

# The Agricultural **EDUCATION** MAGAZINE

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**We're All in This Together:  
How to Support ALL  
Beginning Teachers**

# Welcoming and Supporting All to the Profession

by Gaea Hock

This year marks my nineteenth year as an agricultural educator. I have worked with beginning teachers while in the high school classroom, working on my graduate degrees, and currently as a teacher educator. There have been several modifications and improvements to how we prepare future teachers, but especially how we support beginning teachers since I started out as a first-year teacher. This issue of the magazine allowed me the opportunity to reflect on my first few years in the profession and my current role as a teacher educator. Here are a few of my thoughts and pieces of advice to support all beginning teachers.

- Introduce yourself to the new person (people) in the room. While business cards are not as common as they once were, leaving your name, school and contact information with your new colleague will help them keep track of who they met.
- If you are leading a session at a meeting, take a moment to introduce the new people in the room (or have everyone introduce themselves if there is time). Even those who have been teaching in your area for several years may not know each other. This is especially true as we transition back to more in-person events.
- Remove jargon OR take the time to define jargon in your presentations. Also, think about the institutional/state/district knowledge some individuals may not be aware of when you share information.
- Spell out the acronyms. We love our acronyms in agricultural education (FFA, SAE, CDE, LDE, WLC, NAAE, etc). Teachers who join us from other states, disciplines, and industry may not be aware of all the letters we use to describe our programs.
- Reach out and offer to provide support/guidance. New teachers are not always going to know who to ask or may feel they are “bothering” another teacher when asking questions.
- Invite new colleagues to join you for professional development opportunities. This is especially true for those new to the state/profession who may not be aware of the many PD opportunities offered.
- Send them a quick reminder regarding key due dates. As you are working on state required reports and documents, send them a quick text just to make sure they are doing the same.
- Track who is hired in your state/region/area and share that information with others. I created and currently run the Kansas Ag Ed Vacancies website. This website allows all teachers to know when a position is posted, if someone is leaving the profession or moving schools, and when positions are filled. This tool has allowed many stakeholders (FFA Foundation, FFA Alumni, fundraising companies, commodity organizations, etc).
- Let your dedication for inclusion be present in all your communications. Beginning teachers from marginalized groups look for those who

will welcome them into the profession and serve as an ally as they navigate the many challenges.

All this advice leads to one main theme. We need to welcome **all** teachers to the profession and make them feel welcome. Work to do this in all your interactions, communications, and processes.

As you read the articles in this issue, reflect on what you can do on an individual basis and what the different organizations in your state can do to support beginning teachers. If you are a beginning teacher - welcome to the profession! We want you to be successful and remain in the classroom for many years. Look for the helpers in your state/area/community. They are there and eager to help you succeed!



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## Distribution

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## Article Submission

Articles and photographs should be submitted to the Editor or Theme Editor. They will acknowledge their submission. Items to be considered for publication should be submitted at least 90 days prior to the publication date of the intended issue. No items are returned unless accompanied by a written request. Articles should be approximately 1500 words. Information about the author(s) should be included at the end of the article. Photos and/or drawings appropriate for the "theme issue" are welcomed and should be submitted as separate files (jpg or tiff format preferred – minimum 300 dpi). A recent photograph (jpg or tiff format preferred– minimum 300 dpi) of all authors should accompany the article. Articles in the Magazine may be reproduced without permission but should be acknowledged.

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Front and Back Cover Photos Courtesy of Kellie Claflin

# The Importance of Support

by Kellie Claflin

Thinking back on my first year as an agriculture teacher in Wisconsin, I remember the feelings of overwhelm, excitement, and most importantly, support. While I completed an outstanding teacher education program, I still felt bewildered as I planned lessons, figured out school policies, connected with community members, and advised the FFA chapters – times two. What kept my head above water the first year in the classroom was the support from other agriculture teachers and state leaders.

One example of the support I received was from the Wisconsin Association of Agricultural Educators (WAAE). The summer after my student teaching experience, I was welcomed, along with fellow new teachers and former college classmates, to the summer ag teacher's conference. We started with a pre-session just for new teachers where we were able to network with each other, meet state staff members, collect resources, and get expectations for the conference. We also met our agriculture teacher mentors assigned to us to share resources and offer advice throughout the year. It was a fantastic feeling knowing that a group of caring people had my back in the classroom.

Because of the impact of the support from other ag teachers, I chose to get involved with the WAAE new teacher committee to give back and support beginning teachers. We assisted in planning the pre-session for new teachers during the summer conference, worked with mentors and mentees, and made connections with preservice ag teachers at universities in the state. During this work, I was inspired to become a teacher educator and make helping new

ag teachers a more prominent focus of my work.

As I transitioned away from the ag classroom and into higher education, I realized that specific populations of new ag teachers might not feel as supported as traditionally prepared agriculture teachers. One such group are alternatively or provisionally certified teachers who haven't been licensed to teach through a traditional teacher preparation program in agricultural education and/or entered the profession from industry. It is easy to stick to people we know, but often alternatively certified agriculture teachers may not have a cohort of individuals who went to college together or aren't included because it is assumed that they have different needs. However, if we want to continue offering agricultural education in schools, we need to

be supportive of all the educators doing that important work.

This issue of the Agricultural Education Magazine focuses on how we can support ALL beginning teachers. Several articles highlight best practices for induction programs that support beginning teachers, including alternatively certified teachers, those from another CTE content area or farm business management instructors.

From my experiences in agricultural education, research I've completed, and reading through these great articles, an essential part of supporting beginning teachers is a sense of belonging and an opportunity to share. I also reached out to early-career ag teachers to see what support was most helpful to them as they entered the profession. Overwhelmingly, they said other ag teachers,



*Beginning agriculture teachers in Wisconsin are recognized at the annual Wisconsin Association of Agricultural Educators Professional Development Conference to celebrate their first year in the classroom.*

whether it was a co-teacher or ag teachers, on social media.

*"The thing that has helped me feel the most supported as an ag teacher is from fellow ag teachers. They are always welcoming and willing to share!" Ellissa Chatfield, Oregon*

*"I often find myself using the advice of agricultural educators on social media. I come across new strategies, fun lessons for a lab I will soon teach, or not-your-average assessments on topics I teach. It's not necessarily a form of 'direct support,' but it does make me feel supported to see other ag educators putting it into practice." Chaney Merritt, Virginia*

*"The best support system was my super honest relationship with my teaching partner. It makes such a big difference to have a strong, supportive teammate. No room for judgment when you're trying to learn and get stuff done!" Abby Chase, Oregon*

*"The best thing that has helped me as a new teacher is finding a supportive community. In my first year of teaching, I found a group of ag teachers through social media who really helped me get through the rough patch of teaching during Covid and finding a new job during that time. Since then, I have been able to reach out to them in times of need, for lesson ideas and materials, or for a quick rant." Callahan Anderes, North Dakota*

No matter your role in agricultural education, there are fantastic ideas and resources to support beginning agriculture teachers in this issue. However, simply

reaching out to new teachers and a willingness to provide resources can make a world of difference. We really are all in this together!

**If we want to continue offering agricultural education in schools, we need to be supportive of all the educators doing that important work.**



*Kellie Claflin is an assistant professor of agriscience education at The Ohio State University. She taught middle and high school agriscience in Wisconsin for five years.*

# It's as Simple as Socializing

by Amber Rice & Jared Biciolis

I clearly remember the first time we proposed having an agriculture teacher social at summer conference. "But why?," many teachers and state leaders remarked. "What data will we get this from this?" Is it truly a good use of our funds?" However, Jared and I were committed and did not let these questions discourage our efforts. We had witnessed a rapid decline in teacher morale statewide. Even pre-COVID-19, teachers reported feeling isolated, detached, and in need of an outlet to connect with other teachers. Yes, we had the traditional professional development sessions, new teacher workshops, and other systems in place to support all teachers. We saw each other regularly at state events and committee meetings. But what teachers really craved was a time to unwind and speak freely about their jobs, their lives outside of school, and to socialize with their peers, without students present. This burnout and craving to connect socially was not isolated to our newer professionals. We observed teachers across all demographics and experience ranges felt these emotions. A very successful, ten-year teacher in our state Melissa Veo put it best, "I love my job and spending time with my students but teaching through COVID was rough. Honestly, when I didn't think it could get worse, this post-COVID phase has brought on its own set of challenges. It is easy to let it all overwhelm you as a teacher."

It is no secret that our state, like many others across the country, is experiencing significant issues with teacher retention. The teacher supply shortage in K-12 schools is expected to reach 200,000+ nationally by 2025 (Hanover Research, 2019), and 32% of respondents to a recent National



*Superstition Region teachers enjoying a wine and painting night!*

Education Association survey reported they planned to leave the profession earlier than anticipated due to the toll of the pandemic (Walker, 2021). Many of our teachers in Arizona are joining the profession directly from industry and do not have pre-formed cohorts from traditional teacher preparation programs. This puts them at greater risk for leaving the profession all together. We needed to create an avenue for new and experienced teachers alike to connect with one another, foster future relationships, welcome them to the Arizona agriculture teacher family, and encourage them to remain teaching. We held our first ever agriculture teacher social in 2019. It was one of the easy things we could do with our limited time and resources and was not a heavy planning lift for Jared or me. The agenda was simple - finger foods, drinks, door prizes, a platform for teachers to connect, and boundless enthusiasm from the organizers and participants.

We held it at summer agriculture teacher conference to reduce extra travel time for teachers. Our first social yielded over 60 participants from across the state. From that moment on, we decided to prioritize teacher well-being, in the form of social connection, throughout the year.

When the pandemic hit Arizona in early 2020, socials became more difficult to execute due to restrictions on school and community gatherings. To counteract these limitations, we shifted our approach to region level socials. These events were coordinated by each region president, allowed for small gatherings within the current state guidelines, and encompassed a wide variety of activities depending on the region's preferences. We utilized STAR grant funding through the Teach Ag Campaign to support these region socials, further bolstering our state's teacher retention mission. These region socials were so successful in 2020, we decided

to continue to include them as a part of our STAR grant budget into 2021 and beyond. AJ Argueta, an early career teacher in our state, described his feelings about the socials. "It reminds me I'm not alone in this journey. The region socials have allowed me to both feel welcomed to the profession while also welcoming others, even in times of distance. Sometimes it's the small things that make all the difference." Here are some tried and true ideas for social events and tips for implementation that have worked well within Arizona:

### *Ideas for Social Events*

- Painting and wine nights
- Dinner and drinks
- Top Golf
- Trivia
- Brewery visits
- Bingo and raffles
- Dave and Busters
- Beginning teacher overnight retreats

### *Tips for Implementation*

- Advertise widely! Consider electronic flyers, social media posts, teacher list servs, and word of mouth to encourage people to participate.
- Hold events during times teachers can attend. Remain cognizant of the busy schedules of teachers and avoid dates that are typically full of activity. For Arizona, we steered clear of fair season, statewide events, holidays, and CDE competition seasons.
- Even the individuals you wouldn't expect to attend might; don't count anyone out! Be welcoming and inclusive of all teachers. We have had teachers who were brand new and ones who had been in the profession for 40+ years attend events.
- Still host even if not a 100% of people show up. We held an event at the Arizona Na-

tional Livestock show in 2019. It was a less attended social event, but the ones who came benefited. Even if 20 people participate, that is 20 people who you might not have connected with otherwise.

