

Filling Buckets for Our Beginning Ag Teachers

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Introduction/Need for Idea

Agricultural education has faced a continual shortage of qualified agriculture teachers over the past two decades (Smith, Lawver, & Foster, 2017). Therefore, state and national agricultural education leaders have engaged in efforts to recruit and retain people for careers in agricultural education. The National Teach Ag Day and the Future Agriscience Teacher Symposium are examples of national efforts through the National Teach Ag Campaign to address teacher recruitment and retention. The Teach Ag website provides numerous ideas and suggestions for identifying and recruiting future agriculture teachers, as well as retaining current teachers. Teacher education faculty across have provided innovative statewide efforts to recruit potential teachers. Examples include an Agricultural Education Institute (Thoron, Osborne, Myers, Barrick, Roberts, & Dyer, 2016), letter of intent signing day (Thoron et al., 2016), Teach Ag! Avengers (Foster, Ewing, & Rice, 2015), and agricultural education instructor trading cards (Gerwig, Falk, & Touchstone, 2015). These activities reinforce the *family* atmosphere and community among agriculture teachers, which are linked to retention and job satisfaction (Darling & Hammond, 1997; Friedman & Kass, 2002).

How It Works

To welcome new teachers to the profession and provide them with tools to start teaching, teacher educators at North Carolina State University developed the *Fill the Ag Ed Bucket* campaign. The first step was identifying new teachers. Prior to North Carolina annual summer conference, a list of beginning teachers since January 2017 and those recent graduates entering the agricultural education classroom was collected and placed into a Google Sheets document. This generated a list of 40 new teachers from all teacher preparation institutions and alternatively certified teachers.

We intended to fill the buckets with resources that could be used by a new teacher. Resources might include curriculum, books, bandages, tools, pencils, markers, sticky notes, coffee cards, etc. Teachers could even contribute used, but good condition resources from their own stocks. Due to limited resources and to foster a sense of community, we wanted veteran teachers, agriculture industry, and vendors across the state to help with the endeavor. To accomplish this, we sent requests to agricultural education stakeholders for donations to resources to fill the buckets and be given to beginning teachers. Stakeholders included local agricultural companies, commodity associations, vendors of agricultural education materials, and agricultural individuals, as well as current agriculture teachers.

Those receiving the link were able to sign-up to sponsor a specific individual's bucket or donate to all of the 40 buckets. A local Lowe's Home Improvement Store graciously donated the buckets to be used for the event. Other items were collected prior to or at the opening of the summer conference. Everything from dry erase markers, notebooks, seeds, tools, and welding rods were donated to fill the buckets. During the beginning teacher meeting, individuals were

instructed to pick up their bucket at the end of the day (due to all of them being heavy and overflowing with items).

Results to Date/Implications

During this *Fill the Ag Ed Bucket* campaign, 36 beginning teachers received a bucket filled with much-needed classroom supplies. Over 50 individuals contributed to the buckets, some of whom were not directly connected to agriculture, but found merit with idea. One beginning teacher said “This was like Christmas. I emptied my bucket and was amazed at the items that people donated.” A teacher that was a “bucket-filler” stated, “I know how hard it was for me my first year with little money to buy those extra supplies for my classroom, so I wanted to give back. It was so much fun shopping for my beginning teacher.” Pictures of new teachers with their buckets were posted on various forms of social media, which positively promoted our family-like atmosphere and encouraged both the beginning and veteran teachers. Beginning teachers expressed how much it meant that so many agricultural education stakeholder groups cared about them. A list of every sponsor that participated in the event was placed in each bucket that allowed beginning teachers to know who invested in them. Beginning teachers provided thank-you notes or emails to their donors.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

This year the buckets were distributed during the opening day at the annual summer teachers conference. In the future, we hope to distribute the bucket to the beginning teacher during a conference banquet. This would allow the beginning teacher to be recognized and presented with the bucket by their high school agriculture teacher, student teacher mentor, and their “bucket-filler.” This event was a tremendous success in bringing our veteran teachers and beginning teachers together. Due to the nature of mass emails, sending a personal email asking for a bucket filler is necessary. Many of the teachers expressed that they must have overlooked the mass email, but they are happy to contribute when contacted personally. Next year, due to the popularity and publicity of the event, we believe we will have even more bucket-fillers. Further, finding stakeholders may be a challenge for some. However, a post on a personal Facebook page led to individuals outside of agriculture to also contribute. Also, we intend for ownership of this event to move to the North Carolina agriculture teachers’ association, since it builds community.

Costs/Resources Needed

The costs associated with this event varied between each bucket. Institutionally, the only cost was faculty time. Lowe’s Home Improvement donated the buckets, and our Farm Bureau Association and different agricultural commodity groups donated several other items. Most teachers stated they spent an average of \$25.00 on the supplies for each bucket. Organizing this event and securing some of the supplies involved an estimated 12 hours.

References

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