

**Filling Buckets for Our Beginning Ag Teachers**

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## Recruiting through Agricultural Education's Family Trees

### Introduction/Need for Idea

The shortage of qualified agriculture teachers has been well documented (Smith, Lawver, & Foster, 2017). As a result, efforts have been made at both the state and national level to promote careers in agricultural education and encourage students to consider teaching agriculture (<https://www.naae.org/teachag/index.cfm>). The National Teach Ag Campaign has launched a variety of initiatives, such as National Teach Ag Day and the Future Agriscience Teacher symposium. As well, the Teach Ag website provides numerous ideas and suggestions for identifying, nurturing, and supporting future agriculture teachers. Teacher education faculty across the country have also been responsible for several innovative efforts to recruit and encourage 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). While these activities focused on high school students, they did serve as the impetus for the introduction of several new Teach Ag activities in North Carolina focused on the recognition of beginning and established teachers. These activities also created a collegial team environment of support, areas found to be linked to retention and job satisfaction (Darling & Hammond, 1997; Friedman & Kass, 2002).

### How It Works

Teacher preparation faculty at North Carolina University developed an idea to recruit future teachers by recognizing the North Carolina Ag Ed Family Trees. In spring 2017, faculty surveyed teachers in North Carolina to determine where they attended high school if enrolled in an agriculture program, where they student taught, who among their students became teachers, and who they mentored as student teachers. To date, of the 518 teachers in North Carolina, 355 have completed the survey for a response rate of 68.65%, inclusive of even first-year teachers hired after May 15.

In June 2017, we selected a design for the family tree posters and created the template in Microsoft PowerPoint. The design included a visual tree where the teacher's own agriculture teachers and cooperating teachers formed the roots of the tree. The teacher's own high school students who became agriculture teachers and his or her student teachers are arrayed in the branches of the tree. We included the first line of the *Ag Teacher's Creed* and part of the FFA Advisor's part of opening ceremonies on the poster. Finally, the Teach Ag logo and the sponsors of Teach Ag were added to the posters. Finally, the 11x17 posters were framed in a matte black frame.

We distributed 38 of the North Carolina Ag Ed Family Trees to our teachers at the summer teachers' conference. We arrayed them on a table outside of the main ballroom. As teachers filed into the room, they stopped and discussed the Family Trees, where people student taught, and who they mentored. Because of the high level of interest, we hustled to complete the

next ~250 to be disseminated at the fall regional inservice meetings. As the next batch of Family Trees was disseminated at the regional inservices, even more teachers supplied their information, so we have 50-70 Family Trees to complete and disseminate. To date, we have printed and disseminated 267 Ag Ed Family Trees. At dissemination, we encouraged teachers to hang their framed Ag Ed Family Trees in their classrooms. We also encouraged them to ask prospective and promising future teachers in their classes, “Who among you will be my next (or first) branch of my NC Ag Teacher Family Tree?”

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

Results of the efforts have been both quantitative and qualitative. From a quantitative perspective, teachers appear to be more encouraging of their students to consider teaching this fall. A teacher emailed, “After hearing your presentation yesterday at in-service I wanted to send you a name of a current student of mine who is interested in Ag Ed.” To date and while certainly not confirmed with robust research methodology, the agricultural education program coordinator at our institution has received 12 emailed recommendations from different teachers of prospective agricultural education students, compared with zero recommendations over the same period in 2016. Teachers have posted their trees to social media and recognized their students and student teachers via the Family Trees. We have received written feedback from teachers, with one remarking, “I just wanted to say that your tree meant more to me than about any other award I have received in my teaching career.”

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

Annually in the future, we will update the Family Trees of teachers whose own students or student teachers graduate from one of the agriculture teacher preparation institutions in the state. We will develop their distribution and recognition into the awards banquet of the annual [StateAAE] summer conference.

When distributing the family trees, meetings with a large number of teachers allows for the easiest distribution. This year, family trees were distributed at summer conference and regional meetings. Also, once the PowerPoint template is populated with Family Tree information, future updates and new trees will require less investment of labor to reprint. Further, maintaining the database of teachers and student teachers should be relatively easy to maintain. This database also holds good potential for research on teacher recruitment and retention.

### **Costs/Resources Needed**

Costs include \$6.00/frame, \$0.75/poster for printing, and \$1.39/poster for labor, for a total cost of \$8.14/Family Tree. The total cost for Ag Ed Family Trees was \$2,173.38. Reprints of Family Trees will cost approximately \$0.75/poster. All materials were purchased with funds from the National Association of Agricultural Educators Teach Ag STAR grant program.

### References

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