



THE GOLDEN SLATE

The official newsletter of the California
Agricultural Teachers' Association

In Your Corner

By John Williams, CATA President

This year has become one of the best years of my career. I have enjoyed having the opportunity to serve members of the CATA tremendously. I have had a lot of time to reflect upon the things that have happened in the past 4 years and have observed many good and bad behaviors of our profession. One thing is certain: when faced with adversity, our organization will step up and overcome. There are some unsung heroes that we tend to overlook when things are going well. This article will hopefully give us all an idea of what each member of our organization does.

First and foremost are the over 1,000 middle school, junior high, high school, community college, and university members of our organization. I give praise to each of you, and I value your work towards making agricultural education great. Is the career you chose easy? Far from it. In my experience, it is both one of the most rewarding careers and, at the same time, one of the most stressful careers. Finding a life balance is hard for everyone, but keep at it, and in time you will figure out what works for you. I encourage the younger generation to reach out to the "elders" for insight. They have been at it for a while and have a wealth of knowledge. I encourage our seasoned teachers (elders) to reach out to the younger generation and instill in them the value of our careers and what we can do as educators to make an impact on students.

I feel we overlook the value of the seasoned teacher. Sure, they may look grumpy and tired. They may be tired, but they aren't grumpy. They have seen our profession grow and have a lot of experience that is worth learning about. One of my favorite memories as a new teacher was having a beer with Dave Segna one evening at summer conference. We were just talking about teaching, coaching small engines, and I learned a lot about life

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from an hour or two at my first conference. I have become good friends with him, and he has been a great mentor to me over the years. I would say that he is one of many people who are in my corner to give me advice or a kick in the pants if I need it. In agriculture education, we have many people who are in our corners. We have support from various sources within our school communities, including fellow teachers and administrators. Additionally, there are community members who serve as advisory members, and sometimes we're fortunate to have dedicated parents involved in booster clubs. The important thing to remember is that support is available. Sometimes all you need to do is ask or go have a beer...

Within the CATA, you have many people in your corner, more than you realize. Sometimes early in our careers, we may feel alone. That's not the case. There are many teachers within your section, region, and the state who want you to succeed. The downside to this is sometimes others like me may not recognize that you need assistance. I am begging and pleading that you ask someone for help. We will do what we can at the moment to encourage you and help you get what you need. The idea that you and you alone are responsible for getting a mentor is not a realistic expectation. If you are a seasoned teacher, take the time to look around the room. Find an early career teacher and just have a conversation with them. That can mean the most to that person just as it did for me.

I have said "in my corner, or in your corner," and I am sure some might not know what I mean. If you ever watch boxing or MMA, there are people who are there to take care of the fighter. You all as agriculture teachers are fighters and deserve to have some people in your corner to help you overcome and win. I look at our profession, and I see the best teachers in the state. I see collaboration, and I see empathy when one of our own is down. I encourage you all to be in the corner of another teacher, be the person they need to help them overcome challenges.

Some individuals within our state seem to take the hardest punches, yet consistently support every agriculture teacher or FFA member in the state. These individuals are our state staff members. The California Department of Education prioritizes Career Technical Education (CTE) and Agriculture Education. We, in the agricultural



community, are incredibly fortunate to have these eight individuals in our corner. At the beginning of this article, I mentioned how I have reflected on my career, especially the last four years. I am guilty of being someone who didn't fully value the work of the state staff. They do more than what is required of them, and it is about time we give them the credit they deserve. They assist our section, region, and state CATA officers. They supervise contests, they make hard decisions, and they take the brunt of the fallout from angry ag teachers. Many of them took a pay cut to serve our regions and state. All eight of these individuals are dues-paying CATA members and have extensive experience in the classroom as agriculture teachers. They are in our corner, they value your work, and they work hard managing all that is sent their way. I want to take a moment and thank Shay, Greg, Chuck, Jackie, JessaLee, Anthony, Jill, and Hugh for all the work you do for us and our students. Thank you for always having our backs and for working with us even when we can be hard to handle.

Lastly, I want to thank Cari and Matt for their work for CATA. We are incredibly lucky to have them. The CATA and its members are not perfect, but we strive for perfection. Every member reading this, I thank you for your time and commitment to this organization and profession. You all deserve a smooth end to your school year, and I look forward to seeing you at the upcoming contests and conference. Remember, if you have any questions or concerns, don't hesitate to reach out to me. Look out for my next article in May, which will delve into the roles of the secondary and post-secondary divisions within our organizational structure.

