Election Brings Big Changes to Sacramento

By Matt Patton, CATA Executive Director

Sacramento

As the calendar rolls to 2019, great changes are coming to Sacramento and the Capitol. The 40th Governor of California was elected. This marks the first time in over 100 years that California has elected two consecutive Democratic governors. A new Legislature was sworn in during early December. Democrats will maintain their supermajority in both the State Assembly and the State Senate. Additionally, the Democrats will maintain the trifecta in California by holding the Assembly, Senate, and Governor’s Office.

Specific to education, a come-from-behind victory results in the crowning of a new Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tony Thurmond. Undoubtedly, the first order of business for all branches of government in California will be dealing with the devastating economic impact of the fires on California.

Governor

The Governor-elect is a Democrat who has been the Lieutenant Governor of California since 2011 and was previously the 42nd Mayor of San Francisco. Gavin Newsom will be officially sworn into office on January 7, 2019.

Mr. Newsom’s policy on education has been dubbed “Cradle to Career.” The Governor-elect has often referenced universal preschool and the need for preparing students for college and career. Additionally, he has promised to increase the funding to the University of California and California State University systems to avoid future tuition hikes.

Superintendent of Public Instruction

Former Assembly Member Tony Thurmond is the new Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI). Mr. Thurmond is a Democrat who represented the 15th Assembly District, which encompasses the East Bay.

Prior to his service in the Assembly, Mr. Thurmond focused on social service work related to foster youth and educational programs targeting at-risk youth. Mr. Thurmond promotes “giving every kid an opportunity to...”
Officers’ Corner

Finding Your Bliss
By Shay Williams-Hopper, State CATA Treasurer

In October 2016, my oldest son, Wyatt, asked me to go outside to run and play. At that time, I was unable to physically keep up with him. I was stressed, unhealthy, and unhappy. I had become so engrossed in everything else I had to do, that I missed taking the time to care for myself. I was withdrawn from my life, friends, and family.

Take a second to think about all of the items you have on your plate on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis: lesson plans, purchase orders, sending emails, writing tests, grading papers, contacting parents, booster clubs, evaluations, FFA meetings, PTO meetings, school site council meetings, professional development, proofreading speeches, award applications, transportation requests, essential learning outcomes, sectional meetings, dinner, grocery shopping, getting your oil changed, cleaning your house, baseball practice for your children, bedtime routine—the impossible to-do list goes on and on. We have a tendency to become overworked and tired, which leads to us being burnt out and resentful.

Making Time for YOU
Now, how many of those items on your plate require you to stop and focus on YOU only? As educators, we are so focused on everyone around us, we forget that in order to care for them, we have to care for ourselves first. We need to hit the refresh button, just relax, and free our minds.

I vividly remember that day in October as I walked in the house and told my husband, Ryan, “That’s it…I am taking charge and I am going to do something for me.” So I laced up my tennis shoes and went for a walk. I walked to the stop sign down the street from my house, which was 1.4 miles round trip. I felt my body relax. My mind cleared and the only thought I had was the music playing in my earbuds. When I got home, I was tired, but so much happier. So the next day, I laced up my shoes and I went walking again.

As I got stronger, I started running bits and pieces of my walk and gradually increased my distance. As I did, the calmer I felt myself and my life become. Carving out 30 minutes a day just for me, made me something I had not been in a long while... happy.

Competition
If you know me, I am the most competitive person in the world, but I love to compete with myself the most. I set a goal of walking / running 365 miles in 365 days. To help meet this goal, I looked online in February and found a half-marathon in San Francisco and I signed up. Now let’s be honest, the only reason I signed up was because I got to wear a pink tutu while I ran, and as a prize at the end (Continued on page 3)

Sacramento Scene

(Election Brings Big Changes to Sacramento)

(Continued from page 1)
succeed in the 21st century, not just the ones that show the most potential.”

Budget
Governor Newsom’s first budget is due three days after he takes office. For the first time in decades, there is an expectation that Career Technical Education (CTE) will have a permanent, sustainable source of revenue. The current budget allocates more than $300 million ongoing dollars to K–12 CTE.

We will closely monitor the release of the new budget, making sure that the Agricultural Incentive Grant, Strong Work Force dollars, and the CTE Incentive Grant are all funded at appropriate levels.

It is also important to monitor the rollout of these programs to ensure that the intent of the new funding is being implemented and that the money gets to students and is not supplanted.

