

Why We Teach Agricultural Education!

Query existing teachers who are passionate about their profession and they will tell you know that they teach, first of all, because they enjoy working with their students! Most agricultural education teachers will also tell you that they want to give back what others have allowed them to experience as students and FFA members. Others may include that teaching allows them to combine their love for the food, fiber, and natural resource systems with their desire to prepare our future leaders, scientists, farmers and ranchers, agri-industry leaders, teachers and government employees! The enjoyment of using minds-on hands-on teaching approaches to reach students is quite appealing to others who have observed many students unnecessarily struggle in a variety of learning situations. And, yes, many affirm living the lifestyle afforded by smaller towns and open spaces.

Most early career teachers leave their traditional pre-service teacher preparation experience ready to go out and make a real difference in the lives of their students! Supplied with a multitude of personal experiences and beliefs, as well as ideas and theories from course work and teaching experiences, many start out knowing they will, indeed, quickly eclipse the performance of most veteran teachers. Concerned veteran teachers, state supervisory staff, and teacher educators have observed and supported scores of well-meaning new teachers who have, indeed, enjoyed some spectacular successes early in their career! Likewise, they have been there to also assist those who have experienced some early career disappointments. Through the high and low points of becoming a teacher, novice and veteran teachers know they are teaching, first and foremost, for their students! And, they also know they do have the best education delivery system for meeting the needs of a very diverse group of students.

Agricultural leaders, educators, and students are very optimistic about the future of agricultural education. Despite the annual fiscal and policy challenges, teachers know that the profession is effective in developing individuals using a combination of classroom and laboratory instruction, student leadership and personal growth opportunities afforded through the FFA, and application and discovery of concepts in work-based learning opportunities featured in quality supervised agricultural education programs!

So, if all this is true, what can be done to keep our best teachers in the classrooms and as FFA advisors? I submit we need to ensure that all teachers develop an early understanding of the characteristic phases or stages of professional teacher development so that they are prepared for the joyous and especially challenging parts of being a teacher. Likewise, we need them to experience the concern, caring, and support of other successful early career and veteran teachers soon after entering the profession! Coupled with a team of concerned and caring professionals, each teacher needs to understand the importance of, and participate in on-going professional development opportunities for the ultimate benefit of their students!

The following section -- **Career Experiences of Lifelong Teachers** -- features three different models of career teacher development followed by a model that illustrates how attitudes often change throughout the year as an early career teacher. Hopefully, one or two of the models will provide a description of a journey professional teachers experience from the time they are initially prepared until they retire!

