Change — A Time for Reflection and Gratitude

By Matt Patton, CATA Executive Director

The dawn of 2018 brings with it many significant changes for the California Agricultural Teachers’ Association (CATA) and the California Association FFA. With a multitude of changes to agricultural education on the horizon, two will alter the landscape of the profession moving forward.

Jim Aschwanden Retirement

As of January, Jim Aschwanden will retire as the Executive Director of the CATA. For decades, Jim has been the respected face of the CATA, and his reputation for a student-first philosophy, dedication to agricultural education, and unwavering honesty has mirrored the attitudes of the CATA membership. Dwight D. Eisenhower wrote; “The supreme quality of leadership is integrity.” This quote encapsulates Mr. Aschwanden’s approach to leadership.

Within Mr. Aschwanden’s 25-year tenure, he has grown the organization from a membership of 460 paid members in 1993 to nearly 900 today. Along the way, he has guided us through State of California budgets and countless threats to the foundation of our profession.

Because of Jim’s humble nature and the reality of backroom politics, we may never know the extent of his leadership and sacrifice. Nevertheless, we owe him our gratitude and appreciation for a career dedicated to advocating for agricultural education, and the students and teachers who are part of the most successful Career Technical Educational system in the United States.

Mr. Aschwanden strategically orchestrated his retirement to draw the least amount of recognition and public fanfare as possible, because that is his nature. We can respect his wishes and still show appreciation for all that he has done.

Veteran teachers: in the coming months share a story of Mr. Aschwanden and/or the trials of the CATA with a younger teacher. This will be an opportunity to reach out, mentor, and share our story with the next generation of agricultural educators. If you have been inspired or influenced by Jim, reach out via email or a handwritten note and thank him for his impact on our profession.

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Expanding Our ‘Appreciative’ Culture

By Dave Gossman, Past CATA President (2016–2017)

As we enter and complete the second half of our agricultural education and FFA school year, we will eventually be taking the time to recognize the numerous students within our program, section, region, and our state with a variety of awards and accomplishments. This is especially true with the numerous Career Development Events (CDEs) where many contest host sites and hundreds of volunteers dedicate their “free time” in preparing, organizing, and implementing quality opportunities for thousands of high school agriculture students to participate, compete, and develop various agriculture-related industry skills.

These “pre-state finals” CDE contests are a privilege within our state organization. The number of CDE field days and competitions in our state are a luxury not seen in other states, and although we pay registration fees that go toward each contest, and although each contest host site gets hundreds or thousands of high school students to visit its campuses and/or host site(s), the fees certainly do not reflect the hundreds and thousands of hours it takes to prepare and implement a contest that involves the generosity of many people who volunteer their time to make the opportunity for your students a reality. Remember, all nonstate finals contests are NOT a requirement by our state. They are a privilege.

Recognition Shortfall

Our profession does a tremendous job in recognizing our students; however as a whole, we sometimes do a lousy job of recognizing those who provide and/or expand the opportunities for our students.

For example, last year’s FFA State Finals at Cal Poly was attended and represented by hundreds of individual agriculture programs and a few thousand individual students, and yet Cal Poly received only a “single-digit” number of thank you letters. The same can be said for the nonstate final CDE host sites.

Expanding Thanks

What can we do to expand our recognition-rich culture? A simple “thank you” letter from each program that participates in a CDE. Here’s how you can make it effective and efficient on your end:

• Send the “thank you” letter in a timely manner — within one week following the contest.

• Type the letter on behalf of your department in a business letter form that includes the address of the CDE host site. This way you can copy/paste the address when printing the envelope.

• Make the thank you meaningful and include at least one picture on the letter of your students who competed. Perhaps it is a group photo prior to or following the contest. Perhaps it is a photo of the student(s) competing (in action) during the competition. This provides the recipient(s)

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Teacher Educator News

Program Standard Changes from Teacher Credentialing Commission Affect Universities, Cooperating Teachers Responsibilities

By Dr. Lynn Martindale, UC Davis

In 2015, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) adopted new standards for programs credentialing teachers in California to align with the new Teacher Performance Expectations (TPE). The CCTC approved the draft of TPE in June 2016.