We continue to work with the GetREAL coalition to advocate for all of CTE. With an ongoing funding stream seemingly in place, GetREAL and CATA will turn their focus to securing a continued funding source for CTE staffing.

It is only logical that accountability and support be provided along with funding for CTE. Without oversight holding school districts to the 11 quality criteria of CTE, there is little incentive to build and improve quality CTE programs.

Dr. Lloyd McCabe
After 40 years of serving agricultural education, Dr. Lloyd McCabe has retired. He leaves behind a legacy in the ag teaching profession.

He has accomplished what we all hope to, and that is leave the profession better than when we found it. Thank you, Dr. McCabe.

Please reach out to Lloyd and show him your appreciation.

Reflecting Back
As the New Year begins, we reflect back on the losses experienced in 2018.

The California agricultural teaching community suffered tremendous loss via the fires and the passing of several members of the ag teaching family. These events brought about great trauma and sadness to numerous members across the state.

The level of support and countless acts of kindness provided by the ag teaching community in reaction to these tragedies was both inspiring and humbling. Every level of the ag teaching family, from the National FFA to the local programs, stepped up to help our brothers and sisters in need.

Personally I attended multiple regional CATA events where thousands of dollars where raised in minutes to assist those affected.

These donations where made at the spur of the moment without hesitation or fanfare by you, the ag teachers of California. Thank you all for what you continue to do for others.

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Region Articles

Who Knows You?

By John Williams, San Joaquin Region President, CSU Fresno

We are constantly reminded to make sure we have a strong advisory committee — to make sure you have prominent people in your corner to aid when issues arise. This is very true, but not everyone in your community is willing/wanting to serve on your committee.

Every community has backers of agriculture. Up and down the state, we see acres and acres of farm land, feed stores, tractor dealerships, etc. — businesses that are willing to support you in many ways. One of the hardest things to do is move into a community and find out where that support is.

I was blessed to teach in a community that had a lot of support for our agriculture program. Madera in general has a big heart for kids and loves to support all programs that help those kids. The agriculture program was no different. There were times we needed things and all I had to do was make a phone call and next thing we knew it was taken care of — not just by advisory members, but people in the community who believed in our product.

So how do you do make those connections? There are many ways, but the biggest thing is making sure the people of the community know you.

Making Connections

When I started teaching, Mr. Jim Bomprezzi, the man I replaced after he retired, took me around to meet people who had supported the small engines program that he had established. We went to a couple of businesses in town and took almost an entire day to meet them, learn about their businesses, and make a connection.

If you have ever met Jim, you would know how thoughtful, honest and hardworking he is. He has made an impact on the students he taught and the community he came from. He grew up in Madera, taught for over 30 years in that community and has a lot of connections.

As a new teacher who was from a different part of the state, I knew I had to make some connections to be able to accomplish all of my goals. It took time, it took effort, and to be honest, it was one of the smartest things I ever did.

Making the connections was easy: go into a business, meet the managers and employees, and find out what they do. The key is learning about their business, learn about what they do. (Continued on page 4)

Officers’ Corner

Finding Your Bliss

(Continued from page 2) of the race, they promised me a pink boa and crown… but I knew in my heart that this was exactly the motivation I needed to keep focusing on me.

I was pushing myself to run farther, faster, and longer each and every time, and as a result, the more relaxed, the friendlier, and happier I became.

I had found my bliss in running. Not only did I feel the difference, but my whole family did as well. Ryan, my husband, would meet me at the door with my running shoes on especially trying days and wouldn’t let me in the house until I ran. I saw my productivity increase, I found it easier to deal with stress, and became the happy mom and wife at home that my husband and two boys deserved.

Reconnect with Yourself

So I am sure you are thinking to yourself — why is she encouraging me to run… I hated running in high school, and I hate it today! I get that, I hate running too! My message is not for you to run, but rather find time in your life to do something that makes you happy, relaxed, and stress free. Find your bliss.

More important, I am giving you permission to be selfish and take the time to reconnect with yourself in whatever activity it is that will make you stronger, healthier, and happier. Read a book, try yoga, schedule a monthly massage, journal in a diary, sew, travel, camp, do 90x, bake, try Zumba, go fishing, go to the archery range, write a letter to your best friend, ride a bike, meditate — do whatever it is that takes your mind off of life and allows you to refocus your attention on you.

