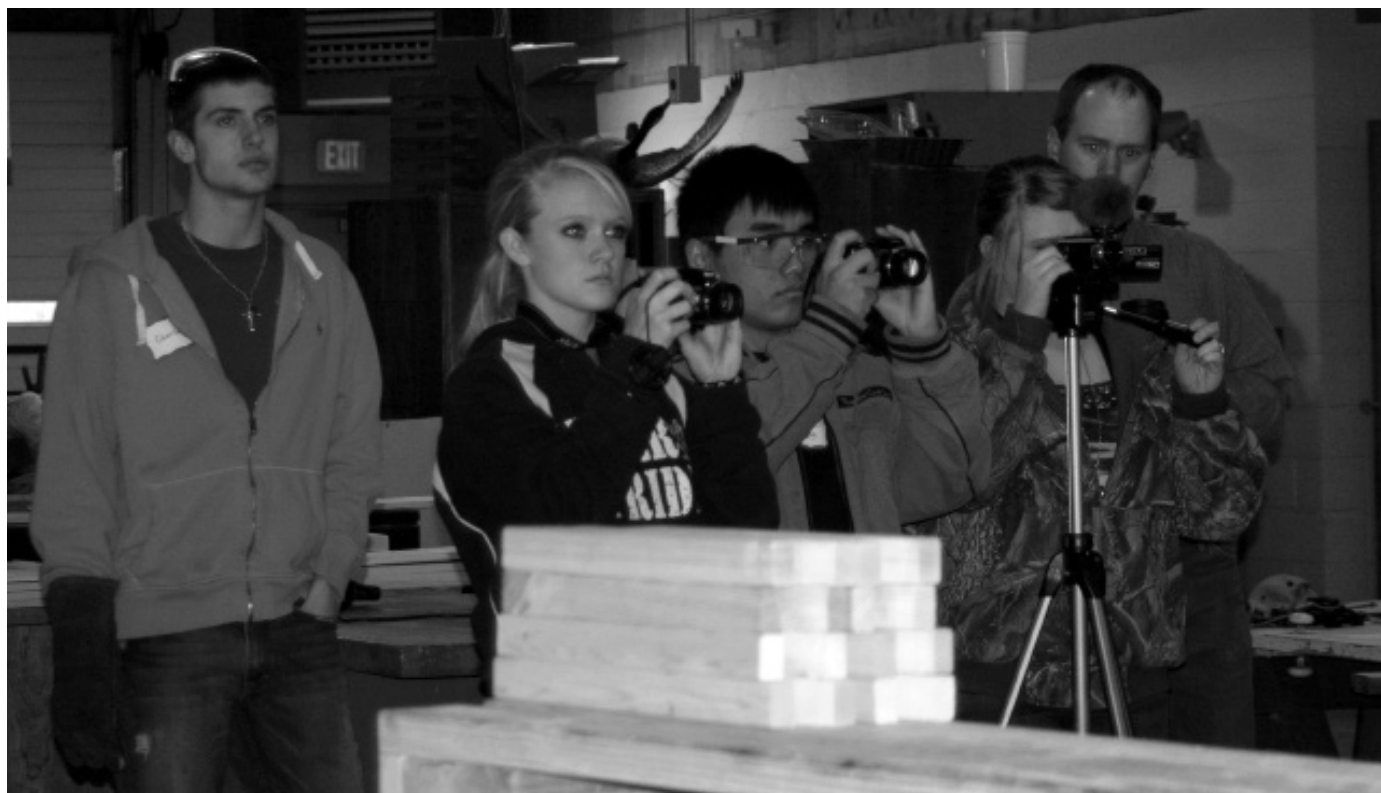


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*Agricultural Communications:
Strategies to Promote Your Program*

Agricultural Communications: Tell the Story of Our Agricultural Education Programs

by John C. Ewing

While I write these editor comments there are national stories focused on agriculture and the environment in many of our media outlets. Stories of biofuel production, pollution of our rivers and streams, water use rights, climate change, genetically modified organisms, and more are all over the headlines. Some of these articles shed positive light on agriculture and the practices being implemented to produce enough food and fiber for the world; some are not so positive. Some tell an unbiased story, and others are written in a way to show the “good” or “bad” of a topic, and to gain new “followers for the cause”. We have often heard it said that we need to be telling our story or others will tell it for us. This is very true, and those of us that are closest to agriculture, and specifically agricultural education in this case, must tell our story so others know what this profession is all about. We need to inform people from all walks of life of the power of educating others “about” agriculture, so that they can be informed consumers. Additionally, we need to educate students “in” agriculture to continue being the researchers, farmers, processors, and marketers of our agricultural commodities. The agricultural education programs that we impact each and every day, and the students that make up these programs from all across the nation, are the avenue in which to tell our story. We need to educate our students to be mindful consumers of news content, but also proactive participants in sharing their own stories, especially those related to agricultural education. Students that are positively impacted by the agricultural education program are

often the best representatives to tell others about the good things that are happening!

All students should have the opportunity in their agricultural education program to practice the skills, and utilize the knowledge, associated with agricultural communications. Do we, as educators, take the time to think about how we are giving our students the opportunity to communicate their agricultural education story? Do we encourage them to have an “elevator speech” about what they are learning in school? Do we encourage them to write and share a speech about their experiences in agriculture, and how they believe that may impact their future? Do we provide opportunities for our students to share the great news about agriculture and agricultural education in our local news outlets, whether that is newspaper, radio, or television? Are we encouraging the use of social media to promote our message to those beyond our county, district, or state borders? This issue of the *Agricultural Education Magazine* should challenge all of us to consider how we incorporate agricultural communications into our daily routine. If we find ourselves to be lacking in providing students with opportunities to grow in this area, then we need to work to develop a plan to encourage additional experiences for our students to become better communicators. Even if you are doing a great job of developing students in the area of agricultural communications, I encourage you to read each article to see what “gems” you can find to add to your treasure of already great lessons and activities.

This issue of the *Agricultural Education Magazine* is full of articles that will help reinforce the need to “tell your story” in your local com-

munities about the good that is happening in your program, and how the students are growing as individuals, while adding to the greater good of the community. There are articles that provide you access to great resources. There are resources for the teacher that has never taught agricultural communications as a topic, and resources for teachers that have been teaching agricultural communications for years. There are examples of how to get your students thinking about future careers in agricultural communications, and examples of how to prepare if you are the one being asked to be interviewed regarding a specific topic. These resources can be used with your students in the classroom, and can be used to encourage students to participate in events as part of the FFA. Students have a great opportunity to connect the classroom, FFA, and Supervised Agricultural Experience program in areas of agricultural communications. We need more educated agricultural communicators, whether as community members or professionals in the field, to tell our story!



Dr. John C. Ewing is an Associate Professor at The Pennsylvania State University and Editor of *The Agricultural Education Magazine*.

The Agricultural Education Magazine

Agricultural Communications: Strategies to Promote Your Program

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Agricultural Communications: Working to Better our Programs

by Karen Cannon

I have to confess something to you, readers. I'm an impostor. Shhhhh, don't tell anyone else! I didn't grow up in an agricultural community, participate in a high school agriculture program or FFA, or even have much of a clue about agriculture until college. In fact, I grew up the person we often refer to as "the consumer" – the kid from the city who didn't know or care much that her home state (California) is one of the leading agricultural producing states in the country. Heck, I didn't know what FFA was or that high school agriculture programs even existed until college!

