Friends, Connections Help Ag Educators Weather Storms

By Jim Aschwanden, CATA Executive Director

With any onset of a new biennial session of the California State Legislature, there is usually a sense of renewal, similar to one that many of you feel each fall as the school year starts. New faces, new personalities, and another year of adventure—it makes for an interesting journey over time.

Besides the many new members coming to the Capitol this year, we are also experiencing a sea change in leadership in both houses due to term limits. With a new Speaker in the Assembly and a new President Pro Tempore in the Senate, the leadership structure and operational policies have already been impacted, as new people have been brought in to staff key committees and advise leadership on important policy decisions.

Whether this new leadership “team” will function better than those it replaced is yet to be seen, but it certainly won’t be business as usual. New priorities and personal preferences will shape many of the actions of this new leadership structure, and it will take a while to figure out how to best negotiate this new environment. Could be an interesting adventure!

Fundamentals Unchanged

Despite these changes, the fundamentals of what we need to do to ensure that Agricultural Education programs remain strong in California really haven’t changed. We need, at every level, to continue to inform others about the impact that our programs have on the lives of young people, and give those students the ability to have their voices heard at every opportunity. School boards, civic clubs, community groups, etc.—they all offer opportunities to hear the personal and powerful stories directly from these incredible young people regarding the value of Agricultural Education in their lives.

For many of you, last years’ Incentive Grant battle was a blessing, because your students gave voice to the value of what
Officer’s Corner

Why Don’t Young Men Choose Ag Education as a Profession?

By Ralph Mendes, CATA Vice President

I recently commented on a picture on Facebook of an Ag Education student teaching class that had 16 girls and one lonely guy. This subject has bugged me for a number of years now. Why don’t young men choose Ag Education as a career choice?

As most of you know, the National Future Farmers of America Constitution was amended in 1969 to allow the participation of females in the FFA. Many females, like my mother in the late ’50s, had been participating in ag activities through the 4-H. However, when she got to high school, she was not allowed to join and participate in the all-male FFA (except to be a “Chapter Sweetheart”). It is safe to say that a majority of our new Ag Education majors come from ag programs with FFA experience. So, if the statewide ratio of male to female FFA members is 55% male and 45% female (2013–14 R-2 data), you might expect that half of the students wanting to be ag teachers were male, and the other half of the new teachers would be female. That is NOT the case: over the past 10 years, female new teacher recruits have outnumbered their male counterparts by a ratio of more than 7:1 (research done by counting at the new teacher introductions at State CATA Conference). Why is that, you might ask?

The 1969 Decision

The 1969 vote at the National FFA Convention was met with quite a bit of resistance but eventually, when the concept of a gender-integrated FFA was eventually accepted with no second thoughts, girls began to excel and eventually became an integral part of the program. They very rapidly made up almost half of the national membership. Not only did the female members just become members, they began to take leadership roles and began to win competitions. I remember when Jan Eberly (from California) became the first National FFA President in 1982.

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Sacramento Scene

Friends, Connections Help Ag Educators Weather Storms

(Continued from page 1)

you do, and as a result, administrative and community support for your program is stronger than ever. For those of you who were more hesitant to engage in those activities, you lost an opportunity to foster support that may be more crucial than you think over the next few years. We may well continue to face those challenges, and it will take the collective actions of all of us to keep Agricultural Education strong.

The faces may change in Sacramento, but that doesn’t change our core work or our conviction to continue to make a positive difference in the lives of young people. An important part of that work needs to be a continuing effort to inform and educate people in your community, as well as to your elected representatives.

Ag Education Budget

By the time this issue of the Golden Slate is published, we will know if our efforts to educate and inform the Governor have been successful. With the release of his proposed 2015–16 budget, the Governor will reveal whether he supports continued funding for Agricultural Education. Although we hope that AIG funding is included in his budget proposal, the Governor’s decision really shouldn’t impact the kinds of actions that we take going forward. I certainly won’t stop advocating for your programs and students at the state level, and regardless of the budget proposal, you should be planning new strategies within your community as well. The bottom line—we need all of the ears in the water if we expect our programs to remain vital and strong, so start rowing now.

On other fronts, the efforts of all of you involved in the Ag Ed 2030 effort are impressive! We have seen, and will continue to see, important discussions and decisions made about the future of our profession, and I am confident that Agricultural Education will remain strong as a result of this work. Our ability to work together on efforts like the Career Technical Education Pathway Grants and other projects is a direct result of the strength gained when we know and understand each other. That ability to communicate and share a common vision is what separates us from others, and we need to continue to find ways to ensure that this organization keeps that philosophy as a core value.

Make Connections

As we begin to ramp up for the busy spring schedule of field days, fairs and shows, leadership events and other activities, please take every opportunity to meet and visit with your peers. The friendships and connections you make may become incredibly valuable as you work to strengthen and improve your program, or as you seek to improve your skill level in new areas. That’s been a tradition in the Ag Education profession for a long, long time—and a key reason we have weathered so many storms.

In closing, I remain confident that we will survive and prosper regardless of the challenges we face. I hope that you understand your role in that effort, and how important your participation in our professional organization is in that regard. There are some outstanding articles in this edition of the Golden Slate—please read them and take them to heart. Thanks to all of you who submitted articles for this edition.

See you down the road….
Change Can Be a Very Good Thing
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo Update

By Ann M. De Lay

Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo enjoys a special place in the hearts of our Agricultural Education community. It is home to our annual conference where we gather to examine the health and determine the future direction of our profession. If it weren’t for this yearly reunion, and the chance to walk around the campus, many might be stunned by the significant change this university has endured in the past few years… and there is still more to come. Jim Rohn’s words have become the campus mantra, “Your life does not get better by chance, it gets better by change.” If true, Cal Poly is getting better each and every day.

Faculty Changes
The Agricultural Education and Communication Department continues to thrive, serving 261 undergraduate students from both the Agricultural Science and Agricultural Communication majors. There are also 150 students enrolled in various stages of their credential and masters programs.