Biggest Changes

How does this affect sites that host student teachers and university credentialing programs? Basically, the largest changes are:

1) student teachers must have 600 hours of clinical experience;
2) university supervisors must do four formal evaluations per quarter or six per semester;
3) cooperating teachers provide five hours of support to student teachers per week;
4) new cooperating teachers receive 10 hours of mentoring and program orientation; and
5) student teachers leave the teaching site with an individual development plan.

Consequences

And, so what? Well, it means:

1) Student teachers will need to document 600 hours spent with the students, lesson planning, and working with cooperating teachers. We have found the AET T1 program is a great way to document the time spent in and out of the classroom.

2) Cooperating schools will see more of the university supervisors for formal evaluations of the student teachers. The increase in visits will cause an increase in cost for the universities and the need to develop student teaching sites close to the universities.

3) Cooperating teachers will be expected to spend time each week with the student teacher—planning, observing teaching, mentoring, coaching, and encouraging reflection, a minimum of five hours. Although many cooperating teachers may already be spending time with student teachers, in the olden days, the cooperating teachers would say “good luck” and leave; that style of supervision can no longer happen.

4) Universities will need to develop 10 hours of training for new cooperating teachers. The Supervising Conference will come back, replacing the Mentoring Conference requested by the Vision 2030 Committee.

5) The cooperating teacher, university supervisor and student teacher develop an individualized development plan that students will take with them in to their induction program.

New Standards Synopsis

Below is the “Reader’s Digest” version of the New Program Standards. In boldface type are the changes directly affecting the way we currently do things.

Standard 1: Program (University) Design and Curriculum

- Universities may use their own design to prepare student teachers to teach in the public school system. The university curriculum must prepare student teachers to work with typical and atypical children and adolescent growth and development; human learning theory; social, cultural, philosophical and historical foundations of education; subject-specific pedagogy; designing and implementing curriculum and assessment; understanding and analyzing student achievement outcomes to improve instruction; understanding of the range of factors affecting student learning such as the effects of poverty, race, and socioeconomic status; and knowledge of the range of positive behavioral supports for students.

Standard 2: Preparing Candidates to Master the Teaching Performance Expectations (TPEs)

- Student teachers should have multiple opportunities to practice, learn, apply, and reflect on each of the TPEs.

Standard 3: Clinical Practice—Student Teaching Experience

A. Organization of Clinical Practice Experiences

- Student teachers are now required to have a minimum of 600 hours clinical practice. The clinical practice includes any early field experiences, co-planning, co-teaching, activities involving students outside of the classroom under the supervision of cooperating teacher.

- A formal evaluation will be provided by the university supervisor on each candidate four times per quarter or six times per semester.

- Cooperating teachers provide five hours of support per week. The support can vary from emails, observation, coaching, mentoring, attending meetings about students or for professional development.

B. Criteria For School Placement

- School sites selected demonstrate commitment to collaborative evidence based practices and continuous program improvement and the least restrictive environment.

C. Criteria for the Selection of Program (University) Supervisors

- University supervisors should be experts in the content area.

D. Criteria for Selection of District Employee Supervisors (cooperating teacher)

- Must hold a clear credential (minimum of three years of teaching experience).
- Must exhibit exemplary teaching practices as determined by the employer.
- Must participate in 10 hours of initial orientation to the program curriculum, cognitive coaching, adult learning theory, and current content-specific pedagogy and instructional practices.

Standard 4: Monitoring, Supporting, and Assisting Candidate Progress toward Meeting Credential Requirements

- Collaboratively, the university supervisor and cooperating teacher.

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Officers’ Corner

Expanding Our “Appreciative” Culture

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of the letter with a “positive return on their investment” when they can “see” the impact it had on your students.

- Save the letter in your computer files. This will provide you with a saved template for the following year for future contests.

It is easy to rationalize that the people involved in supporting your program and/or students, or the people who volunteer their time in organizing a CDE “know” we appreciate them; however, the fact remains that a simple “thank you” is genuinely appreciated and can be the difference between someone continuing to volunteer their time for you and your students, or taking that time for someone or something else.

Be appreciative. Take the time to show it this year with a simple “thank you” letter or card.
News and Views

Delta Conference Coming to Central Region

By Hugh Mooney, Consultant, California Department of Education

Occasionally, we have an opportunity to participate in an activity that can change our perspective. In 2005, I took advantage of such an opportunity—the Delta Conference. Though I had no idea the impact that this experience would have on me, it changed my perspective and prepared me to become involved in agricultural education in a way that may benefit many more students and teachers than I had ever thought possible.