What in the world, then, is this person doing as the theme editor of this issue of *The Agricultural Education Magazine*, you ask? Well, I landed at a land-grant university for my college education, at which point I couldn't possibly avoid learning about agriculture (I lived in the "ag dorm"). And then I came to learn just how important agriculture is to our lives. After graduating with a third degree in agricultural communications a few years ago, I feel only slightly more aware. In the years since I "discovered" agriculture, I've had great experiences and adventures, and a fortunate career as an agricultural communications professional, first as a public relations practitioner and now as communications faculty member at another land-grant university (my third to date).

When my colleague John Ewing asked me to be a theme editor for this issue of the Magazine more than a year ago, I said yes because he's the kind of colleague you say yes to. Not in the 'he's the kind of guy you

don't say no to' intimidating kind of way, but in the 'this person asked me to help with a project, and isn't that cool' kind of way. See, John did something that is often challenging to do – he reached across a murky boundary between teacher preparation and agricultural communications. It's easy for us to stay in our lanes, to work where our expertise lies and to leave a subject out because we don't have much background there or don't know much about it. Sometimes it's hard to reach outside of our comfort zones, to stretch into new and unknown areas. To be quite honest, that's what the experience of pulling together pieces for this issue has been for me – unknown territory. But, it's been another great experience and one I hope you'll find something useful in.

The focus of this issue is using agricultural communications in your secondary agriculture program. You'll find an article from a team who created a successful communication program out of a joke about regurgitated owl food, a piece about a free online agricultural communications curriculum produced by faculty at the University of Arkansas, a piece on how to help prepare for a media interview from a graduate student, and an article about the career opportunities available to those interested in agricultural communications, also by a graduate student, and more. The intention behind each of these articles is to provide you, the very busy (let's be honest, the OVERLY-busy) high school agriculture teacher with resources and topics to help infuse agricultural communications into your programs.

As an area of study and a career path, agricultural communications is growing across the country. While

we're fond of reporting the ever-widening gap between today's average consumer and knowledge about where their food comes from, the reality is there are now, at a minimum, 40 higher education institutions in the United States with either a major, minor, or concentration course of study in agricultural communications (Miller, Large, Rucker, Shoulders, & Buck, 2015). Enrollment in these programs are on the rise. And yet, we're still struggling to tell the story of food production and the science behind it on a societal level. Learn and work fast, students – we need you!

As agriculture teachers, you well know the struggles of preparing young women and men to be contributing members of society. You know it's important not only to teach a wide range of scientific and leadership concepts to your students, but to ensure they're able to communicate what they've learned about those concepts to any number of audiences. My hope is that with the information the contributing authors have shared in this issue, that process is made even just the slightest bit less burdensome for you.

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The Agricultural Education Magazine

Telling our Story through Students: In & Out of the Classroom

by Don Edgar and Leslie Edgar

Agricultural Education is a multi-faceted discipline, where secondary education teachers instruct young minds about the many aspects of agriculture—from animal sciences to plant sciences and from natural resources to agricultural mechanization. Being content experts in multiple agricultural areas and in areas like teaching, advising, and mentoring is not easy for any agricultural teacher.

Today, most degrees leading to certification in agriculture education focus on science and technical skills such as plant and animal sciences, mechanical technologies, and leadership training. However, with today's technology infused society, teachers need to help students learn communication skills in writing, design, and multimedia. These skills have become more and more critical as single and multi-teacher agriculture departments work to gain and maintain school and community support as well as promote student activities. This requires teachers to build additional expertise areas including news writing, photography, graphic design, and videography skills to their already full repertoire. Still, who has time to go back to school or learn these skills on their own? What if there was a free resource available to you and your students to learn these skills?

At the University of Arkansas, we wanted to promote agricultural communications to students in agricultural education classrooms. However, we were unsure how to train teachers and provide the skills and knowledge necessary without taking valuable time from already full schedules. We

also wanted high school students to be active participants in their learning and share and promote what they were learning in their classrooms. So, we wrote a Secondary Education, Two-Year Postsecondary Education, and Agriculture in the K-12 Classroom Challenge Grants Program (SPECA) grant application in response to a call from the United States Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) agency. And we got the funding as a part of a secondary/postsecondary partnership to implement the Visual Communications on the Road in Arkansas: Video and Photo Creative Projects to Promote Agriculture, a mobile classroom facility able to visit classrooms in Arkansas to train students in video production.

Overview of the Project

Our goal was to allow students in agriculture education to develop and tell stories using agricultural communication skills. We recognized most agricultural education teachers do not have a background in this area, so we developed a package of resources (detailed lesson plans, instruction, and activities) to help train students and teachers. An initial goal of the project was for students to work individually or in groups to select a topic based on the agricultural class(es) they were involved in and wanted to share with others, then share the topic in a story format for a general audience. The idea was that students would design how that story would be told, and using multimedia tools and technologies in the mobile classroom, would develop 3 to 5 minute videos to be shared on YouTube.

Project Resources

For the project to be successful, we recognized a package of resources was necessary to help teachers deliver content in writing, design, multimedia, and agricultural communications careers. The curriculum package includes a writing section with content about journalistic writing and public relations, a design section with information about photography, graphic design, and layout, a multimedia section with information about videography, broadcast, and social media formats, and a careers section with content about the history, career opportunities, college preparation information about agricultural communications as a career path.

Utilizing Resources

Does this information sound useful for you and your program? If yes, you can find it with a few simple clicks on the internet. On the website, you'll find each section (writing, design, multimedia, and careers) contains a plethora of information about the topic area. Most sections have a "unit preparation" element, which includes a lesson plan formatted for agricultural education students as well as other resources. You may notice



a Perkins grant form for use by Arkansas teachers to apply for grants to gain equipment and technology (we recognize this may not be an option in your state or area). Lesson plans are formatted for beginning teachers—written in a very detailed format using a problem solving approach. Resources needed for using the lesson plan are listed in each section or are hyperlinked directly. Materials and activities are presented in each lesson but teachers also have the option to develop their own, and a time schedule is provided which can be adapted to teachers' and students' needs. Furthermore, pre-tests are available to help you measure what your students understand or do not. Perhaps most importantly to teachers, an accompanying PowerPoint presentation (PPTs) is provided for each lesson. These high-quality resources were designed with teachers in mind, recognizing that many teachers have little background in agricultural communications and even less spare time in which to learn these skills on their own.

Implementing in Your Program

Where can you find these resources? Use the project's website address (<http://agricultural-education-communications-and-technology.uark.edu/mobile-classroom>) to find all the resources described here. Thanks to the United States Department of Agriculture grant, the resources will remain freely available to teachers and students. Some resources such as the PowerPoint Presentations may be in older software formats, but you can save the file to your computer and open it with your current version of PowerPoint. Because technology is ever changing, file formats have been maintained to aid in functionality.

One advantage of these materials is that, as the instructor, you choose what to teach and how you teach it. Although numerous resources are presented, you are free to adapt them

to the needs of your students and program. You can teach writing, design, multimedia, and careers, or just cover one or two sections. While the information was designed for anyone to use, we suggest you review all the materials to get a feel for the skills and knowledge needed. It might also be helpful to download all the materials to your computer before beginning to use the curriculum, because as we all have experienced at one time or another, sometimes websites go down and resources may not be readily available.

Ways to Implement

When we created this curriculum, it accompanied a mobile classroom where we provided tools and technologies (video and camera equipment), however, some teachers in our state chose to implement without assistance and direct support from our mobile classroom lab. Initially, we were able to get a few teachers to review the materials, give pre-tests, teach the curriculum and design the basic layout of the story and video. Then, faculty and staff from the University of Arkansas set up a time to visit the school and using our laptops and video cameras, students were able to capture the video needed for their story, then edit and post the final video projects. Videos created as a part of this grant project are available at <https://www.youtube.com/user/AEEDVisual>. An important note about today's available technology: cell phones have good video capability and many free video editing software apps are available. Computers with a video editing software may be the biggest hurdle for secondary teachers, and some free resources are identified in the instructional materials.