- Force it in the calendar. There is never a great time for everyone, and it is easy for this type of an event to get pushed to the backburner for other events that must occur. You need an individual or group of individuals to spearhead the process and buy-in from state leaders.
- Seek out funding sources. We heavily utilized STAR grant funds to make these types of events possible. You may also reach out to your state FFA foundation, local university, and other state resources to support teacher socials. Larger, statewide events for us cost \$700. Region level socials cost \$300 each. Figure out what works within your budget.

Teacher socials, on the surface, may seem like a waste of time and money. However, we have found that the benefits far outweigh the costs. As educators, I think we tend to instinctually feel the need to formalize every get-together and add some sort of professional development credit to every gathering we have as professionals. But as we have discovered, that is not always necessary. Sometimes the most beneficial gatherings between

teachers are the LESS formal ones. In a time of a mental health crisis where teachers are continually being asked to do more with less, this was our chance to do something positive to alleviate the problem. It's a small thing, but as AJ said, "Sometimes it's the small things that make all the difference." Aleah Shook, an early career teacher in a single teacher program, reflected, "These social events continue to give me the ability to connect with my colleagues and really get to know them on a deeper level. Believe it or not, I can't begin to describe how much of a stress reliever a small thing like that is." Whether it's a formal event planned at the state level or a small gathering at someone's home, we implore you to make time for social rejuvenation and connection. It's as simple as socializing!

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# The Importance of Aligning Support and Teacher Decision-Making

by Aaron McKim, Buddy McKendree, & Mark Forbush

The motivation behind supporting beginning agriculture teachers is simple, we want new teachers to have long, impactful careers in the profession. Therefore, we provide support anticipating these efforts will encourage beginning teachers to make the decision to stay in the profession. Alignment between support and decision-making is, therefore, key. If, for example, we invest efforts in supporting A, B, and C attributes among beginning teachers, but they decide to stay in the profession based on X, Y, and Z, we are not providing support which leads to retention. In this article, we explore teacher decision-making and traditional models of support to uncover potential shifts to bring into alignment support and decision-making.

First, let's explore decision making. Instead of doing an extensive literature review on the theories and models that attempt to describe decision-making, we focus on a decision most of us have made, keeping or not keeping a car. Of course, car ownership does not have the same weight

as deciding to leave or stay in the teaching profession, but the decision-making process holds regardless. When deciding to keep a car or not, an individual weighs many factors which can be condensed into three questions: (a) is it my decision (control), (b) do I like the car (value), and (c) am I good at driving the car (ability)?

Shifting our car metaphor to agricultural education, early career teachers weigh similar factors when deciding to remain or leave the profession. First, the teacher may ask if they have the decision. Many work (e.g., program cut, poor performance) and family (e.g., spouse career change, new care responsibilities) factors could stop an early career agriculture teacher from having decision making autonomy. In these cases, especially those influenced by the family domain, retaining the teacher is not related to the support received. If the teacher has the decision-making autonomy, however, they will weigh the value they perceive from being an agriculture teacher and their competence teaching agriculture in their decision. The lower their

perception of value and/or competence, the less likely they are to remain in the profession.

Having explored decision-making, let's now explore beginning teacher support. As this issue of the magazine articulates, there are a variety of methods and programs to support beginning agriculture teachers. We distill this variety of support mechanisms into four categories: (a) resources: providing curriculum, technology, or materials, (b) mentorship, (c) growth: providing learning opportunities via professional development or educational programs, and (d) recognition. As we evaluate the efficacy of these support mechanisms, their alignment to the decision-making factors should be considered. In the following table, we provide a tool for conducting this alignment assessment (Table 1).

Reviewing your responses to the alignment assessment should illuminate actions to enhance the portfolio of support mechanisms and their alignment with teacher decision-making. In Michigan, completing the alignment assess-

Table 1  
*Alignment of Support Mechanisms and Decision-Making Factors*

	Value				Competence				Control			
Resources	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Mentorship	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Growth	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Recognition	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4

1 = No Potential for Alignment; 2 = Changes in Support Structure Would Improve Alignment;  
3 = Alignment is Probable but Could be Refined; 4 = Solid Alignment Exists



ment uncovered five important considerations as we look to improve our support of beginning teachers. We explore these considerations to reinforce the utility of the tool and unpack potentially common deficiencies in the alignment of support mechanisms and teacher decision-making within agricultural education.

**Consideration 1:** Determining the alignment between support mechanisms and control was challenging. We resolve this dilemma by suggesting support mechanisms often increase the effectiveness of the teacher; thus, making it more likely the school offers them the decision to return.

**Consideration 2:** We found an opportunity to enhance alignment between growth and value. With this realization, we are committed to weaving in value-based experiences within professional development and educational experiences for beginning teachers. Examples include workshops on the importance of agricultural education to communities, lessons exploring the impact of an agricultural educator over their career, and seminars exploring the total financial compensation received by agriculture teachers.

**Consideration 3:** This process reinforced the importance of identifying or developing mentors that address both competence and value. We found the alignment between mentorship and competence to be higher, suggesting training mentors to illuminate the value of being an

agriculture teacher as an important next step.

**Consideration 4:** The intersection of recognition and value was particularly interesting. While alignment existed for those teachers who receive recognition, it was not true for teachers who did not receive recognition. Therefore, it is important to recognize a broader number of beginning teachers than many traditional approaches.

**Consideration 5:** The alignment with all support mechanisms and competence illuminated a unique dimension to consider. Specifically, does the support increase competence because we empower teachers with resources, mentorship, and growth or does support foster an identity among beginning teachers that they are lacking in each of these areas, reducing their competence? While untangling the intricacies of this dilemma, our discussions reinforced the importance of initiating support mechanisms by recognizing beginning teachers as emerging experts. This manifests in, as examples, professional development experiences in which beginning teachers are first asked to share their knowledge on the topic and working with beginning teachers to co-select resources for distribution.

In conclusion, the goal of our support resulting in long, impactful careers requires evaluating the alignment between support and decision-making. In

this article, we provide a discussion of this alignment as well as a tool to facilitate an evaluation of alignment. We have found this process to be a useful and informative; therefore, we highly recommend other supporters of beginning agriculture teachers adopt this approach.



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# Induction Programs for Today's Early Career Agriculture Teacher

by Brandie Disberger

Together, we can create a powerful induction program to meet the specific needs of ALL beginning teachers. Today's early career agriculture teachers have unique skills and experiences unlike those before them, they are more comfortable on a virtual platform and are accustomed to have access to "on demand" resources. Professionals with these unique experiences may not be well served through yesterday's methods. We must adopt new tools and resources to best meet their needs. Thus, we should consider examining how we conduct induction programs to ensure they are multifaceted programs that span beyond the first year of teaching.

Early career programs should span the first three years and provide unique experiences within each year. The content delivered during the events should include both time sensitive information and requests gathered from the teachers to ensure their unique needs are met. Induction programs should be designed as a comprehensive professional development program, rather than a series of events that could appear to be unrelated "snapshot" activities. Induction programs can move from a highly structured format in year one and later become less structured and more "self-guided" in years two and three.

## Consider the following components in a first-year agriculture teacher program:

**A mentoring program** should encourage beginning agriculture teachers to having multiple mentors. Beginning teachers benefit

Today's early career agriculture teachers have unique skills and experiences unlike those before them...We must adopt new tools and resources to best meet their needs.

from an in-school mentor, an agriculture teacher mentor, and a peer mentor. While some mentors may be informal and self-selected by the teachers, at least one of these mentors should be formal in nature. The formal mentor needs to receive training and support through the program. The formal mentor is expected to have regular conversations with the teachers to guide reflection.

**Teacher Reflection** should be guided by the formal mentor. The mentor should schedule monthly conversations with the teacher to ensure they are taking the time to reflect, consider the following questions to guide these conversations:

- What went well this month?
- What were you challenged by this month?
- What are you looking forward to in the month to come?
- What are you concerned about in the month to come?
- If specific areas were not discussed (FFA, SAE, Classroom, School/Community, etc.) directed follow up questions should be asked.
- Let's talk again in a month, what day/times works best for a call?

- Mentors should send a reminder via text or email 1-2 days ahead of the call as a reminder.

**In-person meetings** develop a community among the beginning professionals. This helps connect teachers who are entering the profession through different means (traditionally, alternatively certified, etc.) into a cohesive group. To develop the content for the meeting, survey the teachers a few weeks prior to identify topics for the event. The daylong meeting should be a mixture of timely topics and information they need to know.

**Online meetings** are best used to deliver time sensitive information. These meetings should be limited to one hour. They should be recorded and distributed to those who were unable to attend in person. Consider conducting the meetings twice monthly in the first semester and decrease to once a month in the second semester as needs decrease and schedules become busier. Formats that work well include 30 minutes of content delivery followed by 30 minutes of a mentor panel fielding questions from the teachers about any topic.

**Feedback** on all aspects of the beginning professionals' position is essential. Teachers regularly compare their student abilities in FFA competitions. Generally, we assume administrators are providing feedback on teaching which may or may not be happening and it may not be in depth or specific to agricultural education. Finally, there are limited ways teachers receive feedback on SAE engagement for students. Consider including on-site visits by mentors or agricultural education professionals to observe and provide feedback on teaching, FFA, and SAE roles and responsibilities the teachers are conducting. The purpose of this observation is not about evaluation of the teacher, rather, having a professional assisting their growth in all aspects of their position.

**Consider the following components in a second-year teacher program:**

**Mentoring** programs should continue in the second year and multiple mentors should be utilized. If the formal mentor is unable to continue or is not a positive experience, teachers may self-select a new mentor to fill that role. Teachers should continue to stay connected with peer mentors, school-based mentors, and agricultural education professional mentors throughout the second year.

**In-person meetings** should be conducted, but less frequently than the first year. Consider two meetings in the second year, perhaps towards the beginning of each semester. The meeting topics should be a mix of reflection, goal setting, timely information, and topics requested by the teachers.



