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**Allies in
Agriculture**

Learning to Be an Ally

by Dr. Gaea Hock

I strongly believe we, as educators, must learn how to welcome all students into our classrooms and support them while they are with us. Therefore, this issue is one of the most important during my term as Editor of the *Magazine*.

At K-State, I have worked to grow my capacity to be a welcoming and supportive educator for all students who enter my classroom and office. Young people are under pressure to perform and behave in certain ways. When they go against what is considered mainstream there are situations that could arise that negatively affect them. As educators, it is our responsibility to provide a safe learning environment for all students.

In order to learn how I can do better, I have taken advantage of several trainings offered on my campus. My goal is to continue to improve my own capacity as an ally and educator.

One of the trainings focuses on creating and offering spaces of belonging for all students, faculty, and staff at our institution. I attended a SAFE Zone training several years ago to learn more about how I can be a SAFE Zone Ally here at KSU. This network of professions helps link campus and community resources to support students' physical and mental health. The training is open to all

faculty, staff, students, and community members both on campus and in the Manhattan area. After the training, we are given a sticker to signify we are "someone who will support and advocate for people who may be of a historically excluded, marginalized, or silenced identities" (<https://www.k-state.edu/safezone/>).

We also adhere to our KSU Principles of Community which include valuing diversity and inclusion. National FFA has the [Code of Ethics](#) which includes "appreciate and promote diversity in our organization." Does your institution/organization have a set of principles to guide practices and behaviors? Do you reference them or help your students better understand and apply them?

I have noticed an increase in the mental health struggles of young people, especially after the pandemic. These struggles can be higher in marginalized communities and among those who may not adhere to gender norms. [The Bandana Project](#) is a national campaign focused on suicide prevention and mental health awareness. K-State partnered with the national organization to provide more trainings and support for students, faculty, and staff to be trained on how to recognize and re-

spond to signs of distress in others. We also learned about resources available on campus and received a green bandana to tie on our backpacks. I notice the bandanas on bags when I walk around campus and hope those who need help are also seeing them.

Does your organization offer training and support to become an ally? The articles contained in this issue of the magazine convey the need for allyship and creating a safe space for all to benefit from agricultural education. I hope you enjoy reading the articles as much as I did and reflect on how you can be an ally for those who need one most.

The Bandana Project trains individuals on suicide prevention and mental health awareness to aid those who are in need.



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Allies in Agriculture

Editor Comments

Learning to Be an Ally.....2
by *Dr. Gaea Hock*

Theme Editor Comments

An Invitation for Allyship.....4
by *Dr. Kirby J. Schmidt*

Theme Articles

The Imperative of Inclusive Language in a Diverse World.....7
by *Dr. Tyler Price & Josiah Robinson*

Firsthand Views: Prepping for a Positive Workplace Experience.....11
by *Emily McVey*

A Snapshot of Student Experiences in SBAE: A Women’s Perspective.....14
by *Angus Donaldson & Dr. Amber Rice*

Endarkened Allyship.....17
by *Dr. Tiffany Drape & Kendrick Spencer*

2SLGBTQ+ Agriculturalism: A Relationship Between Place, Space and People.....20
by *Dr. Gail J. Woodside*

Queerness and Allyship in the Classroom: A Conversation on How Current Agricultural Education Teachers Support Queer Students....22
by *Ethan Dado*

Developing Student Allies.....25
by *Logan Layne & Dr. Donna Westfall-Rudd*

Envisioning Safe and Equitable Agricultural Education Programming Through the Lens of Genders and Sexualities Alliances.....28
by *Eric M. Moser*

Cultivating Inclusion: Empowering LGBTQ+ Youth in the Future of Agriculture.....31
by *Dane Rivas-Koehl & Dr. Courtney Cuthbertson*

Sowing Seeds for Future LGBTQ+ Agriculturalists.....35
by *Kurtis Miller*

Hidden Allyship: How Do We Help Those Who Do Not Feel Comfortable or Safe Being Out?.....38
by *Dr. Tiffany Drape & Kendrick Spencer*

ATA Essays

Promoting Diversity and Inclusion in School-based Agricultural Education.....40
by *Luke Luttrull*

Inclusion within Agricultural Education Classrooms.....42
by *Taylor Irvin & Madi Hofreiter*

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Article Submission

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An Invitation for Allyship

by Dr. Kirby J. Schmidt

Taking on the role of an editor has been a deeply personal journey for me, entailing a revisitation of behaviors I think we all can relate to: the subtle art of choosing when and how to be authentic. The looming questions about how my openness might be received or rejected have been ever-present companions. In livestock terms: *palatability*. Will my openness be the beginning of a trajectory or a screeching brake signaling a misfit within Ag Ed?

Belonging and social inclusion are deep, and intimate desires we all have (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Diversity is an intrinsic facet of human existence, and inevitably finds its way into our lives too. Unlike diversity, inclusion is an intentional choice. This edition of our magazine builds upon an emergent legacy of scholarship bringing voice to (in)equity, inclusion and accessibility in agricultural education (Barajas et al., 2020;

Elliott & Lambert, 2018; Hartman & Martin, 2021; Smith & Rayfield, 2019; Wood et al., 2023). Prior editions emphasized inclusive practices (Drape, 2021; Whittington & Vincent, 2018) related to physical and cognitive abilities (Teixeira, 2022), proximity to production agriculture (Brown, 2013), or cultural and racial diversity (Moore, 1994). “Allies in Agriculture” centers gender and sexual diversity.

This edition is a menu of opportunities for the reader to reflect on how they can widen the ripple of allyship they have with the aforementioned populations of students and faculty, especially those who are underneath the umbrella of the queer community which includes, but is not limited to, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning people, etc. (LGBTQ+). LGBTQ+ individuals have always been part of society, and the field of agricultural education is just beginning

to explore these stories and experiences (Murray et al., 2020).

What’s in a Name?

Originally, this edition was conceived as “Queer Futures in Agriculture.” The act of juxtaposing “future,” “queer,” and “agriculture” was a deliberate assertion—a counter-narrative to the struggles faced by many LGBTQ+ individuals who grapple with envisioning a positive future due to the stigmatization they experience (Rivas-Koehl et al., 2023). However, in the introspective process described in my opening comments, I (and authors) acknowledged the historical, pejorative nature of the term “queer” along with the potential impact it might have on readers. The word carries different weight for different people in different places. The current title was chosen to ensure a more approachable and inclusive publication, encouraging broader readership without dis-

(LEFT) I was honored to be recognized as one of nine K. Patricia Cross Future Leaders at the 2023 American Association of Colleges and Universities conference. The award is for individuals who demonstrate commitment to innovation in equity, community engagement, and teaching and learning. (Pictured L-R, 2023 recipients).

(RIGHT) The seed for this publication was planted at the 2022 Cultivating Change Summit in Washington D.C, and supported through the encouragement of colleagues. (Pictured L-R Kirby Schmidt, Kait Murray, and Colby Gregg).



missing the unique perspectives and experiences that make up the LGBTQ+ community (at times referred to as 'queer').

As this edition unfolded, I experienced moments of concern about the reception and legality. In the past year, legislative moves targeting LGBTQ+ individuals and curriculum in schools, coupled with violent tragedies, underscore the ongoing struggle for belonging (Powell, 2023). When I was a student, the school-wide, null curriculum of LGBTQ+ people implied a history and future absent of their existence:

- I learned about the 1950s Red Scare without the additional context of the Lavender Scare and how government officials were systematically removed from office because of their sexual orientation (Haynes & Aneja, 2020).
- I practiced how to tear down a Briggs and Stratton engine, yet never learned how the 1978 Briggs Initiative to legalize the firing of LGBTQ+ teachers was dismantled (Goldberg, 2021). Harvey Milk, the first openly gay man elected to public office, championed the effort and was assassinated 11 months later.
- I was reminded of the losses associated with the 1980s Farm Crisis, yet never of the loss of over 40 million people, farmers included, from the ongoing AIDS Crisis.
- I witnessed the celebration of many "first " National FFA Officer moments based on their social identities in the 2000s, and the disapproval of those who first identified themselves as part of the LGBTQ+ community.

I have had several, revised "As I write this..." moments. *As I write this* on November 17th, the Utah Pride Center sign was vandalized to read "Utah Pride Fa-word Center." What's happening today as you read this? My own encounters

with assumptions about my sexuality in everyday conversations reinforce a lingering sense of wrongness, prompting uncertainty about opening up and being authentic anywhere: the grocery store, doctors office, livestock shows, classrooms or hiking in the woods. It's like navigating a minefield where I don't know how big of an impact the weight of showing up will have on my wellbeing.

Yet within these struggles remains an invitation.

Opening Up

These articles are an invitation for readers to challenge assumptions, to reimagine their roles as allies, and to embrace the discomfort that accompanies growth. Coming out is the (ongoing) action of opening up and letting people in. When we are more open we have room to expand. As allies, both queer and non-queer, we are urged to embrace our own expansion and reflect on our roles as teachers, faculty, friends, family, and neighbors. My invitation is: to be open and expand; to be more than what you thought possible; to be more than what others have assumed of you.

In consideration of my invitation, I also want to be clear that I am not expecting that, in one day, you will make a full 180 degree shift. It took me almost 30 years to share a secret I had been hiding; my journey of self-acceptance is far from a one day event. Instead, it is through small, one degree shifts that I find myself still working closer to the kind of person I know is more authentic. My journey of allyship began with first deciding to be an ally to myself, shedding the early expiration date I believed to be my only option. Interestingly enough, through a [Letter to the Editor](#), I opened up to my home community, and here I am now opening up professionally to my Ag Ed community as the theme editor of this issue. Two things I never expected myself to do but here I am.

The goal of "Allies in Agriculture " is to extend the invitation for allyship, and reimagine a more expansive future of agricultural education. How and what we learn about LGBTQ+ people, especially those in agricultural education, impacts our collective possibilities. I am grateful for the thoughtfulness, and authenticity of our contributing authors. Not all identify as LGBTQ+, yet their collective experiences invite readers to rethink our own futures as allies. My aspirational wish is that we all accept the invitation, reflect on our openness and recognize: we can *still* expand.

- Kirby

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The Imperative of Inclusive Language in a Diverse World

by Dr. Tyler Price & Josiah Robinson

As students, educators, and experts of animal science, we should be at the forefront of appreciating the expansive diversity in our world. If you are an agriscience teacher reading this article, there is a good chance you have taught an animal or plant science course or unit at some point in your teaching career or preparation program. A popular pathway in school-based agricultural education (SBAE), the curriculum captures the attention of thousands of students every school year. But have you stopped to consider just how beautifully diverse—and arguably queer—our animal and plant kingdoms are and how our teaching of concepts in these courses can help us to better understand and connect with our sexual or gender minority students?

More than a thousand species, including mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fish, exhibit queer—or often more precisely, bisexual—behavior. Queerness, bisexuality, same-sex relationships, courtships, and co-parenting is commonplace in the natural world. We see these behaviors in giraffes, manatees, geese, sheep, dogs, elephants, penguins, chimpanzees, and flamingos, and humans. And this doesn't even consider the expansive and complex traits and characteristics that exist as it relates to sex, genitalia, and other social norms (Pouydebat, 2022).

Even beyond the animal kingdom, research continues to demonstrate that a binary understanding of sex fails to appreciate nuances in evolution and ecology (McLaughlin, 2023). We even see sexual diversity in fungal and plant

species, further highlighting an expansiveness of sex in the natural world. As educators, we can reject inaccurate frameworks of sex that have been used to inflict harm on sexual and gender minorities. And instead, we should appreciate the diversity, expansiveness, and queerness in our natural world. In our classrooms, one way we can directly appreciate diversity is through our language.