Closing Thoughts from the Authors

As a former agricultural education teacher (14 years), I know the

challenges of learning new skill sets are difficult but necessary to keep up with our changing society and the needs of our students. These agricultural communications resources will allow you to have descriptive lesson plans and well thought out PowerPoint presentations. Skill sets learned through this curriculum will benefit you, your students, and your FFA chapter. Remember, all the information is free for you to use. You can use it to teach students or have them utilize it for projects and other activities to strengthen learning occurring in the classroom.

The skill sets and knowledge in these lessons can help you and your students promote school and chapter activities. Providing students with some instruction in these areas will allow them to create powerful written and visual messages to audiences of interest. We hope you find value in the instruction and resources.



Don Edgar, Associate Professor at University of Arkansas



Leslie Edgar, Assistant Dean for Student Programs at University of Arkansas

Acing the Media Interview: What to Know to Promote Your Programs

by Kelsi Opat and Erica Irlbeck

For every FFA chapter, no matter the size, gaining recognition from the media can help with recruitment and community support. However, teachers and students alike may be a little intimidated about speaking to a reporter. This article will help to understand the process of working with the media, including proper interview techniques, etiquette, and how to speak on camera. These skills will mold students and teachers into the reliable, camera-friendly sources the media needs and, most importantly, wants.

Before the Interview

Write down a reporter's name and organization as soon as they contact you. If you have never heard of the company, ask what type of media outlet it is (television, radio, online, others). Look up the organization to make sure it is legitimate. Researching the organization can also help you better understand what might be asked of you and what type of information they may be looking for. Never accept an interview that appears biased against you from the beginning. It is never worth communicating with an audience that already has firm, unwavering beliefs against agriculture.

Reporters are generally on a strict deadline. If they do not tell you a deadline right away, ask when it is. Understand that the reporter should be willing to work with your schedule, but they also have pressure to provide timely content. Do not feel compelled to give an on-the-spot interview.

During your initial discussion, ask the reporter what questions he or she will ask. This will help you prepare your answers. It is also good to prepare in the following ways:

- Research any facts you find relevant.
- Look up past interviews/stories from the specific reporter interviewing you.
- Find other interviews/stories relating to the topic you will be discussing.

Occasionally, we are asked to comment on a controversial topic. Although unusual, it would probably be best to speak with the reporter. Unless instructed otherwise, declining interview requests or responding with "no comment" is easily confused with "I'm guilty." Keep in mind, the reporter WILL find a source. If you are the best, most knowledgeable person to speak about the topic, do so. It's better for you to offer the information rather than someone who does not have the best information.

A good exercise to do before an interview is to anticipate any potential questions and write out answers for each. It's okay to ask the reporter to email you a list of questions. Practice your interview with someone you trust.

A good exercise to do before an interview is to anticipate any potential questions and write out answers for each. It's okay to ask the reporter to email you a list of questions. You should also choose an overall message you would like to convey.

Practice your interview with someone you trust. Ask them to read you the list of questions to see if you stay close to your original answers. Edit or change them as needed.

Have your practice interviewer ask other related questions you did not think of. This can give you practice answering questions you have not thoroughly thought through beforehand. Think back to your overall message you want to convey, and incorporate that into your answers.

During the Interview

Reporters are generally looking for a few short, catchy quotes from their interview subjects. Make your statements brief and concise to make them more appealing. Be sure to speak in complete sentences and to repeat questions back in the answer. For example:

Reporter: Describe how this early freeze could affect your crop.

Subject: This early freeze could...

You can always repeat a statement if you begin to get off track. This will make it easier for the reporter to use your quote later. Also ask a reporter to re-phrase or repeat a question that

you do not understand. You can also ask the reporter if you gave an adequate answer. Sometimes, subjects interpret questions differently than reporters intended.

Use anecdotes to help make your point. Audiences are more likely to understand and remember narratives, and reporters are more apt to use them. Appropriate animated and memorable behavior is encouraged. A few other tips to consider during the interview:

- Use your organization's full name; stay away from acronyms.
- Turn your phone off.
- Do not fidget; modern microphones pick up every sound.
- Use body language to communicate that you are following the conversation. Avoid saying "yeah," "oh," or "uh-huh." Instead, nod and make eye contact to provide clear sound bites.
- Do not fake it; if you are not prepared, do not do the interview. If you do not know the answer to a question, simply state "I am not sure about that. Let me get you in contact with a source that knows the answer."
- State your previously chosen message(s) more than once.
- Realize there is no such thing as "off the record."

Speaking on Camera

Speaking on camera adds a visual element that radio and print lack. For that reason, it is important to follow this advice when a camera is involved. Avoid wearing stripes, plaids, and solid white. Patterns tend to look

like they are moving on screen, and they make the subject look heavy. Solid white makes the interview subject look very pale.

Stay focused during the interview. Do not rock or sway, and avoid sitting in an office chair during an interview. Keep your hands at your sides. Pay attention to the questions to make sure you are answering correctly. Sometimes it helps to ask the question again in your head to make sure you understand it. This also provides a pause that sounds good on camera.

Wearing a hat or cap is common in agriculture. Wear a clean cap to the interview, but be prepared to take the hat off if asked. Hats can cast a shadow that makes the subject look strange. This may apply to coats and jackets as well depending on the setting and formality of the interview.

After the Interview

At the conclusion of the interview, thank the reporter for the opportunity to offer your opinion or information about the topic. A compliment always goes a long way. Make sure the reporter has your contact information in case they have any other questions.

It is common for written media (newspaper, magazine, blog, online newspaper/magazine) to send a copy of the story before it runs so that you may check the facts. Ask if that will be the case with this story. Report any major errors before their deadline. Many reporters will send a story for review less than one day before the deadline. Be mindful of this, know when to expect the email, and be very prompt to respond. Do not try to change any quotes unless you gave inaccurate facts previously (i.e. dates, numbers).

Use the media to promote your chapter

Help reporters help you. Following these suggestions will ensure you become the go-to, quote-worthy source. At the same time, know they have a job to do and usually have very tight deadlines. If you prove to be a source that is consistently available, helpful, and informative, the media may continue to use you. This is a great way to continually promote FFA and agriculture in general.



Kelsi Opat, Doctoral Student at Texas Tech University



Erica Irlbeck, Ph.D., Associate Professor at Texas Tech University

Unlikely Source:

Communications Lessons Learned from Owls and Their Pellets

by Catherine W. Shoulders,
Marshall A. Baker, and Brian E.
Myers

It began as sort of a joke – three colleagues sitting at a restaurant under a bridge in San Antonio, mulling over the best ways to share agricultural education research with the teachers who could use it.

“If we could just take our research and repackage it into a format easy to consume...kind of like an owl does with its food,” said one of the group. “Like, an owl pellet? Like, actual owl vomit?” As former agriculture teachers, we’re pretty familiar with owls... and their digestive products. “Sure, like eating a mouse and regurgitating the bones in a nice little package. Only we’re regurgitating research.”

We laughed at the idea of equating our dissemination of scholarly knowledge with owl vomit, not knowing at the time that we had stumbled upon an analogy that would guide our team’s goals and actions over the next two years. We are, after all, talking to wise owls themselves – high school agriculture teachers, as they lead their programs with experience that is “based on true knowledge and ripened with wisdom”. And, like an owl, our group takes complex things, internalizes them (mentally rather than physically), and repackages them into easier-to-manage “pellets”. And, much like the owl pellets you can purchase for student labs, teachers use our pellets to enhance the student experience in their agricultural education programs.

