

**Coaches for Beginning Agriculture Teachers: Providing Support to Improve Retention**

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## **Introduction**

Each year 10-15% of the agriculture teachers in the U.S. are new hires. Of these, approximately two-thirds are newly licensed or unlicensed (Smith, Lawver, & Foster, 2017). Much of this demand is a retention issue as up to half of new agriculture teachers leave the profession within their first six years of teaching (Clark, Kelsey, & Brown, 2014; Hasselquist, Herndon & Kitchel, 2017). From an Agricultural Education profession standpoint, this contributes to the problem of greater demand for teachers than are produced each year and can create an impression that teaching agriculture is not a desirable one to enter. Additionally, this turnover is potentially disruptive to students, schools, and communities.

Prior to 2008, Indiana was able to fill the demand for new agriculture teacher hires through licensed graduates, licensed graduates entering the profession after several years in other careers, and licensed teachers from other states. However, the past decade has seen an increased demand for new hires primarily due to new programs and existing programs adding additional teachers. This has stressed the supply of licensed teachers leading to more hires of alternatively licensed agriculture teachers and emergency permit teachers. Retention surveys showed these latter two categories of new hires with a high rate of leaving the profession within their first three years of teaching.

Beginning in summer 2014, Indiana implemented a structured mentoring program, Coaches for Beginning Agriculture Teachers (CBAT), for new agriculture teachers. CBAT was an initiative of Indiana Team AgEd with the goal of improving retention of agriculture teachers in the profession as well as increasing their satisfaction in being a teacher. The program's main initiative was to create a relationship between a seasoned teacher and a teacher just beginning in the profession.

## **How it Works**

CBAT is organized and managed by two co-coordinators. They divide the state into half to make site visits and to have closer contact with and knowledge of coaches and beginning teachers. Smaller states may be able to conduct a CBAT with one coordinator, whereas larger states may require more than two. Each beginning teacher is paired with a seasoned teacher who serves as coach. The coaches agree to meet responsibilities in return for receiving a small stipend of \$300 to cover time and travel. The coaches must submit monthly reports to receive the stipend. Coaching activities are tailored to specific needs of each new teacher.

The co-coordinators and the coaches make a site visit to the beginning teachers. Site visits allow for discussion and advice on curriculum, FFA, SAE, classroom management, and other topics of importance to the beginning teacher. Additionally, coaches contact beginning teacher at least once per month. This may be through electronic means; however, many times it occurs face-to-face at FFA events and Agriculture Teachers Association professional development meetings. Coaches are encouraged to provide transportation for the beginning teacher to professional development meetings as the trip to/from the session can be valuable conversation. Indiana has three agricultural education state-level professional development

meetings, one each in September, January, and June providing opportunities for coaches and beginning teachers to meet on a regular basis.

### **Results to Date/Implications**

In Indiana for 2014-16 there were 103 new agriculture teachers, of which 76 (74%) participated in CBAT. A greater percentage (83% versus 78%) of those participating in CBAT were still teaching at the end of the reporting period. Additionally, of the 13 CBAT participants who left teaching, 4 did not leave until their second year.

Qualitative data indicate mentor teachers feel valued and energized. Although not a stated purpose of CBAT, this may contribute to retention of seasoned teachers in addition to retention of beginning teachers. It may also contribute to renewal and refreshing of seasoned teachers' skills as they have reported learning new uses of educational technology and new teaching techniques from the beginning teachers.

The Indiana Department of Education provided initial support through Perkins State Program Leadership Funds, approximately \$30,000, for CBAT funding. The positive results of CBAT have led to renewed funding each of the past two years.

### **Future Plans/Advice to Others**

Plans for CBAT include requiring regular state-level electronic meetings for coaches and beginning teachers to share ideas. An initial telephone conference call this past year was not as successful as hoped because all but one of the participants were coaches.

We have learned structure and reporting requirements are essential to program success and would advise others contemplating starting a CBAT program to require these. We also believe that coordinators are essential to success as they do the behind the scenes work allowing the coaches to focus on the beginning teachers and their needs. It helps if the coordinators are not currently practicing teachers allowing them to devote time to organizing and managing CBAT.

### **Costs/Resources Needed**

As implemented in Indiana, CBAT costs \$30,000 per year. Two-thirds of the cost is for part-time co-coordinators. Another 25% provides stipends for the coaches, while the remainder covers reimbursement to school corporations for substitute teachers and administrative costs to the fiscal agent. Since CBAT replaced a volunteer-led effort that was not as successful, this level of funding is recommended to add accountability for task completion. The co-coordinators need access to multiple means of communication, many of which require high-speed internet access. It also helps if they are versed in social media and simple website development. Resources for the coaches include multiple means of communication, ability to travel, and dedication to time requirements to be an effective coach. The funding for substitute teachers helps in freeing coaches' time for face-to-face meetings with their beginning teacher. Beginning teachers need administrators willing to allow them to participate in CBAT and supportive of their professional development. They also need access to and the ability to use multiple means of communication.

### References

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