Spend that time to focus on relieving stress, and becoming mentally focused. I am giving you permission to pause being a teacher, wife, mother, counselor, friend, sister, entertainer, referee, PTO president, etc. and focus on yourself, so that when you return to all of the hats you wear, you can do those jobs to the best of your abilities.

Difficult Task

I have to be honest, it is a difficult task to focus solely on yourself.

• First off, guilt has a way of making you put yourself on the backburner. I have a difficult telling people “no,” which causes my self-care balance to take a back seat. Please talk with your teaching partners, significant others, families, and friends and let them know that you need their support to allow you to become healthier. But in return, you must foster this same culture for them and their needs.

• Second, create an action plan of how you are going to care for yourself, and schedule it into your calendar. Do not forget to think about the logistics that go along with this activity, so that your stress reliever can be stress free. Also, don’t be afraid to incorporate this stress-relieving activity into your school day if possible. I often walk during my lunch break at school.

• Third, do not allow for a mental excuse to sideline your progress. There were days when I would come home, and try to make excuses about why I couldn’t run: it’s too cold, it’s too hot, it’s too dark, my clothes are dirty… but those were the days I needed to run the most. Those will be the days you need to focus on yourself the most to!

Commit

Together, let’s commit to being better — better tomorrow for ourselves, our families, our friends, and our students.

There will always be another day to finish grading those papers, write lesson plans, send that email, or whatever else is on your plate.

But there will never be another time to begin bettering yourself. Take the plunge, and find your bliss.
Region Articles

Agricultural Education: Learning to Do, Doing to Learn

By Alex Hess, Central Region President, Davis Sr. High School

During the past 30 years, research in agricultural education has focused on agricultural literacy. This research focus has invigorated debate about the role agriculture plays in the United States and about its place in a modern public school system.

As agriculture educators, we understand the importance of agricultural literacy from two clear and distinct vantage points:

• First, from the urban city centers to the corners of our productive rural farming communities, the general public does not truly understand how food is produced and what it takes to get safe and affordable food to the table. Simply take a survey of your students who are taking your class to get their background and understanding.

• Second, we understand the importance of educating our students in agriculture. We want them to be equipped with the hard and soft skills that will allow them to be successful in the agriculture industry. As agriculture teachers, we know that thinking and understanding is great, but the proof is in what students can do.

For agriculture teachers, it’s knowing, understanding and doing!

School gardens, greenhouses, land-labs, barns, and shops are vitally important to teach for knowledge and understanding, but are you using them in ways students can experience agriculture and demonstrate practice skills needed to be agriculturally literate?

Learning to Do, Doing to Learn...

Hands-on education (or experiential learning) is a powerful and transformative method of structuring learning that calls upon higher order thinking skills as depth and breadth of content knowledge is created. School gardens, greenhouses, land-labs, barns, and shops have the potential to be powerful experiential learning environments.

The work-based learning environments we, as agriculture teachers, have created present students with the appropriate context needed to construct knowledge, build understanding, and develop desired skill sets.

Have you, as the creator of experiential learning environments, asked yourself the following: “What do my students experience and how does that prepare them to know, understand, and do in the future outside of school?”

Focus more on what they do than what you provide as part of the experience.

Also think about your curriculum. If your curriculum has not been changing, you may have been moving backwards, in some respect, and not just standing still.

Think about the change that has occurred over the last 30 years.

Knowledge of genetics has opened possibilities for new ways to control disease, ward off pests, improve food safety, improve nutrition, and improve productivity in light of increased demand and limited resources.

And many of the possibilities have become realities in the marketplace.

Additionally, rapid advances in the dissemination and distribution of information, globally, have fundamentally changed decision-making processes (you probably have a cell phone and are wondering why the Golden Slate newsletter is still in print form).

I am a seasoned professional, which means that I went to high school when MTV played music videos, there was no internet, and a cell phone cost $4,000, required two hands to hold, a briefcase-size battery to carry, and was not (Continued on page 5)

Who Knows You?

(Continued from page 3)

and make sure you remember as much as possible.

Make Sure They Know You

The other part to the formula is making sure those community members know who you are. Can you walk into a business today and be recognized?

In downtimes (I know, few and far between) I would go visit these people and make an effort to build a relationship. Find a common interest and go chew the fat.

