

**Identifying the Concerns of Early, Mid, and Late Career Agriculture Teachers in Illinois  
Introduction**

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### Introduction

The concerns of teachers among all experience levels have been studied extensively. The concerns of teachers among all experience levels have been studied extensively. Early The concerns of teachers among all experience levels have been studied extensively. Early The concerns of teachers among all experience levels have been studied extensively. Early literature identifies three concern stages: pre-service concerns, early teaching concerns, and late teaching concerns (Fuller, 1969). Fuller's work shows that as teachers gain experience, their concerns change. Fessler and Christensen (1992) explain that the characteristics of teachers are influenced by the organizational environment as well as the personal environment. Current concerns of teachers must be identified to improve current professional development and teacher education practices. When not addressed, these concerns related to teaching, laboratory instruction, experience levels, and FFA and SAE can have lasting consequences on teachers and agricultural education. The effects of not addressing these issues can include lower teacher retention and recruitment rates. In one case study of former Illinois agriculture teachers, a common reason for leaving the profession was unrealistic expectations concerning FFA Events. In the study, several former teachers discussed the pressure they felt to do more outside of the classroom and typical instructional day (Solomonson et al., 2019). In the last 50 years, on average, between 50% and 60% of agricultural education graduates chose to enter teaching during their first year after graduation (Eck & Edwards, 2019). Though multiple studies on the topic have been conducted, it is necessary to continue research on current issues affecting agriculture teachers. One item that requires more research includes the concerns of agriculture teachers who are in different stages of their careers. More research should also be conducted on how concerns affect teachers of different genders, ages, and degree type held. As education changes, it is imperative to understand the needs of teachers in agricultural education.

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### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is based on the ideas of Fessler and Christensen (1992) and their Teacher Career Cycle. The teacher career cycle is influenced by two environmental conditions: personal environment and organizational environment. Fessler and Christensen (1992) identify 8 stages in the Teacher Career Cycle. These stages are Pre-Service, Induction, Competency Building, Enthusiastic & Growing, Career Frustration, Career Stability, Career Wind-Down, and Career Exit. In each stage, the teacher has certain characteristics and professional development needs. While the Teacher Career Cycle does have beginning and ending stages, the model is not necessarily linear. As a response to positive or negative environmental factors, teachers may move from stage to stage at any time.

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### Methodology

The target population consisted of current agricultural educators of all ages and experience levels in Illinois (N=432). In the instrument, demographic data such as gender, age, years teaching, degree held, and agricultural education experience as a student, was gathered. Likert-type scale questions from Stair, Warner, and Moore (2012) were used to determine areas of concern. The scale contained 20 common areas of concern for agriculture teachers which have been identified in previous literature. The areas of concern were: organizing an effective alumni chapter, organizing an effective advisory committee, organizing FFA activities, managing student discipline in the classroom, recruiting and retaining alumni members, balancing personal and professional responsibilities, recruiting and retaining students, building support of faculty, counselors and administrators, time management, managing finances of the agricultural program, making special education/ESL accommodations, class preparation, developing and managing effective SAE programs for students, motivating students, completing paperwork, developing community support, self-confidence, reputation of the previous teacher, multi-teacher issues, and managing and developing program facilities. The participants were directed to rate each concern on a scale of one to five with one being not concerned and five being extremely concerned.

### Results

The Likert type scale results were split into three groups: 1-5 years (early career), 6-16 years (Mid-Career), and 16+ years (Late Career) of experience. Researchers focused on concerns with a mean score of 3.5 or higher. Early career teachers had one concern above a 3.5 which was Motivating Students (3.55). Mid-career teachers had four concerns above a 3.5. They were: Recruiting and Retaining Students (3.86), Time Management (3.67), Balancing Personal and Professional Responsibilities (3.59), and Motivating Students (3.58). Late career teachers had one area of concern which was Balancing Personal and Professional Responsibilities (3.53).

### Conclusions

The goal of the instrument was to determine the level of concern of Illinois agriculture teachers based on years of experience. The group with the greatest number of concerns was the 6-15 years of experience group. The concerns that scored a mean above a 3.5 are similar to findings in past agricultural education research. Motivating students (Smalley et al. 2019; Sorensen et al., 2014; Stair et al., 2012), balancing personal and profession responsibilities (Myers et al., 2005; Solomonson et al., 2019; Sorensen et al., 2014; Stair et al., 2012; Touchstone, 2015) recruiting and retaining students (Myers et al., 2005; Touchstone, 2015) and time management (Myers et al. 2005; Sorensen et al., 2014; Touchstone, 2015) were the highest mean concerns in this study.

### Recommendations

The results of this study offer a better understanding of the concerns of agriculture teachers in Illinois. The Illinois Association for Vocational Agriculture Teachers, State FFA Staff, university teaching faculty, FCAE, and other stakeholders should be informed of these specific concerns. Since teachers have different needs at different career stages, these stakeholder groups should consider tailoring professional development to different groups of teachers to eliminate one-size fits all in-services (Fessler & Christensen, 1992). In Illinois, professional development specifically for the first- and second-year agriculture teachers should continue. The Professional development and university course curriculum in the areas of

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motivating students, recruitment and retention of students, balancing personal and professional life, and time management, should continue to be implemented.

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