

**Culture Shock! Examining the Family-Work Culture of Agriculture Teachers**

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### **Introduction/ Need for Research**

One of the biggest challenges facing the agricultural education profession today is the lack of qualified agriculture teachers necessary to meet demand (Myers, Dyer, & Washburn, 2005). Recruitment of more teachers into the profession as well as retaining those already in the profession will help solve the teacher shortage problem. In an effort to establish a “sufficient scientific and professional workforce that addresses the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (Doerfert, 2011, p. 9), this research focused on the retention of existing agriculture teachers.

One specific challenge facing agriculture teachers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the need for teachers to find a balance between work and family roles (Foster, 2001; Murray, Flowers, Croom, & Wilson, 2011). One barrier to successfully balancing work and family roles is the lack of work-family culture. Work-family culture is defined as the extent to which an organization supports and values employees’ work and family lives (Thompson, Beauvais, and Lyness, 1999, p. 394). Research suggests that a supportive work-family culture is associated with less intention to leave the organization, less work-family conflict, and greater overall organizational commitment (Grover & Crooker, 1995; Thompson et al., 1999). Therefore, exploring the work-family culture of agriculture teachers may be a salient endeavor in addressing and understanding agriculture teacher turnover and retention. However, a dearth of literature about the work-family culture of agriculture teachers exists. This study sought to address this gap in the literature by utilizing a national sample of teachers to describe the work-family culture within agricultural education.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

The Conservation of Resources (COR) model offers a theoretical lens for understanding the interface between work and family domains (Hobfoll, 1989). COR posits that individuals are motivated to acquire and maintain resources in an effort to cope with the strain of trying to balance between multiple roles (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). Accordingly, we view work-family culture as a coping resource for teachers trying to balance work and family roles. Thomas and Ganster (1995) described the elements of work-family culture as: family-supportive policies (e.g., benefits), family-supportive supervisors, and family-supportive organizations. Considering the theoretical foundations of this study, we conceptualize the work-family culture of agriculture teachers as resources consisting of family supportive policies, family-supportive administrators, and overall family-supportive organizations (agricultural education profession and workplace).

### **Methodology**

The target population for this study consisted of all secondary agriculture teachers in the United States during the 2014-2015 school year and who self-identified as a participant in the family role. We obtained a simple random sample of agriculture teachers from the National FFA Organization ( $n = 667$ ). Surveys were distributed electronically to participants, which yielded a usable response rate of 35% ( $n = 234$ ). As part of a larger study, the instrument was designed to elicit respondents’ perceptions of the work-family culture in which they were employed.

Participants were asked to respond (agree or disagree) to four statements indicating whether or not they perceived their work culture to be family friendly. The four statements, adopted from Harrington, Deusen, and Humberd, (2011) included “my administration really cares about the effects that work demands have on my personal life” (family-supportive administrators), “my workplace has a family supportive culture” (family-supportive workplace), “the school and district policies where I work support teachers that have family obligations” (family-supportive policies), and “the agriculture teaching profession has a family supportive culture (family-supportive agricultural education profession).

### Results/Findings

The purpose of this study was to describe the work-family culture of agriculture teachers in the United States. Figure 1 provides a breakdown of the respondents’ perceptions of the work-family culture in which they were employed. Overall, agriculture teachers perceived their work culture to be family friendly with all four areas indicating more agreement than disagreement.

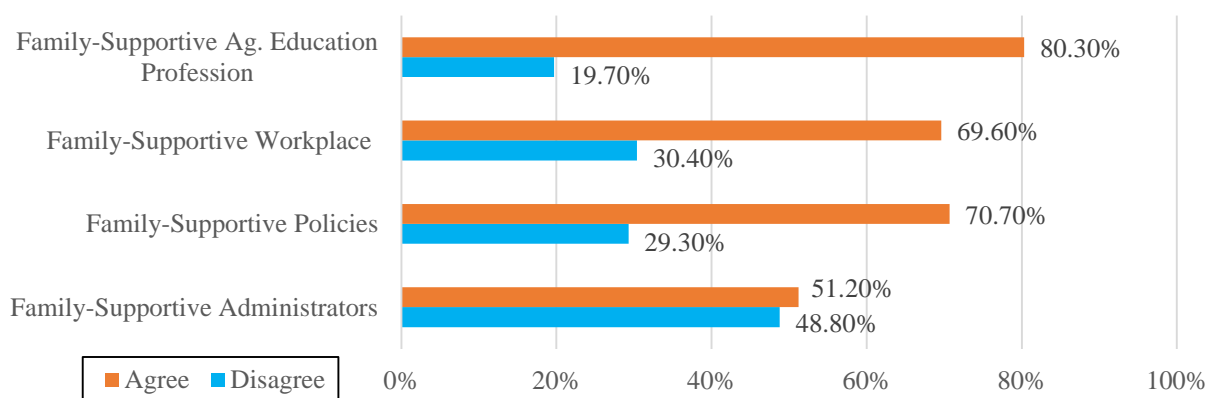


Figure 1. Perceived work-family culture of agriculture teachers in the United States.

### Conclusions

Although these results are based on only four questions, they are encouraging for the agricultural education profession. Family-supportive administrators was the component of the workplace culture which teachers perceived to be the least supportive of family. This finding is consistent with research indicating a challenge agriculture teachers face is lack of administrative support (Boone & Boone, 2007). This finding suggests the need to broaden the definition of administrative support to include support of teachers’ family needs as well.

### Implications/Recommendations/Impact on Profession

We recommend research like this be shared with so they strive to improve the work-family culture within their schools. Additionally, we recommend more research that includes administrators and their perceptions of the work-family culture. Finally, qualitative research that explores the culture within agricultural education, identifying practices and artifacts that enable and discourage a family-friendly workplace might be helpful. This research can have a profound impact on the profession in our effects to address the issues of teacher attrition and retention.

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