At the 2004 Central Region Road Show, I attended a workshop that Dr. Dodson presented on the LifeKnowledge Curriculum. At the time, I was teaching at Galt High School and we needed to develop an Agriculture Leadership Course—not one of those so-called “leadership” classes where students sit around and think about the next rally or meeting, but a true leadership class that developed students’ ability to influence and engage other members.

National FFA had announced the Delta Conference to be held in July 2005. This conference was limited to 50 teachers. My thought was: try to get accepted and learn how to better use the LifeKnowledge Curriculum.

Conference Memories

I was excited to have been accepted and made my plans to travel to a resort in Fort Collins, Colorado. I remember the opening session when the National FFA Advisor, Dr. Larry Case, gave the opening remarks. He spoke of the 50 participants being the Delta Force to spread the influence of agricultural education throughout the country. After that session, I wondered what I had gotten myself into. I seriously considered packing up and going home. Andy Armbuster and Seth Derner convinced me to give it another 24 hours. I was glad I did.

The person who led the Delta Conference training was Mark Reardon. He provided perspective and identified the science behind the fact that much of what is normal in education does not engage students in learning.

That is something that I think many of us clearly understood, but our administration would push the latest thing that the district was paying some consultant to fix until they hire the next consultant because it was not working. With the Delta Conference, it was all about the teachers so that when they returned home it would be all about their students.

Pivotal Statement

The statement Mark Reardon made that let me know the Delta Conference was for me was when he said, “It is not important how well teachers teach. What is important is how well students learn.”

What a concept! I was the oldest teacher participating and had the greatest number of years of teaching experience. Most of the teachers had four to eight years of experience.

Because at this conference we all had to stand and deliver parts of lessons, I was able to see some of the most talented teachers in the country.

I realized that most of them were better classroom teachers then I was. I realized that I needed to become better. For a person who was beginning his 21st year teaching, that was not easy to admit.

This experience changed my perspective and allowed me to better engage my students in learning.

In both 2007 and 2009, I was happy to have been part of an effort to bring the Delta Conference to California.

If you would like to hear from those who attended those two conferences, ask around. These teachers will be happy to share.

As I mentioned, this conference is unlike any conference you have attended. That is why it is a competitive application process. The registration fee is inclusive: room, food, and materials.

Teacher Educator News

Program Standard Changes from Teacher Credentialing Commission

(Continued from page 3)

Each student teacher will leave the student teaching site with a plan for induction. This plan of recommendations will be based on the collaboration of the cooperating teacher, university supervisor, and student teacher.

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If you would like to hear from those who attended those two conferences, ask around. These teachers will be happy to share.

If you truly want to better engage your students in learning, the Delta Conference is for you.

Why Delta Conference Is Different

The Delta Conference is not like other conferences that you have attended. They will not read a PowerPoint to you and then give you a 40-minute break. You will start early and work late. You will not need to plan evening activities while you are attending the conference, because after you take a few minutes each evening chatting with those in other groups, you will have plenty to do to prepare for the next day.

I worked harder at the Delta Conference than any conference that I have ever attended. I also accomplished more than I had at any conference I have attended. This is by far the most impactful conference I have attended. If you have the opportunity to attend, you will change to better engage your students.

Central Region to Host

If you are not aware, the Central Region Agricultural Education Career Pathway Consortium is hosting a Delta Conference July 2018. It is open to all agricultural education teachers.

As I mentioned, this conference is unlike any conference you have attended. That is why it is a competitive application process.

The registration fee is inclusive: room, food, and materials. Ask your regional supervisor and teachers you admire if this conference is for you.
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News and Views

5 Ways Agriculture Teachers Can Help Lift Students Out of Poverty

By Nicole Ray, CATA Operations Division Chair-Elect

Some of the students we make the most lasting impacts on are not the ones who are featured in blue jackets on the front page of the newspaper, members of a top five state finals teams, or members of the officer team. One of my most treasured teaching experiences relates to a student who never even wore an FFA jacket. In fact, Jorge only passed my Biology class with a D.

I had the opportunity to work with him the next year in my double period Animal Handling class. Jorge had his own flock of Dorper sheep and wanted to learn to take care of them. Over the next year, Jorge learned many skills that would help him with his sheep business, and I learned a lot about Jorge.

