

A Ten Year View of Georgia Agriculture Teacher Attrition and Mobility

Dalton Green, Undergraduate Student, Agricultural Education
University of Georgia
405 College Station Road
Athens, GA 30602
Dalton.green@uga.edu

McKinley Blassingame, Undergraduate Student, Agricultural Education
University of Georgia
405 College Station Road
Athens, GA 30602
Mckinley.blassingame@uga.edu

Jason Peake, Professor
University of Georgia
405 College Station Road
Athens, GA 30602
jpeake@uga.edu

Eric Rubenstein, Assistant Professor
University of Georgia
405 College Station Road
Athens, GA 30602
erubenstein@uga.edu

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Introduction

This descriptive study examined where Georgia agriculture teachers went when they left their position of teaching agriculture. Agriculture teacher numbers have been tracked since the inception of secondary agricultural education and the “teacher shortage” has been a consistent problem in secondary agricultural education for at least the last four decades (Smith et al., 2018). Nationally there were 10,600 secondary agricultural education positions nationwide on September 1, 2009, with a net demand of 667 replacements, or 6.3% (Smith et al., 2018). Determining where teachers go when they leave the profession is the first step to better understand their reason for their departure. This study used data from the past ten years (2009 – 2019) containing every move of each agriculture education teacher in the state of Georgia. The findings of this study align with Ingersoll and Smith (2003) who reported 42% of former teachers indicated a variety of personal reasons for leaving the profession. The rationale for this study is explained in the American Association for Agricultural Education’s (AAAE) National Research Agenda: Research Priority 3, “Sufficient Scientific and Professional Workforce that Addresses the Challenges of the 21st Century” (Lindner, Rodriguez, Strong, Jones, & Layfield, 2016).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is shaped by the Human Capital Theory as applied to education (Becker, 1993). This theory suggest that it is highly important to be aware of the attrition rate to inform decision makers of the profession. This is the primary factor driving this research for Georgia Agricultural education teachers. The Human capital theory divides teacher attrition factors into two categories: life-cycle factors and involuntary attrition. The involuntary attrition includes retirement, illness, death, and school uncertainty. The life cycle factors consider family conditions, location motivators, and the number of years teaching (Becker, 1993). Based on this framework the teacher attrition factors for this study were divided into the same categories of life-cycle factors and involuntary attrition. The study by Kirby and Grissmer (1993) to develop the Human Capital Theory studies the attrition rate over a number of years as opposed to the overall number of teachers leaving the classroom. The same idea is used in this study and the Georgia Agriculture teacher attrition rate is tracked over the span of ten years.

Methodology

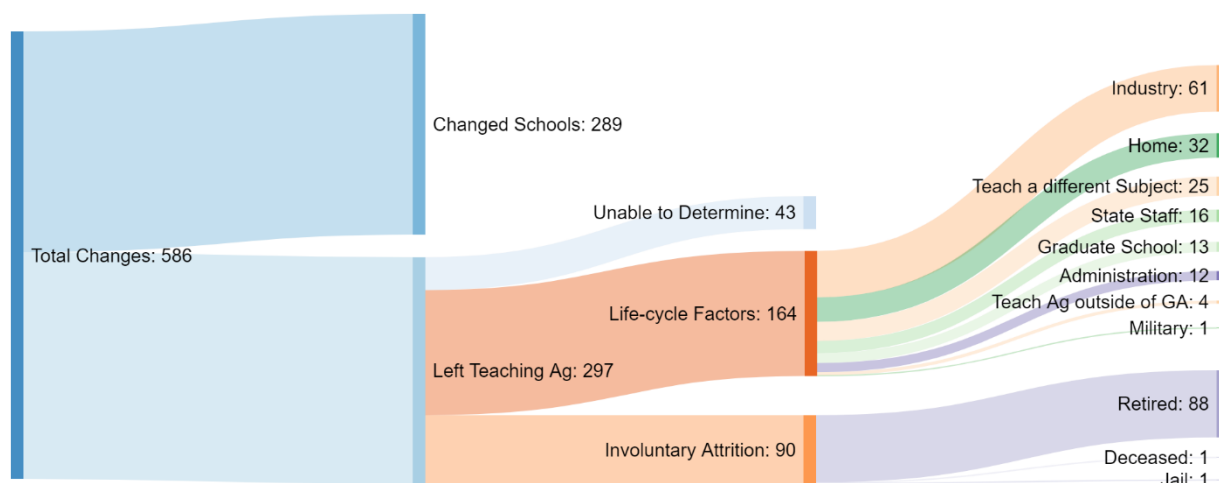
Data was collected by contacting Georgia Agricultural Education State Staff members, principals, superintendents, and current and past agricultural education teachers. The majority of the data was collected by conducting an interview with the Georgia agriculture education recruitment and retention specialists. These specialists had a record of each position change that had occurred over the past ten years. Primary effort was made to contact the former agriculture teacher directly if possible. After this, several other teachers were contacted directly, as well as other state staff members, to fill in any missing information on the remaining teachers. If the former agriculture teacher could not be reached than at least two data sources were used to triangulate and verify where teachers went after leaving the profession. There were 66 former teachers that the researchers were not able to locate and/or find anyone who knew where they went. This information was graphed to show the attrition rate over the past ten years.

Results and Conclusions

During the 10-year period of 2009-2019 there have been 586 Georgia agriculture teacher movements that were divided into two primary categories: “Changed Schools” (and are still teaching agriculture) (289); and “Left Teaching Agriculture” (297). There were 289 teachers that moved from one agriculture teaching position to another within Georgia and remained agriculture teachers. The “Left Teaching Ag” (297) category was further divided into secondary categories of “Unable to Determine” (43), “Life-cycle Factors” (164) and “Involuntary Attrition” (90). The secondary categories were finally broken down to tertiary categories.

Of the 297 teachers that left the profession there were 43 teachers who left the profession whose destination after teaching agriculture is unknown. Of the 297 teachers that left the profession, 164 had a Life-cycle Factor and 90 left due to Involuntary Attrition. Of the 164 that left due to life-cycle factors: 61 went into industry, 32 chose to stay home, 25 taught a different subject, 16 became state staff, 13 went to graduate school, 12 became administrators, 4 went to teach in another state, and 1 went into the military. Of the 90 that left due to involuntary attrition, 88 retired, 1 is deceased, and 1 is in jail (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. Georgia Agriculture Teacher Movement between 2009 and 2019



Evidence supports that over the past ten years, in the state of Georgia, the professions in which agriculture teachers go when they leave the teaching profession are varied amongst the population. However, the greatest number of agriculture teachers leave due to retirement (88), followed by industry (61), staying at home (32), and teaching in another area (25). In Georgia, over the past ten years, 40% of the agriculture teachers who departed the profession have done so due to various Life-cycle Factors.

Implications and Recommendations

The results of this research project provide much needed information for Georgia Agricultural Education State staff, Agricultural Education Faculty Members, and other agricultural education decision makers in the state of Georgia to assist them in their effort to understand the agricultural education teacher attrition rate. The results of this study are currently being used to support a larger study that will examine *why* agricultural educators leave the profession. It is the hope of the researchers that decision makers can use these results to better focus retention efforts in areas where the greatest impact can be made.

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