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*(TOP) The two day Early Career Ag Teacher Retreat was held in December of 2021. It was attended by 25 first through fifth year teachers in Kansas.*

*(BOTTOM) A combination of in person and online programming best fits the needs of today's early career agriculture teachers. The teachers should be invited to provide ideas for content at the events to ensure the events are meeting their unique needs.*

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**Online meetings** once per quarter allows for the delivery of timely information and resources and a panel of mentors to answer questions from the teachers. Limit online meetings to one hour and record and distribute to all teachers to view or review later.

### **Consider the following components in a third-year teacher program:**

**Mentoring** should continue but may be focused on specific areas of growth for each teacher. If the teachers have a specific content goal, they should select a mentor specifically to help them grow in that area. Mentors are utilized on an “as needed” basis rather than a strict monthly scheduled conversation.

**Contribution** to beginning teachers can be a great way to utilize third year teachers. Although they may not feel confident in being a formal mentor, they should be utilized in delivering components of the 1st and 2nd year programs such as serving on teacher advice panels. This will help them see how much they have grown and begin to give back to the profession.

**An Early Career Teacher Retreat** held over two days can help focus on the whole person. At this time, the teachers can identify what is going well and where they want to grow. Support the teachers in personal financial management, work life integration, and utilizing community resources to ensure they are prepared to teach long term in the profession.

To make induction programs successful, a dedicated individual is needed to coordinate the many events and activities happening throughout the year for each stage of early career teachers’ professional development. In addition, mentors need to be trained, supported, and held accountable for beginning teacher support.

We are truly “all in this together” as we support beginning teachers, we need financial support from our foundation partners, expertise and leadership from our state staff, dedication and knowledge shared by our experienced teachers and most of all, beginning teachers to attend and engage in programming provided.



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# Bring the State Level Support!

By Kellie Enns & Emily Baylie

*Perhaps you are a new teacher in a remote mountain town, trying to register your Horse Evaluation CDE team - long past the registration deadline, unsure of how you will explain this to the practicing students and their parents.*

*As a young teacher in a remote, rural school, there are few teachers, and most have been teaching for many years and are long-time members of the local community. You are isolated, unsure, and uncertain who to go to when you need advice and support about a student with challenging behavior.*

*Perhaps you are a new teacher in a multi-teacher, urban school. Your background in agriculture has led you here but working side-by-side with another teacher who has seniority, living in a metropolitan area where you do not have connections, a huge high school staff, and seeing over 200 students each day feels overwhelming and isolating.*

*Or maybe you are a teacher, just out of industry, hired on an alternative license who doesn't know what the state-level affiliation and reimbursement forms are or how to complete them.*

These are just a couple of scenarios inspired by our Colorado teachers – teachers with the correct intentions, the right passions, the desire to make a difference in agriculture and in local communities but feeling the high stakes of being a new teacher.

This is where mentoring – robust, multifaceted, and state-level, mentoring – should come in to play!

Teaching, like all careers, comes with its fair share of obstacles which may lead to challenges in teacher recruitment and retention. Constant turn-over in the school system is detrimental for students, the school, and the teaching community (Enns, et al., 2019). The unique structure of school-based agricultural education (SBAE) presents agriculture teachers with additional responsibilities not required of teachers in other content areas (Greiman, Walker & Birkenholtz, 2005).

Failure to succeed in mastering the classroom, FFA, Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) and other program management duties can contribute to teacher frustration and isolation (Boone & Boone, 2007). Lack of consistent teacher preparation may also contribute to the decision to leave the profession (Cole, 1984). In Colorado, many of the areas of concern for new agriculture educators include classroom instruction, student management, agriculture mechanics instruction/management, FFA leadership activities, FFA fundraising and budgeting, working with administrators and the community, and keeping student records/grades (J. Stahley, personal communication, June 27, 2019). Challenges within these areas may cause a teacher to leave the profession.

There is an old visual of a three-legged milk stool. The milk stool has three legs which equally holds the weight of the stool. When one of the legs is broken,

the stool cannot stand up – the weight is off balance and the stool and its contents, fall over. In Colorado, we have learned that the mentoring stool for teacher support includes three important legs: local, community support, regional agriculture teacher support and the most influential – state-level Team Ag Ed Support. Often, local, and regional supports are in play for a new teacher, but at times, the perceived stakes are high for new teachers to seek this local or fellow agriculture teacher input. This is where state-level support mechanisms should be triggered.

Colorado Team Ag Ed, approached retention with a robust, innovate response: The Local Teacher Success (LTS) program. Through the LTS program, state-level leadership, Colorado Team Ag Ed, initiated state-level supports in three areas: teacher professional development, a week-long New Teacher Bootcamp initiated before the start of the fall

semester, and focused on-site visits from a state-level mentor.

Much like the planning and building of shop projects, the LTS program has similar steps: planning, building and evaluation. In the planning phase, Colorado Team Ag Ed meets and discusses priorities for the upcoming year utilizing data from previous years, both formal and anecdotal (Enns, et al, 2019). A list of professional development activities throughout the year are created, with specific detail and responsibilities assigned. At minimum, three state-wide professional development conferences are provided, based on the needs expressed or witnessed by Team Ag Ed; conferences may be regional, or state-wide provided by Team Ag Ed, industry, and experienced agriculture teachers to eliminate the perceived barriers of new teachers asking others for help.

New Teacher Boot Camp is a relationship building opportunity for Team Ag Ed members, veteran teachers and beginning teachers. Bootcamp is an intensive and en-

compassing training that allows teachers to learn expectations of local programs and the state. As well as gain skills to propel them into their first few weeks of teaching in the new school year. The main objectives of Boot Camp are to understand Colorado Team Ag Ed members and their roles, understand how to create quality programs, and participate in deep dives in Classroom/Lab, FFA, and Work-Based Learning. Through activities and pedagogy that teachers can use in their own classroom new teachers are given tools they need immediately. The Boot Camp has specialized programs for 1) alternative licensed teachers 2) brand new (first-year) hires, and 3) teachers in their 2-3rd year, knowing the needs are varied and specific for each of these induction years. All first-year teachers in Colorado are also presented with a signing bonus and university housing is provided to encourage after hours socialization.

The LTS mentor(s) (a teacher who has recently left the classroom) provides on-site visitation to address needs of the teacher, while also working with local

administration and community members to support the new hire. During LTS visits, mentors create an individualized coaching environment for teachers. Typically, LTS mentors greet students and help to encourage the success of the program through promotion of Agricultural Education, their teacher, and the importance of the agricultural industry. Depending on what the teacher may need, coaching may focus on work-based learning, how to utilize AET to its maximum potential, the opportunities for careers in agriculture and articulation of post-secondary options, or being a resource for FFA activity planning and execution. LTS can also observe teaching, FFA advising, and work-based learning supervision. Discussing events and looking at different artifacts the teacher has collected, LTS staff mentors teachers through their day-to-day activities. Much of the local visit is utilized to make sure the teacher has their personal questions answered and resources they need to be successful and to assist the teacher in building relationships with community

(LEFT) Emily Baylie, LTS mentor, visits students and the new teacher at La Veta School.

(RIGHT) A member of Colorado Team Ag Ed presents to new teachers at the annual New Teacher Bootcamp.



members, administration, and students through the meetings and communication.

Colorado LTS has improved agricultural education in many ways. We have expanded the program to have two traveling mentors. SBAE programs have grown by almost 25% and our teacher force by has grown by 34% over the last 6 years. We have also improved our retention - currently we are retaining 93% of 1st year teachers signing their 2nd contract, 88% of 2nd year teachers signing their 3rd contract, 93% of 3rd year teachers signing their 4th contract, a huge increase over statistics prior to 2015. Additionally, from 2015 to 2021, more than 80 teachers attended the boot-camps, and over 97 agricultural education programs and teachers were visited by LTS mentors. This equates to more than 120,000 traveling miles (combined) over 184 days a year.

### What do the new teachers say?

Teachers have responded favorably as well:

*"If it weren't for LTS, we wouldn't have a program... It had been over 30 years since Monte Vista had a program or any sort of Ag Ed here... when we talked to LTS about what we could do to get that [the ag ed program] going, they assured us that it was doable, and not only assured us that it was doable but were there every step of the way." - Edwin Mondragon, Monte Vista High School*

*"Having them [LTS] as part of your support circle and group has been instrumental, I believe, in me staying in the profession. It definitely has its day, and it has been nice to be able to call our LTS group up and tell them what we have been going through and ask for advice..." - Mariah Klingler, Ignacio Middle/High School*

*"Having somebody to have as a sounding board on some days or other days, someone to call up and say, 'I need some curriculum for this class or that.' Or how do I establish my Alumni? Having somebody that is that resource that can help us to do that has been extremely helpful and is critically important for any ag teacher, but especially those of us who are just getting started." - Justin Tedford, Alamosa High School*

Our advice to other states considering similar programs: make this a Team Ag Ed Program. This has helped us to establish consistent funding through endowments and the STAR program, has expanded our leadership team, and improved communication across our team members and made Team Ag Ed accessible in local programs. State-level leadership, focused on those specific needs of the teachers, not in evaluative fashion, has strengthened our state, and the quality of programs. Prior to the LTS, only two of the three 'legs' were provided to new teachers and retention continued to be an issue. Including LTS and Team Ag Ed as part of the mentoring 'stool' as provided the necessary balance to improve retention in Colorado.

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# Investing in Your Own: Illinois' Strategies to Support and Retain Beginning Agriculture Teachers

by Jay Solomonson & Megan Coy

I believe most agriculture teachers would agree the first few years of teaching are the most difficult. Besides developing curricula for multiple courses and managing a new classroom, agriculture teachers are required to advise the local FFA chapter, supervise students' SAE projects, operate school laboratories, complete mountains of paperwork, and so on. This extreme workload can frequently result in high levels of stress, a prominent factor leading to teacher burnout (Lambert et al., 2011). This is why we're not surprised when we hear that close to half of all teachers leave the profession within the first five years (Ingersoll et al., 2018).

Over the past decade, researchers have identified top reasons agriculture teachers leave the profession. Besides stress and burnout, top attrition factors have included family or personal reasons, heavy workload and responsibilities outside of contract time, low self-efficacy, inadequate compensation, and poor administrative support (Solomonson et al., 2018). On the contrary, a recent study from researchers at Illinois State University and Southern Illinois University have examined retention factors and revealed top reasons agriculture teachers remain in the profession. Top reasons cited included possessing a high-level of self-efficacy, working in a positive school environment, having highly-motivated students, receiving additional compensation through extended contracts, and

The grant program is set up to recognize four teachers who have finished their first year, by presenting them with \$10,000 in supplemental income over five years as long as they continue to teach high school agriculture.

getting support from those in both their personal and professional lives (Solomonson et al., 2021). New agriculture teachers, in particular, need that extra support and encouragement to ensure they are successful early in their careers. This has shown to make a tremendous impact in retaining them. In Illinois, several agricultural education stakeholder groups have worked together to create a multi-faceted approach to support their beginning agriculture teachers. Let's see how they are investing in their new teachers and supporting them through their first few years.