He had been working on a dairy milking cows at night in order to help support his family. He came to school each day with only a few hours of sleep. It is no wonder he struggled to be academically successful. His family, like many others you may know, are part of a multi-generational poverty cycle.

Complex Issue

Poverty is a complex issue involving parental employment status, family structures, and parental education. These factors combine and can result in a deficit of resources for families and students.

“The true discrimination that comes out of poverty is lack of cognitive strategies. The lack of these unseen attributes handicaps in every aspect of life the individual who does not have them.” (Payne, 2005, p. 107)

In order to overcome these handicaps, there are two major factors that can help students move out of poverty: relationships and education. As agriculture teachers, we have the opportunity to help students make the jump.

Helping Break the Cycle

Here are some ways we can help these students break the cycle of generational poverty.

Give students a reason to leave poverty

This seems obvious, but in order to make the leap to the middle class, students need their own why or who. The why relates to helping students to see the value in education and to set goals for their future. Ag teachers can guide students through the process of developing a resume, cover letter, and portfolio. Give students opportunities to explore careers and continued education through college or trade school. Help them to create goals and timelines to meet their goals.

These activities help students to see where education and career training might fit into their short- and long-term goals. Seeing this vision as a real possibility makes these goals seem attainable.

As teachers, we can also be the who for our students in poverty. To negotiate the unwritten rules of the middle class, students need someone to model what these behaviors look like. You might remember a time when you have taken a student to a restaurant, and they were not sure why there were so many forks, or how to use them. Many students need training on basic social graces, like not interrupting others when they talk, chewing with their mouths closed, and other behaviors that will help them to negotiate the norms that are necessary for employment in high-paying jobs.

Teach language

Help students to gain the formal language skills they will need to be successful in the middle class. This means incorporating authentic opportunities each day for students to engage in the domains of language through reading, writing, listening, and speaking. If students can’t learn to speak and write in the academic register, they will struggle academically, on standardized tests (for school and those that might be required for employment), and will be unlikely to make it through the interview process for high-paying jobs.

What does this look like in your classroom? Activities like think, pair, share are great ways for students to practice writing their thoughts individually, then listen to others, and share their own thoughts.

You can make this activity even more powerful if you make the expectation for their arguments or explanations to get clearer and stronger with each pair share. Clearer thoughts can be a result of learning from other students’ vocabulary and sentence structure. Stronger thoughts may look like a greater number, or better use of evidences to support their claims.

After the sharing activity is complete, you might consider giving students an opportunity to reflect on the process to help them to build metacognition. Seeing how their explanation became clearer and stronger may help students to become more aware of their learning, not only relating to your content, but also relating to the domains of language.

Model and reinforce positive behavior

There are many unwritten rules students will need to learn to live by if they are to be successful in the middle class. Because they lack language, students often resort to resolving conflict with what we perceive as violence, argument, and disrespect.

In poverty, these are necessary skills to survive, but if students can’t learn conflict resolution and self-control, they will struggle to lift themselves from poverty where they can maintain a job and avoid domestic dysfunction in their home.

You can give students opportunities to practice self-control through your class activities. Have clear expectations about how everyone will be treated in your classroom through rules or classroom norms.

When issues occur, you may be able to help students see alternatives to their response, and understand the consequences of the attitude or choice they have made.

Use graphic organizers and make models

Consider how students communicate with their casual language. Their stories often jump from place to place, and may even begin with the end. As a result, this language structure creates difficulty for students in organizing and categorizing knowledge.

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Maggie McGill
(855) 837-9110
maggie.mcgill@cevmultimedia.com
Thomas McMullen
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Ag Education Manager
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steve.derosse@cevmultimedia.com
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Shannon Barnett
423 W Fallbrook Avenue #105
Fresno, CA 93711
(559) 226-0405
alltechcalifornia@alltech.com

Pat Ariaz & Jan Griffin
(209) 969-4307
10180 Hayward Road
LaGrange, CA 95329
patariaz@yahoo.com
Ariazboers.com

John Scheuber
4100 Bangs Ave.
Modesto, CA 95356
(209) 541-4092
Fax (209) 545-8244
john.scheuber@vsi.cc
www.vsi.cc

Animal Health Products Distributor
In order to commit learning to a memory, individuals must create a mental model. Models may be different for each individual, but could be a drawing, story, metaphor, or analogy. Incorporating graphic organizers and utilizing models where students identify big ideas, connections, and make labels, can help students to learn a systematic approach to organizing and categorizing what they have learned.