What started as a joke idea among colleagues two years ago has turned into a multi-faceted social me-

What started as a joke idea among colleagues two years ago has turned into a multi-faceted social media powerhouse delivering practical tips through infographics, podcasts, videos, and interviews to over 2,000 agriculture teachers every day.

dia powerhouse delivering practical tips through infographics, podcasts, videos, and interviews to over 2,000 agriculture teachers every day.

While we hope you join us (see the image for our shameless plug), the purpose of this article is to show you how our model, refined since the initial dinner conversation in San Antonio, can help you enhance the connections among your local agriculture industry members, your program, and community.

This behind-the-scenes tour gives you details on what to pellet, where to post, and how to build a digital following to improve agricultural literacy, agricultural awareness, and support for your program...all while helping your students gain transferable skills in agricultural communications.

The Owl Pellets Model

1. Set Your Goal – Before creating any sort of posting, you need to know what need you’re trying to do with those posts – a unified goal will make sure all your posts are valued by your audience. For Owl Pellets, our goal came from a problem we’ve faced in agricultural education for a long time – we haven’t been able to find an effective way to quickly disseminate important and useful research to agriculture teachers. In adapting the model for your own use, your goal may focus on your program, community, students, or your state’s agricultural industry, to name a few. Check out the table below for some potential goals to focus your communications efforts.

Program Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness of an important issue • Improve connections with the community • Provide information on critical topics
Student Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve students' understanding of agriculture • Improve students' communications skills
Community Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve community's agricultural literacy • Create relationships between program and community
Agricultural Industry Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote awareness of local agriculturalists among community • Improve transparency of agricultural producers

2. Identify Your Audience – Carefully selecting your target audience is a critical and often

forgotten step in planning for outreach programs. Without a specific audience in mind, the products developed are less likely to make the impact you are hoping for. Keep in mind that this is Step 2 for a reason - your target audience will be clearly driven by your program goals. In the case of Owl Pellets, our target audience was pretty narrowly defined as classroom agriculture teachers. That was the group that we wanted to serve by getting research-based tips in their hands to help them solve the problems they faced every day in the high school and middle school classroom.

Every decision the planning team makes should be based squarely on the program goals and target audience.

Every decision the planning team makes should be based squarely on the program goals and target audience. Without this focus it is easy for the team members to lose their way in terms of delivering a product that actually matters. For us, we know that teacher educators, state agricultural education staff, and pre-service agriculture teachers are secondary audiences for our work. However, several times since Owl Pellets was established one of our team members reminds the others of our primary au-

dience and goals by asking the question, “Does this (task/opportunity) take us too far off our mission? How does doing this help classroom teachers?” Not only is having this focus important to make sure the products are useful, but it also helps direct the most valuable and limiting resource you have for this type of project – team member time.

3. Create a “Home Base” – It is critical to create a home base to house all of the elements of your campaign. Our Owl Pellets team chose to use Wordpress.com, a free service most often used for blogging. But for us it provides a platform to post our infographics, podcasts, and engagement pieces all in one place. There are two primary benefits to establishing a home base like this: 1) you can see who is truly engaging with your material no matter what social media platform they follow, and 2) posting to various sharing accounts is easier when you are simply sharing one resource link.

4. Create Sharing Accounts – If the home base is the keystone of the bridge you’re building to your audience members, the social media sites you share your material on are the stones that complete the structure. Stay in touch with the social

media platforms your audience uses, and create accounts for your campaign within each. Owl Pellets can be found on Podbean, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Your audience may use Tumbler, Snapchat, Instagram, or whatever else kids these days are in to. By using these social media platforms, you don’t have to wait for your audience to find their way to your home base – you can connect with them in the spaces in which they already spend their time. If you’re nervous about the time it takes to post to the multiple social media platforms, don’t worry – there’s an app for that. Wordpress.com can automatically post to multiple social media platforms of your choice, and if you want to get really fancy, you can use apps like Hootsuite to schedule all your posts across social media platforms well in advance.

5. Establish a Publishing Calendar – One of the best ways to keep your audience members engaged is to keep your content in front of them by posting every day. However, busy schedules make this task tough to keep up without a calendar. The Owl Pellets team follows a calendar (see table 1) that identifies the item to be posted, who is responsible for creating it, and who is responsible for posting it. This is updated every few months so all team members can prepare their items with enough time to make edits and post. The calendar follows a weekly routine so our audience members can anticipate the type of post we’re making each day, and so we don’t overuse a particular type of post.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Infographics	Podcast	Resource Roundup	Engagement Post	Owl in Action

Table 1. Owl Pellets team calendar

6. Produce Content – While we’re sure there are many ways to develop and produce content, we’re sharing the ways in which Owl Pellets shares content.

a. Podcasts – A quick and simple way to share information through an audio file, podcasts are recorded audio conversations you can listen to on demand. The number of regular podcast listeners increases by the day. When planning your podcasts, there are three key considerations:

i. *Content* – The “meat” of your podcast. The content included in your podcast should be directly tied to your goals and be clearly applicable and meaningful to your target audience. Owl Pellets content consists of practical tips taken directly from current research in agricultural education. We discover content by searching research journals, attending research conferences, and selecting the practical tips and recommendations presented there we believe are most useful for teachers. For your own project, you might discover useful content by contacting local agricultural producers or scanning publications and magazines in a variety of industries and interest areas.

ii. *Format* – This refers to the overall structure of the podcast. Several formats have been shown to be effective. A narrator might read a scripted story with your content, which employs storytelling skills to share the message. For our Owl Pellets podcasts, we use an interview format where we invite researchers to talk with Owl Pellets hosts about their research projects and how their findings are applicable for classroom agriculture teachers. We’ve discovered it’s important to complete two steps prior to recording interviews:

1. Have a pre-interview conversation before the recorded interview. We do this by having a member of the Owl Pellets team contact the interview guest to discuss the content focus of the podcast, the logistics of recording, and ensure key information the guest believes is important to include is discussed in the interview. We’ve found this pre-interview conversation helps guests feel more comfortable about the recorded interview itself and helps

them focus their own thoughts.

2. Prepare excellent questions. The key to a great interview is having a great set of questions. It’s important for the interviewer to have at least a general idea of the types of questions he/she would like to ask. Without this preparation it’s easy to fall into the trap of only asking yes/no questions. An interview with engaging and thought provoking questions is much more enjoyable to listen to than one where the conversation drags on.

iii. *Equipment/Software* – A number of software programs exist for recording podcasts, many of which make the process fairly simple. We record our podcasts using either GotoMeeting or Zoom, since our podcast guests are in different locations, and we edit audio using Audacity software (freely available online at www.audacityteam.org). One thing we’ve learned over time is the value of quality microphones – just listen to our first few podcasts and you’ll see why! Since then, Owl Pellets team members have purchased high quality mi-



 @OwlPelletsForAg

 @OwlPelletsForAgEd

 Owl Pellets: Tips for Teaching

 <https://owlpelletsforag.wordpress.com/>

crophones, rather than relying on those included with web cameras (we highly recommend the Yeti).

- b. **Infographics** – The way people consume information is changing. Research has decisively shown that in order to get attention on social media, content must be visual. The Information Age has created a culture where people love to learn and share. Visualizing information allows readers to gain insight and understanding quickly as they flip and scroll through their social media platforms. Infographics can be created many different ways. Our team is not trained in graphic design, so we turned to the intuitive website Piktochart.com to act as our designer. With a yearly subscription (\$99/year for professional subscription), we're able to use high quality infographic templates, edit them to fit our messages, and publish infographics in all types of sizes, formats, and designs. We've also found creating an infographic requires our team to be short and sweet in deciding what to share with our audience!
- c. **Engagement Posts** – Getting your audience to view content is one thing...getting them to engage with you is completely different, and requires different content to be posted. Consider the time your audience members would be willing to spend constructing a response to a question you pose; make sure your post doesn't require more effort than they're willing to give. Does your audience appreciate humor, controversy, storytelling, or reflection? What you ask audience members to respond with can make a difference in whether they respond at all.