## Beginning and Second Year Agriculture Teachers Conferences

Each year, the staff of Illinois' Facilitating Coordination in Agricultural Education (FCAE) project facilitate two workshops to support beginning teachers. The Beginning Ag Teacher Conference is traditionally held in late summer for all first-year agriculture teachers in Illinois. During the two-day event, participants are able to network and learn from the Ag

Ed state staff, university partners, and their agriculture teacher peers. A major goal of this event is to create a cohort and leave these new teachers with connections to other teachers from across the state. Topics covered at the conference include, but are not limited to, classroom management, preparing for the first day of school, advising the FFA chapter, curriculum development, lab resources, SAE for All plans, and an experienced teacher panel. Teachers with provisional licenses also have sessions on lesson planning, curriculum development, and teaching students with special needs. Along with the two-day workshop, teachers participating in the conference have the opportunity to earn graduate credit. To receive this, the teachers complete additional assignments as well as attend a bus trip visiting other agriculture programs in their part of the state. This additional experience allows them an opportunity to visit with experienced teachers, obtain more teaching resources and ideas, and get additional assistance with other challenges they may be facing.



The Second Year Ag Teacher Conference was initially requested by teachers who had completed the Beginning Ag Teacher event. Oftentimes attendees at the first conference are unsure of what they need; however, as they enter their second year they have identified their deficiency areas. The Second Year Ag Teachers Conference is a two-day conference held in late June and is treated as a celebration. The conference begins with teachers celebrating the completion of their first year and looking forward to the excitement of getting a second chance to continue to grow as a professional. This conference involves experienced teachers leading sessions on curriculum development, improving classroom management, writing grants, obtaining a work-life balance, FFA chapter management, and SAE implementation. The continuation of this cohort experience allows for building stronger relationships with their peers and state staff, in addition to providing further support and resources for these novice teachers.

### Local Program Support Visits

To provide additional support to beginning teachers they are visited several times a year by both their district FCAE program advisor and one university agricultural education faculty member. FCAE program advisors travel to programs and assist teachers with curriculum, facility preparation, program development, and much more. These early career



*(TOP) Illinois agriculture teachers working collaboratively on classroom activities and labs at the Second Year Ag Teachers Conference.*

*(MIDDLE) Two Illinois agriculture teachers learning about veterinary science from an experienced teacher at the Beginning Ag Teachers Conference.*

*(BOTTOM) Agriculture teacher, Destiny Swalve, with her principal Darren Loschen, as she is being announced as a recipient of the IAA New Teacher Grant. Photos courtesy of Megan Coy.*

teachers are encouraged and incentivized to meet with their program advisors at least twice a year. FCAE program advisors also work to support beginning teachers by providing timely professional development opportunities and serving as an advisor to support these teachers as they advance through their career.

The Illinois Agricultural Education University Council, a group made up of the universities within Illinois that offer an agricultural education program, also developed an initiative to provide on-site assistance and support to first year agriculture teachers in the state. The program is funded by a grant through Compeer Financial. University faculty contact the new teachers and schedule visits each semester. During these program visits the university faculty member will observe classes, speak with the new teacher and their administrator, and offer advice and encouragement. The goal is to visit each new teacher before their first evaluation to provide some constructive feedback on their teaching abilities. The new teachers are presented with a gift card at the end of each visit to thank them for their participation. These visits also allow the university Ag Ed faculty an opportunity to make connections with the new teachers and serve as another outlet of information and support as the teacher begins to build their professional network.

### **Mentoring Program**

The Illinois Association of Vocational Agriculture Teachers (IAVAT), Illinois' state agriculture teacher association, coordinates a mentoring program for interested teachers in their state. Any teacher is welcome to participate in the program as either a mentee or a mentor. Mentees are typically teachers with one to five years of experience and mentors are those with over six years in the classroom. The program requires new teachers to complete an electronic

questionnaire identifying their strengths, weaknesses, and professional goals. The IAVAT Recruitment and Retention Committee then works with state staff to match the mentors and mentees. Each month the committee chair sends out a list of topics to discuss, which often correspond to upcoming Ag Ed / FFA events or due dates. Both the mentor and mentee fill out a short post-meeting evaluation and identify further topics to discuss. Additionally, each month a random mentee and mentor are selected and highlighted on the IAVAT social media channels as well as receive a gift card for their participation. Currently, there are 52 teachers participating in the program.

### **Farm Bureau Agriculture Teacher Grants**

The IAA New Teacher Grant Program is a project of the Illinois Agricultural Association (IAA) Foundation, the charitable arm of the Illinois Farm Bureau. This grant program was created in response to the critical shortage of agriculture teachers in Illinois. Agricultural leaders in the state recognized the importance of agricultural education programs and understood the limiting factor to growing these programs was having enough quality agriculture teachers. The IAA decided to fund a program that not only recognized the importance of agriculture teachers but to also encourage those in education to continue to teach. The grant program is set up to recognize four teachers who have finished their first year, by presenting them with \$10,000 in supplemental income over five years as long as they continue to teach high school agriculture. The four teachers are selected based on an application and interview process. Since 2017, 20 teachers have been selected as a part of the program, with 18 of those remaining in education. Each year, the teachers submit

an updated progress report on their short, mid and long-term goals. The program also strives to involve the school community in recognizing these teachers. Many schools have all school assemblies, inviting school board and community leaders, along with the families and students of the recognized teachers. This very visible celebration of agriculture teachers is also important in educating schools and communities about the impact of local agricultural education programs.

### **Ag Ed Line Item - Three Circles Grant**

While not specifically designed to just assist beginning teachers, the Three Circles Grant program, a grant offered through the Illinois State Board of Education, was developed to support the implementation of a complete agricultural education program by compensating teachers for their time outside of contract hours in the areas of work-based learning (SAE), student leadership (FFA) and the development of curricular resources and professional learning. This matching grant is set up for a school district to provide funding to compensate their agriculture teacher for 60 extra days or 400 hours of work outside of their regular contract time. The grant has added to teachers' salary significantly and has not only affected early career teachers, but all teachers. For the 2020-2021 school year the average salary increase for a teacher on the Three Circles Grant was \$18,278. This is providing early career teachers a starting salary comparable or higher than other positions within the agricultural industry they might otherwise be considering. Early career teachers are definitely seeking out schools that are participating in the Three Circles Grant Program.

### **Summary**

It is essential that new agriculture teachers are supported and nurtured so they remain in the

profession. This can be accomplished in part by providing appropriate guidance, support, and professional development early in their career. For more information about the programs and initiatives found within this article, feel free to contact the Illinois Agricultural Education State Staff with any questions you may have (<https://www.ilaged.org/Contact>).

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# Mentorship Matters

by Lavyne Rada

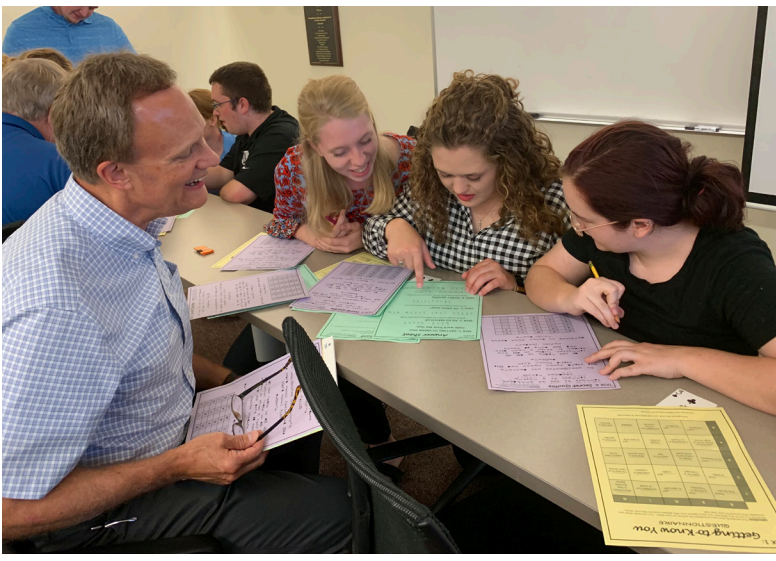
Teacher shortages, teacher recruitment, and teacher retention have been areas of concern for years in schools across the county and can often be found as a topic in daily news headlines. Agricultural education has shared this concern for decades as our profession has come together to analyze supply and demand trends, share best practices through the State Teach Ag Results (STAR) program, and support the Teach Ag campaign to recruit future teachers. However, as any good classroom teacher knows, the real impact is made by building relationships, and Minnesota has found great success in providing opportunities for networking within our profession for more than 25 years through mentorship programming.

## Recruiting the Future

Mentorship and network building in Minnesota occurs before a teacher ever enters their first classroom. Postsecondary agricultural education students in the midwest are invited to participate in professional development. Minnesota has hosted four Midwest Regional Future Agriscience Teacher (FAST) Symposiums in conjunction with the mid-year Minnesota Association of Agricultural Educators (MAAE) conference. Throughout the symposium, current teachers share advice and experiences related to student teaching, getting a teaching position, and preparing for the first year. Students from five universities in the Midwest participate in the symposium prior to the MAAE conference and then participate fully in the two days of professional develop-

ment. Sponsorship from MAAE, Minnesota Agricultural Education Leadership Council (MAELC), the Minnesota FFA Foundation, and STAR funds reduce the registration costs to participants significantly. The MAAE also offers professional development through a four-day summer conference and additional two-to-three-day content specific professional development. College students and current teachers can participate in these professional development experiences.

Future teachers also can experience the summer as a teacher through the Minnesota Agricultural Education Internship. This paid internship is made possible through generous company sponsorships and the MAELC. The purpose of the internship is to spark an interest in undergraduate students to consider entering



(ABOVE) Retired Teacher Induction Program Director Dr. Brad Greiman working with new teachers to complete the BreakOut Box Challenge during the New Teacher Conference.

(RIGHT) Teacher Induction Program Senior Mentor Brad Harguth working with new teachers to complete the BreakOut Box Challenge during the New Teacher Conference.



the teaching profession and to provide hands-on experience in the teaching profession. Interns are partnered with one or two current agricultural education programs during the summer and spend those weeks teaching courses, attending FFA leadership conferences, visiting students, leading officer retreats, managing gardens, and so much more! Engaging future teachers has resulted in participants being retained in the degree and feeling more engaged and supported as they enter the profession.