These organizational structures help students to build the framework for learning academic language, which is highly structured compared to their conversational language.

The ideas of models can include drawings used to plan agriculture mechanics projects, it could also be a model your students make to explain a phenomenon relating to a performance expectation in your Agriculture Biology or Chemistry class.

The process of identifying relationships and using the correct language to describe the components of the model are crucial for helping students to build academic language to help them succeed in school and to get the high-paying jobs they need to break the poverty cycle.

**Project-based approach**

Hands-on learning and project-based approaches create a greater level of engagement, which also helps students to see the value in education. Challenging students to create solutions to real world problems looks different in each agriculture course; the spirit is largely the same, however.

Working with industry and keeping up on current agricultural issues can help you to provide authentic opportunities for students to engage in creating their own solutions to real problems. When possible, incorporate rubrics and allow students to use their rubric in the planning process as well as the evaluation of their learning.

Reflecting on their learning and areas of strengths and areas for improvement play an important role in what students will commit to long term memory. It will also assist in helping students to make behavioral choices where students can see the consequences of their choices.

**Student Support**

“The supports these students need are cognitive strategies, appropriate relationships, coping strategies, goal-setting opportunities, and appropriate instruction both in content and discipline.” (Payne, 2005, p. 107)

Unless you teach in a bubble, we all have our own Jorge. My Jorge graduated, and has come to visit me several times since then. The dairyman he works for has made it a priority for Jorge to attend college, and is helping him to earn his two-year degree in dairy science. Jorge has also been working with the dairy’s AI technician to learn the skill of AI, and now does most of the breeding on the dairy. When Jorge finishes his degree, his employer has offered him a managerial position.

I certainly don’t claim to be the reason Jorge is successful; however, it’s important to note Jorge has had several adult mentors that have given him a reason to leave the poverty cycle and offered to help him build the skills necessary to live in the middle-class world.

It is important to remember that we are agriculture teachers, but more important, we teach kids. In our position, we have the amazing opportunity to use agriculture as a vehicle to provide students with opportunities that can empower them to rise above challenging circumstances regardless of their socioeconomic or domestic status.

Further Reading: Understanding Poverty by Ruby Payne

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**Aggie Annex Now Online**

Look for the Aggie Annex online at www.calagteachers.org/GoldenSlate.html
Questions to Ponder: Answers from the Generation of Agriculture Instructors Who Have Shaped CATA

By Travis Cardoso, Operations Division Vice Chair

The voice of the experienced generation has spoken. The new generation of agriculture instructor had their chance to speak with my article last year and now it will be time for the new generation to sit back, glean, and listen. As you sit back wondering how you will get through the year.

We have all seen the chart below. As you review the chart, know that this is the lowest point of every year. The reason for this article is to let you know that we are here for you and if you need anything at all—support, an ear to vent to, curriculum—all you have to do is ask.

There were five questions the instructors were asked to answer:

- What do you feel is the strongest aspect of CATA?
- What do you think the future of CATA holds for you?
- What is one area in which CATA can help younger teachers “stay in the game”?
- Do you feel that younger teachers capitalize on all of the support in our profession, why/why not?
- How can more experienced agriculture educators (like yourself) help younger educators become better?

The experienced instructors who had responded were very excited to feel included on a task such as this. To me it is always important to know where you came from in order to know where you may be heading. To learn from your past is one of the most important aspects of elevating yourself within education.

What do you feel is the strongest aspect of CATA?

Of the teachers polled, the majority stated that the strength of our organization lies within our members and our current structure of how the local level up to the state level is laid out. It allows for constant face-to-face interaction, which allows us to come together and represent the common goal. The foundation is laid within the sectional leaders and allows the region and state association to be as strong as they are.

Other individuals feel that being able to keep our current entities, such as the Ag Incentive Grant, alive has allowed many programs to flourish over the last few decades. Our organization with its summer conference (Continued on page 13)
Questions to Ponder

(Continued from page 12) has allowed for a great structure when it comes to things such as Curricular Code so our contests are always run at the highest level.