7. **Build Your Following** – You could follow the “Field of Dreams” philosophy of building your audience – build it and they will come...but we don't think you'll find that to be successful. To be completely honest, that is almost the strategy we used when we first launched Owl Pellets. After a year of moderate success, we had a group evaluate our project; one of the recommendations we received was the need to follow a regular publishing schedule and to post more often. Research shows followers need regular, consistent, and frequent interaction for best results. Guess what? The research was right! During our second year, where we employed a regular posting schedule we saw our reach, engagement, and downloads increase dramatically.

Every program, industry, or community sends the message, but how can you actively engage in crafting and highlighting that story? The Owl Pellets model seeks to identify key messages to be shared, “pellets” those messages in a format to meet audience needs, and monitors the impact and interest in the shared messages to improve lines of communication over time. Our model, based on these eight steps discussed can be helpful in a myriad of contexts! Log in to [Piktochart](http://Piktochart.com), create an infographic and share it this week! Take control of your message and make sure your work is reaching those that need it most!



Catherine W. Shoulders, Associate Professor, University of Arkansas



Marshall A. Baker, Assistant Professor, Oklahoma State University



Brian E. Myers, Professor & Chair, University of Florida

Interview with an Agricultural Communication Expert: Dr. Emily Buck

by Karen Cannon

If ever anyone could speak to the power of high school experiences in helping to get her where she is today it's Dr. Emily Buck, Associate Professor of Agricultural Communications at The Ohio State University. Since 2011, Dr. Buck has served as a leading teacher and researcher in the higher education agricultural communications profession. She has won the American Association of Agricultural Education's Outstanding Early Career Educator Award (in 2012) and just this May became the second person to receive the Distinguished Agricultural Communications Educator Award. Dr. Buck has been an active member of the Ohio Farm Bureau for several years and recently began a two-year stint as one of the U.S. Farmers and Ranchers Alliance's "Faces of Farming".

The real reason to hear from Dr. Buck though is that her path to today began as a student in the Centerburg FFA program, in Centerburg, Ohio, where her agriculture teacher laid the groundwork for her passion for agricultural communications.

In this interview, Dr. Buck shares her perspective about how she got to where she is today (a successful professional agricultural communicator and teacher) and what she thinks is important for students to know and learn about agricultural communications.

KC: Emily, thanks for taking time out of your busy schedule to

talk about agricultural communications. Can we start by you talking a bit about your current role, professionally and personally?

EB: Sure, I'm glad to talk about the great experiences I've had in my career so far – they definitely started with my participating in my high school agriculture program and Centerburg FFA, so it's neat to have this opportunity. Right now, I'm an associate professor of agricultural communications in the Department of Agricultural Communication, Education, and Leadership at The Ohio State University. Go Buckeyes! That's my "day job", but I also farm with my husband John in Marion, Ohio, where we are raising our daughter Harlie on our corn and soybean operation (we also have sheep, since I grew up with them and love them).

I'm also serving as a member of the USFRA "Faces of Farming" panel where I travel to conferences and events across the country to speak as an expert and answer consumer questions about agricultural production in the United States. It's a really neat experience that allows me to use a lot of the concepts that I teach in the classroom and do research on that are related to good communication. So it's nice to get to exercise those skills and give back to the agriculture and farming community that I am a part of.

KC: Although you and I have known each other for several years now, I don't know the story of how you became interested in agricultural communications as a career. Tell me about how you got involved in this profession.

EB: Absolutely. I was raised on a farm near Centerburg, Ohio, where my folks and I always had sheep. I was the kid that loved to show sheep, and when I got to high school it seemed only natural for me to get involved with the agriculture program and join FFA. My agriculture teacher, Mr. (Garrett) Swendal, got me involved in lots of things in FFA that I might not have otherwise pursued.

When it was time for me to go to college at Ohio State, I really wanted to study veterinary medicine. But once I got to chemistry I quickly learned (like many folks) that science wasn't my thing and that I'd better try to find something else. I have always had a creative side and enjoyed writing and design, and one day I ran into a professor in the agricultural communications program who showed me I could blend my love of agriculture with the creative side of things, that veterinary school wasn't the only way to have a career in agriculture. And since then, I've been hooked.

KC: So, the focus of this issue is using agricultural communications to help secondary agricultural education teachers and students promote their programs. What advice do you have for teachers who have students interested in agriculture communication? How might they help their students nurture this interest?

EB: Well my first piece of advice, the biggest thing I suggest is letting the students get into it and DO things. Get them some tools to use – whether it’s an iPad, digital camera, or just a smartphone, and put them in charge of doing things like planning events, creating marketing materials for the chapter fundraiser, or making all the FFA program’s flyers. If there is something the students are interested in, encourage them to play around with technology and ideas. I’ve found the best way to learn is to practice, hone your skills – the more you can play and be creative, the more students find their passion and they’ll get better at communicating ideas.

Also, get them in contact with someone in the area that does the kind of work they’re interested in to either shadow them for a day or give some professional advice. Using photography as an example, because that’s one of my areas of interest, but also radio is a good example – see if the students can tap into a local professional and get involved with existing projects and connections. Think beyond the local newspaper. And,

with digital technology what it is, you can always Skype someone into the classroom!

I definitely think the agriculture communication Career Development Event (CDE) is a great thing for students to get involved in, but it’s not the only CDE that taps into areas of agriculture communication. There are other areas and contests that have communication skills built into them that might not come to mind right away – like the agricultural issues or marketing competitions. I’d

say encourage students with communication interests to get involved in those contests as well...they go beyond what comes to mind first when we talk about ag communications, and I think it’s important to recognize communication is a broad area.

KC: What memories and experiences stand out in your mind from your time in the Centerville agriculture program and FFA? Do you think those contributed to your career choices?

EB: I really do – one of the things that stands out the most in my memory is Mr. Swendal taking me to our state FFA Con-

vention. I was such a quiet kid and didn’t talk to many people, and he got me to participate in public speaking, which I never would have done in a million years if he hadn’t pushed and encouraged me. It contributed to my becoming a state officer. And I got second in the state in soil judging, again something I wouldn’t have thought of being involved in without support and direction from my teacher. It was remarkable to have someone find a talent in me and push me toward it and I think it helped me push myself and find a career. I’m passionate about

One of the things that stands out the most in my memory is Mr. Swendal taking me to our state FFA Convention. I was such a quiet kid and didn’t talk to many people, and he got me to participate in public speaking, which I never would have done in a million years if he hadn’t pushed and encouraged me.

being involved in agriculture, but in a different way than I had thought of as a high school student. Other great memories I have are related to my passion for sheep and showing them, and animals in general. The fact that I’ve gotten to parlay that love into a business and make a success of it has been rewarding.

KC: You’ve done so many things in your career already, and you’ve still got a long way to go in terms of career, but I wonder if you could share some of your favorite experiences with us that might illustrate the different opportunities available to folks in agricultural communications.

EB: Yeah, one of the coolest things I've gotten to do – I love web design and getting to work in that area has been really neat for me. It's a creative outlet. I got to work for an animal feed company and an agriculture magazine and do coding for their webpages – those were always amazing opportunities for me that really fueled my passion and interest. I think they really contributed to my interest in teaching this kind of thing in the classroom – I really love teaching web design.

