Letters, Contacts Make Difference in Fight to Protect Ag Incentive Grant

By Jim Aschwanden, CATA Executive Director

The battle to protect Agriculture Incentive Grant funding has been an all-consuming priority over the past several months, and while we continue to wonder what the eventual action of Governor Brown will be on this issue, we can look back with pride on the incredible amount of work that teachers, students, parents, and supporters did to raise awareness about the value of Ag Education among our elected officials.

As I make visits to offices in the Capitol, the level of both awareness and understanding about the positive impact that this program has on students is gratifying. Your letters, phone calls, and face-to-face meetings have truly made an impression — thanks to all of you for working so hard to help others understand how devastating the proposed elimination of Ag Incentive Grant funding would be to your programs and students.

As this edition of the Golden Slate goes to press, we are seeing strong support for Ag Education and FFA within the legislative arena. The students who came to Sacramento to participate in the Ag Day rally, or to offer their testimony in committee hearings, did an incredible job of describing the positive difference that Ag Education has made in their lives. As a result, Ag Education is no longer an abstract idea in the minds of legislators — it’s the faces and the stories of those students that helped them understand why this program is so valued by so many. We can only hope that the Governor and his staff get the message as well.

(Continued on page 2)
Sometimes a Little THANKS Is All It Takes!

By Mike Albiani, CATA President-Elect

If you are like our agriculture department in Elk Grove, this current battle to preserve the Agricultural Incentive Grant has brought a large group of supporters of the FFA program to the surface. Politicians, school board members, service clubs, alumni, the business community and parents have been generous with their time and money to help us tell the FFA story. As the activity happens or the donation is made, I always make sure to thank the person involved as they provide the service.

Sometimes the thank you is rushed because of the event or is just a polite exchange taking less that a second. Later, after the crowd is gone, it is not uncommon to sit and contemplate, was that enough? Did I express myself clearly? What else can I do? The answer might just be a quick, thoughtful thank you note.

As agriculture advisors, we must make sure to follow the directions and bring our sponsor thank you notes to the scholarship and proficiency interviews and our state finals team contest sites to be mailed by the supervisor in charge. We strongly encourage our students to send notes to sponsors of awards and other recognitions.

But many of us get caught up in the next activity and never thank many of these supporters of our program individually. I am as guilty as anyone. Check that item off the list and on to the next; glad to be moving forward and not taking the time to reflect on the past.

Commitment

It’s time now for all of us to make the commitment to take a moment to appreciate the past and more importantly all of the people who assisted in the successful completion of the activity.

There are many guides to help us get started. Do we consult Miss Manners? Consult an etiquette book or the most well- mannered person we know?

Formats

It’s much simpler than that. In my opinion there are two types of thank you formats: formal and informal.

The formal are for politicians, donors of equipment, money or time, and anyone who might need proof of their donation. These most likely are on department or school letterhead and are written in a more formal and direct manner. In my experience these letters are rarely displayed above someone’s desk or kept in their feel good file, but are a gesture to show your gratitude while conducting business.

The informal thank you is my favorite to write and to receive. These typically handwritten notes are great for making someone feel special and appreciated.

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Sacramento Scene

Letters, Contacts Make Difference in Fight to Protect Ag Incentive Grant

(Continued from page 1)

very successful hearings with powerful testimony from FFA members, teachers, and administrators. As the budget process continues, we fully expect to see support within the Legislature for retaining the Ag Incentive Grant funding within the state budget. We remain hopeful that both houses of the Legislature will adopt this position in their version of the budget.

Send Letters to Governor

The more crucial issue is whether the Governor will agree with the Legislature and sign the budget with this funding intact. Even if the Legislature sends him a budget that includes the Ag Incentive Grant, the Governor still has the authority to edit, or “blue pencil” specific line items out of the budget bill. While it is true that the Legislature can override such an action, the reality is that it takes a two-thirds vote from each house to do so, which presents its own challenges — especially in an election year. As gratifying as it is to see support in the Legislature, we must continue to focus our attention on the Governor — he needs to understand what’s at risk here.

To that end, please continue to send letters to the Governor, and to work within your local community to find those who can help deliver the message to Governor Brown. You should also have your students continue to send letters to the Governor as well. They should be letting him know of their positive experiences at State FFA Leadership Conference, State Finals Judging, etc. — and have them send copies of those letters to legislators in Sacramento. And yes, those letters do make a difference!