While these statistics have remained relatively steady, the department experienced a number of changes. First, the team said goodbye to Robert Cummings and Jerry Clark, as both retired in June. To continue to serve students well, two experienced teachers joined the faculty in September through the Teacher in Residence Program. Mrs. Erin Gorter came from Templeton High School and Mr. Clemente Ayon from Santa Maria High School. The two have been excellent additions to the department as they are busy teaching courses, co-advising the Collegiate FFA chapter, and supervising teacher candidates.

New Social Media Center
The Agricultural Communication major continues to grow and the faculty have responded by regularly evaluating the program. With social media’s popularity and industry’s need to keep up, the department is developing a new digital media laboratory and social media center. This new and highly valued resource will be located near the Brock Center for Agricultural Communication in Building 10.

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Officers’ Corner

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Today, even though they make up only 40%–45% of the membership in California, it is not uncommon to see chapter, sectional, regional or state officer teams made up of ENTIRELY female officers. I don’t have the numbers, but I would bet there are far more girls competing and winning in parliamentary procedure contests, public speaking contests and other leadership contests.

Politically Incorrect
I have often asked myself and others why this phenomenon is taking place in our chapters. I reflect back on what I was like at 14–17 years old. I liked riding loud motorcycles and tractors, hitting things with hammers, and welding. I suspect young men, on average, like picking things up to see how much they weigh rather than writing speeches or working together on banquets.

R-2 data confirms my suspicions as ag mechanics classes are made up of 88% boys while horticulture classes are made up of 69% girls. I think the difference we see in leadership participation in our FFA programs could be explained by the inherent difference between young men and young women. Please note… I am purely speaking in generalities here, as I do not think that girls always make better leaders than boys.

The real politically incorrect question here is: are female FFA members more gifted and at an earlier age in the areas that make up good officers and competitive CDE participants? Generally speaking (and I think data will support this), I think females learn language and communication skills quicker and at an earlier age than their male counterparts. I think there is evidence that the talking, writing, listening skills needed to compete in speaking contests, Parli-Pro, and officer training comes more naturally to them earlier. It is not that I don’t think that boys have those skills; just think they gain them at a later age and with more maturity. But we ask kids to step up and be leaders in our programs at age 14–15, and many boys are just not ready for that. By the time they are ready, the girls are already firmly entrenched in competitive events and leadership positions.

An additional factor comes into play when you consider that over 50% of the ag teachers in California are now female. Young men often need male role models to be able to develop as young men and leaders. This is a very touchy subject. You very quickly get into danger areas when trying to generalize male and female behavior of our students at ages 14–17.

Choosing Ag Education
Young people choose careers that they think they will like, and that they think they can succeed at. If young men in our chapters are consistently being beaten by females at elections, speaking competitions and judging contests that involve language, then it is no wonder that fewer choose Ag Education as a profession. As a matter of fact, the national ratio of teachers in ALL education is 72% female, 38% male, so this is not a trend just restricted to Ag Education.

The question is, how can we get more young men to choose Ag Education? Maybe the answer is: “it is what it is” and we should not worry about it. I think the issue needs to be looked at on a state and national level. I do not have an answer, but I think it could lie somewhere in the area of the things that we value.

Maybe, as educators, we could dial back the “glory” in winning leadership positions and speaking/Parli-Pro contests and reward more status to having a large project or on building things or winning proficiency awards.

If our behavior as educators has contributed to the phenomenon, we need to have the courage, whether “politically correct” or not, to discuss the situation openly and see if we can come up with ideas to address the problem. The future of our profession may depend on it!
Change Can Be a Very Good Thing

Teacher Candidates

In the teacher education program, a strong relationship with quality secondary agricultural education programs is key to a teacher candidate’s development. Currently, the department has 12 teacher candidates completing their student teaching this fall at: Exeter, Fillmore, Foothill (Bakersfield), Hilmar, King City, Nipomo, Pioneer Valley, Pitman (Turlock), Righetti, Ripon, San Luis Obispo and Tulare.

Six teacher candidates will begin their student teaching experiences at the following schools in January: Arroyo Grande, Exeter, Hilmar, King City, Los Banos and Nipomo. Thank you to the teachers, students and administrators at each of these schools. Your collaboration makes all the difference in the development of our young professionals.

Endowments

Scholarships are vital to the teacher candidates’ ability to focus on their assignments during student teaching, rather than worrying about their financial situations. We are blessed to have a number of friends who have established endowments with the department.

Ron and Diane Furtado recently offered a generous gift to our department to provide support to our candidates as they complete their programs. Ron taught agriculture at Livermore High School for over 30 years and is a Cal Poly alum.

The college also received a significant gift from Peter and Mary Beth Oppenheimer, both graduates of the university. The couple pledged to give $20 million to CAFES for the development of a new 70,000 square-foot agricultural events center, a new equestrian pavilion, and a farm store. Furthermore, the funds will be used to support the modernization of existing animal science facilities.

New Dean

The announcement of the Oppenheimer gift is just one of the exciting developments within CAFES. In June, the President’s Office announced Dr. Andy Thu-lin was appointed Dean of the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences. One of the first items on his agenda has been working with faculty, staff, students and advisory committee members to develop a strategic vision for the college.

This project is no small feat as there are many voices to be represented. Dean Thulin’s commitment to the process has been evidenced through his regular communication with the CAFES community. We look forward to the opportunity this project has to help our entire college speak and act with one strong, clear voice.

Live Mascot

Cal Poly’s live Mustang mascot took the field at the first home football game back in September. The mascot was a gift from Robin and Michelle Baggett and has spent the past year working with Pete Agalos and the Cal Poly Animal Sciences Department.

During halftime at the football game on November 15, the mascot was provided the ceremonial title of Chase. The mascot was named for Margaret Chase, the university’s second president and the only woman to hold the office. The name will serve all current and future members of the Mustang Herd.

Tagged to Teach Workshop

The agriculture teacher shortage continues but Cal Poly is not sitting idly by. Department faculty continue to make visits to orientation classes for other CAFES majors, in an effort to share the career with other talented students. The department will again collaborate with the four other teacher education programs in the state on a Tagged to Teach Ag workshop at the State FFA Conference. In the past, the workshop connected with nearly 60 high school students interested in teaching agriculture.