### Induction and Coaching

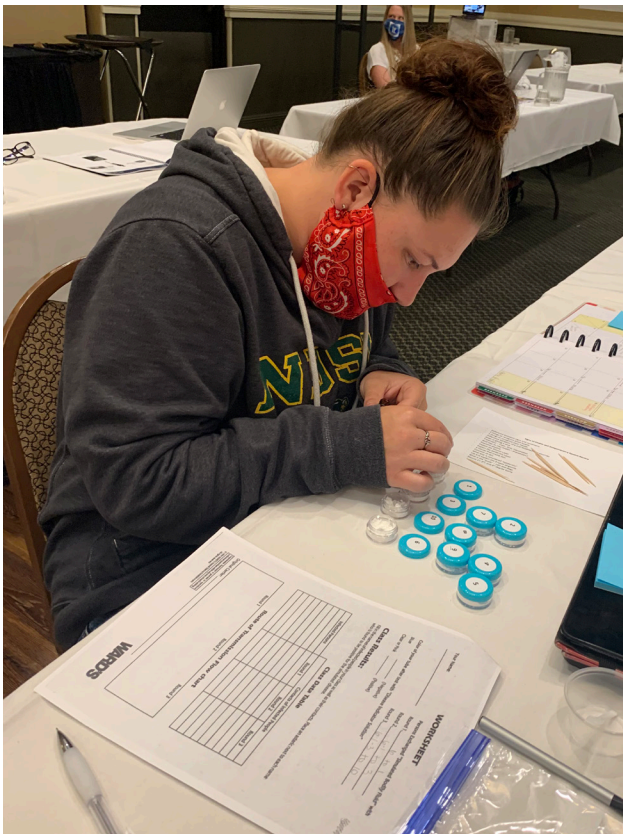
The Minnesota Teacher Induction Program (TIP) for school-based agricultural education teachers was started in 1999 and has had more than 20 cohorts of new school-based agricultural education (SBAE) teachers in Minnesota. The TIP is the primary professional development program for teachers new to Minnesota SBAE and is a collaborative program involving numerous partners. Collaboration for this program is between local school

districts, the Minnesota Department of Education, the MAAE, the University of Minnesota Twin Cities, and MAELC. Through this collaboration, teachers are paired with two mentors, collaborate virtually each month to learn and discuss just-in-time teaching topics, and meet in-person at least three times throughout the year.

Mentorship in the TIP occurs in four ways. Senior mentors are former teachers who serve as coaches. They observe teaching, provide coaching, and serve as a resource for classroom and program support. Regional mentors are current SBAE teachers who are geographically close to the early-career teacher and serve as a resource for local needs, regional FFA questions, and other regional programmatic needs. The program's monthly coaches meet with the program participants virtually and provide coaching related to just-in-time teaching topics such as classroom management, grant writing, integrating SAE and FFA into the classroom, and program planning and development. Peer mentoring also occurs

through virtual and in-person events as teachers share successes and resources, seek advice from peers, and collaborate to improve their programs. Mentorship through various methods provides the coaching and support needed by early-career teachers.

The main goals of the Minnesota TIP are to build the participant's teacher efficacy, increase job satisfaction, provide support to build resilience, and increase retention by having the teacher return the following school year as an SBAE teacher. The program recognizes and contributes to the research that shows the increased retention rates of beginning teachers who participate in teacher induction programming. More than 400 teachers have participated in the TIP since its creation, and an average of 88% of teachers are retained between year one and two. The program has changed over the years, but the goal has remained to support early-career SBAE teachers. This program is made possible through legislative funding managed by the MAELC.



(ABOVE) Erik Hiemark and Joshua Munoz work with their Collaborative Inquiry Group to identify the resources needed to manage an effective advisory board during the Resources for Professional Learning program. (LEFT) New teacher Kaylee Pratt works to identify mystery substances during an inquiry experience during the Teacher Induction Program.

## Developing Life-Long Learners

Resources for Professional Learning (RPL) is a teacher retention program for early-career SBAE teachers, with emphasis on those in their second and third year of teaching. The program begins with a Delta conference, a three-day professional development event focusing on student engagement through teacher development. Delta provides teachers advanced professional development on pedagogy, work-life balance, classroom management, and effective program management. At the conclusion of the Delta training, teachers identify a gap in their teaching skills. Teachers form collaborative inquiry groups (CIGs) around common topics and focus their professional learning on this topic for at least six months. Research has shown that focused professional development on a topic for more than 50 hours has a significant effect on participant learning. These CIGs allow teachers to identify their needs and provide the opportunity to develop their knowledge and skill related to a topic such as work-life balance, developing advisory committees, classroom management, incorporating inquiry teaching methods, managing a greenhouse laboratory, starting an SBAE program, and engaging diverse learners. Additional support includes access to professional development like XLR8 and access to Ideas and Innovations for Instruction (I3) retreats. The I3 retreats are an opportunity for teachers to get away and focus on what they need most. Attendees are asked to identify areas they can “show” (share resources/lesson plans and offer advice) and areas in which they can “grow” (looking for resources). It provides a space for collaboration and intentional focus on what the individual teacher needs most. The RPL program is made possible through legislative funding managed by the MAELC

**Mentorship and network building in Minnesota occurs before a teacher ever enters their first classroom.**

and legislative grants managed by the Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board.

### Mentorship for All

Mentorship has long been a foundational piece of supporting SBAE teachers in Minnesota. While the programs highlighted here focus on supporting secondary teachers, mentorship is available to all agricultural education teachers in Minnesota. The Postsecondary Instructor Mentoring (PIM) program is designed for agriculture, food, or natural resources instructors at the postsecondary level. The program’s goal is to connect, collaborate and help college and university instructors, especially those in their first three years of teaching. Participants meet six times per year, twice in person at conferences and four times virtually. Topics discussed include integrating technology, classroom management, communication with diverse populations, assessment strategies, mental health for educators and students, working with administration, and more. The PIM program officially started in 2016 and has worked with new college instructors throughout Minnesota since that time.

The Professional Excellence Program (PEP) is designed for adult farm business management (FBM) faculty during their first three years of teaching. The program has expanded into PEP 2.0 for faculty in years four through six. Most FBM faculty operate independently in their own offices off campus, and it can be very difficult to onboard into the program. The PEP helps new faculty understand the curriculum, provides teaching tools, and helps instructors navigate where to turn

for help. The PIM and PEP programs are made possible through legislative funding managed by the MAELC.

Mentorship provides the support and encouragement needed for an individual to develop their skills and improve performance while developing their full potential. John Crosby shares, “Mentoring is a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction.” Mentorship, coaching, and collaboration are key components to the professional development opportunities available to Minnesota’s secondary, postsecondary, and adult Farm Business Management instructors. These experiences are provided to potential and current teachers in agricultural education through a variety of programs built to meet their unique needs at each step of their career. Through the support of these programs, we have found higher career retention rates and more collaboration while also developing the skills of our educators. Consider how mentorship could work for you and how to expand your network and support system. Mentorship works and mentorship matters to all of us.



*Lavyne Rada is the Minnesota FFA Association Regional Supervisor and Program Manager, the director of the state's Teacher Induction Program, and manages the Midwest FAST Symposium, Resources for Professional Learning program, and CTE Teacher Induction Program.*

# In the Present and for the Future

by Dr. Jessica M. Jones

Over my career as an agricultural education teacher, I have witnessed teachers enter enthusiastically into the profession with an aim to change the world everyday with every student on their class roster. Each educator sets a plan of action for others to live out their expectations, chiefly their students but also themselves. I will admit, though a lofty goal, it can be a double-edged sword, be it realistic and attainable, realistic and unattainable, or unrealistic and unattainable, contingent on the prism of view. Depending on the background, educators come from a broad swath of experiences that shape their pedagogy, work ethic, and drive. How these tenets of teaching are perceived is realized through the teacher's level of engagement with classroom/laboratory instruction, the supervised agricultural experience program, and the career and technical student organization, FFA.

Early career teachers often enter the profession directly from a student-teaching experience having been provided tools, guidance, and instruction on how to implement the three-circle agricultural education model, while developing a network of healthy collegial relationships in and out of the workplace. On the other hand, early career teachers can enter the profession without having those pieces to the puzzle, and yet, still have the ambition to set the world on fire and believe their students can and will succeed daily. The transformology of the variety of skills, abilities, and talents the individual brings to the learning environment, coupled with the need to learn,

grow, share and repeat frequently yields a deft balance on educator retention.

Teacher retention activities take many forms and are largely focused on the early years of teaching since 44% of new teachers leave the profession within the first five years of teaching, according to the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (Ingersoll et al., 2018). The National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE) defines agricultural education as teaching students about agriculture, food and natural resources (NAAE, 2022). Further, through these subjects, a wide array of skills, including science, math, communications, leadership, management and technology are delivered through the three interconnected components of classroom or laboratory instruction, experiential learning, and leadership education. Based on this definition we know agricultural education, in particular, is a profession within education that is not like any of the others. The requirement to perform duties as assigned gives credence to realizing you must have stamina, determination, grit, know-how, empathy, and selflessness, while also juggling the needs and ambitions of students, parents, administrators, colleagues and community supporters.

Like those who have chosen to remain in the teaching field, there are those of our colleagues who leave the profession often referencing the lack of knowledge, resources, and support spurring them to move schools or change professions altogether. Education as a whole is a rewarding endeavor, yet a challenging one that remains a true calling. Within that calling is an active directory for educa-

tor access to broaden the scope, sequence and outcome lens for those who seek it.

A research article published in the Australian Journal of Teacher Education titled, *Teacher Retention and Attrition: Views of Early Career Teachers* (Buchanan et al., 2013), focused on the notion of "resilient stayers." Resilient stayers, principally, the recipe of circumstances in the school and system, along with individual properties of resilience on the part of the early career teacher, lead to maximize the likelihood of the teacher choosing to remain in the profession versus that of leaving the profession. From this research, six themes emerged: collegiality and support; student engagement and behavior management; working conditions and teaching resources; professional learning; workload; and isolation. Taking a deeper dive into the findings, it was identified that in professional learning, learning away from the worksite is less distracting than online learning or attending on-campus workshops or seminars. Further, teachers find it more useful to meet and learn from other teachers with similar concerns to their own; too, meeting and learning from peers without interruptions, particularly for those who may have few or no colleagues teaching the same subjects or grades at their school. This paradigm of providing viable and tenable experiences that help bolster educators where they are in their professional continuum is echoed throughout the literature, but how to do it and ensuring success were the questions at hand.

In Virginia we held, for more than a decade, the Middle School Ag Teachers Conference. The con-

ference was designed especially for middle school agriscience teachers to help promote strategies for instruction and working with curriculum and co-curricular activities. Similar to the Virginia Association of Agricultural Educators (VAAE) Annual Summer Professional Development Conference, the middle school conference provided workshops, state and national curriculum updates, networking, and socialization but specifically for the middle school teachers attending; this was a group of educators focused on the unique needs for their specific educational experience. As time went on and more opportunities were added to the middle school conference, the conference popularity and attendance grew, but so did the positive outcomes related to Virginia middle school agriscience teachers and their student achievements. This conference had a direct correlation to an increase in overall middle school agriscience participation in career and leadership development events; student academic achievement; and program growth.