Another individual stated that our ability to have a hand in legislation in Sacramento has been a strong area for CATA as well. What do you think the future of CATA holds for you?

The question here was unanimously stated as the toughest question in the mix. Every single instructor stated that this was tough because they have already participated in a lot that the CATA has to offer. Some of these instructors have served several times through the sectional chairs; some have served as state officers; and some thought that this was a collective operation and not just about the individual.

The overarching theme was that these experienced teachers already have had to get through the gauntlet and know exactly what it takes to make it in this profession. Even through all their combined years of teaching experience, not once did they say that they would change it for the world.

They also stated that one of the things you have to learn as an agriculture instructor is that you may not always like the task, but the task needs to be completed. These advisors felt they would be willing to roll up their sleeves and complete any task that is placed in front of them because it will not only make them better, but it will better everyone around them.

What is one area in which CATA can help younger teachers “stay in the game”?

This question had the most diversity to it, which is exactly what I was hoping for. However, even though it was diverse, the underlying message was almost the same throughout. In our profession, just like any, there are good days and bad days. How you handle each situation is what essentially makes the reflection process a real learning experience.

A few instructors stated that mentoring is where we can help the most. It has started to take shape with the California Agricultural Teachers’ Induction Program that Vision 2030 was able to get off the ground. The responses also stated that if you need help, ask around, especially if it is in your subject/content area of “expertise.”

Do you feel that younger teachers capitalize on all of the support in our profession? Why/why not?

The question that had the most split response amongst the experienced instructors was this question right here. Teachers weighed in on a wide variety of thoughts and answers and it is something the new/beginning teacher should listen to. Every section, county and region, is a little different but the answers to this question carry their weight in gold if you are taking away the overlying message.

First, all the teachers remember what it was like being a teacher in your first few years: How overwhelming it was and still can be.

Second, they understood what it was like and how times have changed for the better in several areas. They also found a few pet peeves, if you will call them that, of which some of our younger teachers are guilty as well.

With this question came several responses, as I alluded to earlier. Both sides of the fence were voiced and some instructors felt as though new teachers in this day and age want instant gratification. The days of learning by doing are becoming ancient history and some of our experienced teachers want it to be known that if this continues, we will cease to exist.

They also stated that this occurs in every pathway; they are seeing instructors want the right answer now, and are not willing to put the time in. Some instructors would also like to see, if and only if the younger instructors are comfortable, involvement at the sectional level so the new instructors can learn how the foundation is supposed to be laid.

On the other side of the coin, we have several instructors who feel that our younger instructors are doing a fantastic job. They are volunteering, they are asking for help and they are staying involved.

Many experienced instructors looked to and noted the burnout rate is now up to 50% of teachers do not make it past year five. These teachers were concerned that professional development is not a mainstay in other areas and were very pleased with how much professional development is available in CATA.

They also stated that in order to stay in the game, you have to keep practicing; whether that’s professional development at their site, CATA, or an outside source.

It’s always nice to mingle with other teachers who are in our same experience group.

How can more experienced agriculture educators (like yourself) help younger educators become better?

The experienced teachers had a unifying voice on this last question they stated that communication is key. Unless they are in your department, they cannot know if anything is wrong unless it is shared. They would love to extend a helping hand wherever needed, but if they do not know where it is needed, they cannot help.

They also praised the CATA on how lucky our organization is to have such a strong foundation and how it has continued to be progressive over the last century. It has also been noted that other organizations have been visited and nothing really can compare to what we have here.

It was also stated that the veteran instructors should be reaching out to the younger instructors as well. They know where the younger generation is coming from and know that it is no easy task to be able to go up to a teacher you have never met personally, but you absolutely respect them. Veteran teachers are always challenging themselves to be better and now are wanting to help in any way, shape or form.

Challenge

The challenge has been extended to the younger generation of agriculture instructors; now the real question is: will you accept?

“A good leader is a person who takes a little more than his share of the blame and a little less than his share of the credit.”

— John C. Maxwell
Welcome to the Spring Semester

By Wesley Hunt and North Coast Region Teachers

Every November and December, I begin thinking about how I will manage the spring semester. It seems that it’s one of those constant worries for me as I drift off into winter break. How will I get everything done? Who has enough activities for their State Degree? When will I tag all our animals for fair? Who is going to compete in the speaking contest? When should I do chapter project competition? How will I make sure labs supplies are prepared? These are just some of the questions that plague my mind months before they ever come to fruition. While I like to think I am still a new teacher, I sat down to think: What do actual new teachers worry about? FFA? Classes? SAE supervision? Etc.