Leadership Changes

Besides the challenges of the ongoing budget battle, we are also faced with the challenge of significant leadership changes in Ag Education at the state level this coming year. By now, all of you have probably heard that Bob Heувel has announced his retirement after 25+ years as program manager for Agricultural Education. Under Bob’s leadership, Ag Education in California has grown and prospered, with record FFA membership and participation, nationally recognized program and curriculum standards, and a leadership continuum program that is the envy of other states.

Despite the many challenges faced by our profession over the last 25 years, Ag Education in California is stronger than ever, due in great part to the efforts of Bob and his state staff team in keeping us focused on what really matters — our students. I would like to personally thank Bob for his tireless efforts on behalf of Ag Education and to wish him the best in his retirement. A job well-done, and a retirement well-earned!

Summer Conference

I hope all of you have sent in your registration materials for CATA Summer Conference by now, and have secured your hotel accommodations. We have expanded the professional development opportunities at this year’s conference and made other changes that should provide you with even more opportunities to grow and improve your instruction. I look forward to seeing you in San Luis Obispo!

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Reconnecting with Our Industry
By Carrie Phillips, Central Region President, Bret Harte High School

As I am beginning to prepare for a lab today, it is hard to contain my excitement and enthusiasm for the lesson. More thrilling to me is that I have a class full of students who feel the same way and cannot wait to arrive to class and learn. So what type of lab could create such a spark in the classroom? I don’t necessarily believe it’s a specific content, but the fact that the lesson is industry-based from professionals in agriculture.

When was the last time you were excited to teach your students something brand new? When was the last time you learned something innovative or received training within the agriculture industry?

Agriculture educators are a fantastic family of “experts” and we have multiple opportunities to share that knowledge with each other... but what about our industry connections and training? Where are those opportunities? How do we get that needed training?

Reaching Out to Industry

Many of us become so busy with doing everything within our job, that sometimes we forget what our job is all about... teaching the relevant agricultural industry skills which are constantly changing and evolving.

A few years back, I started to lose interest in teaching a subject; not because I believed it wasn’t valuable, but because I didn’t know how to improve my skill level or what the next step was. On top of that, I began to teach an advanced version of the class, so the pressure was really on to continue engaging students and growing a program.

That same year, at the regional road show, we had some industry professionals come and speak with us. Just from listening to the professionals talk and teach, I began to regain my interest, and it sparked my excitement for the industry once again. So like any other eager ag teacher, I got contact names, emails, phone numbers, and much more important, I found another ag teacher who wanted to improve her skills too.

Ever since then, Kristy White (of Beyer High School) and I have been traveling to at least two industry training seminars per year. These seminars are attended by industry professionals, taught by the best of the industry from all over the country, and hosted by wholesalers within the industry. How much closer can you get to Career Technical Education?

Most important, we are receiving “hands-on” training from the industry experts so that we can bring back creditable information to our students.

What truly surprised me about attending these workshops is that the industry professionals wanted us to attend; to learn the correct techniques; to bring those skills back to our students so that one day industry could hire skilled workers trained “correctly” by their ag teachers.

Bringing Industry to Our Regional Road Shows

If you are not finding what you need at road shows, then it is up to us, as professionals, to go out and find people working within industry and bring them to the road shows for others to learn from.

This year in the Central Region, we hosted Gerry Gregg of United Wholesale Flowers in San Jose and an AIFD (American Institute of Floral Designers) designer at our road show. One-third of the road show attendees took his afternoon class, which was designed to train ag teachers and assist them in raising their skill level.

The class was not designed to come up with inexpensive classroom projects, but to provide ag teachers with professional training so that we could put our own twist on it for students. As a profession, we have perfected finding ways to make projects affordable. But, if we do not have anyone teaching us industry techniques and standards, then how are we to improve our skill level? How do we become and remain the experts in the eyes of our students?

It doesn’t matter what your particular trade is — floral, welding, woodworking, etc. — if you are truly passionate about bringing the most current industry trends and ideas into your classroom, you will become excited to teach your craft, and excitement ignites the spark within your students. Excitement is contagious.

Our Challenge

Attending industry training workshops can be intimidating for any ag teacher. Many questions arise in our minds prior to signing up for a new workshop.

Can keep up? Will I be welcome?

So, pick up the phone, call the number on the registration form and explain to that person that you are an ag teacher who teaches that subject and that you want to receive more training.

I challenge you to begin or continue your training and education in Career Technical Education. Perfect your craft and develop your knowledge base so that we can serve our students better. Add more tricks to your bag!

