Beginning Georgia Agriculture Teachers Motivation for Teaching Agriculture

Sallie K. McHugh
Assistant Professor
smchugh@abac.edu
Department of Agricultural Education and Communication
Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College
ABAC 8, 2802 Moore Hwy
Tifton, Ga 31793

James Lindner
Professor
jrl0039@auburn.edu
College of Education
Auburn University
3084 Haley Center
Auburn, Alabama 36849-5218

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Introduction/Need for Research

Each fall new secondary school agriculture teachers enter the classroom. No matter their certification path, these teachers have been hired to accomplish the same task; run a successful school-based agricultural education (SBAE) program and survive. Currently, there is a national shortage of agricultural educators at the secondary school level. According to the *National Agricultural Education Supply and Demand* study there is a teacher shortage of over 250 teachers annually (Smith et al., 2018). Further, it is estimated that there will be hundreds of unfilled positions across the United States annually, simply because not enough students are choosing to be agricultural educators (National Association of Agricultural Educators, 2017). The question then becomes: why are students not choosing a career in agriculture education? To fill these teaching vacancies and reduce the amount of turnover rate, agriculture education supervisors must find out what makes beginning teachers remain in the profession by determining what they enjoy about their job (Rice et al., 2011). Being able to understand what motivates new teachers to have a job in this profession and identify the experiences and practices deemed valuable in their job can be further examined and built upon to help prepare our future agriculture educators and encourage them to remain in the profession.

Theoretical Framework

To identify what brings joy and motivation to beginning school-based agriculture teachers we must determine what tasks motivate them to be in and remain in the profession. Applying process motivational theory, SBAE supervisors can determine what external factors motivate current beginning agriculture teachers to enter the profession and increase their chances to remain. The four main process theories are reinforcement, expectancy, equity, and goal setting (Stotz & Bolger, 2017). Due to the nature of the job of a SBAE teacher, involving numerous daily tasks and roles, these daily teacher tasks require motivation from the teacher to complete. Tasks producing low motivation in an agriculture educator, could be a potential factor for leaving the profession due to decreased motivation in job related responsibilities. Tasks producing higher motivation in an agriculture teacher, could be a potential factor for the teacher to remain in the profession. Determination of external driving factors in tasks related to the agriculture education profession will help to control whether a current agriculture teacher may remain in the profession. Determination of tasks teachers view as motivators for the profession will allow state leadership and teacher preparation programs to capitalize on recruitment.

Methodology

The design for this research was descriptive, correlational, and utilized a standard-based instrument based upon the seven National Quality Program Standards. Participants were asked to rank the standards from one to seven, with one being their highest motivator. This instrument was researcher-developed and was examined for face validity and construct validity by university faculty and current Georgia Agricultural Education teachers. Statistical validity was checked using covariance at a specific alpha level and lack of homogeneity (Drost, 2012). Alpha for all statistical test was set *a priori* at .05. Once a relationship was determined, focus was turned to the internal validity of the instrument. Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each standard within research instrument to determine reliability. The results of each standard produced were as follows: standard 1 (r=.93), standard 2 (r=.99), standard 3 (r=.89), standard 4 (r=.91), standard 5 (r=.16), standard 6 (r=.86), and standard 7 (r=.84).

The population for this study included all beginning Georgia SBAE teachers (N=45). Participants were contacted via email requesting participation, initially. Data was collected via Qualtrics survey and at the new agriculture teachers meeting during the Georgia Vocational Agriculture Teachers Association winter meeting. New teachers were asked to complete survey voluntarily and anonymity remained.

Results/Findings

Overall, 40 Georgia beginning agricultural education teachers responded to the questionnaire, which produced a response rate of 88.9%. The results of motivation level for overall ranking of the seven National Quality Program Standards and is part of a larger study. Participants ranked the seven standards from most important (score=1) to least important (score=7). The ranking of most important, participants ranked Standard 3: Leadership and personal development through FFA (*f*=10, 25.0%). The next standard ranked following most important was standard 4: School and community partnerships (*f*=9, 25.0%). Standard 2: Experiential and project, and work-based learning through SAE ranked their (*f*=9, 22.5%). Fourth ranked, was standard 6: Certified agriculture teachers and professional growth (*f*=11, 27.5%). Standard 1: Program design and instruction ranked fifth (*f*=7,17.5%). Standard 7: Program planning and evaluation (*f*=9, 22.5%) ranked sixth, and the least important standard was Standard 5: Marketing (*f*=14, 35.0%).

Conclusions

Based on the seven National Quality Program Standards the highest overall standard ranked was standard 3; leadership and personal development through FFA. Teachers understand the importance of this part of the total program. FFA allows a student to bring the other two parts, class/lab and SAE, into the leadership program of FFA. This is also the area where teachers get to see their students succeed through Career Development Events, obtaining leadership positions, winning proficiency awards, and the list goes on. Perhaps the ability for teachers to see their students succeed and grow personally motivates teachers. The least important standard was standard 5 marketing. Teachers see the importance of marketing based on the need to implement a strategic plan based on the ranking of standard 5 quality indicators, but in general teachers are least motivated by marketing. The to do list for an agriculture teacher is always long and marketing can sometimes be the last item on this list and perhaps is the area that teachers are least prepared.

Implications/Recommendations/Impact on Profession

This study found the least motivating standard for beginning agriculture teachers is marketing. SBAE teachers must share their story of their program. Without a strategic marketing plan, this may only be a vision. Teachers must involve chapter officers in this effort, or a potential class project focused on agriculture communications or marketing. The ability to share with the community the events occurring in your chapter helps to build support. It also allows stakeholders to see how the program is utilizing funding and providing opportunities to students. For teacher preparation recommendations the focused is also based on marketing. Teachers understand the importance of having a program marketing plan, but it was the least important motivator among the seven quality standards. Marketing could be just another job on an agriculture education teacher's to-do list. Teacher preparation programs must provide instruction to show the ease of marketing and provide students a marketing packet of materials prior to leaving program. The focus of the marketing should also be based on technology today using social media. Future research should be conducted to determine specifically why marketing the least motivating and ways teacher educators and state staff can help teachers with this task.

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