During those times of talking, talk about you, your family, your program, what your students are doing, and show off successes.

Some people do not want to put themselves on the back, but if you can talk about your students and what they are doing, it’s about them and not you.

When you compete on the state level and do well, make sure people know. If you win an award, make sure people know.

You want to spread the news as fast as you can, because when you do need something, those community partners will want to help because they see, hear and know your students are going to benefit and use those resources.

Building Relationships

There were times after school or during my prep where I would go visit people just to see how things were going. I wouldn’t go in and ask for things, but I made an effort to go see different community members at least once or twice a month, sometimes more.

I would go talk about hunting, what’s going on at the school, answer any questions they may have.

It wasn’t all about asking for what I needed; building those relationships was key and still has a meaning after I moved to the college level. I still keep in contact with many of those individuals who made my job easier in Madera. It’s not because I did some great things in Madera; it was because I made meaningful relationships with those individuals.

Worth Trying

If you are timid, it may be difficult to step out of your comfort zone. But it is worth it to try. It’s OK to not feel comfortable meeting people, but every great agriculture teacher I have met has a great community backing his/her program.

Being a part of your community is important. Your students seeing you at events and functions, community members seeing you around, being present, being seen — all help in your mission.

We got into this profession to make a difference, to make an impact on our students. Do not have blinders on when it comes to your community.

As you think about this, think about who knows you. Do people know what you do, do people know what your kids do, and does your program make a difference in your community? All good questions.

Much more than a typical teacher, being a part of the community you serve will make a huge impact on what you do. (Continued on page 5)
very good at its sole purpose of making phone calls.

In contrast, my students have been “connected” since birth. Many of my students do not understand what it means to be disconnected from media (or what Kodak film is).

What I am seeing in practice is that students have much more information about the world (and their social network), but the gaps in their knowledge, their understanding, and their ability to apply new knowledge in practice is still lacking.

Yes, having the brain of a teenager is developmentally appropriate for a teenager and their world is different from when I was in high school (and my experience was different than my parents’, etc.). “So,” you may ask yourself, “agriculture is advancing, the world is changing, and kids are different, but they have the same learning needs, so now what?”

Learning to Do, Doing to Learn...

One way to fill in the gaps that all of our students will have is to focus a good portion of your curriculum to be taught through the ongoing experiences you create in your school garden, greenhouse, land-lab, barn, and shop.

What is it about these unique learning environments that hold so much promise? These unique and specialized facilities allow for an experiential aspect of education not found in “traditional” classrooms or “traditional” education. Agriculture educators and many of our Career Technical Education (CTE) colleagues have a particular view of what “traditional” means.

The “traditional” classroom is divorced from reality. It is a world of its own and is a product of its own design. Classrooms, and school, for that matter, are not set up to teach; rather, most classrooms and schools are set up to manage students efficiently.

Classrooms are mechanisms to efficiently deliver content and assess the teachers’ productivity based on delivery of information to a large number of students, as opposed to the students’ use of new knowledge.

Traditional education is divorced from that which is meaningful and important to the student. Traditional education lacks an interest in the desires and motivations of the students and focuses on the needs of administratively delivering a product of education, divorcing itself from the life and experiences of the child or of the goals of education.

Agricultural education provides the necessary experiences to move beyond the confines of traditionalists’ approaches to education and looks for the best means of educating students to be critical thinking, lifelong learners who are successful leaders in a profession they seek to enter.

It is the experiential learning, made available through our specialized learning environments (school gardens, greenhouses, land-labs, barns, and shops), that offers the greatest potential in fostering a child’s education where critical thinking, deep and complex understanding, and advanced skill development occurs.

Be a progressive agriculture educator and see if you can spend more time in your school garden, greenhouse, land-lab, barn, or shop than the classroom. Change your thinking about the three circles — SAE, FFA, and Classroom. Start thinking SAE, FFA, Experiential Learning!

The role agriculture education plays in a modern public school system is to allow for guided practice, hands-on learning, and an experiential education that mirrors real world settings. As we ramp up for fairs and shows, and California Department of Education competitions, are all your students ramping up to get out of the classroom and experience your curriculum in your school garden, greenhouse, land-lab, barn, or shop?