As we saw an increase in middle school success, we began to see a stagnation and slight decrease in high school agricultural education teacher participation, especially early career teachers, in FFA events and professional organization activities. Boone and Boone (2009) posited at the time, agricultural education faced a shortage of qualified teachers. The situation was made worse by the attrition of teachers from the profession. One way Boone and Boone stated to increase the number of qualified agricultural education teachers would be to reduce the number of teachers who leave the profession early through attrition. I agreed and based my dissertation upon that very argument. But, instead of thinking about the recommendations and implications section at the end of a 100+ page document, we put the recommendations into action. Then and now, more



than ever, stands the essential task for nourishing, encouraging, supporting and enhancing the collegiality of early career teachers. Thus, we began the Early Career Teachers Dinner in 2014. This was a pilot program, based on the Middle School Ag Teachers Conference model. The dinner event was held by invitation only for those educators with five or less years of teaching experience. The goal at the time was to provide a format for early career teachers to connect, get to know each other, gather information and establish a system of ag teacher operation. Of those who attended the initial dinner, 100% of attendees remained in the profession for at least five years and received their VAAE Five-Year Tenure award at the annual VAAE awards banquet.

To date, the dinner has expanded to be an entire conference. The conference is held as a prelude to the VAAE Annual Summer Professional Development Conference. The Early Career Teachers' Conference hosts workshops, trainings, and interactive sessions that covers the evolution of an early career teacher. Topics include but are not limited to professional organization membership, time management and effective communication, National FFA resources, the three-circle

model, state and national officer visit expectations, and the use of technology in the classroom. With the sponsorships garnered, in addition to the support received from the NAAE STAR Grant, classroom starter packages are provided to all early career conference attendees. These starter packages include a setup and/or replenish of your classroom with items including everything from staplers to college and university posters. The colleges and universities across the Commonwealth of Virginia that have an agriculture or agricultural education program provide resources and materials to help link the early career teacher to their institution, enabling the teacher to connect their students to agriculture, agriculture programs, higher education, and future opportunities.

Much like with the Middle School Conference, the Early Career Teacher Conference has grown in popularity and attendance. Furthermore, so have the positive outcomes as related to high school agricultural education teachers and their student achievements. We are experiencing a retention of agricultural and agriscience educators across the state. Truly, we are all in this together, and we must support all beginning teachers and assist



them in reaching their goals because they are the present and the future of our profession.

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# We're All in This Together: Supporting Agriculture Teachers in Oregon

by KJ Joseph, Josh Stewart, & Reynold Gardner

## Introduction

The current state of education in the United States, including the ongoing teacher shortage, is of no surprise to any of us reading this magazine. Look no further than the National Supply and Demand reports (Foster, Lawver & Smith, 2020) for evidence of the changes taking place throughout the nation. This National Supply and Demand report provides a snapshot of the current status of agriculture teacher supply and demand, including information such as how many newly hired teachers there were in the last year, and how they received their license (traditional or alternatively certified) as well as how many teachers left the profession and why. No state is immune to the disparity between open positions and number of available teachers. There are instances, however, when the term *teacher shortage* is misunderstood, particularly when districts are searching for someone to fill an open position which is the result of a positive chain-of-events. We celebrate those heading into retirement and support those who migrate from one position to another. In higher education, we seek out award winners and teachers perceived as high-achieving, hoping to attract them into academia and teacher education. Thriving and growing programs add teachers and legislative funding supports the development of new programs.

Another consideration is those entering the profession through alternative routes. In many cases, you left a well-paying industry job to follow a passion for teach-

ing and learning, or left teaching in another subject area for the opportunity to teach agriculture. The point being, these are all *good* problems facing the teacher supply chain, albeit misunderstood if you're only looking at the numbers of those entering and leaving the profession. The result, however, is a big group of teachers who need support in their new positions. In Oregon, Team Ag Ed has had many conversations about the best ways to support the agriculture teachers, including new teachers, migrating teachers, and alternatively certified teachers. By having open conversations, and a "we're all in this together" mentality, Team Ag Ed has had many successes in supporting all Oregon Agriculture teachers.

## Oregon Team Ag Ed

Team Ag Ed in Oregon includes: Oregon State University, Oregon Department of Education (ODE), Oregon Agricultural Teacher's Association (OATA), Oregon FFA, Oregon FFA Alumni, Oregon Community College Instructors, Regional CTE Coordinators and the Oregon FFA Foundation. Together each partner has a voice and role in assisting the collective effort to move school based agricultural education forward.

Oregon State University (OSU) works with agriculture teacher-licensure candidates and provides quality education for future agricultural educators. Faculty at OSU have close relationships with some of the newest agricultural educators who have recently gone through the licensure program, and the close relationships

allow for candid insight on how to support early career teachers.

Within the ODE, Dr. Reynold Gardner holds the Agriculture and Natural Resources Education Specialist position. Dr. Gardner provides licensure support to all teachers, including those entering through alternative routes and those adding a CTE endorsement. Oregon's alternative CTE licensure model has called upon Team Ag Ed for guidance and direction to support industry or non-CTE teachers in becoming agricultural teachers. Through the alternative licensure sequence the teachers are connected to the professional development offerings of OSU, OATA, and Oregon FFA.

The Oregon Agricultural Teacher's Association (OATA) provides many in-service and professional development events throughout the year. Additionally, OATA coordinates the teacher mentoring program, which is a mentoring program for all early career teachers. One successful example of the OATA directly supporting all agriculture teachers in Oregon was monthly Zoom calls facilitated and hosted by a small group of teachers during the COVID pandemic to offer support for one another and share virtual learning resources. Invitations were sent out to the OATA teacher listserv and each monthly meeting highlighted a different topic of conversation, or provided break-out options for teachers to discuss specific content areas or contest preparation.

The Oregon FFA is continually providing teacher / FFA advisor training and support. As a result



*(TOP LEFT) Early Career Teachers after an interactive silent discussion.*

*(TOP RIGHT) A small group of teachers during a breakout room.*

*(BOTTOM LEFT) A veteran teacher sharing a workshop about planning field trips and overnight trips.*

*(BOTTOM RIGHT) Group of participating teachers attending Early Career Teacher Workshop.*

of the tight-knit connections between Team Ag Ed partners, the Oregon FFA staff play an integral role in managing or supporting all professional development events throughout the year. FFA staff create curriculum resources for teachers, provide annual calendars, and maintain the listserv for constant communication among all Oregon agriculture teachers, in addition to managing all the typical FFA events that happen each year.

The other collective partners within Team Ag Ed (FFA Alumni, Oregon Community College In-

structors, Regional CTE Coordinators and Oregon FFA Foundation) provide collective support and expertise to the professional development facilitators and have an active voice as what is needed for the early career teachers and local agricultural education programs.

In all likelihood, many of the teachers who Team Ag Ed interacts with every day will be an early career agriculture teacher. In Oregon, one opportunity for early career agriculture and CTE teachers to build community and develop professionally is the Early Career Teacher Workshop (ECTW).

One of the things we are most proud of is ECTW which is a professional development event held annually on campus at Oregon State University.

### **Early Career Teacher Workshop**

Many years ago, water cooler conversations led Team Ag Ed to the realization that *we needed to do a better job at supporting young agricultural teachers.* Teaching is hard, and we wanted a way to let early career teachers know they were not alone in this profession, and that there is a

collective group designed to help them succeed. Out of these conversations came an annual professional development event, the Early Career Teacher Workshop (ECTW). The ECTW is held every February on OSU's campus, and is an open invitation to all agricultural educators, forestry and natural resource educators, and many other CTE educators, with zero to five years of teaching experience. For the last decade, we have had teachers from across Oregon, usually numbering around 60, attend this workshop. The ECTW was designed to offer practical support, workshops for educators, and eight hours towards professional development hours (within Oregon, documented professional development hours are a required component of licensure and renewal). With overwhelming support from Team Ag Ed, we are able to provide a well-rounded professional development event for our early career teachers.

The Early Career Teacher Workshop is an all-inclusive educational workshop where all of the participants' needs are met upon arrival. Hotel accommodations, parking, meals, snacks, internet access and workshop materials are all provided by the organizers. The planning and organization helps to maximize the available time for engagement of the attendees. The workshop begins on a Friday evening and is concluded midday Saturday afternoon. The ECTW includes invited presentations from ODE, OATA, Oregon FFA, doctoral students at Oregon State University, and other agriculture teachers across the state who are willing and interested in presenting a session. Presenters are encouraged and often stick around through workshop breaks to make themselves available to address specific one-on-one questions.

An example of some of the session topics presented from the last few years include: organizing your shop, social media,

setting boundaries, professional vs personal life, National FFA resources, classroom technology, giving effective feedback, and more. Many of the workshop topics are driven by needs we have heard or suggestions we have received by early career teachers and their mentors. We request input from teachers throughout the year and again specifically when the call for registration goes out to the email listserv.

Further, the OATA Officers join the workshop and provide an overview of the benefits to joining the association, as well as lead a socializing activity so teachers from other disciplines, or from other areas of the state can get to know each other. Dr. Gardner from ODE provides the Perkins, legislative and educational policy updates. Additionally, Dr. Gardner and Lee Letsch of the Oregon FFA provide one-on-one time for specific FFA, career and technical education (CTE) and program of study questions. With all the support from Team Ag Ed, early career teachers tell us year after year that this is their favorite professional development event. A testament to the success of the workshop was the record turnout of participants during the 2021 event that was completely virtual. We felt sure the attendance would be down as people were getting tired of doing everything virtually. Thankfully we were wrong.

The growth and value of the ECTW has evolved over time. In collaboration with Dr. Reynold Gardner the forestry, natural resources and environmental science CTE program areas are encouraged to attend and participate. Specifically the ECTW professional development hours have been built into the Professional Development Plans of the alternatively licensure CTE teachers. The regional CTE coordinators who oversee all of the CTE programming within specific geographic regions in Oregon have also placed a value on the ECTW and have made it a required onboarding / teacher induction programming for alternatively certified CTE teachers. OSU and Team Ag Ed understands and responds to the specific needs of the forestry, natural resources and environmental science CTE programs and provide special "birds of a feather" breakout sessions. These specific breakout sessions allow for the specific needs these programs and following the Team Ag Ed model, key leaders from these career-learning areas are tapped to facilitate the conversations specific to their sessions.