As educators, we teach our students about sexuality concepts within the plant and animal kingdom (e.g., asexual reproduction in potatoes), however, are often uncomfortable having these same discussions with our sexual minority youth. Using more inclusive language in our classrooms can help us to become more understanding and welcoming of our wonderfully diverse students.

How does language lead to marginalization?

Language is a powerful tool that we as humans use to make assumptions and create societal norms (Taheri, 2020). As educators, it is critical we examine our vocabulary to identify and avoid stigmatizing or biased language that perpetuate the marginalization of others. Research shows that the use of gender-neutral language can assist LGBTQ+ students in feeling included and supported in schools (Cross & Hiller, 2021; Matsuno, 2019). Specifically,

Using more inclusive language in our classrooms can help us to become more understanding and welcoming of our wonderfully diverse students.

avoiding phrases such as “boys and girls,” or “ladies and gentlemen” and simply using their names or gender-inclusive phrases (e.g., “y’all,” “everyone,” “members,” and “students”) can help some LGBTQ+ students feel more comfortable. The FFA recently adopted the use of more inclusive language with the addition of the option to forgo the use of “mister” or “madam” during opening and closing ceremonies. The failure to use inclusive language, however, can lead to students of underrepresented and marginalized groups feeling uncomfortable and unsafe expressing their true identity. Teachers should be models for their students using inclusive language, demonstrating their desire to make all students feel welcomed and supported. Examples can include:

- Using students' chosen pronouns;
- Intervening when inappropriate or derogatory language is used (e.g., “That’s gay,” “Check the tr*nny (transmission),” or “Girls can’t weld.”);
- Providing all students equal opportunities to participate (e.g., “Can someone come help me move this?” instead of “Can I get a boy come help me move this?”);
- Avoiding gender as a grouping strategy (e.g., “Boys over

here, Girls over there” or “Boys come with me girls hangout in here.”).

Why does this matter for SBAE programs?

This matters because there are likely between 75,000 to 150,000 LGBTQ+ students in SBAE across the country. Specifically, according to the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law, approximately 9.5% of youth between 13 and 17 in the United States identify as LGBTQ+ (Williams Institute, 2020), while estimates from other Gallup polls put members of Gen Z at closer to 20% (Jones, 2023). Therefore, of the more than 800,000 in SBAE, it's likely that tens of thousands of those students identify LGBTQ+, proving the importance of inclusive SBAE programs.

We also know that, when compared to non-LGBTQ+ students, LGBTQ+ students have higher rates of truancy, lower grades, lower high school completion rates, and fewer numbers attend four-year colleges (Aragon et al., 2014). The use of gender-inclusive language in the classroom is one way to make LGBTQ+ students feel more welcomed and supported, reinforcing that teachers value equality and are advancing social progress (Mallinson & Inscoe, 2020; Matsuno, 2019). This imperative is more important now than ever. In 2023 alone, there have been over 220 school and education bills that target LGBTQ+ people introduced in state legislatures across the country (Movement Advancement Project, 2023). Censorship laws, book bans, forced outing, and removal of anti-bullying protections for LGBTQ+ students has fostered a hostile and scary school environment for many queer students. However, the majority of Americans support LGBTQ+ rights (GLAAD, 2023). And despite efforts to harm LGBTQ+ students, SBAE teachers and advisors are uniquely positioned to foster safe classrooms and support their students, starting with inclusive language.

Where do we go from here?

Notably, in other ways, certain conditions for LGBTQ+ students have improved and we should acknowledge the progress. For example, in 2017, the delegates at the National FFA convention updated the official dress standards putting an end to the once heteronormative guidelines put in place in the early 1930s. This small victory should be celebrated and expanded across the three-circle model of SBAE. SBAE teachers should work to continue to create inclusive classrooms and programs that reject the marginalization of queer students. Moreover, the development of events and activities within the Program of Activities should include the creation of inclusive activities for all students. Collaborations with the school's Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) can also assist SBAE teachers and FFA officers in developing inclusive events for all students and members. Lastly, we encourage SBAE teachers to continue seeking out resources and training to better serve the needs of their diverse classroom.

However, these ideas are not exhaustive. How else can we ensure our standards for growing leaders, building community, and strengthening agriculture include our LGBTQ+ students, communities and agriculturalists? How can we foster a sense of safety within our classrooms? How can we educate and inspire other educators to support LGBTQ+ students? Does your school or school district have a mission and vision statement that visibly welcomes and includes LGBTQ+ students? Does your school's anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies include protections for LGBTQ+ students?

In conclusion, as we know, language (just like our animal kingdom) is ever evolving and we are continuing to develop terms to describe the spectrum of human experiences and identities. Although the list below is far from comprehensive, it provides a sample of

some of the terms from GLSEN and Out and Equal that could help teachers support LGBTQ+ students. For a list of more terms and concepts, check out GLSEN or Out and Equal for resources to incorporate inclusive and supportive language and teaching practices into your classroom.

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Terms to Know:

- **Inclusive Language** - A mode of communication that steers clear of words, phrases, or assumptions that could stereotype, belittle, or marginalize individuals. It aims to be respectful and fosters the recognition and worth of all individuals. The purpose of inclusive language is to prevent any offense and uphold the principles of equality and fairness.
- **Gender Pronouns** - Refer to the set of pronouns an individual wishes others to use when not addressing them by their given name. Common examples of these pronouns include “she/her/hers,” “he/him/his,” or “they/theirs.”
- **Coming Out** - The continuous journey that LGBTQ+ individuals experience that involves acknowledging and understanding their unique sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression, ultimately leading them to embrace and share these aspects openly with others. The process takes various shapes and each coming out experience is unique and is influenced by the support received in school, home, or community, as well as the privileges possessed in other facets of your identity.
- **Queer** - A broad concept encompassing diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, or gender expressions that deviate from prevailing societal norms. Although “queer” is now regarded as a neutral or even empowering term by many members of the LGBT community, queer also has been and continues to be used as a derogatory slur.
- **Lesbian** - An individual who identifies as female and experiences emotional and/or physical attraction towards other individuals who also identify as female.
- **Gender** - Refers to a collection of cultural identities, behaviors, and societal expectations categorizing individuals as either feminine or masculine, primarily determined by their physical and reproductive attributes. As gender is a construct shaped by society, it is feasible to challenge or adjust the prescribed gender assignment and cultivate an identity that aligns more authentically and equitably with one’s own sense of self.
- **Transgender** - An individual whose gender identity and/or presentation do not correspond to the gender they were assigned at birth.
- **Cisgender** - A person whose gender identity and expression align with the gender they were assigned at birth.
- **Non-binary** - A gender identity that exists outside the traditional male and female categories, indicating that an individual does not exclusively identify as either male or female. Non-binary individuals may identify as both genders, neither gender, or sometimes lean towards one or the other. Various terms, such as genderqueer, gender non-conforming, agender, and bigender, are used to describe gender identities that go beyond the binary.
- **Gay** - Describing an attraction to individuals of the same sex, “gay” is commonly used as a term synonymous with same-sex attraction. While it typically refers to men who are attracted to men, it is also embraced by many women who are attracted to the same sex (see “Lesbian”).
- **Pansexual** - A person who experiences emotional and/or physical attraction to individuals, without regard to their gender identity.
- **Bisexual** - A person who experiences emotional and/or physical attraction to individuals of both genders.
- **Asexual** - A person who does not feel sexual attraction but may experience other types of attraction.
- **Heteronormativity** - The assumption that heterosexual identity and relationships are the norm.
- **Homosexual** - A person who is emotionally and/or physically attracted to some members of the same gender. Many people prefer the terms “lesbian” or “gay,” instead as this is an outdated clinical term often used by anti-gay individuals to stigmatize gay or lesbian people.

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Josiah Robinson, J.D. (he/they) is a policy researcher, advocate, and strategist focused on civil rights and LGBTQ+ equity. After law school, Josiah worked at the intersection of law, policy, research, and writing to support queer students at religious colleges and universities. He now serves as the Managing Director of Prism Project, an initiative that aims to advance inclusivity for LGBTQ+ Tulsans through research and education.

3 Firsthand Views: Prepping for a Positive Workplace Experience

by Emily McVey

Preparing LGBTQ+ students and their allies for what to expect when they enter the workforce is a significant responsibility, and ag-related industries must do their parts. The KC Animal Health Corridor, alongside a variety of ag-related organizations, is doing its part to bring the industry together to support educators, promote inclusivity and develop the next generation of animal health leaders.

The KC Animal Health Corridor—both an organization and an area spanning from Manhattan, Kansas, north to St. Joseph, Missouri, and east to Columbia, Missouri—includes more than 300 animal health companies representing 56 percent of worldwide animal health, diagnostics and pet food sales. These companies employ about 20,000 people.

KC Animal Health Corridor: Working Collectively for an Inclusive Industry

The Corridor works to bolster students' understanding of the variety of employment opportunities in animal health and the diversity of people needed to fill them. By setting aside competitive goals, we are raising awareness that the industry does indeed include veterinarians, who are vital for keeping our pets healthy and feeding our growing population. But veterinary jobs are only the beginning. We need data scientists, technology developers, regulatory experts, entrepreneurs—and the list goes on.

We're also debunking the misconception that animal health is only for certain people. It is for everyone, and that includes LGBTQ+ students and their allies.

Expand Students' Career Views



[ExploreAHCareers.com](https://www.exploreahcareers.com).

At this website, students can learn about career opportunities and complete an interest profile, and you can access free resources like a career-path toolkit.

In addition to providing tools and resources for educators to share with students, the KC Animal Health Corridor is highlighting the impact members and allies of the LGBTQ+ community are having on the industry, helping students understand the diversity within the animal health workforce and how employers can be a resource. We hope the following insights help you prepare your students to enter an animal health workforce that is as diverse as they are.

JJ Jones (he/him/his): Cultivating Confident Next-Gen Professionals

Executive director for the National Institute for Animal Agriculture and former board member of the Cultivating Change Foundation, which acknowledges and values the presence of the LGBTQ+ community in the agricultural industry

I'm at a place in my career where I'm comfortable being my authentic self as a gay man. But it wasn't always that way. I used to think my passion for food agriculture meant I couldn't be myself.

Many of us who took agricultural classes viewed our teachers and FFA advisors as mentors. We went to them for career and educational advice, as well general life advice. I was fortunate that my ag educator was phenomenal. He always made me feel comfortable. I've taken that support a step further and now know I don't need to create separate spaces for who I am at work and who I am in my personal life. It should be one space.

This is why I helped create Cultivating Change. What's more, as a member of the KC Animal Health Corridor's DEI workforce committee, I help ag educators and students understand there's more to animal health than they may think. From the LGBTQ+ perspective, there are still hurdles and barriers to overcome, but many people are open and affirming to those with a different lifestyle or background.

One of the greatest lessons I've learned came from my time as a state FFA officer in a program called the International Leadership Seminar. Part of the program involved traveling overseas, a first for me. As I encountered new cultures, a program facilitator said,

“It’s not right and it’s not wrong. It’s just different.”

We can all adhere to that philosophy and help LGBTQ+ students and allies understand they don’t have to assimilate to a culture, ideals, or an organization, but we should respect them and seek to learn more. Our ultimate responsibility as mentors and employers in the animal health industry is ensuring students of all kinds know they can be themselves at work. In fact, the industry needs them to be.

Omar Farías (he, him, his), VMD: Choosing an Inclusive Employer

Director of Scientific and Academic Affairs at Hill’s Pet Nutrition and board member and president-elect at PrideVMC

When I was getting started in my career, I didn’t know what to look for in an employer that supported me as an out gay man. I’m thankful for that perspective now, and I hope LGBTQ+ students can benefit from what I’ve learned.