The opportunities I've had with USFRA has also been significant for me – I'm getting to practice so many of the skills and theories I teach in the classroom and have gotten to talk with consumers in ways I haven't had a chance to before. It's interesting because those of us in agriculture often find ourselves on the defensive, but it's been a great time seeing what it's like to be on offense and out in front of things. I've gotten to talk with media outlets and consumers at events in New York City, and at a screening of the documentary *Food Evolution* on Capitol Hill, sharing what we do in agriculture and in agricultural communications. One of the things I bring to the discussion as someone who has degrees in agricultural communications, and definitely having a PhD after my name helps with credibility in terms of messages, it gives me a different perspective and view in the conversation. We get to do all kinds of things that are really neat opportunities, so being involved in the "Faces of Farming" program has been amazing and a lot of fun for me.

KC: Thinking about all the things high school agriculture teachers have on their plates, what resources and/or strategies can you recommend to help teachers incorporate agricultural communication into their programs or encourage students toward it?

EB: Well, I know our colleague Dr. Leslie Edgar at the University of Arkansas had a grant project and created an agricultural communication curriculum that is free online (see article by Edgar and Edgar), and so that's an easily accessible thing to start with. And I know there's a package of materials about farm broadcasting created by a colleague Dr. Erica Irlbeck at Texas Tech University in collaboration with the National Association of Farm Broadcasting (website: http://www.depts.ttu.edu/aged/nafb_website/) that's also available on the web.

One thing that's really useful for students beginning to learn about agricultural communications both students, at the high school and early college level is the textbook written by Dr. Ricky Telg and Dr. Tracy Irani at the University of Florida – *Agricultural Communications in Action: A Hands-On Approach* (published by Delmar Cengage Learning, 2011). It's a great overview of the kinds of topics and skills agricultural communicators have to know about and be familiar with, and it comes with videos and supplemental teaching resources, so those are always help-

ful when beginning to teach a topic. I'd definitely recommend that.

And then for learning anything related to technology and software things, Lynda.com is a great resource. The company has free trials available and then some universities have subscription services that teachers might be able to pair up with faculty members to use, and there are all kinds of videos on YouTube from Lynda.com.

KC: What are some of the differences; do you think in teaching students to communicate with agricultural audiences and consumer (non-ag) audiences that might be helpful for agriculture teachers to be aware of?

EB: Hands down it's the difficulty students have with bias and not being able to see things from a perspective other than their own. Our students aren't accustomed to seeing the world from a different point of view. I'll give you an example. Just recently in one of my classes, one freshman student was talking in a class discussion about how she showed cattle and loving being in the show ring. Another student in the class, from an urban background, raised his hand and asked, essentially, 'what do you mean showing cattle? What's a ring?' He had absolutely no frame of reference to understand what his classmate was talking about, and she had no idea he'd never heard of the thing she loved so much and is such a part of her life.

It's essential we pull students out of their world and have them talk to people who come from different places than they do. Another great example is we use the word producer a lot in agriculture, and definitely in agricultural communications, right? Well, I guarantee you that to people who live in Los Angeles the word producer doesn't mean what we think it means! So it's about helping students learn that their frame of reference isn't the only one out there and that it really matters when talking to people that we take that into account and don't assume they understand what we're talking about.

KC: I love that example about producers! Ok, so I know you've worked for several years in the press room at the National FFA Convention. What kinds of experiences would you recommend for students who have an interest in agricultural communication related to FFA and conventions?

EB: Well, the press room at National FFA Convention relies on college students mostly for their interns and then professional staff, but definitely if students are interested in getting involved, state conventions are always looking for people to work on social media for them during the convention. I'd say jump in and offer to take photos or record impromptu videos that can be used by staff later on – I guarantee staff members would love to have those kinds of things available to them to tell the stories of what all happens at conventions. And they

likely don't have any time to do these kinds of things. If students have an interest, encourage them to offer to be a student reporter or give after-session feedback through something like a live streaming event. State staff members would love that kind of initiative. Look for ways you can help and ask.

KC: What is it about the experience at National FFA Convention that brings you back each year?

EB: The friendships I've made and the sense of re-energization it gives me to be involved with a group that did so much for me in high school. There's really something about the ceremony of it all and the sense of pride it instills in students, it instilled in me. It's powerful. The energy I get from watching students and speakers – it's stuff that pumps me up, even still. You really see positive things for our future and for these students.

And honestly, one of the great things I get from the experience is the professional development aspect. I get to work with professional communicators and see what new thing they're doing or trying out – it gives me an opportunity to learn from them while doing something valuable. I also get to recruit students to Ohio State, especially graduate students, which is a great thing.

KC: Emily, this has been great. Do you have anything else you'd like to share that I haven't asked about?

EB: The biggest thing I think is if

you want to incorporate agriculture communication, or if you have students interested in it, think of it broadly and tie it into the curriculum in broader ways. Like in terms of marketing and advertising, not just writing. There are state standards beyond writing you can tie into. If there's a science standard, help students create a science event – that's agricultural communication! Have them create a "talk to the community" type of event on facebook live each week and explain what they're doing in their science unit or how they're raising money and what it'll go to help them get to do. There are so many things that can be done to get the program and students more visibility that also just happen to teach them skills.

Dr. Emily Buck is an associate professor of agricultural communications at Ohio State University where she teaches both graduate and undergraduate students, and conducts research related to consumer perceptions and social media use in agriculture.



Karen Cannon is currently a lecturer in strategic communications in the Advertising and Public Relations program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

The Agricultural Education Magazine

Thinking through Expressing a Passion

by Andrea Wach

Feeling a passion is easy. Seeing a passion is evident. Explaining a passion becomes difficult for many, especially students, and it's not often a skill addressed as students go through school.

As I've gone through college, I've begun to see how powerful career and technical education is for students. Enabling students to see its value while still in high school, as well as effectively communicate it to others not only benefits them as individuals, but has the potential to enhance the experience for students following in their footsteps.

How does one explain a passion? In a marketing class recently, we were asked to examine a paperclip. Looking at this single paperclip we were to write down all its qualities. What was the purpose of the shape? What unique features did it have? What various purposes could it have? What other forms could it be used in? What about it could be enhanced? What are a paperclip's competitors? What are its competitors doing better or worse than it does? What slogan could we create for the paperclip?

The simple paperclip became the topic of a large and almost heated discussion as we all discovered an inner passion to defend a small, bent piece of metal.

In our next class period, we were challenged to choose our favorite pen. With our pens, we had to describe why our pen was unique. Then we had to think through the emotion-

al and functional benefits we got from our favorite pens.

What functional benefits did the pen give me? My pen allowed me to write down ideas. It was used to organize my thoughts and solidify them on paper. I used it to do my homework assignments. Our professor kept asking us what else, what else, what else? to push our brains to think through all the functional benefits the small pen served.

Next, we were asked to think through what emotional benefits the pen served. This too, became a passionate discussion as we each grew a weird and unexpected loyalty to our favorite pen. The reason for my preferred pen? The slim and fine tip of its point. Until this exercise, I never realized how deep my dedication is toward fine tipped pens. In my mind, by using such a fine tipped pen I have more clarity of thought, cleaner writing, and tighter lines.

At the end of the all the processing questions, we were tasked with developing a slogan highlighting the benefits we identified. As a class, our brainstorming and creativity became much more fluid because we had sorted through so many details of both paperclip and pen.

In theory, paperclips and pens are simple concepts. But what we learned in class is that we had much more to learn about ourselves and our own preferences than we expected.

