for the sake of change. If I were teaching today I would change but the core values of our Ag Education has not changed that much.

I will never forget after I had been on the job a few weeks, I walked into my classroom and there sat Dr. Parsons "cleaning his fingernails." He announced that he would be with me for the day. He was a professor in the Ag Education Department at West Virginia University. He was not only there to help me but he was there to find out if they had prepared me for my job. I am sure he went back to

the University with many ideas to help beginning teachers. Is that done today? If not, why not?

I feel that Ag Ed will be stronger in 15 years, 30 years if we take a look at where we have been and educate the masses that we are still growing food and training young men and women to be useful citizens.

I think that there is much to be learned from former Vo Ag Instructors. How many times are you invited to just come by for a visit? I know we are invited to judge contests but



Mr. Porterfield, sixth from left, as a member of the WV Vo-Ag Teachers Association Program and Policy Committee.

I think we are wasting a lot of talent by not asking former teachers to help solve many problems of the day.

There is a closeness in Vo Ag teachers that you won't find among other teachers. Let's keep up the good work. LET'S BE TEACHERS!



William Alvin Porterfield was born on August 3, 1922 on the family farm located at Gap Mills, West Virginia. His parents were William and Nina Porterfield. Both parents had grown up on farms and their young son was initiated into farming at an early age. He attended a one room school and received an eighth grade diploma. He enrolled in Gap Mills High School and graduated in 1939. While there he was active in the Agricultural program and Future Farmers of America. He received this State Farmer Degree in FFA while a Senior in High School.

The following year, he remained on the farm and worked with his father where they grew beef cattle, fed hogs, milked cows, and raised corn, wheat alfalfa and had five acres of potatoes. His father was the largest poultry producer in the southern counties, supplying the eggs for the Greenbrier Hotel resort.

After being out of High School one year, he entered Potomac State College where he majored in Agriculture. After two years he transferred to West Virginia University College of Agriculture. He volunteered for service in the United States Army during his junior year. Served during World War II for forty-two months seeing service in the European theatre and later sent to the West Coast on the way to Japan.

He returned to West Virginia University and received his Bachelor of Science in Agriculture in May of 1947. He began teaching Vocational Agriculture at Lewisburg High School where he taught agriculture for twenty and one-half years. He received his Masters of Science degree in 1949 in Vocational Agriculture.

Upon consolidation of the High Schools in Greenbrier County, he was appointed Vocational Director of Greenbrier County Schools where he developed Vocational Agriculture programs for the two new high schools. He was promoted to Assistant Superintendent of schools and held these two positions for nineteen and one-half years retiring in 1987 with forty years of service in Greenbrier County Schools.

Helping Teachers Teach The “Future of Agriculture”

by Dan Swafford

As we enter the second decade of the 21st century many agriculture teachers are faced with the problem. “How do I teach the emerging technologies in agriculture with reduced budgets and no training in these technologies.” For the past several years, the Agriculture and Ex-

has allowed teachers to receive training and the materials to what could have been an expensive technology, at no cost to their local departments.

A second technology which our local agriculture department cooperated with Virginia Tech to train our state’s agriculture teachers was GPS. Just like Robotics in Agriculture this technology is an expensive one

agriculture teachers association and the Agricultural Education Department at Virginia Tech, five GPS training workshops have been presented. During this time workshops were presented by Virginia teachers to agriculture teachers in South Carolina and Kentucky. Over the past two years though a grant at Virginia Tech 20 GPS units were purchased and are now loaned out to agriculture teachers who have undergone our training. This program has allowed teachers to teach this technology to their students, without their local programs having to purchase the GPS units.

The use of graphing calculators and sensors to collect data was another emerging technology which the Agriculture Education Department at Virginia Tech provided training to agriculture teachers in the state. Beginning in the spring of 2007 under the leadership of Dr. Tom Broyles in the Department of Agriculture and Ex-

By sharing equipment across the state, local agriculture departments can teach the “Future of Agriculture.”

tension Department at Virginia Tech has been trying to help Virginia agricultural education teachers solve this problem.

Lets, take a look at what can be done on a local and state wide basis to promote the teaching of emerging technologies in agriculture. In 2002 our high school’s agriculture department applied for and received a federal grant to conduct research in the area of Robotics in Agriculture. Part of this grant was used to purchase Lego Mindstorm robotics kits and to develop curriculum materials in area of Robotics in Agriculture. During the years since receiving this grant, our department has conducted three state wide workshops in the area of Robotics in Agriculture for in-service teachers and two workshops on the national level in this area.

For the past four years this project has lent out robotics kits to agriculture departments across the state for local teachers to teach this technology to their classes. This project

to teach and is an area which many of our teachers had not been trained. Like in the Robotics in Agriculture technology, the cost of the equipment was covered by small local grants. This allowed for the purchase of a small classroom set of handheld GPSs. Training for the instructor was provided by the local school division.

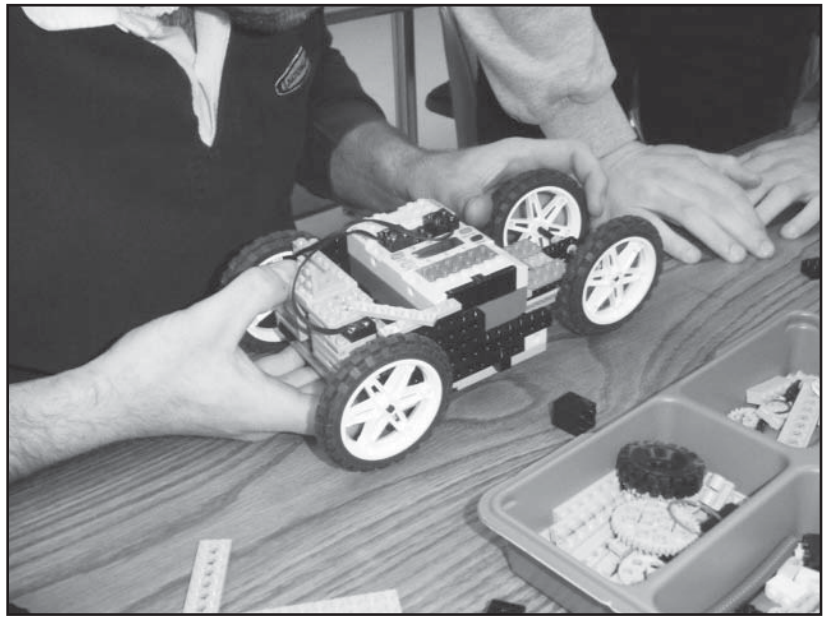
Since 2003, with cooperation between our state ag-



Agriculture teachers use graphing calculators and pH sensors to collect water quality data.

tension Education a project was established through to train agriculture teachers how to use graphing calculators and sensors in their agriculture classrooms. As the project began, two agriculture teachers (one high school and one middle school) along with the project director underwent training on the equipment. These three would serve as instructors for the teachers in the state. Since the summer of 2007, six workshops have been presented to agriculture teachers across Virginia. One workshop was also presented to teachers at the NAAE conference in Charlotte N.C. These workshops centered around how the calculators and their sensors could be used by high school agriculture students to collect data from their agriscience projects.

Funds from the project were used to purchase 50 calculators and a number of sensors. The first 50 teachers attending the workshops were given a calculator for use in their departments. Teachers could also use the sensors purchased in the project.



A teacher constructs a Lego tractor as part of the “Robotics in Agriculture” project.

There is a line from the movie/book “The Right Stuff” that goes like this “You Can’t do Buck Rogers without Bucks.” By sharing equipment across the state, local agriculture departments can teach the “Future of Agriculture.”



Dan Swafford was an agricultural education teacher at Christiansburg High School, VA. He recently retired from teaching and now works in the State 4-H Office at Virginia Tech.

Two teachers on a GPS course during the Virginia Agricultural Education Teachers Summer Conference.



Take Two

by Lisa Summers

I have always fondly remembered my college days at West Virginia University. They were filled with enough classes and homework to enable me to graduate in four years with a BS in Agriculture and a BS in Journalism with a 3.5 GPA. I completed a Master of Science degree in Agriculture Education in one year with a 4.0 GPA while writing a thesis.

Going back to school at 32 years of age and as a wife and mom of three was a completely different experience! In fact, the only similarities were the AGEE Faculty at WVU and the building itself. My goal was to earn my teaching certificate in a year.

The first task, was to pass the Agriculture Praxis test if I could still sign up to take it (it was past the late deadline). The deadline was to pass the exam in three weeks. After some extra money and some convincing, I got the test scheduled. I was very nervous since I only had one chance to pass the exam in order to accomplish my goal of earning my certificate in one year. I had not picked up a textbook in quite some time and since I got married, honestly, my shop skills had not been in demand and had taken a backseat to changing diapers. But nonetheless, I started reading, and with the good Lord's help, I managed to fill in enough correct bubbles!

Next on the plan was to sign up for nine credit hours at Wheeling Jesuit and ten credit hours at West Virginia University. I would continue to work full time at Wheeling Jesuit as the Special Events Coordinator and definitely not slack on my duties as a Mom of three. This was not an easy

task, but again with a supportive family, Skyping one class, and taking a lot of sick days, I was able to receive all A's!

Next on the agenda was probably the hardest and definitely the scariest thing to do. I had to quit a job that I enjoyed at Wheeling Jesuit University. With three kids depending on me I took a leap of faith to student teach. I know that teaching is my calling now, but at that point, I was still scared that I might have been confusing God's plan for me. So, you can imagine how hard it was to drive away on that last day at Jesuit; however, upon arrival at Cameron High School, I was greeted by the welcoming faces of my cooperating teachers, Mrs. Hattie Debolt and Mr. John Lockhart.