It’s easy to get caught up in the excitement of a new job and overlook the importance of finding an environment that supports the true you. Future professionals with diverse backgrounds must research potential employers before deciding to apply. I wish someone would have advised me to ask questions like these:

- How does the organization support diversity, equity, and inclusion?
- Do the company’s benefits cover my health needs if I’m an individual looking to transition?
- Are there employee resource groups I can join to celebrate my diversity?
- Does the organization promote from within?

I value that my current employer, Hill’s Pet Nutrition, headquartered in the Animal Health Corridor, has created an inclusive culture with a diverse leadership

(TOP) JJ Jones provides the keynote address for the 2017 Cultivating Change Foundation Summit. He highlighted strategies for ensuring agriculture and rural America become more welcoming and inclusive via a two-way conversation centered on better understanding and shared values.

(MIDDLE) Omar Farías celebrates after attending a PrideVMC event that raised funds for the Trevor project and ACLU’s Drag Defense fund.

(BOTTOM) Dr. Mia Cary with fellow University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine ‘99 classmate, longtime friend, and frequent co-presenter Dr. Kemba Marshall.

and a multitude of resource groups, including the Pride Group that I co-chair. My husband and I put our benefits program to use even before we were married.

LGBTQ+ students should expect employers to foster an environment where they’re comfortable being themselves. If you create such an environment, students are more likely to expect that same security in the workplace. Model correct behavior by doing something as simple as introducing yourself with your pronouns. You may become the first advocate for LGBTQ+ students and their allies.

Finally, make sure your students know that if they find themselves in an unsafe environment, they should leave it. That includes their jobs. Individual safety and well-being are always

more valuable than staying in an organization. Everyone deserves to be satisfied professionally and personally. And if you stand up for your students, they’ll be more likely to stand up for themselves.



**Mia Cary (she, her, hers),
DVM: Creating a Support
Network**

*CEO and Change Agent of
Cary Consulting and CEO of
PrideVMC, an organization
focused on creating a better
world for the LGBTQ+ veteri-
nary community*

As a cis-gender, heterosexual white woman I can be an ally to many. It starts with caring. My personal and professional purpose is activating others to thrive, and I know equity—ensuring everyone has what they need to be successful—is central to that purpose.

This is a story about the importance of allyship.

During the VMX veterinary conference in 2020, there was a young man who frequently walked by the PrideVMC exhibit hall booth. He slowed his pace but would not make eye contact or engage. One afternoon the

exhibit hall was quiet while most attendees were in sessions. I saw him walk by the booth again while looking at us out of the corner of his eye.

I exited the booth and walked alongside this gentleman, giving him an opportunity to engage away from the booth if he chose. And he did.

After we were out of sight of the booth, he turned to me with a radiant smile and said, “I am so happy PrideVMC exists. I had no idea. I walk by the booth every day because it gives me hope and courage. I am an associate veterinarian in a very conservative practice. I am also a gay man who has not yet come out at work. I love my job and am afraid; however I am almost ready to share with my team. When I do ... I’m going to become an out and proud member of PrideVMC. Thank you for existing.”

We hugged and promised to stay connected. How cool is that? That’s why I do what I do.

What one thing are you going to do to activate your allyship? Decide now and commit. Perhaps your next “one thing” is exploring a resource in this magazine by the end of the month. Or perhaps you will share one idea or resource with your students by the end of next week. Pick one thing and do it. Likely that will lead to one more thing in a positive loop thus propelling you on your journey to activating your allyship.

Standing with Pride



PrideVMC.com > Resources.

The PrideVMC website features a comprehensive set of resources ranging from information for parents to a Gender Identity Bill of Rights.

PrideSVMC

With chapters at over 30 colleges of veterinary medicine, the student-led arm is the future of PrideVMC.

**Growing the
Movement
Cultivating Change
Summit.**

An annual event for educators working in agriculture to network and get more engaged in valuing and supporting LGBTQ+ individuals in agriculture.

**Cultivating Change
Collegiate Affiliate
Program.**

University educators and students are invited to reach out to learn about partnering to promote academic and professional advancement by empowering lesbian, gay, bi, and transgender collegiate agriculturalists.



Emily McVey (she/her/hers) is Vice President of the KC Animal Health Corridor. She leads the Corridor’s workforce development initiatives, spearheading the DEI committee and partnering with student-focused organizations such as FFA, 4-H, Agriculture Futures of America (AFA) and Minorities in Agriculture Natural Resources and Related Sciences (MANRRS). She also assists with implementing the Corridor’s additional strategic priorities.

A Snapshot of Student Experiences in SBAE: A Women's Perspective

by Angus Donaldson & Dr. Amber Rice

Setting the Stage:

The National FFA Organization was founded in 1928, creating a structured system of school based agricultural education (SBAE) in the United States, but women were not allowed membership until 1969. Women are, and have historically been, heavily involved in the agriculture industry and agricultural education, but were often relegated to roles not directly involved in production agriculture (Enns & Martin, 2015). However, for 41 years women were not formally allowed participation within traditional SBAE environments, creating patterns of a gendered organization (Enns & Martin, 2015).

While we know that inequality and discrimination based on gender occurs in the agriculture industry, we felt it was important to describe its presence and effects in high school level SBAE programs. As a current agriculture teacher and teacher educator, we strive to create inclusive spaces for all students and that begins by elevating the voices of those living the experience. We interviewed women who recently graduated from SBAE programs in a southwestern state to learn more about their experiences using a critical feminist lens. A critical feminist lens allowed us to evaluate problematic situations faced by women and the institutions involved in creating those situations, in this case SBAE (Creswell, 2013).

Key Findings and Representative Quotes:

1. **Advisors Perpetuate the Culture of SBAE in Their Programs.** The participants'

It is our obligation as agricultural educators to create safe, inclusive spaces for ALL students we serve regardless of their backgrounds, experiences, and identity.

advisors (i.e., teachers) were the ones perpetuating the culture of SBAE in their programs. Sometimes this culture was positive in nature, but often it contained overt and covert gendered subtext. The advisor was the primary individual who shaped how the students interacted with one another and what the program as a whole valued.

"My advisor, he was just a very racist and sexist old man. ... he a lot of times would make comments that were, like, upsetting. I was like, okay, I don't really want to be involved in this. But then he would also get some of the students to go along with him." -Octavia

2. **Differing Expectations Exist Between Women and Men Students in SBAE.** Expectations set by their advisors, other students, and themselves were more stringent for women than their men peers in FFA, SAE, and in the classroom during non-production agriculture and non-mechanics content. Participants also shared that advisors and students alike held lower expectations for women students during production agriculture and mechanics content.

"They're [advisors] both kind of old school. You know, when it comes to like that kind of stuff. So, it was like only girls on floriculture, only guys on ag mechanics, you know." -Vera

"...I don't have to be the best, but I will not be the worst. I will not be the reason the team [ag mechanics] loses. I don't want them to have to be able to say it was me. I don't want them to say it was Beatriz as a person or Beatriz as a woman." -Beatriz

3. **Enforcement of FFA Official Dress Disproportionately Affects Women Students.** Participants reported that enforcement of FFA official dress affected them to some degree, ranging from slight annoyance to lasting physical and emotional pain. Even though the rules for official dress were changed in 2019 allowing every student to wear what they preferred regardless of gender identity, many advisors still enforce gendered official dress. Participants did not feel comfortable or welcome to wear anything other than a skirt.

"I remember my freshman

year I was pretty insecure about my body. So, when it came to the [official dress] aspect, I was really nervous about it, and I wanted to wear pants. And so, I did a bunch of research and found out they had recently made it so women could wear pants, but my advisor did not allow it.” -Penelope

4. **Gendered Interactions with Advisors, Peers, and the Community.** Gendered interactions occurred with advisors, peers, and community members through comments made to the participants, preferences toward men students, and condescending behavior towards women students. Gendered interactions occurred between participants, their advisors, peers, and community members, with advisors involved in the largest number of gendered interactions.

“[A community member] came over and he was like, ... What are you doing here? I explained it. And then he was like, Oh, are you his assistant? And I was like, Why would you just assume I’m his assistant. We’re partners? So that made me really sad.” -Ximena

5. **Women Not Seen in the Same Spaces as Men Within the Agriculture Industry.** Participants discussed a lack of women representation in the agriculture industry as a whole, but specifically a lack of women in production agriculture roles. The participants reported seeing women primarily in roles that kept them inside an office or at a desk rather than in the field. When the participants were able to have experiences with women involved in male dominated areas of agriculture it had a positive and

encouraging impact on their time in SBAE.

“My initial impressions were that ag was a white male industry. And it’s like there were farmers and farmers’ wives kind of idea... a lot of ways I see women specifically in [agriculture]... it was more in roles like Ginnie Wolff’s role, like that kind of advocacy, lobbying type of way versus necessarily the more production side.” -Maya

Recommendations for SBAE Teachers:

- Continually reevaluate personal biases and unexamined gender beliefs.
- Assign roles equitably based on students’ skills and interests.
- Educate all individuals involved in officer selection of gendered trends in officer roles to ensure that gender does not affect officer assignments.
- Carefully monitor interactions with students, student to student interactions, and community member to student interactions to avoid gender biases.
- Allow and welcome students to wear the components of official dress that make them most comfortable.
- Express that all students have the opportunity to succeed in the agriculture industry.
- Include images, videos, and examples of women when teaching production agriculture or mechanics.
- Carefully choose community members to be involved in your program to ensure that gendered aspects of SBAE and the agriculture industry are not reinforced.
- Make grassroots efforts in SBAE teacher communities and SBAE teacher associations to better educate SBAE teachers on these issues.

Closing Comments:

These findings are limited to the women who participated and their SBAE programs. It is also important to remember that all women are not homogeneous and instead have different experiences, come from diverse backgrounds, and hold different values. Although this research identified themes in the experiences of women SBAE students by looking at similarities, each participant’s experience in SBAE, and what they gained from that experience, was unique.

The participants in this study came from SBAE programs with a single teacher, multiple teachers, men teachers, women teachers, and both men and women teachers. The participants also came from programs located in urban, suburban, and rural areas. These differences between SBAE programs did not affect how the gender inequities within SBAE impacted the participants’ experiences. This lack of difference showed that the gendered nature of SBAE can persist no matter the gender identity of teachers, number of teachers, or location of the SBAE program.

Some participants acknowledged their privilege during interviews, identifying as straight and cisgendered women, because they felt women who identified differently may have less positive experiences in SBAE. It becomes crucial that we demonstrate true allyship both with the women we serve and other marginalized populations as the leaders of our programs.

Call to Action:

As SBAE teachers we hold most of the power at the local level and perpetuate the culture of SBAE. Therefore, we have the opportunity to make a significant impact on our students through creating inclusive spaces in the classroom, FFA, and SAE that are supportive, welcoming of all students, and do not reproduce gen-

dered aspects of SBAE culture. We must reevaluate our personal biases and unexamined beliefs to ensure we are creating a more equitable learning experience. It is our obligation as agricultural educators to create safe, inclusive spaces for ALL students we serve regardless of their backgrounds, experiences, and identity.

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Endarkened Allyship

by Dr. Tiffany Drape & Kendrick Spencer

Every convention, meeting, or event has the same series of events. I show up, I check in, take a seat, then look around the room and I see that I am the only one. Ever since my time in high school, I have been the only person of color at any agriculturally related event. My experience has been echoed time and time again by Hispanic, Black, Indigenous, and Asian (BIPOC) people who participated in agricultural activities as adolescents or in their formative years. Researchers have even reported on the isolation that BIPOC people experience when participating in events that are traditionally dominated by White people. Research has equally identified the racism, bigotry, micro-aggressions and other difficulties that BIPOC people face when participating in White dominated fields or events. These negative experiences inhibit the willingness of BIPOC people to participate in activities or clubs such as those related to agricultural education and the FFA. For example, I had two students in my former school district say “Ya know, we were forced to take this class. We didn’t want to do it because we thought you would be just another racist, homophobic teacher who only cared about FFA.”