Beyond these stand-alone events, the entire Agricultural Education family must be purposefully diligent about encouraging our students to consider a career in agricultural education. We must be diversified in our approach. Consider tagging students of both genders, from a variety of ethnicities and from a number of courses who might make excellent agriculture teachers. Furthermore, we need to let our students know how much we love our jobs. Let’s celebrate our curriculum, our students’ successes, and the opportunities we have to do something different each day! We will not see a change unless we all own the teacher shortage problem and make recruitment part of our regular professional responsibilities.

Cal Poly has reached new heights through the many changes already encountered and will continue to do so through those yet to come. By focusing on our strengths and setting our sights on future growth, we will undoubtedly create better lives for our students, our community, our profession and our industry.

Go, Mustangs!
Now Is Not the Time for ‘What If’s’

By Danny Aschwanden, North Coast Region President, Sonoma Valley High School

For those who follow the great American pastime of baseball, you probably remember the players’ strike in 1994, which caused an early end to the baseball season. I suppose it is human nature to analyze the impact of unfortunate events with “what if’s” in an attempt to tie up the loose ends that left fans in suspense and let down—but there might be lessons to learn from this episode.

Since much of the tradition and lure of baseball is rooted in traditions and statistics, it is not too far fetched to reminisce about what may have been, and more importantly how the path of baseball changed as a result of that shutdown. For example: Matt Williams of the SF Giants was on pace to match Maris’ home run record, the late Tony Gwynn could have been the first player since Ted Williams to hit .400 for the season, and lastly it caused the Montreal Expos a legitimate chance to win the World Series. They were later forced to unload their best players, and the far base shrank as a result. Eventually, MLB bought the Expos and moved them to Washington to become the Nationals.

Impact on Many Lives

With all of that being said, the situation in 1994 boiled down to a debate over money, and the decisions made by others at that time impacted many lives. Did the players and owners really consider those impacts as they held their ground, so firmly entrenched in their respective views? Did anyone at that time consider the damage done to the sport as a result of this lack of vision? What if the players and the owners had considered the impact of their actions on the future health and vitality of the sport? Would they have made those same decisions?

As it turns out, many who were involved in the 1994 shutdown deeply regret their role in that affair. Their actions damaged the sport immeasurably because they didn’t appreciate the immediate impact on the game for fans, and because they didn’t envision the hard work that it would take to rebuild that interest and dedication. For some teams, rebuilding has been successful. For others, the impact of the 1994 strike is still being felt.

“What if” we all had worked just a little harder?

Funding Formula and Ag Education

Fast forward to 2014, as the Brown administration is once again pondering its actions regarding the implementation of its school funding formula, the Local Control Funding Formula, and the impact of that formula on Agricultural Education in California. Last year, the Governor proposed folding Ag Incentive Grant monies into that formula, which eventually would have spread those funds out to every single district in California—virtually eliminating any targeted money for Ag Education.

As he and others in his administration ponder their actions for this year, are they considering the full potential impacts of those decisions? Do they possess the vision and leadership to fully acknowledge the important role that Ag Education programs play in the lives of students, communities, the Ag industry, and the state as a whole? Did our efforts to inform key policymakers about the importance of this important program really make a difference?

We all know Ag Education has a significant impact on the lives of the students that we teach. We know and appreciate the impact the personal development and leadership training that is so unique to our model has on students, regardless of their eventual chosen career.

‘What If’ Syndrome

As we look to the future of Ag Education, will we become victims of the “what if” syndrome? “What if” we all had worked just a little harder to make sure the value of our programs was understood by our whole community? “What if” we had been more diligent in responding to calls to promote and improve our programs? “What if” funding for Ag Education really does get eliminated? “What if” that happens? How will you respond?

I have not lived in the world of Ag Education without the incentive grant, and I hope to never see that day. I realize that many of the “old timers” thrived and accomplished great feats without this source of funding, so it is possible. We hope that our efforts to educate the Governor and others about the value of what we do for students has been successful. We hope that he and others have a new appreciation for “what” might be lost by implementing his plan. We certainly hope that he has the vision and leadership necessary to fully comprehend the impacts of his actions. We hope he appreciates the “what if” impact of his decision.

Regrets?

Regardless of the Governor’s actions, what cannot occur is for our rich traditions in agriculture education to be lost or tarnished because of a funding issue. If local programs wane and fail to provide students with a complete experience of the agriculture education model, then we too will look back in another 20 years with regret.

Regret for those who “would have” accomplished so many things, ranging from FFA degrees, memories associated with field days, an appreciation for what agriculture provides to our daily lives, to those students who simply come to school because of a connection with FFA activities within our programs. Regret that we didn’t do everything we could to maintain those aspects of our programs that filled the lives of our students with richness and the confidence to succeed. Regret that we didn’t possess the vision to meet these challenges with courage and determination.

Focus on Action

We simply cannot afford to let this funding situation dictate what our programs and chapters become. Rather than “what if,” we should be focusing on “what I am going to do”—and then backing up that intent with real action. Will you adapt and move forward, finding new and innovative ways to accomplish great things with students in your program, even if Ag Incentive Grant funding is lost? Will you rededicate yourself to looking forward with vision and optimism so that future generations of students can benefit from their experiences in Ag Education?

Each community and chapter is unique in how they function and deal with challenges and my hope is that we all will prevail and grow stronger than ever. In another 20 years when we take time to look back, will we be proud of our resolve to keep focused on what is truly important? Will we be able to reflect that at a crossroad in time of agriculture education, we all banded together and came up clutch when it counted the most, rather than shrink in the moment of defeat?

Regardless of the Governor’s actions, we control the future of Ag Education in California. We can become crippled by the “what if” syndrome, or we can choose to meet these challenges with vision and energy. I hope that our profession can look back in 20 years and say “This is what we did” rather than engage in the “what if” game.
Reflections on New Professionals Institute
By Amanda Pombo, Taft High School

They say it takes at least five years before you really know what you are doing as an ag teacher. As a third-year teacher, I cannot attest to the validity of that statement, but I can tell you that it seems pretty accurate. I feel at times that I have it all together—the perfectly executed lesson plan or extremely successful fundraiser. I also have those times that I am completely lost, and feel quite alone. Luckily, as a California ag teacher, I have access to countless opportunities that many others could only dream of. One of those opportunities is the New Professionals Institute, which I attended November 19–20, 2014 in Fresno, California.

