

**Home is Where the Start Is:  
An Examination of Home Visits Among California Agriculture Teachers**

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## Introduction

Since the development of the home project method by Rufus W. Stimson in the early 1900s, agriculture teaching has extended outside of the classroom and into the homes of students enrolled in agriculture education (Moore, 1988). Historically, the reason to visit student's homes began with the development of their supervised agricultural education (SAE) projects, which have been a successful method for applying the concepts and principles learned in the agriculture classroom in real-life settings (Retallick, 2010). However, the benefits of working with students in their homes extend far beyond SAE projects. Research suggests that a unique relationship is created among the parents, students, and the home visitor (Larson, 1980).

“Being an effective agriculture teacher goes beyond classroom teaching” (Roberts & Dyer, 2004, p. 94). Home visits are a way to encourage and promote student success, which is crucial to the continued success of a program. One of the goals of the 2016-2020 National Research Agenda (Priority Area 5) is to create “efficient and effective agricultural education programs” (Roberts, Harder, & Brashears, 2016, p. 41). It points out the shortage of trained personnel for agricultural industries and encourages educators to look for ways to engage individuals in considering agricultural careers. One of the ways to engage students is by reaching out to students and parents through home visits. Despite their apparent benefits, there is a paucity of data regarding the number of agriculture teachers performing home visits. In fact, many agriculture teachers do not distinguish between a home visit and traditional SAE visits. In order to clarify the definition of a home visit as a distinct and valuable instructional tool, it is important to understand teachers' perceptions about their benefits and barriers to implementation.

## Theoretical Framework

The Attachment Theory (Bretherton, 1992) was used to frame the research which directly relates to home visits and the student teacher relationship under investigation. Attachment theory is used to explain the impact that an agriculture teacher can have on a student early in their high school career and in the agriscience program. The process of conducting a home visit with each student creates familial security and establishes a foundation for the student to gain new skills and interests beyond their current field (Bretherton, 1992). In addition, Bronfenbrenner's 1986 Ecological Systems Theory proposes that a child's development is influenced by the many aspects of the environment and that to “fully understand a child, one must attempt to understand the dynamic relationship between the child, his/her parent and their family characteristics” (Lin & Bates, 2010, p. 181). According to Bronfenbrenner, “home visits are a part of the mesosystem, promoting two elements of the microsystem (home and school) to interact with each other” (Lin & Bates, 2010, p. 181).

## Methods

Quantitative survey methods were used. The population consisted of 750 California agriculture teachers, from which 34.93% (N = 262) responded. The survey was administered via the California Agriculture Teacher's Association list serve. The survey consisted of sixteen questions asking respondents to provide information regarding their years teaching, their definition of home visits, and their perceptions of home visits. The survey also requested a free response question regarding the difference between a home visit and a supervised agriculture experience (SAE) project visit. For the purpose of the study, a definition of the home visit was provided by the researcher. Respondents were then asked if they conducted home visits

according to the given definition. In addition, there were 41 Likert-type scale questions (i.e., ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree) administered to collect perceived barriers and benefits to conducting home visits (based upon the literature). Themes related to barriers included safety, time, language, training, and support. Themes related to benefits included impacts associated with the student, teacher, program, school, and community. The survey concluded with a question asking respondents if they would be willing to participate in an interview related to home visits for future research.

### **Results / Findings**

*Current home visits:* Of the survey respondents (N = 237), 44 (18.6%) participants answered “yes” to conducting home visits per the definition provided.

*Home visit definition:* Of the sample population, 48.9% (n=116) defined the home visits similar to the given definition as a process of visiting with a student at the home to discuss goals, the FFA and SAE program, courses, develop relationships, and to facilitate overall student success; whereas, 31.1% (n=74) defined the home visit the same as an SAE project visit.

*Years teaching:* The number of years teaching was significantly correlated with the home visit definition,  $\tau = 0.117$ ,  $p = .043$ , with the perception of how home visits impact the program,  $\tau = 0.106$ ,  $p = .047$ , and the perception of how home visits impact the community  $\tau = 0.106$ ,  $p = .047$ . The more years teaching, the more likely they were to agree with the presented definition and the more likely they were to identify positive impacts.

*Barriers and benefits to home visits:* The most significant barrier to conducting home visits was support followed by safety. All respondents indicated recognition of the positive impacts of home visits.

### **Conclusions**

It was concluded that there was a significant correlation ( $\tau = 0.11$ ) between the years of teaching and the perception of how home visits impact the program and the community. The greater the years teaching, the more likely they were to agree with the given home visit definition and to identify beneficial impacts that result from conducting home visits. More teachers defined home visits as focusing on building relationships, goals, and getting to know the family versus just visiting the student’s project (SAE). It can be inferred that approximately 20% of California agriculture teachers currently conduct home visits.

### **Recommendations**

Further research regarding home visits is recommended given the lack of published research related to best practices, documented impacts, and implantation strategies. Plans are in place to conduct interviews with up to 50 of the 85 respondents who have agreed to discuss home visits in more detail. This qualitative research will provide valuable information regarding methodologies to support the home visit process and specific details regarding their benefits to agriculture education. Case studies regarding impact of home visits would also be beneficial to the profession.

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