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The Power of Appreciation

By Alissa Sarvinski, North Coast Region President

I recently purchased my first home, which is terrifying and exciting. While in the process of cleaning out my storage unit and moving, I came across a packet of thank you notes from students and other individuals. I do not know how many of you have moved lately, but sometimes it takes more time to look through all your junk, than it actually takes to move. Whether classrooms or homes, it is all the same. Moving can be difficult.

One note stuck out to me; it was a note of thanks and recognition from my first year teaching. The note was from a veteran teacher who I truly respect and admire, talking about how impressed she was at the flow and organization from a regional event that we hosted. This teacher was not in my section at the time, but took a moment out of her day to send a real snail-mail note.

The North Coast Region has always had a unique feel. We rely on each other for everything from curriculum support to emotional support. That bond is created through weird little quirks like sending a snail-mail note to another teacher, visiting each other in the summer, or taking the time during a break to plan similar courses. I am not really sure where I would be if it was not for my ag teacher family.

Snail Mail

I would like to encourage you to think outside the box in building relationships with your students, teachers, section and region through this interesting concept — snail mail.

Full disclosure, my grandmother was the postmaster in the tiny town of Ferndale for many years. She was the type of person who sent letters or cards for every occasion. She responded to every “Dear Santa” letter at Christmas with hand written notes after she called every parent to make sure “Santa” was saying what the kids should hear. In her later years, we joked that even though the postal service is never in the black, at least she was doing her part to keep it going.

It could be my postmaster grandmother coming out in me, but snail mail notes are pretty fantastic. Have you received a snail mail note lately? Did it make you feel better than an email? When was the last time you sent a snail mail note?

Notice Others

I distinctly remember sitting through a workshop my first year teaching with Mr. Beard where he mentioned how important it was to notice the accomplishments of other teachers. Praise when praise is due and, not through an email. He was adamantly against that fact. Leave a note in the teacher’s box. When the head football coach has a winning season, leave a note to the coach. When the theatre performance received great reviews, leave a note to the teacher. When you hear from a student that they love their new history teacher, leave them a note and tell them.

I have seen the power of these notes first-hand through a new system our school started several years ago. Our school has made pre-printed postcards for teachers to send little notes home to students. It takes two minutes to write a note to a student you appreciate. We send them up to the office and mail them through the school. Students and parents love this concept.

This concept may seem corny or outdated, but I still encourage you to try this idea.

Below is a postcard template that you could easily remove from the GOLDEN SLATE. Take five minutes, remove the template and send a quick note to a teacher you notice or appreciate. I challenge you.
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Your Challenge, Should You Choose to Accept It

By Travis Cardoso, Operations Division Chair-Elect, Hughson High School

In the ever-growing and changing education system, agricultural education remains a champion—not only because of the hard work of individuals in our profession who have blazed the trail before us, but from those experienced teachers who have learned from the pioneers. The “learn by doing” model has worked so well because many of our experienced teachers had someone they could call a mentor — someone they could bounce ideas off of and allow for feedback. All of us need one to remain an integral part of this association.

I recommend younger teachers asking a veteran teacher to be their mentor. I know it can be scary, but trust me, in the long run it is worth it. From a mental health standpoint, it made me feel as if I was not alone. Your challenge, should you choose to accept it, is to find a mentor.

Mentors

Having people I can call at the drop of a hat and know that the advice I am going to receive is going to be transparent and honest is important. The main thing is, it is not someone who will always agree with you, but someone who will help steer you down the correct path.

The recent statistic is that 50% of the teachers in California do not make it past year five. The main reason is teacher burnout. We see that in the regular classrooms; now add all the responsibilities of an agriculture teacher. The stat has the potential to grow exponentially, but it is not due to the fabric that was woven decades before any of us started.

I have great mentors who shaped me into a better agriculture instructor: Dr. Brad Dodson, Tom Vazquez, Rich Wolfe, Carrie Phillips, Dick Piersma, Ryan Patterson, Cheryl Reece, Jill Sperling, Kristy White, Dane White, Dr. Ben Swan, Dr. Ann DeLay, the entire DELTA 2018 crew, and last, but certainly not least, Jessi Cardoso. Your challenge is to stay in this great profession.

Hobbies

A hobby or interest is vital to your success and we should all have one to prolong our longevity in this career. I will let you into our lives, within our family, and tell you about what we use within our household as hobbies.