Industry is the model for “progressive agriculturalists” and we

(Continued on page 4)

Officers’ Corner

Sometimes a Little THANKS Is All It Takes!

(Continued from page 2)

The thought that someone took the time to sit down and write out the note makes it all the more meaningful. In the world of word processors and form letters, sometimes the old fashioned can make the biggest impression.

Priority

This year I have tried to make the sending of thank you notes and letters a priority. While I cannot say that I have been perfect in my quest, I can honestly say that I have improved. If every one of us sends just one more thank you to the politicians who have been willing to visit our chapters, write legislation, or listen to our students when they visit their district or Capitol office, think what the impact may be. They are always overwhelmed by the complaints they receive; a little heartfelt thanks will go a long way.

While you’re sitting down, don’t forget to include a couple of quick notes to your supporters, those who are there every day, helping your students, supporting you in the community, and making sure that you have what you need to support your students.

Thank You

In closing, I personally would like to thank Jim for all of his efforts on our behalf, and Dennis Albiani and Louie Brown for the countless hours, pro bono, in the Capitol hallways. I also want to thank each and every one of you who have reached out of your comfort zone to contact an elected official, organized a letter-writing campaign, or took time away from school to attend Ag Day at the Capitol to engage your students in the political process.

(Continued on page 4)
Agronomy and Veg Crops — Contests that Make Careers!

By Shannon Douglass, Pathway to PCA/CAPCA

Are you looking to impress with a winning FFA team while also getting your students career skills that prepare them for highly demanded careers? Then don’t miss out on the summer conference workshop called Contest Prep for Crops Careers.

This workshop will teach you how to prepare a team for the Agronomy and Vegetable Crops contests. Participants will get supplies to take home in addition to valuable training about the contest and some great door prizes.

Benefits

One of the benefits of this contest is that in addition to the typical great skills in presentation and teamwork which participants learn, these contests have direct connections to highly demanded careers, such as those in agronomy, seed production, a Pest Control Adviser (PCA) and even food safety.

Many past contest participants are gainfully employed in these fields today!

Examples

Here are just a few examples:

Curt Leathers is a PCA in the Woodland area and has made a career out of the skills he began building in high school. The tricks for memorizing names have stuck with him since being part of the State Champion Agronomy in 1988 from Woodland High School.

Garrett Driver is another member of a State Champion Agronomy team from Woodland. Garrett was a part of the 2003 team, three of which have made careers in the crop protection industry. Garrett is currently employed as an agronomist in the Woodland area.

Chris Giannini is now the facility manager for TriCal and a past participant in the Vegetable Crops competition from Tracy High School. Chris is a PCA and CCA who found that the contest not only exposed him to his options in college choices, but put him on the path to eventually become a PCA.

Consider attending this workshop in San Luis Obispo and see how you can make Agronomy and Vegetable Crops part of your Field Day teams and put your students on the path to career success in crop science!

Look for the Aggie Annex online at www.calagteachers.org/GoldenSlate.html
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News and Views

California Agricultural Educators Receive Literacy for Life Grants
By Mindy DeRohan
Three agricultural educators from throughout California have been awarded $500 Literacy for Life Grants to supplement their agricultural education curriculum from California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom (CFAITC).

“We are thrilled to acknowledge these educators for their hard work and dedication to agricultural education,” said Judy Culbertson, CFAITC’s executive director. “These grants will provide an opportunity for these educators to enhance their already-established programs.”

The three agricultural educators who received Literacy for Life Grants are Tammy Burris, Kayla Roberts and Chad Russell.

Tammy Burris, a teacher at Grace Davis High School, has received a grant to fund her project, Experiments in Agri-Science. Grace Davis High School students will conduct experiments that will allow them to form a hypothesis, log data from daily, weekly, and monthly observations, and record the outcome of the projects. Experiments include studying different types of flower plugs, hatching eggs, soil testing, genetic engineering, hydroponics, air-ponics, and other agricultural environments not covered in everyday curriculum.

Kayla Roberts, a teacher at Winters High School, has received a grant to fund her project, Field Trip to the San Francisco Flower Market. Floriculture students will learn about the many career paths within the floral industry while visiting the San Francisco Flower Market and the de Young Museum. Students will learn how cut flower producers sell their products, interact with their customers, and experience what it is like for florists and floral designers when choosing flowers and tools. Students will visit the Bouquets to Art exhibit at the de Young Museum and learn creative new techniques they can use with their arrangements in the classroom.

