



# THE GOLDEN SLATE

The official newsletter of the California  
Agricultural Teachers' Association

## Evidence of Excellence

*By Matt Patton, CATA Executive Director*

Recently, I was asked to present at a Career Technical Education (CTE) conference about agricultural education. Ag Ed, as we affectionately call it, is often touted as a model of CTE. This conference was the same; my role was to explain why agricultural education is so effective.

To have credibility with the audience, some evidence of agricultural education's success would need to be presented. Below are facts that support the claim that agricultural education is successful and worthy of being used as a positive example of CTE.

### **100, 1000, and 100,000**

Ag education has been in existence for over 100 years. The California Agricultural Teachers' Association has existed for 103 years, and the California FFA will celebrate its centennial in 2028. Longevity serves as a testament to the enduring qualities of relevance, adaptability, and practicality. Not only have both CATA and California FFA existed for long periods, but have also experienced consistent growth in their membership over the decades. Presently, both organizations proudly maintain a historic and expanding membership, serving as a clear indicator of their ongoing relevance and applicability.

### **AIG**

The Agricultural Career Technical Education Incentive Grant (AIG) is funding specifically for agricultural education. Established in 1983, it stands as one of the longest-running and consistently funded programs within the state budget. AIG is one of the only specific CTE funding programs for an industry sector. The longevity and categorical nature of the grant quantifies its value and importance. Oscar Wilde famously remarked that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and the fact that the Career Technical Incentive Grant is modeled after AIG proves that the grant is truly an incentive to build quality CTE programs. The continued existence of AIG is due to a quantified return on the state's investment and CATA's presence in the political arena.

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## **DE Staffing**

The Agricultural Education unit within the California Department of Education operates with a staff of eight. Several of those positions are codified in the California Education Code. The vast majority of the other industry sectors in the Career and College Transition Division have only one staff position. It is easy to quantify the value of the Agricultural Education staff as many are stationed regionally and have regular interactions with students and teachers in the field. The stability and continuity of the Agricultural Education unit's staffing levels, despite reductions in other industry sectors, can be attributed to the concerted efforts of CATA.

## **Teacher Pipeline**

California has a shortage of ag teachers, but we are far better off than most CTE industry sectors. Within the single-subject credentialing programs at Cal Poly SLO, Chico State, and Fresno State, there is a higher number of candidates pursuing ag education teaching credentials compared to any other discipline. To reemphasize that point, Cal Poly, Chico, and Fresno produce more ag teachers than English, Math, History, or PE teachers. Ag education has prioritized teacher recruitment for decades, and those efforts have produced results. A recurring phenomenon on secondary campuses throughout California is the absorption of wood, automotive, and industrial art shops by agricultural programs due to the scarcity of replacement teachers in those areas. Ag education is one of the only CTE sectors with a viable teacher candidate pipeline.

## **Community**

Ag education is a community. We have a culture, rituals, ceremonies, and a common vernacular. It is a common saying that you are likely to know an ag teacher across the state better than you know the teacher from just across the hall at your school. Another common saying is that CATA is a family. The number of events and activities that bring us together in agricultural education is unprecedented compared to other teaching disciplines. I guarantee that the English teachers at Holtville High School have yet to learn who teaches English at Fortuna High. However, the ag teachers at those schools know each other and will cross paths often in the coming months.

## **Alumni**

However, the most significant piece of evidence supporting the claim that ag education is a CTE model is our alums. The students who pass through our programs become industry leaders, positive role models, innovators, community supporters, and productive citizens. The students shaped by agricultural education are the most compelling evidence that what we do is effective and impactful.