I think for most new (and some veteran) teachers, the spring, and all that is our “FFA Spring Crazy,” it’s mostly just the unknown. Or just the idea that you need to tread water to make it to June.

Idea to Handle Spring

Whatever method you utilize, here’s a list of ideas to help you take care of yourself and school in the spring:

• Find something that relaxes you. Alissa Sarvinski from Eureka High School says, “Really do enjoy getting starts going in the greenhouse for transplanting in January and February on my family farm. Although this is still considered work, it is mindless and productive. I appreciate that I can be productive and mindless at the same time. It is normally quiet and uninterrupted.”

• Try to still eat healthy. I know when I first started, my field day go-to breakfast was a Diet Pepsi and Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups. Yeah, literally the worst breakfast ever! Since then I have ditched soda, but Emmalee Casillas from Napa has the best idea. “When going to field days we usually think about food that is fast and convenient. Instead of eating the fast food that the kids would rather eat, I always pack snacks for myself. Beef jerky, trail mix, fruit, and lots of bottled water helps keep me eating healthy and satisfied so I eat as little fast food as possible.”

• Take an hour for you. Whether once a month or once a week, find an hour and “You do you.” Anything from getting a pedicure to being in your personal barn with animals to reading the newspaper. Find a little sliver of time just for you.

• We are all out of the class-room for our students, FFA and CATA during the school year, but how many of us just take a day off for us? Sandy Dale says, “I would schedule a day off for myself—actually to get caught up at home. One per semester every year. I would usually schedule my fall day for near Christmas, and stay home and decorate our house while the kids were at school. Spring time I would often get the kids out of school to ditch with me (when they were little). Knowing I would have those two days for whatever kept me going!”

• Google Keep. Have you used it? You should! It’s an app that allows you to create and cross off your To-Do items. It’s super easy to use and lets you keep track of that endless list of things you plan to accomplish. As a department, you can even share your list so that everyone can see what is coming up and what needs to get done.

• Email, beg, borrow, and share curriculum with friends. When I was a first- and second-year teacher, I shared and traded lessons with all my friends who were teaching the same classes. But I also spent most Sundays working on planning, creating and practicing lessons. While we are all stressed for time, it’s important that you know what you are teaching and that comes naturally from putting in the time and effort to design cool lessons.

• Time with friends and family. While we all spend countless hours together as a profession and not at home with our own family, take the time at home and really BE PRESENT when you are home. Whether it’s a family dinner at the table or meeting up with a best friend to enjoy an adult beverage, be present and get rid of the phone/email/etc.

• When you’ve been working a few years and you need to re-energize, Judy Aschwanden recommends, the NAAE XLR8 Program. She says it is great for, “providing strategies, awareness, and confidence that you can be a great Ag teacher without spending 22 hours a day with your students or at school.” She also says to explain to students and parents the value of your time. They really do understand if you tell them, and respect your commitment to yourself and families.

• Give students the responsibility! Don’t do anything that your students can do for you. They are so capable, if you let them do things for you and the chapter. Things might not always be done exactly like you would do it, but it can save your personal time that you can spend on other more important things. Additionally, find ways to maximize your time. I use three-week packets in my classes, which means I make copies only every three weeks. This really frees up my “before and after school time” for more important things like talking to kids, or practices.

• Prioritize your time. Be mindful of how you spend your time—keep a calendar and remember that all your students need your attention. Randy Mendes suggests “evaluating the amount of time needed versus number of kids impacted” for activities where you place your priorities. Depending on department size and student population, it could really change the culture of your department. For example, do you spend time with a team of four or spend time and energy on chapter-wide activities and community development?

Remember, rarely are things an emergency; however, treat everything with the same urgency that you treat your priorities. Show you care, put in the time, work hard—the rest will follow. Just remember, all good things take time. Best of luck to you and your chapter as you embrace the spring semester!
Conversations: Observations from San Luis Obispo Master Classes

By Emmalee Casillas, Napa FFA and Mindy Clisso, Hanford FFA

Emmalee: “So we’re down here at Cal Poly living the SLO life for the next three weeks working on our Master classes and it’s been a nice change of pace from the crazy spring, not to mention a reprieve from that crazy heat everyone else in California is experiencing. Mindy, what’s been the most surprising thing you’ve noticed after taking a couple of your first classes?”