Racist and homophobic were the characteristics students within that school district associated with agricultural science teachers. While we may never know the experiences those students

may have had with agricultural science teachers, we cannot deny that our students are affected by how we treat them, what we say, and our actions as they grow and develop their identities. As teachers our curricular, cultural, and linguistic choices provide students with nonverbal and subliminal queues as to if we are supportive allies or if we are not a safe place for them.

Truth be told, many high school agricultural science teachers are not taught how to be allies, or to be aware of how their actions and words affect their stu-

As teachers our curricular, cultural, and linguistic choices provide students with nonverbal and subliminal queues as to if we are supportive allies or if we are not a safe place for them.

dents. Yet, intrinsically, many agricultural science teachers believe they have a duty to serve as a role model, supporter, and ultimately, a mentor.

However students may have different needs based on their different identities. The influence of society, community, religion, and many other factors will affect how students learn, view their world, and ultimately impact their identity and self-worth. Our students who are Black, Indigenous, Hispanic, Asian, and who may hold migrant status experience a wide variety of systematic and societal oppressions that affect them differently than white students. These oppressions could be compounded if BIPOC students identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans or other sexual minorities

(LGBTQ+). Therefore, teachers and educators, more broadly defined, must learn how to properly serve as an ally to their students who carry multiple identities such as being BIPOC and LGBTQ+.

Endarkened Allyship, which is serving as an ally for BIPOC people who are LGBTQ+, takes on a different face than serving as an ally to White and/or heteronormative people because within Endarkened Allyship we have to confront the systematic oppression that BIPOC people experience daily such as over policing, stereotyping, fetishization, redlining, income inequality, and many other things. We also have to confront our own racialized views of the world and how we see people. Then we also have to confront the historical si-

lencing of BIPOC people that has occurred in the LGBTQ+ movement, and in society at large. So how can we do all of these things for our loved ones and students who are BIPOC and LGBTQ+?

First, we have to actively and fully LISTEN. Within listening, we have to believe people’s experiences are valid and actually happened. Listening involves us centering the person’s experiences, views, and feelings and supporting them through the sharing process. We have to refuse to “explain” or “defend” the actions of other people in the experience based on our own views (Olsen, 2022).

Secondly, accept criticism even when it’s uncomfortable. When BIPOC people share their

experiences and views with you, think of it as a time to grow as a person versus becoming offended or hurt. My students shared their viewpoints and experiences with me, and it opened my eyes to how they had never felt welcomed in the agricultural science program. We have to be willing to accept when we are wrong, and we have done something that may be harmful, even when it was not our intention.

Next, we have to be aware of our privileges and how we are viewed by society. For example, I am wholeheartedly aware of how intimidating I may look or sound as a large bodied Black man. I am also aware that as a man, society has certain assumptions. The same goes for people of any gender, race, body type, title or position. Privilege can come in a variety of intangible forms such as how a person was raised, exposure and participation in activities, the ability to participate in programs, and the ability to navigate systems such as post-secondary education, financial systems, or judicial systems. Being aware of our privileges helps us to focus on the experiences of our BIPOC LGBTQ+ loved ones and students (*10 Ways to Be an Ally to Black LGBT People*, 2020).

Educate yourself on the oppressions that BIPOC and LGBTQ+ people have experienced throughout history! Education is two fold. First, we must understand the history of oppression and systematic racism that has occurred in this country. We have to be open and receptive to learning how certain events and actions have adversely affected BIPOC people. A prime example is how African Americans and the New Farmers of America were reduced to two small paragraphs with the Official FFA Manual for many years. Compounding, how African Americans were erased from the discussion of agriculturalists and agriculture within the United

States. As educators, we have to become more aware of the historical contributions of Blacks and other BIPOC people to the agricultural industry, but we also have to become more versed in the history of BIPOC people throughout America. There are many resources that we can use such as *The Legacy of the New Farmers of America*, *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story*, *Seeing Race Again* and Betina Love's website <http://getfree-hiphopcivics.com/> provides visitors with a multitude of books, videos and resources to help not only LGBTQ+ individuals, but also BIPOC people.

Secondly, in terms of educating ourselves, we have to understand the proper language to use when addressing our BIPOC and LGBTQ+ loved ones and students. It's important to understand how hurtful language, cultural appropriation and stereotyping negatively affect people so that we do not create an uncomfortable or unwelcoming environment. Particularly, stereotyping, while it occurs with all cultures, is particularly harmful when referencing BIPOC and/or LGBTQ+ people due to the historical usage of stereotypes to illustrate BIPOC people as dangerous, less intelligent, or violent. LGBTQ+ people experience the same social shaming when different political and social groups describe them as sexual deviants, groomers, confused, or overly effeminate or masculine. We have to be mindful of how society and groups in power use language and stereotyping to incite harm and belittlement on people who identify as BIPOC and/or LGBTQ+ (*10 Ways to Be an Ally to Black LGBT People*, 2020; Olsen, 2022).

We must also push ourselves, and expand our social networks to include BIPOC and LGBTQ+ people. Harvard Law Review (Hewlett & Ihezue, 2022) reported that 91% of white managers do not have any BIPOC people in

their immediate social circles. Our social networks work as an extension of ourselves and our ability to learn, exchange ideas, and progress through the professional and social world.

Lastly, we have to amplify the voices of our BIPOC LGBTQ+ loved ones and students in areas where their voices are traditionally diminished. This means we have to examine how certain interactions, and structures work to diminish or extinguish the voices of BIPOC LGBTQ+ people. If we do not stand-up and use our positions of privilege to create a way for our BIPOC LGBTQ+ loved ones to be seen and heard then we are not truly allies.

Hearing my students say that agriculture and the agricultural program is racist and homophobic struck a deep chord within me. Allyship is about looking beyond ourselves in order to see, hear, and support the people who experience life in different ways. Allyship is choosing to care and be supportive to the people around us. We are an evolving industry that should be as welcoming to all people as Fortune 500 companies. Our industry is in a race for talent and we should be open to everyone who holds an interest in agriculture, and as teachers we should welcome, embrace, guide, and support all of our students. Like doctors who have an oath to live by, our mission as educators should stand true regardless of the identities of our students. As educators our BIPOC and LGBTQ+ students need us to serve as allies and to create spaces that are safe and welcoming.

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Tiffany is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education. Tiffany investigates issues of equity and access in agriculture and the life sciences. Her goal is to provide equitable, accessible agriculture education to ALL. Tiffany is an evaluator and teaches multiple research methods courses.



Kendrick is a doctoral student in the Department of Agricultural, Leadership and Community Education at Virginia Tech. Kendrick served as an agricultural science teacher in the suburbs of Dallas and focused on creating a safe, caring, and supportive environment for all students. Kendrick investigates how Culturally Relevant and Critical Pedagogies help to increase student involvement and creates an equitable and accessible classroom environment.

2SLGBTQ+ and Agricultural Programs: A Relationship Between Place, Space, and Community

by Dr. Gail J. Woodside

The growing consciousness of inclusivity and equity within agricultural studies is expanding to welcome diversity and equality for all students, including under-represented communities. Indigenous and 2SLGBTQ+ (acronym acknowledging 2S or Two Spirit communities) are part of this growing realization (Joy et al., 2023). It is important to understand that Indigenous and Two Spirit communities have unique relationships within intimate place and space. Long lived place-based rights with land and land stewardship are directly connected to these communities, be it agricultural or subsistence practices. These experienced stewardship practices take place over many millennia with connection to cultural and spiritual foundations, and cannot be separated from one another. These relationships exist as subsistence food gathered in seasonal rounds—tended in cultural

landscapes or regions—and may also include planting of gardens.

Two Spirit and Agriculture

Colonialism interrupted and claimed Indigenous livelihoods in a systematic way including but not limited to: traditional ways of land stewardship, repatriation of landscapes, language, gender roles, wealth, and ways of life. As teachers and instructors of agricultural programs prepare curriculum, the awareness, acceptance and openness of content must include allyship and Tribal inclusion to bring forward long lived practices within Indigenous and Two Spirit communities. Preparation must be in place to understand the long and arduous interruption due to colonial influence and applied genocide. An understanding that agricultural practices are connected to cultural landscapes is pertinent and they cannot be removed from them. It is vital that curriculum must give vision with an understanding that

LGBTQ+ Reflections on Food Through Art, Margaret Robinson speaks to “Double Visioning or a Two-Spirit Reflection” on food by looking at the unique connection to foods and place-based space and rights of Indigeneity. Margaret states, “Two-Spirit is a term that some Indigenous people use to describe our gender or sexual difference...connect(ing) us to a history of similar people who held valued roles in our nations” (Joy et al., p. 9, 2023). It is important to understand at the same time that different names or labels are applied throughout Indian Country in ancestral language and terminology to identify people who are a part of double visioning and their contributions. In other words, the term Two Spirit is not an all-encompassing term and fails to capture the unique, local knowledge of each community throughout Indian Country.

first foods are directly connected to cultural landscapes and ancestral people.

In *Queering Nutrition and Dietetics*:

Two Spirit Agriculturalism is utilized by some Indigenous people to describe gender analysis and not a sexual orientation. However, Two Spirit identity can also connect us to the history of similar people who held valued roles in our Tribal Nations. Two Spirit theory is particularly useful for examining food issues because it combines identity as “coming into” a community rather than coming out of it

Even with the modern adoption of the term “Two Spirit”, not all cultures perceive Two Spirit people the same way. Many indigenous communities recognize at least four genders (feminine female, masculine female, feminine male, and masculine male). Image courtesy of Native Justice Coalition’s Two Spirit Project.



(Darrow, 2014; Joy et al., 2023). Two Spirit theory also determines the ancestral connectivity to identity on landscape and the possible role that Two Spirit identity is situated and determined. Not all Tribal Nations identify Two Spirit individuals with agriculture. Some identify Two Spirit individuals as more closely linked to healing, spiritual knowledge, and/or direct links to the Creator or the Holy Energy that brought everything into existence. Thus, in some traditional belief systems the Creator is also considered multi-gendered, therefore Two Spirit people have a close connectivity with the holy energy that willed everything into existence.

My Participation in Non-traditional Roles

As an instructor in Natural Resource and subsistence focus, I find that my pronouns lead me to take initiative in how subsistence and science play roles within lived experience becoming a defender of the land and its life forms. This also includes the rethinking of worn-out colonial ideologies of food and its relationship and looking at ancestral ties as rightful caretakers. I feel it is my duty to protect community ways of knowing, helping to preserve knowledge and stewardship in the field and lending a world view that changes focus on protection of foods and food sovereignty while working directly with Tribal Nations. These protections include binding contracts with Tribal Nations that include memorandum of understanding (MOU), memorandum of agreement (MOA), and

other agreements to support and protect food sovereignty.

A Call to Action and Self Determination

We must look at the history of cultural genocide of Indigenous people and their personhoods including colonial extremism still in place today, that affects Indigenous folx and many other under-represented people. The affects and issues of colonialism impacting Indigenous people are tied to climate and other matters leading to food deserts where communities are relentlessly connected to commodity food systems of malnutrition. Today with Self Determination many are able to reconnect with ancestral food systems. These systems are still under threat of colonial management and allowance, such as oil pipelines, drilling, water rights, and loss of access to ceded and usual and accustomed lands under treaty.

How can we as agricultural teachers, stewards of the space of our classrooms, and personhood of our students, be allies for the self-determination of our Indigenous and Two Spirit students, families and communities?