My interests include rec league sports and hunting; for my wife, it is horse shows and expos. I know there are others out there which include, but are not limited to, coaching (other than FFA, i.e. school sports), teaching Bible study, owning livestock, owning a small business, or travel.

You have to make the time for it. I know, from experience, that you think you have to take on the world in your first few years, but once you realize you can have your cake and eat it too, you will live a happier and healthier lifestyle.

Ask any mentor and they will tell you that you have to have something for you. Your challenge, should you choose to accept it, is to find an activity that you deem enjoyable and allow yourself some “me-time.”

Get Started

If you feel that calling is too big of a task, then text or email to get the ball rolling. New Professionals Institute was recently held, and everything I have heard, from members present to presenters, is that the conference was a valuable asset to have in our profession. Not only does the conference allow us to mingle with people having the same years of experience as us, but it also allows us to hear from integral pieces of the agricultural education family — which is why they are asked to present.

Remember, this mentor does not need to be in the same school or section, but be someone you can reach out to at any time to seek advice. If you do not have a mentor and cannot think of anyone, reach out to me, tcardoso@hughson.k12.ca.us. Your challenge is reach out and make contact — the sooner the better.
'Family' — Comfort and Support in Times of Need

By Charles Parker, Consultant, California Department of Education

These past few weeks have reminded me how much I value those whom I work with. Yes, state staff, but more importantly, the teachers and students with whom I have come in contact. It has been a very difficult year for my family as well as agricultural education. We have lost some outstanding teachers and advisors way too early. We also have had teachers and students lose their homes and all their memories.

It is during these times of loss that we realize our very own mortality and begin to think beyond ourselves. It is also during these times that we realize that we in agricultural education are a family. One of the units I cover in the agricultural education course I have the privilege to teach at Fresno State is on the agricultural education profession. It is in this unit that I most assuredly address the “family.”

This year the unit brought on a more personal feeling as I was reminded many times of the value of the family. As I was sharing stories with the class, I found myself using this family as one of the benefits of being an agriculture teacher. It seems that we are always around and poke our heads up at some of the most inopportune times. We catch each other at our worst and best, often in the same day.

We compete against each other for the benefit of our students, challenge each other to be better classroom teachers, and often argue to a point where we seem to be ready to come to blows. But even though we often find ourselves as enemies, when it counts, we have each other’s back.

It is in these times, when we need each other, that someone stops by and provides a hug, an offer to help, or even a home-cooked meal. These gestures most certainly remind me of a family, comforting the pain and helping wipe away the tears. It is in these times that we are sincerely appreciative of the thoughts and prayers.

It is almost a shame, that like a family, it takes a moment of pain for us to realize that we are not only cared for, thought of, but loved as well. We endure the pain because we have each other. No matter what the past is, in a time of need, we are there for each other.

I realize it is way too early, but I am looking forward to June when we can gather together at our annual “family reunion” and remember the times we were there for each other, welcome some new faces to our ever-growing family, and celebrate the love we have for each other.

We are in this family by choice, and I am so proud to be allowed to call you my brothers and sisters.
UK Agriculture Secondary School Cultivates Opportunity for Atypical Students with CTE-Style Career/Degree Pathways

By Karlin Ruth, Florin High School

As a 16-year-old student, Tom Hosten was pretty sure he would end up working on cars. At age 16, when all students in the United Kingdom transition to their final two years of secondary school, Tom had not passed the five General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) exams required to acquire a secondary diploma. Focusing on mathematics, science, and languages was not Tom’s strength. He struggled with academic classes that were centered on theory rather than application. Tom could fix almost anything with a motor. He lived for holiday breaks when he could walk down the path in his small village to help his neighbor with her small swine operation. For a student with these skills, but not enough GCSEs, the road to continued education seemed closed.

An Opening

Then Tom heard about Sparsholt College in Hampshire, England. Sparsholt is an agriculture education college (or secondary school) that offers career and technical pathways to career certifications, secondary diplomas and even university degrees.

In the UK, students typically have to pass five GCSE exams between ages 15–16, after two years of secondary school. Fifteen and 16 year-olds take courses akin to those taken by U.S. students in their freshman and sophomore years in high school.

In order to continue to graduation at 18, UK students have to pass enough GCSEs to continue to “college” (the UK equivalent of junior and senior years in a U.S. high school; and the prerequisite for admission to a university).