Gaining Contacts
The New Professionals Institute brings together first-, second- and third-year ag teachers of the state with veteran teachers, industry experts and subject-specific gurus. The idea is to help new teachers improve where they are weak, shine where they are strong, and learn the ever-important lesson, “I am not alone!” We, as young teachers gained valuable resources, in the form of expert contacts, physical product, and camaraderie amongst each other. I feel I can speak for each of us in saying that we had a great time, and came home with more than tiny shampoo bottles from the hotel bathroom.

Coffee and More
As always, the Institute began with coffee. After a brief introduction and welcome, we discussed how to become a teacher leader. Next, we split into groups, with the third-year teachers partaking in industry tours, while the rest continued with further workshops, with topics such as the iRecordbook, Time Management, and Engaging Students through SAE.

As part the former group, I was able to visit local farmers, ranchers and industry leaders to learn more about what exactly our students need to be successful in agriculture post-high school.

Farm Tours
Our first stop on the tour was with Matt Efird of Caruthers. His operation consists of almonds, walnuts, raisin grapes, and prunes. He stressed the importance of students learning people skills, and the ability to communicate outside of text messaging. He also told us he was looking for students with basic welding skills and an understanding of hydraulic and electrical systems.

Our next stop was with Pang Chang, an immigrant from Laos, who now has cornered the market for tropical fruit grown in Fresno. We were able to walk through his hoop houses, packed full of guava, papaya, jujube, passion fruit, and even a banana tree or two. He explained to us how much he values hard work and “learning by doing.” Even though he lacked a formal higher education, he was able to achieve success through his own embodiment of these qualities.

We then drove to JL Vineyards, and talked with Ryan Jacobsen, executive director of the Fresno (Continued on page 7)
Reflections on New Professionals Institute

(Continued from page 6)

County Farm Bureau, and his father, Ray Jacobsen. This vineyard, purchased by the family in 1980, includes five varieties of wine grapes, also grapes for concentrate and raisins. They spoke about benefits and challenges of switching to mechanical harvesting from traditional handpick methods. They stressed the importance of soft skills such as work ethic, thinking ahead, and communication. They also said they were looking for basic welding and small engine skills, as well as the ability to write a sentence, show up on time, and work through a problem to completion. I think we can all agree that struggles we have with students in the classroom spill over onto the job site as our students enter the workforce.

Closing Workshops

Our final day concluded with valuable workshops, including utilizing and improving our facilities, using the Ag Career Network, and sharing our own great ideas and success stories. All in all, we had an amazing time! We made some lasting friendships, let off some steam, and gained new skills that will hopefully carry us through the remainder of the year. Thank you to all of those who helped make it possible!


Superior Region (from left): Jake Wheeler, Meaghan Garrison, Katie Bigelow, Melissa Steagall, Kayla Taylor, Trevor Airola.


Southern Region (from left): Rachel Maryanski, Brian Kim, Jennah Proxmire, Maggie Maratsos, Ashley Doyle, Chelyse DeBoor, Kelly Roach, Michelle Du, Krystal Thomas, Kaylene Maize, Kadie Calac, Lindsey Cox.
Inevitable Change, Friend or Foe!
By Ralph Mosqueda, Southern Region President, Hemet High School

As school districts across the state work to develop a Local Control Funding Formula, agriculture teachers have a chance to get involved in the local process of determining how our programs can play into the requirements of the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP). Agricultural education could be primed to set the bar when it comes to what and how a local LCAP is developed. If we are truly looking for students who are college- and career-ready, look no further than agricultural education program completers. In the last 15 years, the California education system, in general, has had many changes occur at all levels. Along with these changes, Career Technical Education and agricultural education programs have been affected, both good and bad!!

Notice for Ag Education
Looking at all of the courses being approved for a-g credit, we definitely are starting to be noticed. Yes, there are times when frustration sets in when a course is not approved—even though other districts submitted the same information and they were approved. But with the new system, there seems to be a positive view in the grading and approval methods.

With the most recent involvement of agriculture educators and the University of California system collaborating together in response to curriculum needs through Vision 2030, agricultural education can be looked at as rigorous educational potential (even though we as ag teachers, already see it this way).

It is now our time to demonstrate to those nonagriculture believers that “Science Is Agriculture and Agriculture Is Science!” (Thank you, Carole, for this statement.)

Enhance Curriculum
I understand there are a few educators out there who are just tired of all the changes and being bombarded with curriculum development and the idea of teaching just plain agriculture curriculum is fading away. Do not let it ruin the traditions and passion you still hold and possess! Just enhance it with the new ways of education.

I have taught for only nine years and I know I have many years to come, but I too have fallen under this “educational depression,” thinking I was going to teach true agriculture my entire career. In the past two years, I have been involved in rewriting six out of seven courses for a-g curriculum just so we can continue providing the opportunities to our students and keep our program alive. There have been moments that I just wanted to quit because I was spending more time writing curriculum, submitting and rewriting, as opposed to teaching agriculture.

As Valuable as Other Core Classes
One day, I sat back to clear my thoughts and evaluated curriculum development and teaching. I analyzed, compared and contrasted other core academic courses and programs, and I came to a realization as to why I am sitting at my desk, working on a-g submissions. Agricultural education is just as valuable as other core classes, our students are both career- and college-ready, and why shouldn’t our students be challenged to develop their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success?

What other programs can provide both career- and college-ready American citizens, in a way that agricultural education can? Fellow agriculture educators, change is inevitable, so don’t fall into the “education depression” —find a solution and throw it back at the world of academia for the benefit of agricultural education and our students.
Personal Best

By Janice Souza, South Coast Region President, Everett Alvarez High School

Recently I went to a movie with my kids. I knew the movie was about a Bay Area high school football team which had an incredible 151-game winning streak. I knew the movie would be inspiring; after all, a 151-game winning streak alone is amazing! As I watched the movie and the character-building methods the head coach used, I couldn’t help but see the similarities between his methods and those in agriculture education programs.