1. Reaching out for resources like Food Sovereignty Programs (e.g. USDA Indigenous Food Sovereignty Program, NATIFS: North American Traditional Indigenous Food Systems), Indigenous Tribal Agriculture Council (ITAC), and academic offices dedicated to Indigenous Knowledge.

2. Consulting with/and working with Tribal Nations, inviting Indigenous speakers and compensating them for their time.
3. Agricultural Extension programs (e.g. FRTEP: Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Programs) and public health in consultation with Tribal Nations.
4. As instructors it is not appropriate to expect Indigenous students to be knowledgeable of their culture and/or single them out to share their ancestral ways of knowing for any reason.

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Gail J. Woodside, PhD (she/hers/theirs) has a long history assisting school districts in Federal Indian education programs and works very closely with Indigenous communities. She is dedicated to supporting and leveraging underrepresented people with a long history of teaching and leadership at the University level. Gail teaches Difference, Power, and Discrimination classes introducing ways to break down the bonds of Settler Colonial Ideologies in science. Her classes shape worldview in Indigenous Natural Resource Management. She is a graduate of the Difference, Power, and Discrimination Leadership Academy at Oregon State University.

Queerness and Allyship in the Classroom: A Conversation on How Current Agricultural Education Teachers Support Queer Students

by *Ethan Dado*

Our goal as educators is to prepare our students for their futures. Part of this development process is helping students process their identities while allowing them to feel supported by the community around them. True allyship includes supporting students, believing their identities, and learning from and through their lived experiences. Through a question and answer format, this article encourages us to self-reflect on our own practices of allyship through the perspectives and insights of six different educators.

What's your name, where do you teach, and how do you identify yourself in relation to LGBTQ+ identities?



Harley Braun (she/her)
Highland Park, St. Paul, MN
Ally



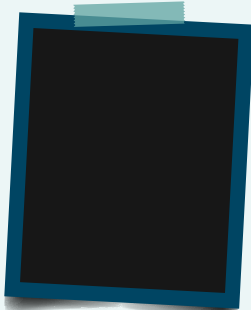
Eric Moser (he/him)
Muskegon Area Career Tech
Center, Muskegon, MI
Gay Male



Dr. Grant Ermis (he/him)
Temple Independent School
District, Temple, TX
Gay Male



Riley Hintzsche (he/him)
Streator Township High
School, Streator IL
Gay Male



Laura Wyatt (she/her)
AFSA High School, Vadnais
Heights, MN
Ally



Ethan Dado (he/him)
Eden Prairie Schools, Eden
Prairie, MN
Gay Male

What are some ways you support LGBTQ+ identities in your classroom?

Harley: “I have posters and signs in my room that affirm LGBTQ+ identities, including the ‘Nature is Queer’ set by Theo Bamberger from Gender Inclusive Biology. I use students’ correct names and pronouns. I remove binary language, especially when discussing caregivers. I teach about the difference between sex and gender in units on plant or animal reproduction.”

Laura: “Some ways I show students my class is a safe space include having a mini pride flag on my desk, a ‘safe space’ sticker on my door, and actively interrupting students that make homo/trans-phobic comments asking, ‘what did you mean by that?’ I also correct students to use their peers’ correct pronouns, and share about my own personal life to show that I’m an ally.”

Eric: “I work to incorporate several strategies throughout my teaching practices to model inclusivity, safety, and acceptance. Some of these strategies include gender-neutral language (avoiding the use of phrases like ‘hey guys’); honoring students’ chosen names and pronouns; and finding opportunities to visibly acknowledge and include queer individuals in my curriculum and examples.”

Ethan: “Language is powerful and I am careful to always use language to support all students. I interrupt any dangerous language (slurs, bias, hateful comments) students use and work to teach students the impact their language has on others and themselves.”

What are some ways you support LGBTQ+ identities in your FFA chapter or Program of Activities?

Harley: “I remove the stereotyped binary with official dress - pants/skirts and scarves/ties. We also use gender neutral language

in our opening/closing ceremonies - ‘President Last name’ over Mr/Madam, which is now recognized as approved language by National FFA. When students use a different name at school than they use at home, I will create two copies of certificates or awards, one with their preferred name and one with the name they use at home.”

Riley: “We use many different activities including: 1, 2, 3: Thank With Me. In this activity students write 1, 2, or 3 thank yous to people that have supported them in their journey or life. It’s important to our program that we show our students that although different from one another, it is important to show gratitude.”

What are some challenges of being LGBTQ+ or an ally in agricultural education?

Grant: “The challenges definitely surround how much of myself I put in front of my colleagues who have yet to either self-identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ community or as an ally. I am considerate that others’ views/beliefs about my identities may not align with my own, and while I unabashedly discuss my husband and aspects of my personal life that help me connect to my teachers and peers, I straddle the line of comfort for those in my periphery.”

Laura: “A lot of people in our field don’t understand the value of welcoming folks in the LGBTQ+ community into our own AgEd community, and to be frank, they don’t care to learn. People are scared of what they don’t know, and as a result many are intimidated by different parts of “team AgEd” making efforts to be a more welcoming and inclusive space. It can feel like an uphill battle to make students feel safe, welcomed, and supported in our spaces when there are so many people actively pushing back.”

Eric: “For me, being in agricultural education over the years

has been extremely isolating at times, especially as the only out queer teacher in my school and one of the only in my state’s agricultural education association. This challenge has also been heightened throughout the years hearing students, teachers, community members, and even higher education faculty in SBAE say to me how they feel queer people have no place in agricultural education.”

Riley: “When my career began in 2014, I had a strong feeling that my colleagues didn’t believe I could be successful at my job as a gay male in ag education. As I have advanced in my career, those feelings have eroded. However, it did make me wonder how many members of the LGBTQ+ community have similar thoughts or feelings when they first start teaching ag education? Things have improved, but at one time, finding other gay ag teachers to relate too was a challenge. It made things difficult to understand myself, my purpose in the profession of ag education, and if the space was inclusive. Add that to finding someone that understands the life of an ag teacher, and the selection gets even more slim.”

What are some joys of being LGBTQ+ or an ally in agricultural education?

Harley: “One joy of being an ally in agricultural education is seeing the joy and relief in students when their identities are affirmed through small acts like trading in their scarf for a tie or receiving an award with their chosen name.”

Grant: “I find joy when I am unapologetically myself, and people in my educational environment find me approachable when they have questions about some of their unfamiliarity with the LGBTQ+ community.”

Ethan: “My biggest joy is when students – that have no

connection with queer identities and many teachers would label as “mean” or “hateful” – begin asking questions about my identity and experiences as a gay male. Some of my most meaningful student interactions have come through honest conversations around my sexuality and experiences as a gay teacher.”

How does LGBTQ+ awareness and knowledge benefit our students, communities and agriculture?

Grant: “Awareness and knowledge about the LGBTQ+ community helps give people perspective as experience when they choose the words they use, have difficult conversations, and make decisions that may impact the LGBTQ+ community. I have seen this play out when my teachers have dealt with contentious situations and are able to debrief with me about that experience. In my experience, when people experience emotional situations with the LGBTQ+ community and our allies, and they do not have a dispassionate outlet to rationalize that experience, they live in the emotion that surrounded their experience.”

Laura: “I see making students global citizens as a vital role in my work as an educator. As global citizens, students will be working with folks of different identities and walks of life, including folks that identify as a part of the LGBTQ+ community. Ensuring that students have awareness, knowledge, and respect for the LGBTQ+ folks will help them to be

successful in their future endeavors, whatever those might be.”

Eric: “Increasing awareness about the struggles of queer individuals and their various intersections of identities can be a huge benefit for our students, communities, and the entire agriculture, food, and natural resources industry. As we work to identify and challenge some of the oppressive structures in agriculture, we can work to create safer environments for queer and trans individuals – especially in rural settings and in schools.”



Ethan Dado (he/him) is currently the Pathways and CTE Coordinator for Eden Prairie Schools in Minnesota and previously served as the AFNR instructor in Mankato, MN. Ethan and his husband enjoy traveling, Minnesota Gopher sports, and loving their dog, Bruce.

Developing Student Allies

by Logan Layne & Dr. Donna Westfall-Rudd

“So I have a lot of involvement [with FFA]. I always go to state convention, always involved in CDEs, and I think that shaped me as a person. But, [LGBTQ+] issues were never a topic that was discussed. Because we don’t exist where I come from, so why talk about something that doesn’t exist? So [being LGBTQ+] wasn’t a conversation I would have had, but I feel like if I had had it in FFA, I think it would have been beneficial to me as a person and not just me as someone who identifies, but also the people who don’t identify, who don’t know anything about it.”
— Atticus (Elliott-Engel et al., 2019)

As a faculty member at Virginia Tech, Dr. Donna Westfall-Rudd was eager to serve as an advisor to a newly formed student organization, Students for Cultivating Change, in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences in 2017. Hearing these words from one of her undergraduates drove home the critical need for a student organization that could serve as a community and a space for professional development. The new organization is structured to engage both members of the LGBTQ+ community as well as student allies. Over time, it is evident that the faculty and student allies are a critical component of the organization’s success. So, how does a teacher mentor their student organization members to support the development of allies and advocates? This question is the focus of this article. As allies, we want to help others work towards their goals to support members of all identities in agricultural education.

How do we do the work?

To begin the work, people must know that the actual title of

“ally” is not something an individual can declare about themselves. Deep introspection into one’s identity is a second step educators should undertake to become influential allies. An ally is a term given to people because of their activism and the personal learning they take to benefit other identities. Allies are “members of dominant social groups working to end the system of oppression that gives them greater privilege and power based on their social group membership” (Broido, 2000, p. 3). These social groups are from a range of different identities. While most allies focus on uplifting LGBTQ+ identities, allies support all marginalized groups by understanding where others fit into the societal structure.

As an educator, understanding how your privileges or experiences of marginalization are present in the relationship between you and your students can be the catalyst as you build positive relationships in students’ lives. While teacher and student relationships are vital, just as important are peer-to-peer relationships, specifically when it comes

to a student’s sense of belonging (Allen & Kern, 2017). As educators, there is a professional standard of being non-discriminatory to students by providing them with equal access and opportunity. We must embody that spirit because our influence on potential student allies starts with how we showcase our allyship. When our student leaders have an advisor who is an ally, they provide a safe space for all students to engage. Limiting student allies limits the opportunity to engage students beyond the classroom in our organization.

At the Heart of Allyship are Student Identities

While acknowledging your identities is primary, it is equally important to understand how they intersect with your students’ identities. There is never an expectation that allies know everything about their students’ identities. Instead, the assumption is that teacher allies try to learn how they operate in the classroom setting. Students’ expression of their identities has increased over the past few years, with nearly 9.5% of 13-17 year old students in the United

States now identifying as LGBTQ+ (Levesque, 2023). While LGBTQ+ students are becoming more open with their identity, educators must remember other aspects of identity, including socio-economic status, race, ability, and religion, which all need allies. Students from any location may share a few similar identities. However, we should never assume they share the same life experiences when entering the classroom.

How will students know they have equal access and opportunity in a local agricultural education program?

When issues arise at school, students will look to the teachers they feel the safest and often most connected with to assist in understanding the dilemma. Potential scenarios emphasize the importance of allyship and the opportunity to create safe spaces for all students. Being a classroom or school ally can be challenging, but learning from others in our community is a great place to start. Each member of this team of authors has experience working in agricultural education classrooms in different regions of the country. We appreciate the opportunity to share how we have worked to be advocates for intersectional student identities and have been identified by others as allies. We have worked differently to develop educational spaces that allow students to see and know they have access and opportunities and are welcome to be their authentic selves in our programs.

Our examples of doing the work of Allyship

Logan - A large class, sometimes over 35 students, can be overwhelming. To be supportive educators and have a positive impact, we must go beyond relying on information from colleagues or records in the school's student

management system (like PowerSchool or Infinite Campus).

