



Meaningful Work: Novice Agriculture Teachers and Retention in the Profession



Agricultural Sciences
Education and Communication

Abby Girardot, MPP, National FFA Organization
Dr. B. Allen Talbert, ASEC Professor, Purdue University

Olivia Power, National FFA Organization
See-Trail Mackey, MS, MPA, National FFA Organization

Introduction

- Decreasing student enrollment in university agricultural education programs (Jalil et al., 2023)
- The exodus of agriculture teachers from the field (Kantrovich, 2010; Smith & Smalley, 2018; Sorensen et al., 2016)

- Agriculture teachers have an influential role on student career preparation and choices (Parola et al., 2023; Stewards & Roberts, 2024; Wong et al., 2021)

➔ First five years of teaching have the highest number of “leavers” from the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling Hammond, 2017; Gray et al., 2015).

📋 Our larger study explored U.S. agriculture teachers' perspectives on their role in preparing and influencing student career readiness and choices.

This part of the study focused specifically on how Novice agriculture teachers perceive their professional experiences and how these perceptions:

- affect their plans to stay in the profession.
- impact how they prepare students for the workforce.

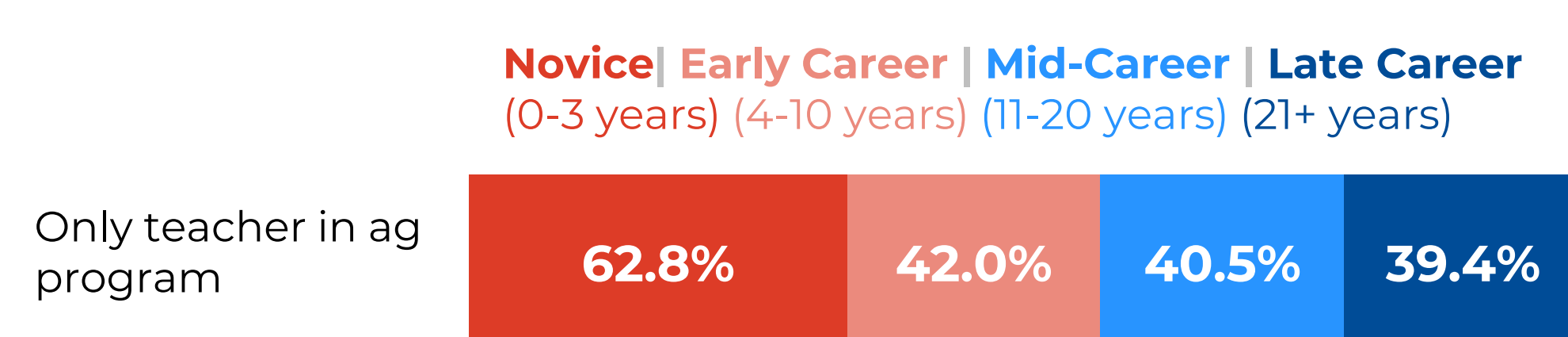
Research Questions

- How do Novice agriculture teachers rate various aspects of their job?
- How do Novice agriculture teachers prepare students for the workforce?
- To what extent do experience-related factors affect Novice agriculture teachers' plans to continue teaching?

Results/Findings

Figure 1. Only Teacher in Ag Program

Novice agriculture teachers, compared to others, were more likely to be the only agriculture teacher in their agriculture program.



Lack of Support for Novices
About one in five Novice ag teachers (21.8%) felt a lack of a support system extremely affected their ability as an agriculture teacher and had the highest percentage report a lack of community support for their agriculture program (14.5%).

Table 1. Respondents' Career Stage by Feeling at Work

Scale	Career Stage	n	M	F	p
Feel Positive at Work	Novice _a	185	2.59	2.770	.041
	Early Career _{ab}	188	2.63		
	Mid Career _{ab}	151	2.64		
	Late Career _b	121	2.80		
Feel Negative at Work	Novice _a	185	2.52	7.331	<.001
	Early Career _{ab}	188	2.42		
	Mid Career _{bc}	151	2.28		
	Late Career _c	121	2.12		

Note. Levels: 0 = Almost Never; 1 = Once in a While; 2 = Sometimes; 3 = Frequently; 4 = Almost Always.
Note. Means with same subscript do not differ at the $p = .05$ level by Tukey HSD post hoc tests.

MANOVA Results:

Novice teachers had the highest means for negative feelings at work, such as exhausted, frustrated, worried, overwhelmed and stressed out. Novice teachers also had the lowest means for positive feelings at work, such as engaged, happy, hopeful, effective and excited.

