

**Routes to Certification and Turnover Intentions  
of Early Career Wisconsin Agriculture Teachers**

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### **Introduction**

Teacher education and preparation has evolved since its inception in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and has been impacted by foci in training, learning and policy (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005). To look at teacher preparation, it is imperative to understand the two main pathways to teacher certification – traditional (TC) and alternative (AC). The traditional route to teacher certification has the teacher entering the classroom after completing teacher preparation training through a university teacher preparation program with alternative routes being all the other options (National Research Council, 2010; Walsh & Jacobs, 2007).

Darling-Hammond and Sykes (2003) recommended there should be a focus on quality preparation and support, adequate pay and working conditions, and the likelihood of teachers succeeding in the workplace to keep teachers in the classroom. With the consistent shortage of agriculture teachers in agricultural education, researchers have focused on the attrition of teachers (Clark, Kelsey, & Brown, 2014; Lemons, Brashears, Burris, Meyers, & Price, 2015). Sorensen (2015) also explored specific reasons agricultural teachers may leave the classroom with a study focused in part on turnover intentions. A key variable to the supply and demand of agriculture teachers is ensuring the profession retains teachers, as Ingersoll (2001) noted that teacher turnover is a major factor in the demand of teachers.

### **Conceptual Framework**

To guide this study, the authors used a conceptual framework of the relationship between teacher's personal and professional background from a report for the United States Department of Education entitled "An Evaluation of Teachers Trained Through Different Routes to Certification" (Constantine et al., 2009). With teacher preparation and turnover intention being identified as major variables in the literature review, they have been included in the proposed conceptual framework.

### **Methodology**

This study utilized descriptive and correlational methods to examine the routes to certification and turnover intentions of Wisconsin agriculture teachers with fewer than three years of teaching agriculture. A survey instrument collected information in the spring of 2017 ( $n = 35$ ). This group included individuals who went through a traditional route of teacher preparation ( $n = 25$ ) and an alternative route ( $n = 10$ ). The survey instrument included questions to identify demographic characteristics and examine routes to certification and turnover intentions. Data collection was completed by making four points of contacts with participants via email. The final response rate was 52% with 35 respondents out of the 67 agriculture teachers in the population.

### **Results**

Research question number one focused on the demographic characteristics of respondents and sought to identify personal and teaching characteristics. Participants were between 22 to 55 years old with 71.40% being female. Regarding racial and ethnic identity, 97.10% of respondents identify as "White, European American, Non-Hispanic." Respondents had taught between 1 to 3 years with the majority of respondents teaching in a rural setting (71.30%). Those who taught in

a suburban setting represented 17.10% of the population and 8.60% taught in an urban setting. The 68.60% of respondents shared they have a full-time teaching assignment in agriculture. A second group of respondents (22.90%) had a full-time teaching assignment, but taught other content in addition to agriculture

The majority of respondents (71.4%) indicated they completed a traditional teacher preparation program as part of a bachelor's degree program. The rest of respondents were distributed across alternative certification programs. Eight respondents signified they had a previous teaching license in another area before adding an agriculture license.

Respondents selected all that applied from a list of statements about why they became a teacher. The majority of respondents (71.40%) noted that as an undergraduate they planned to be a teacher and took all necessary courses to become certified. A majority of the group chose a route to becoming a certified teacher that allowed them to work full-time (50%), based on a program that was conveniently located (40%), and that had required coursework and training which fit their schedule (40%). Overall, the respondents had moderately low turnover intentions ( $M = 2.95$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ). A Mann-Whitney  $U$  test indicated there was not statistically significant difference between the routes to certification and turnover intentions of Wisconsin agriculture teachers with fewer than three years of experience teaching agriculture ( $U = 130.50$ ,  $p = .843$ ).

### Conclusions

While the majority of teachers in the population were traditionally certified, alternative route teachers indicated drastically different reasons for choosing the specific route for a teaching license. Choosing a route which allowed individuals to work full-time, was conveniently located, and complete coursework and training which fits their schedule resonates with literature (Robinson, 2010) on alternative certification and routes to teaching. To fill the need of agriculture teachers in local school districts, it is critical that the agricultural education profession does not discount alternative routes, especially the reasons why individuals choose them.

True to Sorensen's (2015) findings on turnover intentions, the respondents had moderately low turnover intention ( $M = 2.95$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ), which also echoes other findings in agricultural education (Crutchfield, Ritz, & Burris, 2013). While the difference in turnover intentions was not statistically significant, it should be noted the respondents who were in the alternative route group had a slightly higher turnover intention than their traditional route counterparts. This study should be replicated on a larger scale to research if the route of teacher preparation impacts turnover intentions and what other factors lead to agriculture teachers exiting the profession.

### Recommendations for further research

This study has provided several recommendations for further research. Additional research should be done on this population to identify reasons for adding an agriculture license and success in teaching agriculture. Research should be completed on how alternative route individuals are educated about agricultural education and the three-circle model. There are still questions on whether alternative route teachers are effective classroom teachers. Additional research should be completed on classroom teaching, as well as program management of alternative route teachers.

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