This class activity could be applied to helping students think through what FFA and agriculture education has done for them. Help-

ing students process in their minds what FFA is for them, what purpose it serves, helping them to understand what future schooling offers in the realm of career and technical education, knowing why they have chosen to continue being involved in it, what functional benefits they receive, what emotional benefits they receive, and truly challenging them on how they would market their experience is key. This doesn't necessarily mean creating a slogan, although students might enjoy developing their own personal slogan, but simply thinking through their experiences and considering each piece as a part of the overall experience can help identify the essential elements of an important message.

Explaining the experiences and value of agricultural education to others is difficult, but if students can sort through their own experiences and express to people who they are, what they do, and why they do what we do, they just might find it easier to tell people why their passion is their passion.



Andrea Wach is an undergraduate Agricultural and Environmental Sciences Communication student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Feeding the 9 Billion Starts in Your Classroom

by Kayla Jennings and Cindy Akers

With a pen in hand, an arsenal of camera equipment and a laptop at their disposal, agricultural communications graduates are ready to change the face of the agricultural industry one story, photo, video, broadcast or graphic at a time.

While changing the negative perceptions toward agriculture is considered quite an undertaking, people interested in making a difference are needed in today's climate. If no one stands up to advocate for this industry, the technologies used to increase more food with less inputs than ever are in jeopardy. If those technologies

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are in jeopardy, then the goal of feeding the population of 9 billion will be impossible.

Agricultural sciences teachers are noted for their heavy and positive influences on their students' career choices. With agricultural communications becoming increasingly popular, it is imperative instructors are versed in the opportunities available to students during and after high school graduation.

Agricultural communications defined

Put simply, agricultural communicators advocate for the agricultural industry utilizing a variety of mediums. Students graduating with a bachelor's degree in the field are well versed in written, verbal, visual, photography, video and other technological skills. Additionally, students completing this degree program learn how to strategically develop messages to effectively reach target audiences. Programs such as these differ from a general communications degree because they provide an application in agriculture.

When addressing high school students interested in this area of study, it is important to convey the opportunities for work are endless. Agricultural communications

graduates work in policy, photography, videography, graphic design, journalism, public

relations and marketing agencies, broadcasting, and social media strategy to name a few. Many students who pursue this degree program also attend law school.

Logistically speaking, agricultural communications graduates can expect a starting salary from \$25,000 to \$45,000 per year with annual increases depending on the job. This is the average, but students should keep in mind the in-

dustry has such a diverse job pool that these figures may not be accurate for every position available. Individuals working in this sector can expect an office atmosphere with some travel and opportunities in the field to capture content. Today, an increasing number of employers are extending their positions to work remotely. The diversity of opportunities in this area is enticing for many students making decisions on college.

While a variety careers mentioned earlier can be achieved within the agricultural industry, high school students should understand these opportunities are available in other industries, as well. A common misconception associated with agricultural communications is that students are stifled to only agriculture career paths. Consider the misconception debunked. Students entering the workforce from this type of program have taken jobs in countless other industries including sports, music, retail and others.

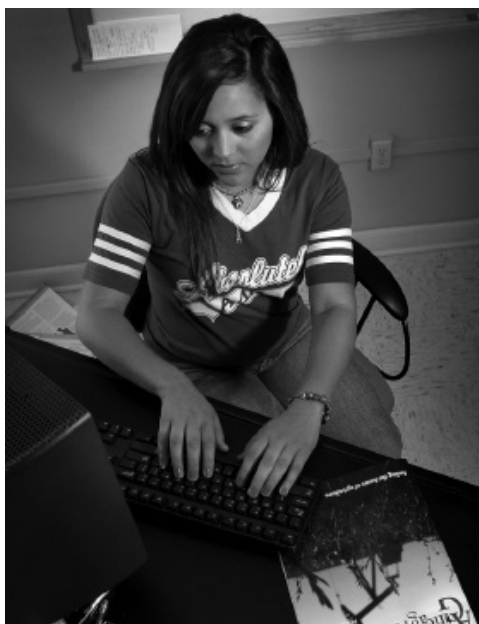
Suppose a student has a greater interest in another area, but they still have a desire to effectively advocate for the industry in their future career using tools described earlier. Those students should be advised to pick up a minor in agricultural communications. Agricultural science teachers know better than anyone else that communication is extremely necessary for any career, so advising students to consider the option is valuable.

Perhaps Bob and Greg Vanourek say it best in their book *Triple Crown Leadership* when they

quote Stephen Wang saying, “No matter what job you have in life, your success will be determined 5% by your academic credentials, 15% by your professional experiences, and 80% by your communications skills.”

So what?

While agriculturists continue to make impressive advancements in technologies, it is easy to lose sight of a huge challenge facing



the industry today. According to the American Farm Bureau Federation, less than 2% of Americans are farmers or ranchers to date. While many are familiar with that statistic, it remains staggering, especially considering the growing world population.

With fewer Americans familiar with agriculture, the gap in understanding grows constantly. This disconnect has resulted in a rise in activists against agriculture. Additionally, the United States citizenry as a whole has a negative perception of the industry. This lack of trust will inevitably lead

to poor decisions regarding policies that tie the hands of producers aiming to feed the ever-growing population.

The brand of agriculture is tainted and it is up to agriculturists to fix it. “An informed citizenry, including policy decisions at all levels, will create win-win solutions that ensure the long-term sustainability of agriculture, natural resources, and quality of life in communities across the world” (Doerfert, 2011, p.8). The question stands, how can this image be fixed to ensure a long-term sustainability of agriculture?

The answer is a movement from individuals with a passion for sharing the story of agriculture with consumers. As obvious as it sounds, a positive change in attitudes will only be achieved if relationships are fostered between the agricultural industry and the consumer. Addressing the problem calls for a long list of people spending their life’s work perfecting their skillset within agricultural communications whether as a journalist, news anchor, broadcaster, photographer, or social media expert. The list goes on.

The movement starts with students enrolled in agricultural science classes and active in FFA. This generation has the potential to pursue opportunities in these areas and make a true difference. However, students do not have to pursue a bachelor of science in agricultural communications to be an effective communi-

tor and help in making that difference. As agriculturists, it is critical everyone take part in advocacy efforts.

In the classroom

In fact, the National FFA Organization has recognized this and developed career development events (CDE) related to this area. The most closely related contests at the national level are agricultural communications, marketing plan, and agricultural sales. It is encouraged agricultural science teachers interested in coaching these teams visit the National FFA Organization website for more detailed information.

The agricultural communications CDE is ideal for students striving to eventually pursue a career in some of the areas highlighted earlier. This contest requires three students to address different practicums. The theme changes each year, but students are consistently required to have a working knowledge of APA Style, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and ethical concerns related to the industry. In addition to the editing and multiple-choice tests, each student must complete a practicum. There is a writer, a graphic designer, and a video producer. This contest provided a real-life experience with what a career in this field would be like.

“No matter what job you have in life, your success will be determined 5% by your academic credentials, 15% by your professional experiences, and 80% by your communications skills.”

In addition to contests, they have endorsed several movements promoting the increase of agricultural advocacy from FFA members across the country. According to their website, the agricultural literacy and advocacy platform seeks to develop and deliver a suite of skills including effective communication, critical thinking, civic comprehension, and holistic understanding for students involved in FFA.

As a subset of the larger movement, the 2014-2015 national officer team developed a hashtag for student use — #SpeakAg. It is encouraged that agricultural science teachers promote the use of this hashtag with their students, the community, and government entities. Methods of effectively taking part in the movement include weaving the concept into curriculum, incorporating classroom visuals reminding students of the movement, and encouraging students to develop stories about agriculture to share with the community via local news outlets.

When it comes to incorporating the idea of advocacy and communications into curriculum, the National FFA Organization has endorsed another subset to the mission at hand, the Habitudes Leadership Curriculum. This curriculum is available to all agricultural science teachers across the country and is designed to not only promote student leadership but to also hone in on communications skills needed to tell the story of agriculture. Bringing these concepts into the classroom has the potential to better prepare students seeking a career in agricultural communications and other areas.