As one of Tom’s instructors, Sparsholt Farm Manager Graham Boyt, explains, “If you don’t have enough GCSEs, it’s off to work. State-funded schooling is over.”

Post-Exam Courses

Typically, UK students begin a focused course of study after taking their GCSE exams at 16 years old and continue in secondary education through their 18th year. Areas of study include mathematics, physics, literature, fine arts and, luckily for students like Tom, agriculture education.

These two-year UK programs equate to a certificate program or associate of arts degree from a community college in the U.S. UK students then take A-Level exams that qualify them for admission to a university. A-level exams loosely equate to SAT and AP exams that U.S. high school students take as part of the admission process for U.S. universities.

In the UK, students also can continue at some colleges for an additional two years and earn a bachelor’s degree. Sparsholt College is one of these institutions.

Curriculum Changes

At Sparsholt, students have the opportunity to earn career certifications and can continue to a university degree. In the past, students were admitted to an agriculture program only after completing one year of industry experience. Students would then take one year of course work at the college, followed by one year of an internship and a final year of career placement.

Now, led by government funding, students can matriculate through five levels of curriculum, from certification to degree, stopping anywhere along the way to end their academics and spend a year in a career placement.

Level 1: a one-year Certificate course, which prepares students for employment or advances them to the Level 2 course.

Level 2: a one-year Diploma course, which qualifies students for employment or allows them to advance to the Level 3 course.

Level 3: a two-year Diploma/Extended Diploma course, which prepares students for continuation at the university level. Successful completion of four to five GCSE exams is required to begin Level 3 studies.

Level 4: a National Diploma course (similar to a minor focus area of study at a U.S. college or university). Level 4 Diploma completion requires additional GCSE exams.

Level 5: Bachelor’s Degree.

Tom’s Path

Tom started out at Sparsholt in the Mechanics Course at Level 1. The Mechanics pathway prepares students in farm and industrial machinery training and maintenance, including a certification for Rough Terrain Forklift Mechanics.

As he continued through the Sparsholt course, Tom found that when offered a curriculum that was hands-on and project-based, he could integrate theory and succeed at academic assessments such as the GCSE exams.

Today, Tom has a bachelor’s degree from Sparsholt. He leads tours of the college for prospective students and visiting educators as the Assistant Shepherd and Swine Facilities Manager of the Sparsholt Farm. He has been part of a team of Sparsholt faculty and graduates that has innovated farm practices to the point where the farm is self-sustaining and does not cost the college anything to run and maintain.

Tom’s instructors at Sparsholt know what U.S. agriculture educators practice every day — offering career technical curriculum along with core academic courses allows atypical students like Tom to thrive.

Read More in May

Read more about Sparsholt College and its courses tailored to UK sport and habitat in the next edition of Golden Slate.
CATA Calendar of Activities 2018–2019

January 10–11 .................................................. Student Teacher Conclave ................................................. Modesto Junior College
January 10–11 .................................................. CATA Winter Governing Board .............................................................. Galt
January 26 ........................................................... Natural Resources State Finals ........................................ Reedley College
February 2 ....................................................... Winter State Finals - Citrus, Tree & Vine Pruning ................. CSU, Fresno
February 4–5 .................................................... Supervising Teacher Institute ............................................... Sacramento
February 23 ..................................................... Central Region Meeting .................................................. Cosumnes River College, Elk Grove
February 23 ..................................................... San Joaquin Region Meeting ..................................... Mission Oak High School, Tulare
February 25 ..................................................... South Coast Region Meeting ........................................ San Luis Obispo
March 9 ............................................................. Superior Region Meeting ................................................. CSU, Chico
March 23 .......................................................... Southern Region Meeting ........................................... Cal Poly, Pomona
March 23 .......................................................... North Coast Region Meeting ........................................... Livermore
April 13 ............................................................ CSU, Fresno Field Day ....................................................... CSU, Fresno
April 24–29 ..................................................... State FFA Leadership Conference ........................................ Anaheim
May 4 .............................................................. State FFA Judging Finals .................................................. Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo
May 21–25 ........................................................ NAAE Region 1 Conference ................................................ Alaska
June 23 ............................................................. Executive Committee Meeting ............................................. Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo
June 23 ............................................................. Pre-Conference Governing Board ....................................... Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo
June 23–27 ........................................................ CATA Summer Conference ................................................ Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo
June 27 ............................................................. Governing Board Summer Retreat ........................................... Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo