

**Making It Work: A Qualitative Study of Work-Life Balance of  
Agricultural Science Teachers**

Kelley Lowes, Julie Harlin, Kim Dooley, Gary Briers, and Joyce Juntune

Texas A&M University

TAMU 2116

College Station, TX 77843-2116

979-862-3014

[Kelleylowes@gmail.com](mailto:Kelleylowes@gmail.com), [j-harlin@tamu.edu](mailto:j-harlin@tamu.edu); [k-dooley@tamu.edu](mailto:k-dooley@tamu.edu); [g-briers@tamu.edu](mailto:g-briers@tamu.edu); [j-juntune@tamu.edu](mailto:j-juntune@tamu.edu)

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### **Introduction/Theoretical Framework**

What happens between eight and five does influence the family, and by the same measure, what happens at home does affect productivity at work. Work and family are fully integrated for most professional adults (Sullivan, 1981). Although social norms may be changing regarding the extent to which spouses share household and parenting activities, women continue to provide a majority of child care and household work (Lee, et al., 2014). In Hainline's, et al. (2015) study, female agricultural teachers reported spending seven-and-one half more hours per week on family responsibilities, in comparison to their male counterparts. Sorenesen, et al. (2016) suggest examining the work-family culture within agricultural education and how this culture influences shared between work and family roles, as well as the relationship work-family culture, work family balance ability, and job satisfaction. Research suggests that combining work and family are one reason why professional mothers leave the workforce at higher rates, with lack of flexible work arrangements noted as one main explanation for these patterns (Leschyshyn & Minnotte, 2014).

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) is a theory of motivation that is driven by the three constructs of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goal-directed activity. These three constructs act as mediators in the relationships between individual and environmental experiences and outcome behaviors (Lent, et al., 1999, 2000). Social Cognitive Career Theory claims that career choice is dictated by both objective and perceived environmental factors. A person's perceived environment can be beneficial or hurtful based on how a person sees themselves in that environment.

### **Purpose/Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to determine how agricultural science teachers in central Texas balance family and a successful career as a secondary agricultural science teacher. Research questions that guided this study were: How do you make it all work in terms of family and work balance? In terms of family, what are the social supports that you need to maintain your role? How do you define success and has that changed since you first started teaching? The population for this study was agricultural educators who supervise an FFA chapter and have a family.

### **Methods/Procedures**

This investigation explored agricultural sciences teachers who were successful at juggling their careers and their families and the supports necessary for that success. Qualitative phenomenological analysis method was chosen because it fit the nature of the investigation. This research examined information about experiences and sought to understand how teachers make their career work with their family.

The criteria for selecting agricultural sciences teachers for this study were 1) Teaching experience: a minimum of 5 years of teaching experience since this is a popular time for teachers to have families; and 2) Successful classrooms and FFA programs: this difficult balance to

achieve involves teaching a variety of different courses while still training leadership and career development teams and a well-established FFA program; 3) Diversity in background/family structure/teaching department size. Ten teachers who met the years of teaching requirement, had successful programs, and had different backgrounds in agriculture, teaching department size, school district size, and family structure, were selected using a key informant and interviewed.

Research questions were asked in semi-structured interviews. Additional follow-up questions were also asked based upon the participant's answers. Participants were contacted through phone calls. Times were set up based upon the availability of the participant. The site for interviews was conducted in a variety of locations based upon the interviewee's hometown and location of school. To establish trustworthiness the following methods were used: reflexive journaling, member checks, peer debriefing, triangulation, and audit trails.

### **Results/Findings**

Ten teachers who had different backgrounds in agriculture, teaching department size, school district size, and family structure, were purposely selected for inclusion in this study. The participants included 6 females and 4 males, who were both married (8) and divorced (2). Nine of the participants had 1-3 children. Teachers were from both urban (4) and rural (6) settings with small to large agricultural science programs ranging from 1-5 teachers. Participants had 5-22 years of teaching experience.

The first category that emerged was that all the teachers interviewed felt very strongly about the involvement of their own children in their agriculture program. While not all children are the appropriate age to participate in FFA, it is important for teachers with children to bring their personal children to FFA events. For teachers, having their personal children involved in the program was the most important factor in choosing a district as well as being able to balance family and a career. The second category to emerge was the importance of staying organized. Training teams, officer meetings, FFA meetings, and travel can be a huge juggling act. When family is thrown in the mix, another huge layer is added. Prioritizing time also showed significance in topics. Being an agriculture teacher is so different than being a core area teacher. Nicole stated, "People in general have to know that ag is different, it's not the same beast" (Nicole, 43-44). In addition, these teachers still have all their duties at the school as well.

### **Conclusions/Recommendations/Implications**

With dual income families and more women in the workforce, both parents are now forced to deal with balancing a career and family. Both genders struggle with finding an ideal balance that allows them to have a successful career and a happy family life. So how do agriculture teachers make it all work? How do they juggle a family and a successful career? The most common answer to this question was involving your children in the program. Teachers use a variety of methods to stay organized so that they were able to spend time with their family as well as meet important school obligations. Learning to prioritize is vital to agriculture teacher survival. Social Cognitive Career Theory claims that career choice is dictated by both objective and perceived environmental factors which was evident in this study.

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