This curriculum is not exclusive to students with a specific interest in agricultural communications as a future career. These concepts can be applied to any career from coaching high school football to writing policy on Capitol Hill. Students who are excellent writers and speakers do not go out of style in employers' eyes.

Agricultural science teachers across the country are tasked with educating youth about the agricultural industry. At the foundation, these teachers strive to ensure the success of their students utilizing instruction, supervised agricultural experiences (SAE), and FFA as their vehicle. Educating students about agricultural communications can serve as yet another avenue to ensure student success both professionally and personally, especially with students seeking a career in this field.

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Exposure and Mentorship

by Jennifer S. Herman

Across the United States, the scarcity of agricultural educators continues to impede on educational opportunities of our young learners as it has for decades. Since 1999, every report includes a “teacher shortage” discussion indicating its importance as an ongoing issue (Camp, 2002). In 2007, the Supply Demand Study showed 78 positions went unfilled (Kantrovich, 2007). According to the 2016 Agriculture Teacher Supply and Demand Overview reported by NAAE, 66 full-time positions went unfilled with 14 of those being from Region 3 (Smith, 2017). Alpha Tau Alpha, also known as ATA, is comprised of high achieving students who are passionate, show a love of and commitment to changing the future of agriculture. Through passion and commitment, an ATA chapter may influence the next generation to end the shortage by facilitating earlier exposures and mentoring young learners to pursue a career in agricultural education.

Members have the power to influence young individuals’ lives for the better by fostering earlier exposures to potential careers. Traditional college students and high school students are relatively close in age which improves their apparent approachability. Due to this, it is easier to connect with students and gain their trust as a role model and mentor. Dr.

Xueli Wang, a professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, studies college students’ learning, pathways, and success. In one of her studies involving early exposure, in regards to academic achievement and future pursuit of a career in STEM, she found that “the effect of students’ exposure to math and science courses is even stronger than that of math achievement” (Wang, 2013). The study also concluded that there was a positive correlation between positive attitudes towards the subject at an early age and an intent to pursue STEM as a discipline (Wang, 2013). This idea can be mirrored from STEM to Agricultural Education. If an ATA chapter employs these research findings, there is an increased likelihood that the student will pursue an agricultural education career due to positive attitudes and early exposure. Going forward, ATA members can aid in creating positive opportunities in local schools such as shadow days, tutoring sessions, and field trips to other agriculture programs, and early teaching experiences. One such example is an Agriscience Day where high school students teach elementary students. All of these events would expose students to the world of agricultural education and increase the likelihood of developing a future agricultural educator.

The path to agricultural education is not straight, defined, or well-lit for numerous individuals. There is no direct route or standard “Ag Ed teacher” and pro-

gram. Due to this, ATA members should broaden their outreach scope to students in various departments outside of traditional agriculture such as biology, chemistry, or other departments such as art. For example, a student enrolled in an art metals and jewelry class demonstrates metal working skills that are strikingly similar to agricultural mechanics. After investing some time mentoring that student, the ATA member may discover that the student was raised in the city, but has their own micro aquaponics system in their window sill indicating a passion for agriculture. However, the student never connected their passion for aquaponics and metal working to a future as an agricultural educator. By venturing into schools and sharing their own personal journeys towards becoming agricultural educators, ATA members can demonstrate the infinite paths that exist. Members can actively share their own stories, connect with students one-on-one, and inspire them to be the individual to educate others about all the beauties of agriculture. With the mentoring of an ATA member, that art student’s eyes could be opened up to a career that fulfills their love of fish, plants, metal, and creativity.

Overall, an ATA member can invest their time and connect with prospective high school students. By doing so, they can share their experiences, mentor the younger generation as they choose their potential future career path, and

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Addressing the Agriculture Education Shortage Through Alpha Tau Alpha

by Christian Stanley and Kendra Flood

Who knew agriculture teachers would be on the endangered species list? As Alpha Tau Alpha chapters look forward into a brave new world, they will find uncertainty relating to the field of agriculture education. Therefore, they must find a way to be able to better address the national shortage of agriculture educators. It is within the realm of the organization's scope to encourage members to take agriculture education positions. Outlined is a three-part program in which ATA chapters would be able to help address the national shortage. These objectives include providing incentives for new agriculture educators, hosting a high school conference devoted to teaching agriculture, and initiating a social media campaign to encourage people to teach agriculture.

With the number of agriculture educators taking positions being less than the number of positions open (Smith et al., 2016), it is essential that agriculture education programs not only produce more agriculture education students, but also keep educators in agriculture education classrooms. The first step for Alpha Tau Alpha to help address this shortage and lack of retention of agriculture teachers would be providing incentives to first-year and recently hired agriculture teachers. This may come in the form of monetary incentives, providing a free first-year mentorship class through the sponsoring university, or giving an opportunity for profes-

sional development during university activities. One such incentive could include teachers an opportunity to further a beginning teacher's education through a graduate course. A university currently offers a unit course called the Beginning Agricultural Educators Course to first-year agricultural educators in a state. This course provides new teachers with a mentorship program, as well as an opportunity for asking their fellow educators about the challenges they are facing in their first-year. By providing this course, they are able to help keep agriculture education teachers in the classroom. In the 2016-2017 school year, only fourteen out of twenty-one agriculture education graduates in a state chose teaching (NAAE, 2017). Alpha Tau Alpha chapters could cooperate with their universities to attempt to create a program similar to what a university has pioneered.

The next step in the three-part program would involve an Alpha Tau Alpha chapter creating a high school conference devoted to teaching agriculture. This conference would provide students with the information that they need regarding their next step on the path to being an agriculture education major. A program similar to this has been done in a state and has proven very successful in recruiting new agriculture educators. ELITE Conference is held in the IAA building in a city, and provides students with an opportunity to connect with the colleges which offer agriculture education in a state. The students are able to attend panels, meet with professors, and learn from

agriculture education recruiters about why teaching agriculture is such a rewarding profession. If Alpha Tau Alpha chapters within their own states were willing to band together to facilitate a similar program, it would be very beneficial.

An Alpha Tau Alpha chapter could also launch a social media campaign in order to encourage students to choose agriculture education as a field. The State Teach Agriculture Results Program (STAR) is an initiative in which states commit to helping agricultural education recruitment efforts (NAAE, 2016). Through the program, states receive resources such as promotional material from the National Teach Ag Campaign. An ATA chapter can join this program and use these materials on social media to recruit and promote agriculture education. For example, the National Teach Ag Campaign hosts a social media video contests each year between collegiate agriculture organizations. Alpha Tau Alpha chapters could join this campaign in order to help promote agricultural education within their states.

As you can see, there are many fantastic ways for Alpha Tau Alpha chapters to help address the national shortage of agricultural educators. While this may seem to be a grim time for agriculture education, we can look toward a brighter future if chapters implement these and other plans to produce more agricultural educators. These three ideas are just one of many possible ways for Alpha Tau Alpha chapters to help address

the national shortage of agricultural teachers. By cooperating and working diligently to promote agricultural education, Alpha Tau Alpha chapters can help to provide quality agriculture programs to students for years to come.

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expose them to the opportunities in agricultural education. It may seem far-fetched to believe that one person could convince an art student that never grew up in the countryside to major in agricultural education and decrease the shortage, but that is actually my agricultural education story. The path is not always straight, but it is those mentors along the way that act as a torch to light it. If ATA chapters and members across the nation unite to work with students directly, the paths of future agricultural educators would illuminate and the shortage would fade into the past.

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