Chad Russell, a teacher at Turlock High School, has received a grant to fund his project, Principles of Turf Management Test Plots. Through an actual hands-on experience maintaining turf grass, students will extend their learning of soil aeration, irrigation, fertilization, and various planting methods that will enhance their agricultural literacy. As part of the new Turf Grass Management course, students on campus will experience real-life agriculture in action while gaining hands-on experience through maintenance of test plots on campus.

Literacy for Life Grants were established by CFAITC to initiate new projects or expand existing projects that promote agricultural literacy. Funds have been provided to California educators to support the integration of agriculture into regular classroom instruction. CFAITC awarded 25 educators statewide with Literacy for Life Grants in 2013.

Applications for the 2014 Literacy for Life Grants will be available August 1, 2014.

To learn more about the 25 Literacy for Life Grant projects, visit www.LearnAboutAg.org/literacyforlife.
News and Views

For The Greater Good
By Hugh Mooney, Consultant, Department of Education

It is interesting to work in state government. The public in general thinks that state workers are overpaid and underworked. Sadly, there are a few that fit that bill. Our state Senate has three members with legal issues that could send them to jail. We have a governor who is determined to eliminate the funding for the Agriculture Incentive Grant. He released his budget, which eliminates our funding and adds it to the Local Control Funding Formula. We were in the same position at this time last year. A year ago, when the budget was finally approved, the Agriculture Incentive Grant was funded for another year. What will be the result this year?

There is a major difference this year. Local agriculture education teachers and their programs are engaged in the effort to restore funding. For many years you have read articles in the Golden Slate that have challenged you to engage people of influence in your community to support your program. You were encouraged to contact your Assembly and Senate representative. Few answered the call. Each year the CATA executive director would work with our friends at the Capitol to fight the good fight for agriculture education and the FFA and we have continued to survive. Something is different this year.

Higher Awareness

It is my belief that because of the CATA 2030 effort, the awareness and level of support among our legislators is at a much higher level. Assembly Member Rudy Salas Jr. submitted a letter to the Speaker of the Assembly and the President pro Tempore of the Senate that called for the restoration of the Agriculture Education Incentive Grant program. If I counted correctly, 63 members of the Assembly and 22 members of the Senate signed the letter. They did not sign because our executive director asked them to. They signed because their constituents contacted their offices to let them know how important the funding is to voters in their district.

Battle Continues

Do not assume that the battle has been won. Even if a bill is passed that restores funding, the Governor has three options. He can sign the funding into law, he can veto the bill, or he can line item veto the funding from the budget. No Governor’s veto has been overridden since Governor Brown’s first term.

To override a veto requires two-thirds of each house of the Legislature — not just those attending a session, but 54 members of the Assembly and 27 members of the Senate.

With three members of the Senate either suspended or on leave due to legal issues, that means we would need all but 10 to vote for an override. We cannot become complacent now. The battle continues.

We Will Prevail

Though many of you may not know it, I am an optimist. I believe that because it is the right thing for students that we will prevail. I am often disappointed by those who make decisions about important education issues when never considering what is good for students.

If I did not believe that agriculture education will survive because it is good for students, then I could not keep this job. I left a great job working with great people, helping great kids do great things. I left that great job for the reason that people convinced me I needed to focus on the greater good for all students not just the few in my program. I applaud many of you who have helped to move heaven and earth to get the attention of members of the Legislature to become aware of the threat to students if this incentive for districts to develop quality agricultural education programs is eliminated. I know that many of you will be fine because your local district will support your efforts since they believe in what you are doing. You recognize that opportunities for your students are greater if more students from different areas with different life experiences are involved. You have worked for the greater good.

Let us all hope that the legislators who signed that letter of support are committed to our cause. We can hope that the Governor has an epiphany and restores our funding in the budget. After all, he did receive the Honorary State FFA Degree in 1978.

Limited Time Offer: Get a Complimentary CalAgPlate

We have a limited number of “paid for” CalAgPlate orders that were previously submitted to DMV but which cannot be filled for a variety of reasons, i.e., moved out of state, no response to inquiries, etc.

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Again, this is a limited opportunity! Orders will be processed on a first-come, first-served basis, so please act quickly!
Music is in the background of our daily lives; for some of us more than others. Upon arrival to the classroom in the morning, one of the first things we do is turn on Pandora. We can seldom think of a time when our classrooms are without some music playing. Even when it is a long car ride with students in tow, the radio is on. Music has the ability to lift our moods, energize us for an activity or event, or assist us in reminiscing on our past. We hope to break down the message from some of the ag teachers’ radio station playlist. Our playlist is just as varied as the agriculture teachers in our state!