Team Family

His team became a family who thought more about their team and teammates than in themselves. They learned that “family” doesn’t have to be blood. Team meetings were held every week before a game. The coach used this time for team bonding and goal setting. The players were asked to come up with a personal goal and a team goal for the upcoming game. By doing this, each team member was visualizing their personal idea of the concept of “perfection.”

At the close of the meeting, anyone wanting to share an idea or feeling was encouraged to do so. This coach created an atmosphere where each member knew they made a difference and understood that their personal best was important for the team’s success and that if they delivered their “personal best,” win or lose, they had achieved their own perfection. This coach’s goal was not to win every game, and certainly not to achieve a 151-game winning streak. It was to develop morals and values, and more important, confidence, so that as adults, they could not only be dependable but accountable, as well.

FFA Programs

If this sounds familiar, it should. It goes something like this: “FFA makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education.” Our programs do the same thing as this football program.

It’s no exaggeration that agriculture educators and advisors work close to 365 days a year to meet all the components of the three circles. Many of our weekends and vacations are spent taking students to fairs, jackpots, judging contests, leadership conferences, etc. We do this because we know that these activities challenge our students and teach them, not only career skills, but leadership skills that develop morals and values, and more important, a belief in themselves so that as adults, they can be someone who can be depended upon.

Diverse Backgrounds

Agriculture educators come from a wide variety of backgrounds, as do our students. Even though the quality standards and criteria are the same, the programs at each school are as diverse as the students they serve. As advisors, we strive for those section, region, and state champions—and sometimes those expectations are met. There are programs that have those advanced kids who are dedicated and motivated to work hard to develop their skills that result in those championships.

However, many of the agriculture programs have kids with low motivation who have experienced so many negative events and situations, it’s a wonder they are in school at all. Whether it’s the high-achieving student or the low-motivated student, the agriculture department becomes their family. For many of the students, it’s the only stable family they have. Their personal best becomes something entirely different: a transformative experience.

Making a Difference

Agriculture educators may not be able to claim a 151-game winning streak, and many may not even have one championship, but the lives of the students we have made a difference in is immeasurable. This is the time of year when most of us are feeling exhausted keeping up with all the events and deadlines. Each and every one of the opportunities FFA has to offer the students makes a difference, and our students have such a small window for opportunities: four years or less.

But it is here where the metaphor of football comes to a screeching halt. As much as I admire those coaches and athletes for their courage and dedication on the gridiron—when the referees blow their final whistles theirs is only a game. Yes. Only a game. Butours—as agricultural educators and advisors know all too keenly—is much more than a game. On a daily basis, we connect and impact, and yes, I will go as far as to say, save the lives of these students and protect their futures. Our personal best is their personal best and that’s our unifying force.

News and Views

Corporate Membership

Corporate Membership 2014–2015

Our Corporate Members are listed with a brief description of their products on the next few pages.

We encourage your patronage of our Corporate Members, as they have shown a commitment to supporting agricultural education in California.

If you are aware of any others who may be interested in this type of membership, call (916) 714-2970 or email cata@calagteachers.org so we may send pertinent information.

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Teacher in Residence: A Perspective from a High School Teacher to the University Teacher Educator

By Clemente Ayon, Teacher in Residence, Cal Poly State University, San Luis Obispo

I was first introduced to the idea of being a Teacher In Residence (TIR) in the winter of 2013 by the staff of Cal Poly at the South Coast Regional CATA Road Show. I had always wondered what it would be like to teach at the university level and even considered going back to graduate school to get my doctorate degree to have that option in my career.

The avenue opened up for me to experience the university in a special way with the TIR position. The TIR position is where I am still an employee of my school district, but it loans me out to Cal Poly. Cal Poly reimburses the district to hire a new teacher to cover my position while I’m at Cal Poly for the year. I wanted to give the members of the CATA my perspective to either encourage them to go after a new position in our profession or gain an appreciation for those in the position.

I have been asked numerous times, “How do you like Cal Poly?” Along with, “What’s the difference in teaching high school to the university level?” Well, I’m going to do my best to address what I have experienced, and it boils down to these three items: schedule, professional growth, and students.

Schedule

Starting with the schedule—I was used to getting to the high school usually around 7:30 a.m. and staying till 5 p.m. daily. This still happens, but boy what happens in between is very different.

Like all high school teachers, we have bells in our lives that tell us when to get ready, when to stop, when to eat and when to go to the bathroom. I realized that we are conditioned or trained if we have some flexibility within your schedule. I don’t have little Johnny, tapping me on my shoulder every time I turn around. But I do have my mind constantly engaged on something within the workplace. You do get a chance to make your own schedule outside of class time, which is a plus.

Mentoring

As far as professional growth, I can break it down to a few different areas: collegial mentoring, introduction to different agriculture programs from around the state, and the workings of CATA/California Department of Education (CDE). The very first week I attended what Cal Poly calls “Fall Conference,” a week-long series of meetings. I was in the mix of all the doctors and professors from the College of Agriculture and, for the most part, they were very welcoming.

The fun part was the ability to observe all the brain power and the ideas being exchanged throughout the room. Yes, they are people just like everyone else, but there is something to be said about getting them all together to share ideas on how to improve the university. It was very inspiring.

I am very blessed to be working with the faculty of the Agricultural Education and Communication Department here at Cal Poly. They have been so extremely helpful with the transition and helping me adjust. They truly take the time to explain the workings of the university and do it with a smile. The communication within the department is tremendous, and it is refreshing to see such professionalism being demonstrated at the workplace.

Visiting Programs

The ability to be able to visit different agriculture programs around the state has been simply awesome. After teaching 14 years at a single high school, I feel anyone can get “barn blind” and potentially miss out on some good opportunities. I feel fortunate enough to be able to get a bird’s eye view of many programs through student teacher visits, student teacher tours, and class field trips.

It has given me a different perspective on what great things other programs are doing. It is giving me ideas to share with others and my students in the agricultural education courses. Personally, it has affirmed the things we were doing right back at Santa Maria High School and opened up my eyes for areas for improvement.