Early Career Teacher Workshop is really a case study of how to support agricultural educators. The conception of this idea wasn't rocket science, it was simply a group of people wanting to support agricultural educators, and *a willingness to*

*"Early Career Teacher Workshop gave me a safe space to connect with peers in my teaching industry, and discuss challenges and successes within our day-to-day life, and career. I leave the ECTW each year with tangible solutions and resources to improve my program and students' experiences in the natural resources industry."*

**- Katelin Walker, Forestry Educator at Sabin-Schellenberg Professional Technical Center**

*work together in doing so.* Being willing to work together is really part of the magic in why ECTW is so successful in Oregon. We recognize that everyone on Team Ag Ed has strengths to support ag teachers, and we lean in on those strengths. As we move forward, we plan to continue to offer workshops and support our early career teachers as needed.

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# Contextualized Mentoring: Building a Culture of Support for Early Career Agriculture Teachers in California

by Dr. Grant L. Ermis

Support for teachers has long been a facet of conversation in agricultural education. Often, the conversation turns to how we support early career agriculture teachers (ECATs) because of their vulnerability to leave the profession prematurely. For state leadership in California agricultural education, supporting ECATs has recently returned to focus for several reasons, but primarily because of a needs assessment that began in 2013. The needs assessment commonly referred to as the Vision 2030 Project, was a project that gathered input from all California agriculture teachers over the course of two years. Mentoring was a major topic identified because ECATs had lost touch with consistent and contextualized resources to navigate entry into the profession. Even so, there were veteran agriculture teachers who felt they had the capacity to meet the challenge and reclaim an appropriate level of support for the sake of helping the future of the profession.

In the recent past, all early career teachers in California had been privy to formalized mentoring (a.k.a. induction) programs tied to gaining a full professional teaching license – enacted through SB2042 in 1998. While the intent behind this legislation was pure and came with categorical funding to support the cause, the mandate became an added burden on early career teachers (Koppich et al., 2013; California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2015). In a parallel timeline to the Vision 2030 Project, the

culture of support for early-career teachers was proving to be largely evaluatory and cumbersome, with excessive paperwork, and a diminished focus on the prime target of mentoring.

For ECATs, leaders in the California Agriculture Teachers' Association (CATA) sought to develop the California Agricultural Teachers' Induction Program (CATIP)--launched in 2016. Since then, the CATIP has focused on heeding the advice of the Vision 2030 Project (Gorter & Ermis, 2019) and research on induction programs to both contextualize support for ECATs and ensure mentoring was provided directly by veteran agriculture teachers. To date, the program has been growing and gaining notoriety for drawing connections between the experience of veteran agriculture teachers and the support available through the California Department of Education and teacher preparation programs. The CATIP is also notable because it is the only known formalized mentoring program for ECATs that is not based in an institution of higher education (or teacher preparation program), per the review of induction programs by Franklin and Molina (2012). Similar to the Communities of Practice support in mentoring and induction advocated for by the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE), the CATIP provides support through a local network of agriculture teachers.

In the past five years of operation, the CATIP has successfully awarded over 200 clear teaching

credentials (full professional licenses), worked with 100 different school districts, and maintains a roster of over 100 active mentors in 6 different regions of the state. Unique to the program, mentors are often not located at the new teacher's school site, which has proven to be a beneficial structure (Ermis et al., 2018). Mentors are provided training and resources to meet the obligations of induction, and CATIP leadership provides professional development opportunities for mentors to collaborate with peers and develop their capacity to support new agriculture teachers. Specifically, mentors spend at least one hour per week supporting ECAT's goals in the classroom, SAEs, and FFA. Mentors observe their ECATs in the classroom as well as during supervision of SAE and FFA obligations, and they conduct these observations aligned with the same California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTPs) that all other content areas teachers are expected to meet.

Recent research in California shows that ECAT's goals in their first few years of teaching largely surround the development of their teaching practice and growing their program (Ermis, 2021), which is supported by content-area mentors. Furthermore, California ECATs desire connection and purpose within the profession during their initial years teaching high school agriculture, and their mentors may be the best resource to help build that connection and capacity. According to Schager (2021), the CATIP has succeeded in providing the

structure for emotional support and resource distribution that are vital to the needs of early career agriculture teachers. The CATIP has been most beneficial to ECATs due to the commonality of agricultural education shared by mentors and ECATs. The vehicle of agricultural education has proven to be conducive for dissemination of resources, which enhances support due to shared cultural experiences.

One of the cultural experiences available to California agriculture teachers is the GrowAgEd Initiative. The initiative is a collective of state funding, professional development, and other resources that foster opportunities for agricultural educators. Of note, the CATIP partners with GrowAgEd to offer the Student Teacher Conclave and New Professional Institute. While these conferences have a long history of being offered to California agriculture educators, the CATIP has been able to leverage them as integral components to the mentoring pipeline. CATIP participants now have the opportunity to continue with tradition, spend the valuable time they have outside of the classroom in a purposeful manner, and engage more meaningfully with the people with whom they share a profession. In time, we hope to continually hone the California Agricultural Teachers' Induction Program, without entirely reinventing the wheel, to be individualized for the needs of each cohort and each agriculture teacher who chooses to enter the profession.

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# Supporters of Beginning Agriculture Teachers Digital Conference: An Origin Story

by Alyssa Bregel & Tre Easterly

The meme from the 1960's Spiderman cartoon has been popular on social media sites for nearly a decade. In the image, there are two Spidermen dressed alike pointing at each other. Oftentimes, we get so caught up in our own work that we fail to realize there are others doing similar things. Our Spiderman meme moment came in our work together on the FFA Agriscience Fair Committee. During a break from one of the sessions, we learned that a significant part of both our jobs dealt with providing support for beginning teachers in our respective states. We shared ideas and best practices but hoped the conversation would not end there. We set out to find other Spidermen, or in this case, people like us who work to support beginning agriculture teachers. We realized that people who work to support beginning teachers are engaged in various professional organizations and work in various roles. Our plan was to facilitate a digital conference around sharing ideas and best practices for supporting beginning agriculture teachers. We wanted an online conference to be able to include as many people as possible even if they had a limited travel budget.

The Supporters of Beginning Agriculture Teachers Digital Conference (SBATDC) was launched in the summer of 2020. Little did we know in the beginning stages of planning that the summer of 2020 was just about the perfect time to launch a digital conference. During the first year, we had over 200 registrants.

Agricultural education teachers are very near and dear to our hearts. When we think of our profession as a big picture, we know the agricultural education teacher can almost be considered a gatekeeper to the industry. They can expose students who have not thought of entering a career in agriculture or even think they have a fit into the industry. If we get more granular, we know beginning teachers are the next generation of our profession. We also know from our personal experience that the mentorship and additional support we received kept us motivated and in the profession. We can both attribute a great deal of our success to the support we received as beginning teachers. We both got a lot of great ideas from our conversation in the summer of 2019, but we knew we could learn more from others who work to support beginning teachers.

Our vision for the conference is to allow all attendees to share and learn from one another. While we know each state has its own unique challenges, we also know there are commonalities that allow us to learn from each other. We also hope to gather data to share with all who support beginning agriculture teachers as they are planning their programming in their respective states. If you are interested in participating in the conference, the 2022 event will be held May 31st – June 3rd. We welcome all attendees, including state education staff, FFA staff, teacher educators, and current and retired teachers serving as mentors. We also hope to have

participants lead round-table discussions and submit proposals for presentations to share best practices. We are also excited about our keynote speaker, Laura Desimone, who is a Professor and Director of Research in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Delaware. Her work focuses on how reform efforts and professional development can be positioned to influence teacher learning. We also like to hear from successful first-year teachers.

In the future, we hope to hear from additional states who have not presented in the past to continue to grow all attendees professionally. We also hope to hear from attendees on their success stories to share out at our upcoming conference! We know that supporting beginning teachers the past two years has been challenging. We are grateful for all attendees who have taken the time to share their stories and success for the common good. We are all in this profession together. With our vision of seeing this conference grow, we also hope to continue to hear success stories from beginning teachers about the programming in each state. We know how connecting with someone from a different state can impact your mission and how you are supporting the teachers in your state.

The Spiderman meme has evolved. One version features several Spidermen pointing at each other. Over the last few years, we have seen our hallway conversation bloom into a meaningful,



weeklong conference that has enhanced the work we do. Just like the Spidermen pointing in the meme, we suspect there are others out there who are interested in helping beginning teachers be successful. If you would like to be a part of the conference, we invite you to attend May 31st – June 3rd, 2022. You can email either of us for registration information.

“ We can both attribute a great deal of our success to the support we received as beginning teachers. ”



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# Help is Available: Free Curriculum for Teaching Decision-Making and Communication Skills

by Jean Parrella, Theresa Pesl Murphrey, Holli Leggette, Christi Esquivel, & Anna Bates

Soft Skills, Life Skills, Employability Skills, Transferable Skills. Regardless of what you call them, decision-making and communication skills are an integral part of student success because they are often the gateway to revolutionary change and the solution to many wicked problems in agriculture and natural resources. As soon-to-be industry professionals, students must learn to initiate transdisciplinary collaborations and develop ground-breaking innovations as the agricultural industry is the leader in combating global challenges like food insecurity, urbanization, and climate change. Furthermore, because social acceptability is becoming increasingly important in the agriculture domain, the need for agricultural students to develop effective communication and decision-making skills is at an all-time high. Although consumers' proximity to agricultural production is decreasing, their interest in agricultural science (e.g., understanding the technologies used to produce the foods they consume) is increasing. Therefore, because consumer support and acceptance are critical to the industry's success and advancement, agricultural science professionals have the social responsibility to communicate and educate in the broader public sphere.

The challenges of teaching communications and decision-making skills are often characterized by time constraints, lack of awareness of how to teach such skills, and lack of access to

resources. Although curriculum is not the only answer to addressing this need, it is one answer. Thus, we are developing 14 learner-centered reusable learning modules for secondary and postsecondary agriculture teachers to help them develop students' decision-making and communication skills. We relied on Crawford et al.'s (2011) report entitled *Comparative Analysis of Soft Skills: What is Important for New Graduates?* to guide topic selection. Seven modules address fundamental communication skills—asking effective questions, communicating accurately and concisely, communicating appropriately and professionally using social media, communicating in writing, communicating orally, communicating pleasantly and professionally, and listening effectively. The context-specific communications modules are intended for implementation in postsecondary plant science, animal science, and poultry science classrooms and are being modified for secondary agricultural education programs. Seven modules, still under development, address fundamental decision-making skills—identifying and analyzing problems, taking effective and appropriate action, realizing the effect of decisions, developing creative and innovative solutions, transferring knowledge from one situation to another, engaging in life-long learning, and thinking abstractly about problems. The context-specific decision-making modules are intended for implementation across secondary agricultural education programs.