Mindy: “I was very nervous going back to school and worried that it was going to be lecture and notes, but the first thing I noticed about the Master classes is they are a very relaxed and open setting, which allows teachers to get to know one another and collaborate. It’s also been fun to get out of my ag teacher clothes and put on my beach clothes to get my learn on!”

E: “Be careful letting people see you in all those comfy clothes; people may start thinking you get the summers off!”

M: “Yeah, summers off... if people only really knew! I love watching all those “you know you’re a teacher during the summer” videos on Facebook because they are 100% accurate. I wish I could sit around all summer and catch up on the latest and greatest on Netflix. After Masters, I have Ag Staff planning retreat. I’m writing a whole new course for Intro to Ag, then have officer retreat. I know when you get home you’re going to sit in the comfort of your air conditioned house and eat bon-bons all day.”

E: “Oh definitely, isn’t that what everyone does?! No, when I get home, I’ve got to take my officers on retreat, which by the way this year we decided to do a low-budget/no-budget retreat in our local area. We’re doing industry tours on one day, camping on the farm, and then program planning and team building the second day. I’ve got some frugal kids who’d rather spend their money on their chapter as a whole than themselves, so that’s kind of cool.”

M: “Wow, your kids want to be frugal?! How many high school kids even see the value in saving a dollar for the better of the greater good? That’s impressive. I wonder how many other careers have the opportunity to make such an impact on the lives of other individuals that will last their entire lifetime? I know I’ve only been teaching for two years, but I knew right away that I would rather take the worst day in the classroom over the best day I ever had in the office while working in industry.”

E: “Sometimes I get a bunch of fresh flowers in my truck to do a floral job and think I’m just gonna quit and open my own floral business. I always forget how much I loved being a florist. But then I take those flowers to the farm where I’ve got kids waiting to help make some arrangements and I remember why I started teaching in the first place. I think one of the coolest parts of our profession is that most of us had that opportunity to work extensively in the ag industry and were exposed to so many facets, and instead of pigeonholing ourselves in one position or another we chose to share our experiences with our kids. Alright, well it’s Thursday and we’re in SLO, I think it’s time to head to the Farmers Market. I guess we do try to sneak in a little fun during the summer.”

“Conversations” will be an ongoing column dedicated to sharing ideas and inspiration between ag teachers from differing backgrounds. If you would like to have a “conversation,” please contact Emmalee (emmalee_casillas@nvusd.org) or Mindy (dclisso@hjuhsd.org). We’ll talk to you about anything!


Golden Slate

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CATA Calendar of Events 2017–2018

January 11–12 ............................................................. Winter Governing Board ................................................................. Galt
January 20 .................................................................... Natural Resources State Finals ....................................................... Reedley
February 3 ...................................................................... Winter State Finals - Citrus, Tree & Vine Pruning .................................. CSU, Fresno
February 24 .................................................................... Central Region Meeting ......................................................... Modesto Junior College
February 24 ...................................................................... San Joaquin Region Meeting .................................................... Tulare
February 26 ...................................................................... South Coast Region Meeting ...................................................... San Luis Obispo
March 10 ........................................................................ Superior Region Meeting ........................................................ Chico
March 24 ........................................................................ North Coast Region Meeting .................................................. Mendo/Lake Section-Kelseyville
April 7 ............................................................................... Southern Region Meeting ....................................................... Cal Poly Pomona
April 21 .............................................................................. CSU - Fresno Field Day ................................................................. Fresno
April 22–25 ...................................................................... State FFA Leadership Conference ................................................. Anaheim
April 25–28 ...................................................................... NAAE Region I Meeting ................................................................. Utah
May 5 .................................................................................. State FFA Judging Finals ......................................................... Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo
June 24 ............................................................................. Executive Committee Meeting ................................................. Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo
June 24 ............................................................................. Pre-Conference Governing Board .................................................. Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo
June 24–28 ...................................................................... CATA Summer Conference ....................................................... Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo
June 28 .............................................................................. Governing Board Summer Retreat ........................................ Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo

“Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality.”
—Warren G. Bennis