I believe this self-reflection piece is extremely valuable for any kind of growth to occur.

The staff from the different high schools I have visited have all been extremely helpful and professional, which is a great testament to the workings of the CATA family we are all accustomed to experiencing.

Department of Education

The CDE workings is an area I am beginning to learn more about in this position as well. Cal Poly gets a contract from the CDE to be a project monitor, and in some cases put on the New Professionals Institute, Student Teacher Conclave, Mentoring Conference, Road Shows, Student Teacher Support and Recruitment, and Teacher Placement (job listings). Just in case you’re wondering how much that all costs, it is a contract of $170,000. Cal Poly does not do it all, but manages and oversees the process throughout the state with different universities and regions.

There is a lot of work, and it is quite the process to put on events, just like I witnessed the department come together to pull off a great New Professionals Institute in Fresno. The behind the scenes for the workings of agricultural education is a great cooperation of folks in Sacramento, the universities/colleges and individuals throughout the six regions.

Students

Students are the reason we are in the business of education. There is a difference in the average high school student versus the university-level pupil. What I can equate it to, is if you have 15-20 of your very best FFA officer-type students from your program, and put them into one class. You virtually have no discipline problems, they all want to be there and will do whatever it

(Continued on page 15)
always tried my best to look through Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 plans for students in our classes to help meet their needs. I, like most teachers, find it far from easy to do this. We have so many students with complicated documents stating “measurable goals and objectives,” and it can feel overwhelming. As teachers we have run to IEP meetings to give input and to sign the line that says regular education teacher. We’ve looked at the parents and the “team” of people at the table and offered input on how that student behaves and/or how they can improve, but really sometimes it feels like we need help figuring it all out.

‘Hands-On’ Approach

Most agriculture teachers believe that agriculture education is the perfect avenue for many students who need or crave a “hands-on” approach to learning. I have heard this over and over from parents who are so thrilled to have their child in our program. This tactile, project-based, hands-on theory is attractive to many students who need a different approach to a traditional classroom setting. The leadership and camaraderie developed through FFA programs offer students with special needs a comfortable place to learn and develop. But, how are we as teachers prepared to accommodate students with special needs into our classrooms? Do we know how to interact with the aides who sit in our rooms to help? Are we supposed to talk to them on a daily basis? How can we understand the big picture when it comes to integrating special needs students into our agriculture education programs?

Ideas to Consider

I’m not an expert, but here are some things I have either experienced or learned through this process as both a teacher and a parent.

Communicate with counselors and resource managers

Try your best to get updated background information about the students with IEPs or 504s and simply what the difference is. An IEP is a legal special education document under IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) that a student must test into via a psychoeducational evaluation done by a school district. If a student qualifies for special education, he/she can be given both modifications and accommodations in special education classrooms and general education classrooms.

A 504 Plan also is a legal document, but a function of general education with accommodations made for students within the general education classrooms. The 504 Plan is just as important for teachers to read through and understand.

Express any concerns you have if there are any safety issues with, for example, a shop class or limitations to activities a student can participate in. For example, we have recently seen an increase in 504 Plans for students with extreme allergies in our school. Something as simple as a lesson on animal feed or a trip to the farm could be a risk for some of these students.

Roles and expectations for student aides

You need to know. There are (Continued on page 16)

Teacher in Residence: A Perspective from a High School Teacher to the University Teacher Educator

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takes to be the best they can be.

As many of you know, it is tough to get into Cal Poly and the average GPA/qualifications for incoming freshmen are very high. The students who are here already know how to be successful in the classroom. We all know high school is not like this. There are less student contact hours, as we only see them two to three times a week and the occasional office hour.

Students at the university level prefer to communicate with emails; face-to-face is very rare for questions outside of class. I do enjoy getting to work with student officers from the Collegiate FFA organization; however, that is even limited to seeing them a couple times a week.

Working with student teachers has been a treat for me. I have been able see real growth happening as they apply strategies on a daily basis in a real classroom setting. Visiting student teachers once a month allows me to see the increase in their ability dramatically. I really do miss the daily student interaction I would have at the high school level. Yes, you still get to make an impact on students’ lives and see the influence you have on college students. However, the relationships you would build with them from seeing them on a regular basis and working with them on activities is something you simply do not have on a university campus. To me it is more rewarding seeing an awkward high school freshman turn into a confident senior who has a skill set that will propel them into any life setting they choose upon graduation.

I have barely finished my first quarter here at Cal Poly and can honestly say that I love it. It is a wonderful change that has brought me a new perspective and has allowed me to meet some great people in our agricultural education world. It has been a whirlwind of change for me personally, but the amount of growth that has taken place so far is priceless.

That said, if I want to continue at the university level, I would have to further my education and get a doctorate. A word of advice to anyone if you are ever thinking of pursuing a higher education career: get your doctorate earlier in your career than later. It is a tougher decision to uproot your family from where you are and potentially take a pay cut from where you are to finish your education.

Only you and God know what is best for you and your family and career. Search it out for yourself and see if it is something you were made to do. The California agricultural education family will be needing the next set of individuals to fill in as the “old guard’s" retirees. As for me, I am thankful that Cal Poly has provided this opportunity and that I had the support of my colleagues, school district and family to participate in this endeavor. I look forward to what the rest of the year brings and the future beyond!
Greetings fellow CATA members: I hope that all of you are enjoying the beginning of this school year as much as I am! My inspiration for this article comes from being a part of the 2030 vision mentoring committee. I am very thankful for the group of people I get to work with on this committee. You guys are awesome!

“Don’t re-create the wheel,” a commonly used statement amongst teachers. This statement implies others will help you, others will share their hard work with you, and others will encourage you to watch them teach or offer advice when needed, but most of all this tells us we need to work with you, and others will help amongst teachers. This state-ment implies others will help us.

In our present day of technology where you can Google just about anything, what does it mean to ask someone for their lesson plans or classroom/program tools? What is the correct way to ask—who everybody wins? It’s been an interesting change of events over the past 15 years that I have taught.

File Cabinet Resource

When I started, it seemed like the Internet was almost a cool new thing, but it didn’t have nearly the capability that it does now. Every classroom I have ever walked into has had a file cabinet of lesson plans left by the previous teacher or teachers. They were dusty and looked as if they were printed from a typewriter or even handwritten in many cases. My first couple of years teaching relied on those files heavily until I could create my own.

To those of you who know where I have taught—thank you for leaving those treasures behind! I am embarrassed to admit that I didn’t ask if I could use them, but incredibly thankful for all the time savings that they have provided me over the years.

Using Technology

This got me thinking: what do I do these days if I want a new idea? What do you do?

My normal course of action is to Google it, see if anybody else has been super creative and happened to post it for the world to use. I also have been known to email teachers in our state and ask them to share their great ideas. Everyone I have ever asked has always been completely gracious and open to sharing their ideas. Thank you to all of you! This kind of compassion and sharing is what makes our organization strong!

All my past experiences aside, not everyone is open to sharing and not everyone is okay with getting an email requesting information. I believe this stems from our societal shift.

Face-to-Face Contact

Those of us who have been teaching 15 years or more are used to gathering at FFA activities and CATA meetings and talking to each other. When we started, email was a much less common technology tool and we picked up the phone and called people if we needed something. We exchanged actual words—no texting, tweeting or Facebooking. In many cases we went to the person’s school and had face-to-face contact if we needed something from them. This was just the way we did things.

Anyone can tell you I still have not truly embraced the technology age. I am trying, but I still believe there is no substitute for a face-to-face meeting, an actual phone call or a good handshake. I really like having personal contact with people. How about you?

Best Way to Ask for Help?

Unfortunately, technology advancements have made things too easy. You can know every-
News and Views

Don’t Re-Create the Wheel;
Make Connections, Network, Collaborate

(Continued from page 16)
thing about anything and any-
one in most cases in a matter of
minutes. So then, what is the best
way to ask for help? I am sure
there are a variety of opinions
on this subject.

Many believe you should
introduce yourself to the person
formally first, in person. Many
believe a phone call would suf-
fice. Is it okay to send an email
asking for materials from a
person you have never met? Is it
okay to send the email and just
say, “Hey, send me your stuff”? If
it’s found on the Internet or
passed on by someone else who
was given permission, is it okay
to just utilize it?

I am not sure what the correct
answer is. I have always given
anyone who has asked whatever
I had. I had never really given
much thought to the how or why.

Professional Courtesy

As agriculture teachers, we
are very busy individuals and
the trouble is that oftentimes
when you figure out you need
something, you need it now; you
usually don’t have time to wait.
That being said, professional
courtesy should still be a part of
the “ask.” Different generations
view professional courtesy differ-
ently. Nowadays it is normal
to exchange texts or emails to get
info. Many things have become
nonpersonal. Some people even
like it that way.

So how do we bridge the gap?
How do we help the folks who
like personal, face-to-face contact
connect with the folks who enjoy
social media and the perks of hav-
ing everything at your fingertips
without having to talk to anyone?
Both of these styles have their
value and their perks.

I believe this is where mentor-
ing comes in. No matter your age
or experience level, two things
are true:
• You should always be continu-
ing to learn; and
• Everyone has something posi-
tive to offer someone else.

In doing some research online
(ha ha) I found two lists that I
would like to share with you:

How to Be a Good Mentor

Listen
Guide
Educate
Provide insight
Be accessible
Criticize constructively
Be specific
Care
Succeed
Be admirable

How to Be a Good Mentee

Be ready to work at the relation-
ship.
Be open-minded and ready to
learn.
Be honest and real.
Be proactive and show initiative.
Be prepared for meetings with
your mentor.
Be a good listener.
Be forward thinking.

If you would like to read more,
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at http://polaris.gseis.ucla.edu/
jrichardson/documents/mentor.

Don’t Re-Create the Wheel;
Make Connections, Network, Collaborate

Bridging the Gap

I am certain that by working
together we can bridge the gap
of nonpersonal vs. personal con-
tact and come out even stronger
on the other end. I also want to
encourage everyone reading this
article to take a good look at the
teachers around you, at your
own school, in your sections and
your regions.

Could you be more accessible
to them? Could you provide them
with insight? Could you utilize
their knowledge and listen to
their advice? Let’s do what we
Teach our kids on a daily basis
— MAKE CONNECTIONS,
NETWORK, COLLABORATE.
Don’t re-create any wheels and
together we will continue to
strengthen our classrooms, our
relationships and our profes-
sional organization.
A Perspective from the Ivory Tower

So You’re a Beginning Agriculture Teacher
Starting to Question Your Sanity?

By Dr. Lloyd McCabe
State Supervisor of Agriculture Education, California Department of Education

I don’t know about you…but I have always hated to fly! I subscribe to that time-honored axiom that if “man was meant to fly, then God would have given him wings.” Unfortunately, here I am again, on Southwest Airline Flight #537, traveling at 600 mph at an altitude of 32,000 feet heading to Louisville, Kentucky. Oh, the pain of it all! I think my fear of flying has something to do with my concept of death.

This fear of flying can bring out your worst primal emotions and interestingly enough is very similar to what I believe that many young agriculture teachers experience on the job during their first year of teaching.

**Bumps in Road**

Now veteran agriculture teachers like Roy Beck will tell you that it is a “right of passage” for first-year agriculture teachers to encounter a few bumps in the road. But these “bumps in the road” can cause any sane teacher to jump off the deep end and perhaps even quit the profession. Listed below are some of the bumps that I have heard from first-year teachers over the years:

- First day on the job… no curriculum, no lesson plans, and no visible instructional support to be found anywhere in the agriculture department!
- For those of you who replaced a popular teacher who left the program… students constantly telling you that Mr. Smith never did it that way! Worst yet, juniors and seniors questioning your fitness as a teacher and refusing to participate in activities that you organize.
- For those of you who come into an agriculture program that has had numerous staff departures… encountering students who are unmotivated and have never been disciplined inside or outside the walls of the classroom.
- For those of you who become the department chairperson during your first year… the avalanche of paperwork required from you by the school, Agriculture Incentive Grant, FFA and the California Department of Education.
- During school orientation, the principal informing the faculty and you to “do more with less” and “we are going to hold each of you accountable for the successful performance of every student!”
- Teaching agriculture courses that are outside of your interest range or, worst yet—you’re expertise!