The modules are free to use and available via the Texas A&M University Libraries (Access <http://oaktrust.library.tamu.edu/>; Type “communication skills” or “decision-making skills” in the search box). Some modules are already available, and more will become available soon.

Educators can use the modules in various ways. For example, they can be integrated into current course content online as graded learning activities, in class as lectures, or through a hybrid approach. Each module includes instructions for educators, PowerPoint presentations and videos, handouts, activities, assessments, and answer keys. We encourage educators to customize their use and implementation of the curriculum to best fit their needs. They can choose to incorporate the PowerPoint presentations as in-class lectures and ask students to complete the activities as take-home assignments, or they can assign the PowerPoint presentations and assessments as extra credit opportunities. Because agricultural educators' capacity to introduce new material and additional curriculum is often limited, we recommend they experiment with the modules to determine the approach that benefits them and their students.

(TOP) Modules are available in an engaging, interactive SCORM compliant format that can be uploaded into most course delivery systems. As shown, the modules include embedded worksheets, quizzes, and videos. (BOTTOM) Each module's curriculum packet includes directions for teachers and is available in editable formats to allow teachers to customize content and delivery. As shown, curriculum and worksheets are provided in formats that can be used in traditional classrooms. Answer keys are also provided to assist with assessment of activities.

### Communicating Appropriately and Professionally using Social Media

**Worksheet**

This module encourages you to engage in thought and reflection as the material is presented.

**Print or save the Communicating Appropriately and Professionally using Social Media worksheet** (fillable PDF) now to record your answers as you proceed through the module.

*Note: When you click on the file, you will need to download the file to your computer or print the file. Alternatively, you can right-click the handout on this page and choose "save as" or "print".*

**Submit the completed worksheet according to your instructor's guidelines.**

### Communicating Orally

**Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this module, you should be able to:

- Describe an audience persona.
- Develop a message to connect to your audience.
- Deliver dynamically and effectively through oral presentation.

**Watch this short video** to understand why communicating orally is an important skill to learn.

## Online Module

### Communicating Appropriately and Professionally using Social Media

**Check Your Knowledge: Question 1**

When communicating on social media, which of the following is **least** important to include?

Choose the best option:

Scientific facts

Transparency

Relevance

### Communicating Appropriately and Professionally using Social Media

**Check Your Knowledge: Question 1**

**Incorrect**

That's incorrect. The public's lack of experience with agriculture means that we need to honestly and openly show how food is produced.

## Curriculum

In this video, animal behavior expert and autism advocate Temple Grandin discusses how she sees things. Watch with your students before completing the next activity. [Guttle Behavior and Handling by Dr. Temple Grandin \(7 minutes\)](#)

Ask students to choose one of the following warm-up activities to practice the creative thinking process or replace this activity with your own.

**Option 1:** Consider an example of change. Find pictures of yourself from different ages: a baby less than one year old, about three years old, second grade, eighth grade, and now. What things about your appearance have changed? What things about your appearance have not changed? Can you think of ideas or beliefs that you had when you were much younger but now don't? Describe the events, persons, or situations that have caused the difference.

**Option 2:** Try the incomplete figure test. This drawing exercise uses a small, simple scribble such as a half circle or loop to create a full drawing. Take the incomplete drawing given and add to it until you've developed a full drawing. Instructors can provide a small scribble to begin.

**Option 3:** Practice visualization. Draw how your classroom or cafeteria would look if you were suspended from the ceiling.

**The Creative Problem Solving (CPS) Model**  
Creativity requires considering things from all different viewpoints and connecting things that might not seem to go together. Looking at a situation from different angles and generating many solutions uses *divergent thinking* rather than *convergent thinking* (the ability to produce a single solution for a situation). Guilford (1957) stated that creativity is influenced more by divergent thinking because creativity requires fluency (of words, associations, ideas, and expression), flexibility (spontaneous, adaptive, or striking out in new and unusual directions), and originality.

The Creative Problem-Solving Model (CPS) uses both convergent and divergent thinking to address situations. Divergent thinking and creativity are used to generate ideas and develop solutions, then convergent thinking is used to select a final solution for a plan of action. The steps used in the CPS model include activities common to other models of problem solving, such as identifying the goal or problem to be solved, using data to understand the issue, and creating a plan of action. However, the CPS model (see Figure 1) uniquely uses creativity to consider different points of view by formulating challenging questions, idea generation, fleshing out idea details, and then evaluating ideas against pre-determined criteria to develop the solution.

## Worksheets

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Worksheet 3: Developing Solutions

Selected agriculture current issue theme: \_\_\_\_\_

Specific Issue 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Description: \_\_\_\_\_

Possible Solution 1:	Possible Solution 2:	Possible Solution 3:

Source: \_\_\_\_\_ Source: \_\_\_\_\_ Source: \_\_\_\_\_

Specific Issue 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Description: \_\_\_\_\_

Possible Solution 1:	Possible Solution 2:	Possible Solution 3:

## Answer Keys

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Worksheet 2: Specific Issues Brain Dump KEY

Selected agriculture current issue theme: \_\_\_\_\_

Issues are available in two research articles listed below. Students may choose from this agriculture issue theme of the teacher's or student's choosing. Themes must be able to represent multiple issues.


Pereira, 2021 image and relationship with the public, economic development and pipeline, food and environmental sustainability, and human health/well-being, food and distribution efficiency, government regulations and relationship with farmers, and relationship with higher education/researchers.	Pereira, 2017 1. water resource management, 2. food security and welfare in rural communities, 3. sustainable food production, 4. competition for land use, 5. changing regulatory environments, and 6. competition for water resources.
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Below, record as many specific issues related to that theme as possible. You do not have to organize or validate your or your group's ideas at this time—focus on the quantity of ideas rather than quality.

Students should not judge the quality of ideas shared. Teachers should be careful to encourage students to think through their responses by asking "if possible" or a similar question.

Students to write down as many ideas as possible, even those that make no sense or are not fully related to the topic. The purpose of this activity is to introduce students to the process of generating creative solutions, which begins with generating many ideas.

When creating competitions for most unique issue, most closely related issue, least closely related issue, most number of issues identified, etc. to encourage classroom engagement. You can use sticky notes, index cards, or another medium for student response.



We tested the usability and effectiveness of three communication modules—communicating accurately and concisely, communicating appropriately and professionally using social media, and communicating orally—by asking students to evaluate their perceived knowledge gains, ease of navigation, and experiences using the videos, documents, quizzes, and assignments. On average, the communication modules took students 1 hour and 24 minutes to complete. Students exhibited knowledge gains after completing each of the modules and expressed that the modules were generally easy to use, the documents were helpful, the quiz questions were not too easy or difficult, and the assignments helped them apply principles learned in the module. Overall, students shared positive opinions and experiences after using the modules. We also tested how the completion of two modules affected senior-level animal science students' communication effectiveness during a presentation. Completion of the communicating accurately and concisely module did not have a significant effect on students' skills but the communicating orally module did have a statistically significant positive effect. Thus, we believe the modules are beneficial resources that can be integrated rather seamlessly into agricultural science courses.

Understanding student perceptions of communication and decision-making skills can help teachers more effectively engage students in gaining such skills. We surveyed nearly 1,000 Texas A&M University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences students, and the majority deemed decision-making and communication

skills most important for career success when compared to other transferable skills (e.g., teamwork, leadership, professionalism). The majority also deemed the two skill areas more important than discipline-related knowledge and technical skills. This is critical for agricultural educators to know because it suggests students understand and recognize the competencies required for them to be successful. It also suggests students might be interested and willing to invest more time and effort into developing these skills. Therefore, we believe the curriculum is available at an optimal time for agricultural educators to foster students' heightened appreciation and awareness for developing these essential skills.

**“...because social acceptability is becoming increasingly important in the agriculture domain, the need for agricultural students to develop effective communication and decision-making skills is at an all-time high.”**

Through our research, we identified a number of strategies agricultural educators can use to improve students' perceived skill levels. For example, students' participation in high-impact experiences (i.e., internship, teamwork, leadership, project management, community engagement, cross-disciplinary, and international) improved their perceived decision-making and communication skills. Decision-making skills were most impacted by project management experiences and cross-disciplinary experiences, and communication skills were most impacted by project management experiences and teamwork experiences. Therefore, it is important that agricultural educators encourage students'

participation in these types of experiences and help them find opportunities for involvement. Agricultural students perceived their decision-making and communication skills to be more developed if they knew the type of career they wanted to pursue after graduating. We believe this could be because students who had career knowledge could envision, or had experience, implementing these skills into real-world career contexts. Thus, it is important to help students identify career interests during their secondary and post-secondary years of schooling.

Although these survey results apply to college students specifically, their implications are important for all agricultural educators. In fact, through the same study, we found that more college freshmen knew the type of career they wanted to pursue than sophomores, juniors, and seniors did. This suggests agricultural science students may spend ample time thinking about their future career during

high school and begin college with a career trajectory in mind. However, it seems that as they progress in college, their career interests change, and they are less certain about jobs they want to pursue. Inevitably, students' interests will change, especially as they complete coursework and participate in relevant work or internship experiences. However, an increased understanding of careers in agriculture and more exposure to the reality of those positions during high school could improve students' ability to navigate the uncertainty and improve their perceived development of decision-making and communication skills.

We are passionate about and dedicated to developing human capacity across the agricultural and natural resources industry and improving students' ability to fulfill their social responsibility as industry professionals. Students equipped with decision-making and communication skills will be better prepared to meet the needs of 21st century agriculture. Through our curriculum and evidence-based teaching recommendations, we hope agricultural educators across the United States can enhance their student's experience in gaining critical skills.

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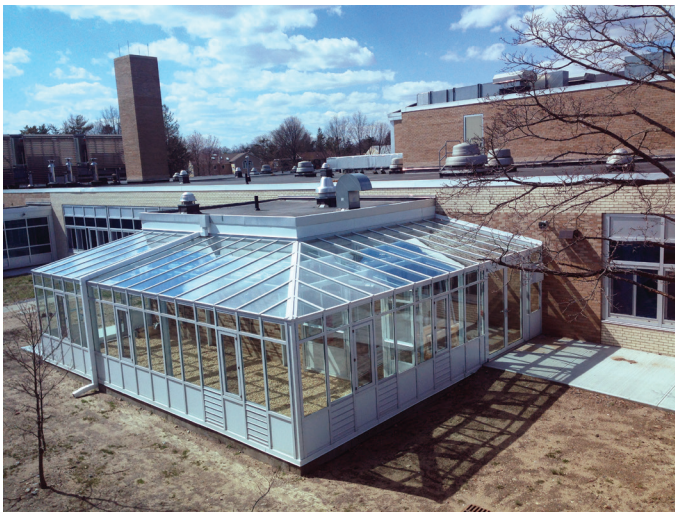
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