Table 2. Respondents' Career Plans by Feeling at Work

Scale	Career Plans	n	M	F	p
Feel Positive at Work	Extended Career _a	161	2.76	10.620	<.001
	Long Term _a	170	2.63		
	Short Term _a	207	2.73		
	Immediate Future	103	2.34		
Feel Negative at Work	Extended Career	161	2.38	2.127	.096
	Long Term	170	2.34		
	Short Term	207	2.30		
	Immediate Future	103	2.53		

Note. Levels: 0 = Almost Never; 1 = Once in a While; 2 = Sometimes; 3 = Frequently; 4 = Almost Always.
Note. Means with same subscript do not differ at the $p = .05$ level by Tukey HSD post hoc tests.

MANOVA Results:

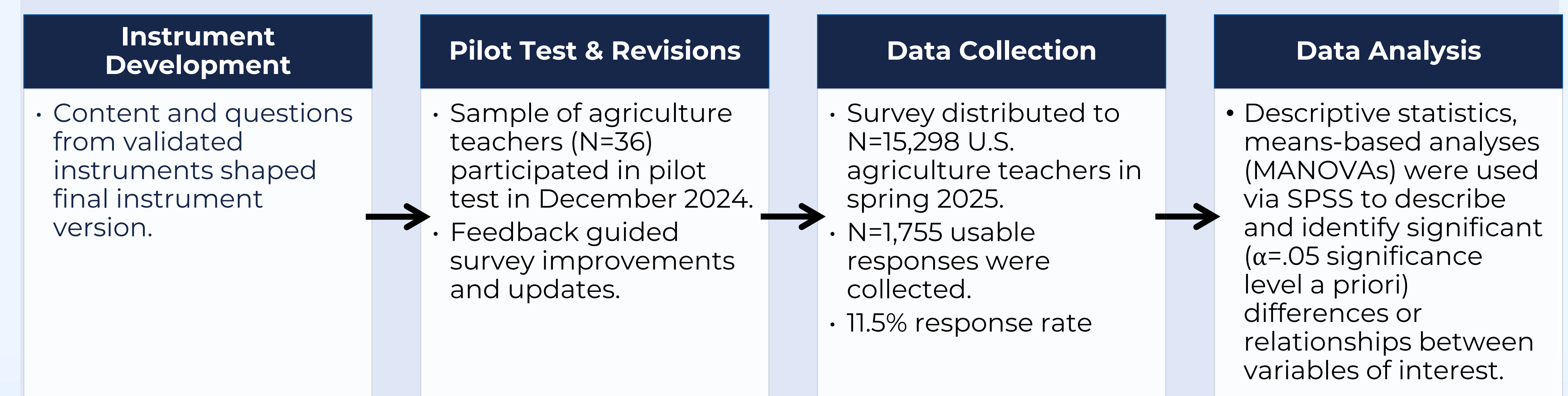
Those planning to leave teaching in the immediate future had the lowest means for positive feelings at work. Career plans and positive feelings at work was significant at the $\alpha = .05$ level.

Theoretical Framework

The **Four-Capital Theoretical Model of Teacher Retention** (Mason & Matas, 2015) stipulates four categories of capital: (1) human capital, or teacher knowledge and experience, (2) social capital, or teacher relationships and support systems, (3) structural capital, or school-based resources and factors and (4) positive psychological capital, or teacher experiences and sentiments.

Methods

- Descriptive research design with an online Qualtrics survey
- Booth et al.'s (2021) compilation of career models and stages was modified slightly to classify four career stages (Novice, Early Career, Mid-Career and Late Career)
- Scales were created for positive feelings at work and negative feelings at work



Conclusions

Negative job experiences and sentiments may lead to burnout.

More experienced agriculture teachers feel less overwhelmed at work.

If Novice teachers can stay until Mid-Career, the outlook is positive for them to have an extended career as an agriculture teacher.

Recommendations

- Efforts and materials aimed at Novice agriculture teachers must be integrated into existing processes or resources, as they likely do not have the capacity for additional work.
- Novice agriculture teachers need ready-to-use resources to support and facilitate their impact on agriculture students.
- Whenever a new agriculture teacher is hired, stakeholders need to be proactive or receptive to relationship building with and providing resources to Novice agriculture teachers.
- Future research should continue to identify and assess the types of support systems, resources and relationships that have significant, positive impacts on retaining Novice agriculture teachers.

References available on request.

Contact information:

Abby Girardot, agirardot@ffa.org
Olivia Power, opower@ffa.org

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