**Teacher Retention**

Statistically, the teaching profession has a very poor track record of retaining beginning teachers. According to the California Department of Education, 20 percent of all new teachers left California’s schools after just one year of service. Another 10 percent leave after the second year and more than 50 percent leave within five years.

According to Dr. Bill Kellogg, head agriculture teacher educator at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, the statistics in agriculture education are not much better.

The reasons for this mass exodus from the teaching profession are extremely complex with no easy answers in sight. I believe that there are three principal reasons many young agriculture teachers leave our profession... poor site support and lack of assistance; isolation; and stressful conditions in a demanding work setting.

**Lack of Assistance**

Site principals and experienced teachers are aware of the rigorous challenges facing beginning teachers. Unfortunately, many principals and veteran teachers are unable to provide the necessary support and assistance for young teachers because they don’t have enough time in the day due to their own hectic teaching and administrative schedules.

This lack of school site support is further compounded when the beginning teacher doesn’t have the appropriate teaching credential or didn’t complete their student teacher experience to learn important classroom and field experiences.

**Isolation**

Agriculture teachers have always had a tendency to isolate themselves from the rest of the campus. Many times this is due to the proximity of the agriculture facility, which in many high schools is located at the back of the school or across the street from the main campus. In my opinion, this isolation for a beginning agriculture teacher leaves them in a “Catch 22.”

Due to the nature of running an agriculture program, new or beginning teachers who are experiencing classroom control or student-related problems have little time in the school day to seek out professional advice from experienced colleagues. Those beginning agriculture teachers who do seek out advice from their department chairperson or site administrator may be perceived as being weak, incapable or less than professional and could receive negative evaluations.

**Stressful Conditions**

A demanding work setting and the stress placed on a beginning agriculture teacher in that setting is in my opinion the chief culprit for many new teachers leaving our profession. Of course, the profession of agriculture education has established high expectations and standards for all secondary agriculture teachers. In other CTE and academic disciplines, teachers develop and refine lesson plans, present their lessons, correct papers, and are assigned to several after school duties during the course of the school year.

But in agriculture education we expect agriculture teachers to:

- manage and run the school farm laboratory;
- attend section CATA meetings;
- advise, organize and attend numerous chapter, section, (Continued on page 19)
So You’re a Beginning Agriculture Teacher
Starting to Question Your Sanity?

(Continued from page 18)

region, and state FFA leadership activities;
• coach an assortment of judging teams;
• supervise student projects;
• take judging teams to field days;
• work on student award applications;
• supervise students at various fairs and shows; and
• develop community linkages and support for the agriculture program.

Of course, this is on top of doing lesson plans, correcting assignments, and being assigned to extra school duties.

Now, don’t get me wrong, I believe that teachers in successful agriculture programs do many of those things listed above and perhaps even more.

However, for a beginning teacher in a one-person department trying to survive the classroom experience, all of these expectations can easily overwhelm this new teacher and cause them to think about other career options.

Support Mechanisms

So, what can be done to reverse this trend of new and beginning teachers leaving the teaching profession? In agriculture education, we have developed several different support mechanisms for beginning teachers. These support mechanisms include:

• The New Professionals Conference, which is designed to help first-, second-, and third-year teachers develop successful strategies for the many challenges of the agriculture education profession;
• Reactivate the ATAC (Agriculture Teacher as Consultant), designed to provide “field experts” in various subject areas to those agriculture teachers who need help with a given problem; and
• Many of the region in-service road shows now have specifically designed workshops just for new or beginning teachers to discuss common problems confronting them in agriculture education.

Transition Measures

Looking at the bigger picture in education, the Governor and State Legislature need to consider far-reaching measures that will help successfully transition all new teachers into the education profession.

These measures will not come cheaply and could include, but are not limited to:

• Requirement that no beginning teacher will teach more than ½ day with a maximum student load of 25 students per class;
• Requirement that every new teacher be helped by some type of teacher support program at the local level;
• Requirement that all beginning teachers team teach with a master and/or mentor teacher during their first year in the profession;
• Requirement that all public schools develop innovative “new teacher support programs” with county offices of education, teacher preparation institutions, and the California Department of Education.

Skilled Teachers Needed

Pie in the sky, you say? Well… maybe! But, can agriculture education and the rest of the California teaching profession continue to lose 30 percent of their new teachers each year? If California is going to have a world-class public schools system that fosters student success, then it will need a large number of highly skilled, trained and talented teachers.

Without these teachers, California students, the education profession and our society will surely suffer the consequences!
2015 Calendar of Activities

January 8–9 .................................................................Student Teacher Conclave ................................................................. Modesto
January 15–16 .................................................................Winter Governing Board ................................................................. Galt
January 24 .................................................................Natural Resources State Finals ......................................................... Reedley
February 7 .................................................................Winter State Finals - Citrus, Tree and Vine Pruning ......................................................... CSU, Fresno
February 23 .................................................................South Coast Region Meeting ......................................................... San Luis Obispo
February 28 .................................................................Central Region Meeting ................................................................. Cosumnes River College
February 28 .................................................................San Joaquin Region Meeting ......................................................... Lemoore
February 28 .................................................................Superior Region Meeting ................................................................. Chico
March 28 .................................................................North Coast Region Meeting ................................................................. Livermore
April 11 .................................................................Southern Region Meeting ................................................................. Cal Poly, Pomona
April 15-17 .................................................................NAAE Region I Meeting ................................................................. Phoenix, Arizona
April 18 .................................................................CSU, Fresno Field Day ................................................................. CSU, Fresno
April 18-21 .................................................................State FFA Leadership Conference ................................................................. Fresno
May 2 .................................................................State FFA Judging Finals ................................................................. Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo
June 21 .................................................................Executive Committee Meeting ......................................................... Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo
June 21 .................................................................Pre-Conference Governing Board ......................................................... Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo
June 21–25 .................................................................CATA Summer Conference ................................................................. Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo
June 25 .................................................................Governing Board Summer Retreat ................................................................. San Luis Obispo

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