First up:
‘Automatic’
by Miranda Lambert
Hey whatever happened to waiting your turn
Doing it all by hand, cause when everything is handed to you
It’s only worth as much as the time put in
It all just seems so good the way we had it
Back before everything became automatic
We have heard the stories of the days before AIG. Scrounging through other people’s trash to find materials, buying equipment from military surplus, and scrapping any metal you could find to pay the bills. We wonder sometimes, did the extra effort made by ag teachers to make ends meet make them appreciate things more?

Today, we have pre-made lessons, the Internet, and Ag Incentive Grant (AIG). Has it all become “automatic” for us? Have we become complacent and unappreciative? What would our programs look like if it wasn’t all automatic?

The next song on our playlist: Kid Rock:
‘Only God Knows Why’
I said it too many times
And I still stand firm
You get what you put in
And people get what they deserve…
So I think I’ll keep a walking
With my head held high
I’ll keep moving on and only God knows why
The battles that we face are going to take effort and hard work from everyone. We cannot afford to have members sit idly by and watch others solve our problems. Are you doing what needs to be done? Have you scheduled meetings with your legislators? Do you have the support of your community? Are you supporting and participating with an active Ag Advisory Committee?

I am sure we all know of at least one program that has had struggles with an administrator or even school board member. From our experience, the programs that have come out of these struggles are those that have done the work. If it is your battle to fight — fight on. AIG is everyone’s battle; it is time for everyone to put on their armor and step to the battle line.

Moving on to
‘Glory Days’
by Bruce Springsteen
Glory days we’ll pass you by
Glory days in the wink of a young girl’s eye
Glory days, glory days
We are in the position now to determine what our glory days are going to be. We are hopeful that the glory days of agricultural education will be the time when agricultural teachers from across the state worked together to continue the legacy of the Ag Incentive Grant. How sad would it be if the glory days we look back on in the future was in the early ’80s when AIG was started, or even 1928 with the inception of the Future Farmers of America, or a year like 2014 with record FFA membership for California?

‘My Way’
by Frank Sinatra
Regrets, I’ve had a few
But then again, too few to mention
I did what I had to do, I saw it through
without exemption
I planned each charted course, each careful step along the highway
And more, much more than this, I did it my way
Yes, there were times, I’m sure you know
When I bit off more than I could chew
And through it all, when there was doubt
I ate it up and spit it out
I faced it all and I stood tall and did it my way

A common saying in our department is, “There is more than one way to tie a shoe.” This song in our playlist epitomizes this saying. How you get to the end product is your decision. We just want everyone to be working toward that same goal. Doubt, we all experience it.

If we can take some advice from Frank, let’s just chew it up and spit it out! Every department is unique and each ag teacher is special. We cannot expect “cookie cutter” programs. Do what is right for you, your students and your program. Remember that just because something is right, it doesn’t mean it is easy.

Our final song in the ag educators playlist:
‘Don’t Stop Believin’
by Journey
Some will win, some will lose
Some were born to sing the blues
Oh, the movie never ends
It goes on and on and on and on
Don’t stop believin’
Hold on to the feelin’

How could we not include this final song in our playlist? We must continue to believe that agricultural education has a strong future and that our educational model is the best for students. Fighting for the Ag Incentive Grant will not be the last challenge we face as a group.

Guidance
If we use all of the previous songs as guidance, everything will be okay. If we put the time in, if we work for it, if we remove doubt, if we continue to believe, we will get through this challenge.

How do we know? Easy, you now have supporters! You have people who will stand with you and fight. Even if AIG goes away, you will have the necessary support structure built to help your program survive this challenge and any others that may come our way.

Ag education in California is at a crossroad. We don’t doubt that we will survive and come out stronger once we decide on the fork we choose. Right now, it is a matter of making that decision. Sing along to our playlist as you choose your direction.

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2013–2014 Calendar of Activities

May 3.........................................................State FFA Judging Finals......................Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo
June 22..................................................Executive Committee Meeting...............Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo
June 22–26......................................... Pre-Conference Governing Board ..............Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo
June 22–26.............................................. CATA Summer Conference ...................Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo
June 26.............................................. Governing Board Summer Retreat .....................San Luis Obispo

2014 CATA Conference registration available at www.calagteachers.org