As new teachers, it's easy to get caught up in the gossip about which students will be easy to teach and which will be challenging. Instead, let students create their own impressions when they enter your classroom. Recognize that students behave differently in different classroom settings, and their comfort levels vary with other teachers.

While we need to get to know each student personally, it's equally crucial for students to know each other. Drawing from my experience as a former high school agriculture teacher, fostering a social learning environment helped students better understand their peers. To learn more about your students, actively engage with them and create op-

As allies, we want to help others work towards their goals to support members of all identities in agricultural education.

portunities for them to share their voices, ideas, or stories. When designing your lessons, incorporate ways for students to collaborate and build relationships. Our students can become allies when we allow them to connect with their peers more deeply.

Donna - When I was teaching in rural, upstate New York, my efforts to help students feel safe and valued in my classroom began before they enrolled in my high school classes. I had the good fortune of teaching all eighth-grade students in our school district. Near the end of each semester of their class with me, I would briefly talk with students individually about my hope to see them in one of the high school classes before they graduated. For the students I knew

would have tight schedules, I suggested they return to agriculture when they have little more time in their senior year. I followed up with students very casually each fall by stopping by the lunch periods when I could to check with them and encourage them to enroll in an agricultural education course. This process sounds like the typical recruiting efforts, and it should. My efforts were inclusive because I always looked for the folks who needed to feel more included or on the sidelines. Typically, these folks had people in marginalized identity groups. As I spent time in the cafeteria, I would ask myself, who's here but not in my classroom? Why aren't they coming to the agriculture classroom? Once students were in my classes, I initiated similar practices to those my colleagues mentioned earlier, where my priority was building positive relationships with all students.

Allyship is a self-driven process that allows students in your classroom to provide a feeling of belonging. Students become visible to others through engagement, which comes from the opportunities teachers offer their students to speak to each person in the class. The teacher's mindset is explicit through their actions and the classroom culture they create. Intolerance of behavior is vital to creating a classroom culture where every student feels secure. When we do not allow students to be exclusive or discriminate, and we defend every student identity present in our classroom, that is how we accomplish allyship. This allyship is passed on through our influence to the students in our youth organizations. Our student leaders are influenced by their advisors more than anyone else. When our leadership does not have space for allyship, neither will our students' leader-

ship capabilities. Developing allyship is an arduous process that requires personal growth for the impact of many others. When you need help, always contact the authors and other individuals in the agricultural education community regarding how we can show up as allies. We are excited to grow and increase the number of teachers to become allies. It is exciting to have people reading this to encourage others to continue learning more. We challenge you to keep learning and showing up for your students.

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Envisioning Safe and Equitable Agricultural Education Programming Through the Lens of Genders and Sexualities Alliances

by Eric M. Moser (he/him/his)

“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.”
— Desmond Tutu

As I reflect upon and conceptualize what allyship in agriculture and agricultural education can look like, I think about the previous quote from Desmond Tutu. True allyship requires intentional actions of support from those outside of the queer community. However, in the context of secondary schools, allyship is lacking. As a whole, we are currently failing to provide safe, equitable, and inclusive schools for queer and trans youth.

Queer and trans students across the United States experience hostile school climates due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity (Kosciw et al., 2022). Of the 22,300 students surveyed in this study from Kosciw et al. (2022), 81.8% felt unsafe at school, 97% heard anti-LGBTQ+ remarks being made in school, and 78.8% reported avoiding school functions/extracurricular activities. The following graphic from GLSEN shares more of the findings from the 2021 GLSEN National School Climate Survey.

Teachers and administrators were often reported to contribute to the hostile school climates by making homophobic and

transphobic remarks themselves. These contributions of school staff to hostile school climates led 61.5% of queer students to not report instances of harassment and/or assault to the school because they believed there would be no intervention. In fact, when students did report victimization, harassment, or assault because of their queer identity, 60.3% of the students received no intervention or were told to ignore the harassment/assault (Kosciw et al., 2022).

Notably, experiences of queer-identifying teachers and administrators go under-reported

Key findings from the 2021 GLSEN National School Climate Survey.

Image from the GLSEN The 2021 National School Climate Survey.

or wholly unreported. This leaves out an important element of how school climate can impact staff's experiences of wellbeing and sense of belonging as well. We should ask ourselves: what is the climate of my school?

However, schools across the United States have provided safe and affirming environments for queer and trans youth through ensuring access to a Genders and



Sexualities Alliance (GSA) in their school. GSAs are one of the most powerful tools for educators to mitigate homophobic and transphobic school cultures (Kosciw et al., 2013, 2022; Steck & Perry, 2016) and are an opportunity for school staff to engage in allyship.

History & Purpose of GSAs

Originally known as Gay-Straight Alliances, GSAs originated in the late 1980s in Massachusetts (Concord Academy, 2018). This original GSA formed between an openly gay teacher and a straight student who wanted to improve the homophobic school culture. Since their inception, GSAs have sought to unite queer, trans, and allied youth in schools to build community and address issues of inequality impacting queer students (GSA Network, 2023).

GSAs serve numerous purposes in schools as they allow for queer and allied students to:

1. Engage in safe spaces in school.
2. Identify supportive peers and educators.
3. Perform agency and activism to meet the needs of their community (GSA Network, 2023).

The presence of a GSA alone signals support of queer students from the teachers and administration and has increased overall sense of school-belonging (Kosciw et al., 2022; Swanson & Gettinger, 2016).

GSA Partnership Opportunities with FFA and 4-H

Partnerships between GSAs and agricultural youth organizations can provide unique opportunities to enact change in our communities and increase civic engagement of our students. While it may seem that our organizations in agricultural education are vastly different from GSAs, I argue that they are extremely similar. At the core of

our youth organizations in agriculture (FFA, 4-H, MANRRS, etc.) we value training youth leaders for life after school, supporting youth organizing, and building our respective communities. These are common values shared by many GSAs as well.

In my research with GSA and FFA chapters, students in both organizations highlighted similar challenges from different perspectives. It was evident there was a lack of acceptance in the school for certain groups due to the stereotypes and cliques in the school. A joint project between the two organizations in a safe environment would have been able to combat the negative perceptions of each group and address the needs of students in both programs.

Those of us who work primarily with school-based programs and the FFA should look to model the allyship displayed from 4-H clubs. Nationally, 4-H has worked to increase their allyship of the queer community in various states. In my home state of Michigan, 4-H has created their own version of GSAs through “Michigan 4-H Helping with Rainbow Hands” clubs to create safe and inclusive spaces for queer youth.

I challenge you, the reader, to consciously reflect on the true purpose of your organization and your role as a chapter/club leader.

- When our students pledge to “develop those qualities of leadership which an FFA member should possess” – are we also considering how to lead and work in diverse groups (in this context, queer and trans individuals)?
- When our students pledge our hands to larger service – does that service include the needs of queer students in our programs, schools, and communities?
- Are we “Living to Serve” **all** of the membership and community?

Resources for Educators

For those who are interested in actionable allyship of queer and trans individuals in our programs, schools, and communities, I have provided some key resources below to look to for more information:

– **GSA Network:** <https://gsanetwork.org/>

- Provides resources for starting, developing, and connecting GSAs across the country.



– **GLSEN:** <https://www.glsen.org/support-student-gsas>

- Provides resources, research, and lesson plans for GSAs and inclusion of queer and trans students in schools.



– **The Trevor Project:** <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/>

- Educator resource guides to create safer schools and communities for queer and trans youth to mitigate suicide rates.

Concluding Thoughts

Now, more than ever, queer and trans students need educators who will work to counter hostile school climates for queer and trans youth. Thinking back to the opening quote from Desmond Tutu, I argue that being an ally is not necessarily a title you choose for yourself. Being an ally is something you earn through the actions you take to protect, affirm, support, and uplift the unique needs of queer and trans individuals in our schools: students, teachers, administrators, and support staff alike.

Creating safer and more equitable spaces in agricultural education is possible. However, true change (and eventual liberation) for queer and trans individuals will require the work of more than just this issue of our magazine; more than just the courageous authors of this issue; and more than the queer and trans individuals in agricultural education. True change will require the willingness of allies across the nation to create safer and more equitable spaces in agricultural education.

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Cultivating Inclusion: Empowering LGBTQ+ Youth in the Future of Agriculture

by Dane Rivas-Koehl, M.S. & Dr. Courtney Cuthbertson

When people talk about sustainability in agriculture, conversations tend towards practices and conditions necessary for agriculture to support humanity well into the future. Often left out are conversations about *how* to make agriculture sustainable for the people who do and want to engage in agricultural work, both in terms of inclusivity of the industry and the wellbeing of people who work in it. This is crucial given that depression, anxiety, and suicide rates are higher among people in agriculture than the broader population (Bjornestad et al., 2021; Hagen et al., 2019; Reed & Claunch, 2020), and ideas of who is and can be in agriculture often limit inclusion to white, cisgender, heterosexual men and women who come from “traditional” farming families, often excluding LGBTQ+ people from such conversations, as well as from research about farm stress and agricultural education (Leslie, 2017; Leslie et al., 2019; Murray et al., 2020). While there are no estimates of how many LGBTQ+ people work in agriculture today, the presence of LGBTQ+ agriculturalists is not new.

New Findings on LGBTQ+ Mental Health in Ag

To center the experiences of LGBTQ+ people in agriculture, we conducted surveys and interviews with LGBTQ+ agriculturalists across the U.S. Our survey of nearly 150 LGBTQ+ agriculturalists from 36 states found participants had diverse experiences of working in agri-

“Agricultural educators have an opportunity to help develop the next generation of agriculturalists, by setting expectations that agriculture is for everyone and modeling inclusive and equitable practices”

culture, relationships with family, and connections to mental health. The majority indicated that their gender and/or sexual identities were a gift or that they were thankful or proud of their identities. However, on average, participants indicated that while their LGBTQ+ identities might be known by others, they were rarely discussed. Being out, meaning other people knowing that you are LGBTQ+, is largely influenced by how safe LGBTQ+ people perceive an environment to be.

Whereas most participants faced depression and anxiety symptoms, we found that being out in agriculture to one's colleagues or supervisors was associated with less depression and anxiety symptoms. Additionally, we found that being out in work settings was associated with less farming-related stress. In 17 interviews we conducted, it was common to hear that agricultural work was a positive influence in participants' lives that helped to foster their own mental wellbeing. Participants shared that working in agriculture helped them feel they were making contributions to support-

ing their local communities and challenging anti-LGBTQ+ stigma. Additionally, participants shared that many organizations typically supportive of farmers did not feel accessible to them because of potential hostility towards their LGBTQ+ identities.

Our findings are reflected in the broader research on LGBTQ+ mental health that points to interpersonal interactions and hostile environments as contributors to the additional stresses LGBTQ+ people face that impact their mental wellbeing (Rivas-Koehl et al., 2023). Consider the current moment we are in - we are writing in June 2023, a Pride month that has seen fraught celebrations, a commitment from some anti-LGBTQ+ people to “make Pride toxic,” and ending with the Supreme Court ruling that discrimination against LGBTQ+ people is legal. Every year since 2018 the record number of anti-LGBTQ+ bills proposed has risen, with this year being over 500 (Choi, 2023; Movement Advancement Project, 2023). Legislation that is proposed, even if it does not pass, has a documented negative impact on LGBTQ+ mental

health. For example, the Crisis Text Line, a text-based mental health support and crisis intervention resource, experienced increased contacts in the weeks following the introduction of anti-LGBTQ+ legislative proposals (Parris et al., 2021). Additionally, communities closer to home matter as well; when transgender youth and young adults perceive that people in their social networks support anti-transgender proposed legislation they experienced increased depressive symptoms, physical health problems, and fear of being out (Dhanani & Totton, 2023).

What Can Agricultural Educators Do?

Agricultural educators have an opportunity to help develop the next generation of agriculturalists, by setting expectations that agriculture is for everyone and modeling inclusive and equitable practices. The ag classroom, FFA, and 4-H are places for youth to develop valuable leadership, teamwork, and communication skills and it is important to realize that LGBTQ+ youth are present in these spaces. To support the next generation, LGBTQ+ youth must be included in the vision for the future of agriculture. One in four high school students are LGBTQ+ (Mpofu et al., 2023), and about 300,000 youth ages 13-17 (1.4%) are transgender (Herman et al., 2022; Mpofu et al., 2023). Reflexively, gay and bisexual men who were in 4-H in their youth reported feeling shamed, excluded, and marginalized by peers and adult leaders during 4-H activities (Howard et al., 2021). I (Dane) can also attest to this as a gay man who grew up in rural West Texas, was very active in my school's FFA chapter and county's 4-H club and earned a bachelor's degree in Agricultural Education and Communications from Texas Tech University. I can vividly recall the experience of being an LGBTQ+ person in these ag spaces - it was not easy. By leading and creating

educational spaces, agricultural educators can create and foster inclusion and thriving for LGBTQ+ youth. From larger societal policies, to the workplace, at home, and in school, we can see that each of these contexts have an opportunity to empower and support LGBTQ+ people.

Making the Best Better

You may be wondering what you can do to structure inclusive, affirming, and positive environments for LGBTQ+ youth to thrive. You might start by reflecting on a few questions:

1. **How familiar are you with LGBTQ+ terminology?**

Resources exist to help you be more familiar with the LGBTQ+ community. Some organizations, communities, and universities offer LGBTQ+ cultural competency trainings to learn terminology and develop skills to use correct pronouns, use gender-inclusive language, and interrupt bias or discrimination.

2. **What kind of language do you use when you talk with and about people?**

Being intentional in adapting language means addressing assumptions you might have about gender and sexuality. Two common assumptions are heteronormativity, the assumption that everyone you meet is heterosexual (romantically attracted to someone of a different gender), and cisnormativity, the assumption that everyone you meet identifies with the sex they were assigned at birth and that their current

Figure 1. Displaying signs such as this one can help communicate the space is safe for all students.

gender expression correlates with their gender identity (e.g., masculine appearance corresponds with someone identifying as a man). These assumptions can lead to misgendering (using incorrect pronouns or assigning a gender identity to a person that is not correct) or making invisible any non-heterosexual identity (for example, by asking a teenage boy if he has a girlfriend). While humor may be a good way to connect, jokes about someone's masculinity or femininity (like a boy being "too girly") are rooted in cis- and heteronormativity and have significant impacts on the mental health outcomes and feelings of safety and inclusion for LGBTQ+ youth (Munro et al., 2019).

3. **How often do you seek information from LGBTQ+ people to better understand LGBTQ+ experiences?**

4. **If you are LGBTQ+ yourself, what supports did you benefit from, or do you wish you had as a young person?**

Being an LGBTQ+ ally is a commitment to ongoing learning, advocating, and challenge biases you see or hear about the LGBTQ+ community. Allyship also involves intentional and active listening for understanding and empathy building.



FOUR LANGUAGE TIPS TO AVOID MICROAGGRESSIONS

1.

USE

Students, Y'all, 4-Hers, FFAers

INSTEAD OF

"Boys and girls"

2.

USE

Numbers, birthdays, or other ways to make groups

INSTEAD OF

Separating by gender

3.

USE

Partner

INSTEAD OF

Boyfriend or girlfriend

4.

USE

Diverse examples in questions or teaching

INSTEAD OF

Only heterosexual or gendered ones

By putting up an LGBTQ+ flag in your office or classroom or adding an inclusion statement to your syllabus, you are telling LGBTQ+ youth that you are a safe person for them and that you will actively work to make your space an affirming and inclusive place for them. Visible displays of LGBTQ+ allyship can help signal affirming spaces by means of signs (figure 1), flags, and other gestures such as adding your pronouns to your email signature (e.g., Dane (he/him)). If you are already aware that some youth you work with are LGBTQ+, you can check in with them to see what would help them to feel supported. Everyone has to start somewhere, and it is important for each of us to continue to grow in our understanding and advocacy.

The Future of Agriculture

We are reminded of the first line of the FFA Creed, "I believe in the future of agriculture, with a faith born not of words but of deeds." Agricultural educators shape the future of agriculture through their long-lasting impacts on youth and can be

important figures for modeling positive, inclusive, affirming behavior for all. In this article we have discussed the experiences of LGBTQ+ people in agriculture and what you can do to ensure that LGBTQ+ folks have a welcoming and affirming place alongside other agriculturists. We urge you and your community to reflect on your written and spoken language, your assumptions, and to seek out opportunities for learning to make agriculture an inclusive place for all. Echoing the 4-H motto, "to make the best better," we believe there is always room for improvement and that everyone can make a difference. As an industry that works diligently to feed and take care of the world, we need to ensure that [all](#) agriculturists feel welcome, included, and supported to thrive.

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Sowing Seeds for Future LGBTQ+ Agriculturalists

by Kurtis Miller

In 2016, I realized there was something out of place in my college agricultural courses. That thing was me. As an LGBTQ+ person, this was not the first time I was made to feel unwelcome, and it unfortunately wouldn't be the last.

Preparing the Soil

After classes started in fall 2016, I knew quickly that it was turning out to be a difficult semester. My courses were exciting and I was looking forward to studying the content, but I frequently left them feeling uncomfortable and unwelcome. I began talking to other LGBTQ+ students about their experiences and realized this was a common feeling for us. The LGBTQ+ community is not often considered in agricultural education settings (Murray et al, 2020). We decided to change that.

Through my networking, I was introduced to staff who were connected with the Cultivating Change Foundation—a nonprofit that promotes visibility and inclusion for LGBTQ+ people in the agricultural industry (Cultivating Change Foundation, n.d.). This organization works with members of the community and allies across the agricultural industry. I started the first chapter of Students for Cultivating Change (SCC), with other LGBTQ+ students who felt unwelcome in our agriculture courses. This student organization offers a community for LGBTQ+ students studying agriculture on college campuses. The Foundation's mission was similar to my goals in creating SCC, which led to an organic partnership. Our initial connection proved invaluable to begin im-

proving the experiences of queer students at Penn State.

Working with Penn State staff and the Foundation, we were able to establish the first chapter of SCC. For me—and hopefully other students—the main success of this chapter was simply offering a comfortable space in an often-hostile environment. Some students, myself included, seriously consider leaving due to educational climates that are unwelcoming (Blumenfeld et al., 2016). In courses, extracurriculars, and internships, I faced slurs, disregard, and patronization for being “different”—in this case, “LGBTQ+.” Classmates' responses to my unique identity as a queer person studying animal science left me feeling unwelcome and alone.

Investing in Success

The SCC network has expanded and now has chapters at Penn State, Virginia Tech, Oregon State, Murray State, Louisiana State, and Washington State. Several other universities are in the process of forming chapters, and many are looking for other ways to become engaged with this network of students. These chapters have found success by developing their own interests and focuses in three main areas: community, professional development, and advocacy. For the Penn State Chapter of SCC, this was primarily professional development opportunities. The chapter offered students chances to network and, importantly, see themselves represented by queer professionals in their industry. I felt empowered and encouraged by these encounters, and other students shared feeling similarly. Seeing oneself represented in a

field where queer folks often feel underrepresented is critical for a student's professional journey (Sarna et al., 2021).

Cultivating Community

Community is what I have already discussed as the reason for this network forming. It's a core component of the past and continuing work student organizations do, but it's also core to the Foundation's work: Their mission is to value and elevate LGBTQ+ agriculturists through advocacy, education, and community. We've seen success for students, hearing their stories of feeling more comfortable knowing this network exists. Meeting with students reinforces my belief that we need communities like SCC to ensure LGBTQ+ students don't feel alone. Creating a similar community can be as simple as proactively sharing your pronouns with colleagues and students. In your lesson planning and delivery, you can also include stories and anecdotes involving the LGBTQ+ community.

Developing Young Professionals

Professional development provides a lasting and meaningful investment in students' success (Levesque-Bristol et al., 2019). Our six (and growing!) chapters have numerous examples of implementing this programming. Penn State invited Monsanto (before the company was acquired by Bayer) for an exciting professional development opportunity. Across two events, members of Monsanto's LGBTQ+ employee resource group (ERG) discussed career opportunities for students or early career professionals and the di-



(LEFT) Three college students at the 2017 Cultivating Change Summit. (RIGHT) Kurtis Miller presenting at the 2019 Cultivating Change Summit.

Meeting with students reinforces my belief that we need communities like SCC to ensure LGBTQ+ students don't feel alone.

iversity work the company's ERG was doing for LGBTQ+ employees. Virginia Tech, the organization's second chapter, hosted a LGBTQ+ urban farmer to speak about his perspective. Multiple other organizations at Virginia Tech joined together to support lectures and other programs he participated in.

Recently, the Penn State and Virginia Tech chapters partnered to organize tours and meetings in Washington, D.C., to learn about agriculture policy and speak to openly LGBTQ+ staff and officials. Seeing the professional journey of openly queer officials and staff helped students see themselves represented in the agricultural industry, demonstrating that they, too, could be successful in this career. Many of the professional development events chapters plan on-campus are industry-focused, so this event diversified opportunities to learn about careers for students. Anecdotally, talking to the students during their visit showed that many of them were more interested in a career in public service because of the trip. Educators looking to foster an

inclusive environment through professional development can invite career representatives of diverse backgrounds to speak to their classroom.

Inspiring Advocacy

For the third area, SCC chapters have recently been working to advocate for better diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policy for LGBTQ+ students at their respective universities. Simply having a chapter is a form of advocacy to remind students, staff, and faculty that LGBTQ+ students deserve a voice in academic and student life decisions. Chapters that focus on advocacy take this a step further by organizing educational events and meetings with university leaders to discuss the importance of inclusive policies for LGBTQ+ students, especially in agricultural courses and facilities.

Students and educators interested in further advocacy should consider planning conversations

with their school's leadership (e.g., college deans, principals) about the DEI work they do. Impress upon these leaders why DEI is important and the value it brings to the classroom. If the agricultural industry hopes to feed over 10 billion people (Cilluffo & Ruiz, 2019), we need all types of perspectives who are up to the challenge.

Harvesting for Future Generations

The student organization concept I formed has grown into something I never could have imagined at its inception in 2016. I've also developed as a queer professional, in large part thanks to the network and opportunities I received from SCC. As a board member of the Cultivating Change Foundation, I can provide guidance and strategy for issues pertaining to LGBTQ+ experiences in the agriculture industry. And in my career, I support a U.S. Senator in his work to

benefit farmers and other constituents through impactful legislation. None of this would have been possible without a community to support students like myself to harness their potential. I'm excited to see how future generations of LGBTQ+ students can impact the agricultural industry with their unique perspectives.

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Hidden Allyship: How Do We Help Those Who Do Not Feel Comfortable or Safe Being Out?

by Dr. Tiffany Drape & Kendrick Spencer

In June 2022, I (Drape) was judging a LDE for the Virginia FFA Convention. I happened to be wearing a pair of rainbow-decorated shoes that day. As students came in to compete, we'd introduce ourselves and get right to the task at hand. Twice, students walked in, introduced themselves, and immediately shared their identities. Both identified as gay. Both shared that when they saw my shoes, they said, "they knew I was cool," with who they were and they immediately felt safe sharing that information. One student shared that their parents were accepting, their family told them they loved them, and there had been no issues at home or school. The other had the opposite experience. One parent would not acknowledge them, one set of grandparents no longer thought they existed, and their home life was in shambles. I shared with both students that I respected them for sharing their story with me. I asked the student who was being rejected if there was any immediate support we needed to find them, if they were in harm's way, or if they had trusted people they could go to in the event something bad happened.

When we speak of allyship, we're talking about actively supporting the rights of marginalized groups. We're remaining

open for the celebrations of acceptance and for the students who may have life altering consequences by stating their identities out loud. We're saying that we're ready emotionally and mentally to support our students in all of their identities and we'll work to support them the best we can. We also acknowledge that our education of their identity may be inadequate, and we may say or do the wrong thing but we're also capable of improving ourselves in tandem. It is a both/and situation.

When people have conversations about allyship, and how to be supportive as an ally, they think about individuals who are already out and open about their sexual identities. People often think of those who are visibly out, or have made the decision personally or professionally to let people in. However, approximately 83% of the population who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual keep their identities hidden (Poitras, 2019). Many people could stay in the closet due to fear of being excluded and not accepted by their families (Reczek et al., 2023), job discrimination, or exclusion from their home communities.

Regardless of why someone may stay closeted about their identities, the very act of staying hidden has been shown to lead to depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and greater exposure to infectious diseases (Poitras, 2019). Staying hidden has a monumental impact on a person's overall well-being and their personal relationships. However, those who care and love closeted individuals can still practice allyship.

First, stop looking for cues.

As allies we must stop looking for signs that someone may be a sexual minority. This "search" creates a sense of unneeded anxiety among people who feel they constantly cover up or stop certain actions. Our goal as allies should be to create spaces where people can feel free to be themselves.

Secondly, **we must encourage people to be completely authentic.** This could be as simple as playing music they enjoy, sharing popular culture references or as complex as asking them to express how they truly feel about something. We must be authentic in representing who we are,



Wearing or displaying symbolism associated with the LGBTQ+ community (e.g. rainbow flags, pins, "love is love" etc.) can communicate your support for LGBTQ+ people.

but we also have to be open to however someone else chooses to express themselves. Sometimes authenticity means listening to a person and asking them to express their feelings and thoughts.

Next, **we have to celebrate people.** This goes for everyone. We have to celebrate wins, learning experiences and progress. Everyone thrives when we create an open, positive, supportive, and encouraging space. For people in the closet, we must work to amplify the joy and positivity that the person experiences.

Lastly, **we must give space and time.** We must understand that coming out of the closet is a personal journey that is mentally and emotionally hard for a lot of people. As mentioned earlier, over 83% of the sexual minority population is still not out due to factors such as safety, resource availability, support, or fear of discrimination. Coming out involves multiple conversations and interactions with a wide variety of people including family, friends, coworkers, supervisors and other people. Each conversation can vary in difficulty and may require the person to educate others in order to combat

stereotypes, religious or cultural persecution, or other forms of discrimination. As a person chooses to come out they may face multiple stages of fear, regret, sadness, loneliness, or worse. We must understand that coming out is not easy and we cannot force someone out of the closet. Similarly, other LGBTQ+ people cannot force or demand for a person to come out. **The coming out process is a personal choice.** All we can do as allies is provide people with support, time and space. We must also work to be as supportive as possible when a person goes through the coming out process.

We, as allies, have a strong obligation to serve those who are out and proud but also to **hold space for those who are still hidden.** As educators, we have a front-row seat to students' identity development. Our actions and words signal to our students whether they are safe to be themselves. We can actively work to make sure every student feels safe in our classrooms and our spaces. We can do that by not looking for cues, encouraging people to be authentic, celebrating everyone around us and giving people space and time to

make their own decisions. If you are in the closet, please know that when you are ready, there are people who will love and celebrate you as you are. As a reader, you may be the first person someone decides to come out to, and when they do, you have to express a warm and welcoming attitude. Acknowledge that coming out is a hard process and that you are thankful for the person's trust in you.

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Promoting Diversity and Inclusion in School-based Agricultural Education

by Luke Luttrull

Individuals outside of the agricultural industry may argue that the agricultural community throughout the United States is based around tradition and resists change, but this could not be further from the truth; “the speed and the scope of the creation and implementation of modernisation [*sic*] of farms ensure their permanent competitive edge,” (Kusz, 2014, p. 171). As stewards of the land and natural resources, the agricultural community has been extraordinarily progressive when adopting new technologies and conservative practices (e.g., no-till, cover crops, crop rotation, etc.) to ensure the success of the agricultural industry for today and tomorrow (Hobbs, 2007). This sentiment of progress, however, is not carried across all areas. While not normally thought of in the same context, diversity and inclusion in agriculture are just as important components for industry success (Hirasuna, et al., 2023). According to the United Nations, the global population is expected to increase to “9.7 billion in 2050, and 10.9 billion by 2100” (2023, World Population Trends, ¶ 1). Thus, it cannot be overstated how pertinent it is to have all hands-on deck to combat this global food crisis (Wittwer, 1979). To do this, we must acknowledge the potential that every individual has to contribute to the solution rather than alienating them for who they are (Hirasuna, et al., 2023). Accomplishing this, of course, has a starting point: the classroom.

To reach diverse and marginalized groups we first must understand that we have done a poor job reaching them in the

past through barriers including “lack of information, internal agency/organizational diversity, perceptions of careers, and historical cultural perceptions,” and “perceived discrimination and cultural insensitivity” (Outley, 2008, p. 147-148). We cannot expect an individual to join us when we have not first extended an olive branch. While youth organizations such as the National FFA Organization and the National Society for Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences (MANRRS) have introduced partnerships at the national level to foster a more diverse future for agriculture (Meyer, 2023), work can still be done, particularly at the local level. Forging local allyships between the school-based agricultural education (SBAE) classroom and community leaders and organizers of marginalized groups is paramount to the success of incentivizing a future in agriculture for those groups. Some example areas and organizations that SBAE programs could establish connections with include PRIDE organizations, food-insecure populations, and groups representing the ethnic minorities in every community served by an SBAE program.

Through these connections, we can share information about agricultural production systems, the various career opportunities in agriculture that rely on an interdisciplinary education, and nurture undeveloped relationships. At the very least, these allyships will increase agricultural literacy in our communities and give current students in agriculture programs the chance to develop their skills as advocates

for agriculture, but it can accomplish so much more: cultivating students with and generating “innovative perspectives, creative solutions, and enhanced problem-solving” (Hirasuna, et al., 2023, p. 4). With an olive branch extended, members of marginalized groups may feel more empowered and supported to enroll in SBAE courses or become more perceptive of the role they could play in agriculture with the career path they choose (e.g., engineering, chemistry, biology, public relations, law, etc.). The possibilities are endless considering the amount of career overlap between industries and the projected job opportunities in agriculture opening every year until 2025: 24,700 positions in management and business (42%); 18,400 positions in Science and Engineering (31%); 7,900 positions in Food and Biomaterials Production (13%); 8,400 positions in education, communication, and the government (14%) (Fernandez et al, 2020).

There will of course be growing pains associated with any change in the industry; the conflict between equipment manufacturers and farmers surrounding right to repair stands as an example of this (Hernandez, 2023). The resistance and push-back from those unaccepting of this change must be weathered now before we alienate marginalized groups even further. To those who criticize this effort, we must be adamant in defending our position that agriculture cannot be gate-kept from marginalized communities; it is a necessity that we all work together to tackle real problems in the agricultural

industry (e.g., hunger, increased cost of inputs, yields, etc.) rather than waste time on human-made societal constructs, including the intentional exclusion and alienation of individuals in our schools and communities.

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Inclusion within Agricultural Education Classrooms

by Taylor Irvin & Madi Hofreiter

Allyship begins with establishing an inclusive mindset. Without thorough self-reflection and changing our thoughts as teachers, we cannot expect students to follow our guidance to acceptance. As stated by Winifred Montgomery (2001) in *Creating Culturally Responsive, Inclusive Classrooms*, “Culturally responsive classrooms specifically acknowledge the presence of culturally diverse students” (p. 5). Students in agricultural education all come from unique backgrounds. It is vital for teachers to highlight the experiences and perspectives students bring into the classroom for their peers to learn directly from culturally diverse sources. To create more inclusive agricultural education classrooms, teachers must encourage creativity, allow for all student voices to be heard, and create opportunities for students to learn from diverse populations.

After graduation, students will rely on a variety of career and leadership skills for post-high school success. The most important skills to foster are creativity and critical thinking (Stéphan et al., 2019). When it comes to creating an inclusive classroom environment, the traditional classroom does not always make the cut. If there is no room for students to grow as individuals in a traditional setting, how can students be expected to feel as if they are part of a community? Teachers have started to revise what the classroom should look like, and this is a place that fosters creativity and lets students be themselves. By creating a space

that students feel comfortable to express their creativity and be themselves, it helps to further develop their socio-emotional skills, giving them the opportunities to develop relationships, be their authentic self, and create the classroom community.

Teachers are also able to unite students in the classroom by allowing for all views to be seen and all voices to be heard. To form an allyship across marginalized populations in our schools, students must first learn what makes each other unique. Then, that uniqueness can be celebrated. Paulo Friere studied cultural consciousness within education. Within his studies, Friere found that collaborations between students, called Cultural Circles, allowed for students to see, and hear the diverse perspectives that their peers offered (Diemer et al., 2016). When students are given opportunities to gain experience from one other’s unique perspectives, they can identify the social, cultural, and political inequalities that marginalized populations face.

Finally, teachers can create opportunities for students to learn from diverse sources. Students and teachers must identify individual biases before being able to recognize the advantages of diversity in the classroom and where prejudices may lie that hinder those advantages. As stated in research in child development perspectives, students must work collectively to change perceived injustices in the classroom (Diemer et al., 2016). Students can learn directly from diverse sources to experience the advantages of inclusive learning. Specifically, having students

partake in open-ended projects that allow exploration of cultural perspectives allows them to experience the importance of diversity within the agricultural field. Without allyship across marginalized populations, many agricultural practices would struggle to be as successful as they are today.

Creating an inclusive environment is essential for any classroom to foster a safe and unbiased learning environment. Many teachers are faced with limited understanding of cultures other than their own and the possibility that this limitation will negatively affect their students’ ability to become successful learners. An inclusive mindset is just the first step to creating an inclusive classroom. It is important for teachers to begin self-reflecting on their teaching practices. As teachers, we cannot expect our students to feel as if they are a part of a community if we have not built up the allyship between students. To create more inclusive agricultural education classrooms, teachers must encourage creativity, allow for all student voices to be heard, and create opportunities for students to learn from diverse populations.

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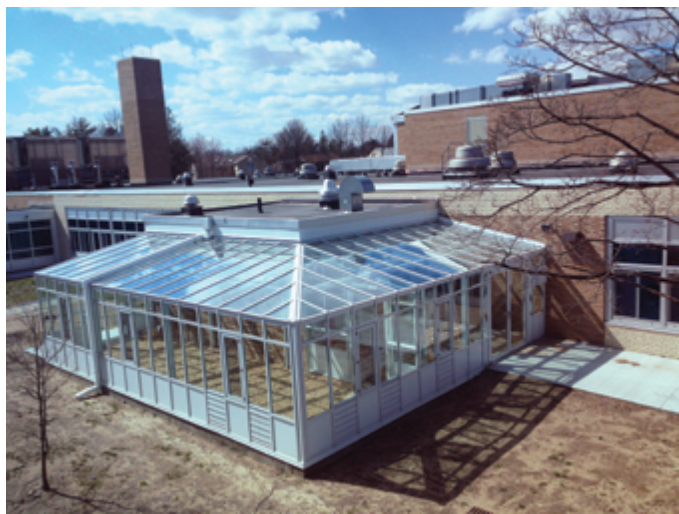
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