After my first few days of observations, we arranged that I would slowly take over teaching one class a week, until I reached a full load. The first class was to be the 8th graders for Agriculture Exploration. As a daughter to an elementary school teacher, niece to a high school math teacher, sister to a reading specialist and wife of high school welding teacher (notice in that long list, I didn't mention a middle school teacher once), I have heard horror stories about middle school students; so I was scared. "Middle school, first?" Gulp. However, this was not the case for me. I welcomed their energy. I was constantly impressed with their innate ability to absorb the information and still be inquiring for more. They easily became my favorite class, which was just more reassurance of God's plan for me.

It was truly an honor to work at Cameron High School. All of the students were very respectful and seemed to really enjoy learning; it

was very easy to care about them and really invest in them. My administrators were wonderful and very supportive. They were always willing to listen and were constantly popping in to check on me.

While I was student teaching my cooperating teachers were able to break the state record with 25 State FFA degrees! Cameron also had five first place state proficiencies winners, four second place state proficiencies winners, the Star Agribusiness person, and the Star Placement winner!

I also really enjoyed helping with the Ham, Bacon, and Egg Sale. One of my tasks was to supervise the trimming of the bacons. This was nerve wracking for me. I was scared to death that we would cut one wrong and lose months of hard work for the students, and honestly, for the pig too!

At the end of my student teaching, I had the opportunity to spend two weeks at John Marshall High School with Mrs. Nicole Shipman. It was really beneficial to see the similarities and differences in the programs.

I can't wait for the final step in this plan: be employed!



The final step did not happen within Lisa's time line. Until the opportunity to be a full-time agricultural education teacher presents itself, Lisa Summers is a substitute teacher in the local school system.

“Go Confidently in the Directions of Your Dreams”

by Eleanor Porter

Henry David Thoreau once said, “Go confidently in the directions of your dreams. Live the life you have imagined.” Over the last few years, I have found that growing up is a difficult task. When I entered my final semester of my undergraduate coursework, the one that began my student teaching experience, I would like to have said that becoming a teacher was my biggest dream; however at that point I didn’t know what I really wanted out of life. I was relying heavily on my student teaching experience to determine if I had chosen the right path.

On the first morning of student teaching, I packed my lunch, put on my new clothes, and gathered my things. As I got ready, I could not help but to remember my first day of kindergarten. That day was not so different from this one. I had my teeth brushed, hair combed and I was ready to go out into the big world of the unexpected. However, unlike that day, I did not have someone holding my hand as I entered the school.

After teaching my first class, I was ecstatic. I started with a communication game to grab the students’ attention and surprisingly, they all participated. Throughout the lesson they asked tons of questions and were engrossed with the material that I presented. By the end of the first class, I had nearly ten students interested in trying out for a speech contest. This was the moment when I knew that I wanted to be an agricultural education teacher.

As I picked up more classes, my excitement continued. There are certain experiences that happened during my student teaching that made it

all worthwhile. My first experience with this came in my third week of teaching. I was walking with two of my students down the hallway and they asked if I could come back to be their teacher the following year. It probably does not sound like a big deal, but I found it to be very touching and reinforced my goal to become a teacher.

Somewhere along the way, I lost my enthusiasm for student teaching. In all honesty, I began to dread each morning and was anxiously waiting for my time at the school to end. My biggest problem was I did not know what triggered this feeling. A few weeks before I was very passionate about my students and the subject matter I was teaching, however this desire to teach dissipated at an alarming rate. I do not know if I became bored with the routine of teaching; but the change was very confusing.

There were some challenges along the way that helped prompt this change. I had to deal with students bullying and mistreating their peers, daily disruptions in the classroom, and at times disrespectful behavior. I realized that no matter how hard I tried to include each student in the daily coursework, there were always a few students that went out of their way to exclude themselves. It was very frustrating when these kinds of behaviors occurred. I noticed that the students who acted out were the ones who need the most help. My solution was to give them more positive attention and to help them with their work on a daily basis. Towards the end of my time at the school the misbehavior in the classroom gradually began to disappear.

In my last couple weeks, I saw a spark of passion for this career path light up once again. One of the big-

gest surprises I found was how much I enjoyed completing my Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) visits. After the visits, I had a better relationship with my students. Many times I had the opportunity to see their home life, meet their family, and learn who they were outside of the classroom setting. Each SAE visit was different and an exciting way to connect with my students. Teaching middle school students was also a positive experience. I had about 125 middle school students that I taught. After presenting an introductory unit on agriculture and the FFA I asked them if they planned to enroll in the high school agriculture classes. Over half of the hands in the class room were raised.

After all my different endeavors while student teaching, I was still as confused as ever about my dreams and my future career path. I wished I could follow Henry David Thoreau’s advice, but sometimes life is not that easy. As a whole, I thought that my student teaching experience taught me a lot about myself. However, I did not want to base my decision to teach solely on this one experience. I want to try out teaching for myself. I want to take every opportunity to learn from my student teaching experiences, however, it will be different when I am on my own.



After completing a Master of Science degree in Agricultural and Extension Education, Eleanor Porter accepted a position with the United States Department of Agriculture’s Farm Service Agency.

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