

## **Matching Mentors and Entry-Level Teachers**

Psychosocial support of the entry-level teacher is very important while they become acculturated into the agricultural education teaching profession. In addition to being available to discuss their professional concerns, expressions of personal concern, support, advocacy, and recognition of their teaching competency are much desired actions from their mentor. As in other relationships, entry-level teachers are most concerned about “knowing how much their mentor cares before they care how much they know” (about agricultural education, teaching, the FFA, etc.).

Differences exist between the interests, personalities, backgrounds, needs, and capabilities of entry-level agricultural education teachers and mentors. Several strategies may be used to ensure the team is compatible and productive. Entry-level teachers desire to select the mentor that best meets their needs. Sufficient time for professional and social interactions among potential mentors and the ELTs is needed before the entry-level teachers select their mentor(s). This approach is best for selecting local school mentors, as well as mentors that are current or former agricultural education teachers. The disadvantage to this approach is that a large share of the academic year may have passed before the selection, and subsequent mentoring activities can occur. Other less desirable approaches also have merit.

Mentors and entry-level teacher matchings can be assigned by school and induction program administrators. The drawback of this method is that little regard has sometimes gone into considering the needs of the entry-level teacher as well as the skillset and commitment of the mentors.

Regardless of the procedure used to select and match mentors and ELTs, each individual needs to work at making the relationship and subsequent activities successful. The mentors need to exercise excellent listening, guidance, and instructional skills. The ELTs need to assert themselves so their needs are met regardless if the match isn't perfect. If the ELT or mentor finds that they are not compatible and productive with each other, immediate communications with program leaders can usually result in finding more suitable matches.