

Supporting SBAE Teachers Through a Local Teacher Success Program

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Introduction and Need for Innovation

All of us who interact with teachers have an influence on the system in which they work (Marzolino & McKim, 2024), however, as a matter of support, agriculture teachers are more likely to engage in mentoring through peer networks (Solomonson et al., 2021). Research in agricultural education has shown that specific factors such as job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and connectivity within the profession, are aspects of career commitment having a direct influence on teacher retention and attrition (Moser & McKim, 2020; Queen et al., 2025). Likewise, research in school-based agricultural education (SBAE) has also indicated adequate training and supportive work and community environments as factors influencing agriculture teachers to stay in the profession (Clemons & Linder, 2019; Igo & Perry, 2019). Solomonson et al. (2019) recommended differentiated training based on career stages and other subgroup categorizations (e.g., traditional versus alternative entry), along with SBAE-specific onboarding experiences that highlight unwritten rules and norms of participating in the profession, in combination with targeted relationship building among agriculture teachers (Moser & McKim, 2020).

Recognizing the need to examine agriculture teacher support and retention in Oregon over the last several years, a needs assessment conducted by university faculty and the state agriculture teachers' association resulted in the creation of a new teacher support position (i.e., Local Teacher Success Specialist), which is funded through the development work of the Oregon FFA Foundation. The position has been operational since June 2025 and was designed to focus on personalized program visits and coaching for early career teachers, problem-solving support through intentional individual contacts, and ready-to-use resources for all teachers. The purpose of this abstract, part of a larger, ongoing project related to agriculture teacher support, was to explore the first-year implementation of the Local Teacher Success (LTS) program in Oregon.

How it Works / Methods

The LTS Specialist is a full-time Oregon FFA position, overseen by an advisory committee and the Oregon FFA CEO. According to the position description,

The Local Teacher Success (LTS) program is a collaboration between all Oregon "Team Ag Ed" entities and is intended to provide support to current secondary school agriculture teachers. It should work closely with all post-secondary agriculture teacher education programs in Oregon and surrounding states. In its initial phase, this program will consist of one full-time staff person who will be assigned to travel the state, meeting with local agriculture instructors to provide support, encouragement, and practical assistance in addressing challenges common to managing secondary school agriculture programs.

Some of the targeted supports provided through the position this year have included an SBAE summer Teacher Boot Camp and fall Extended Boot Camp, regular email newsletters with teaching tips and program reminders, in-person visits and coaching of all first-year agriculture teachers, tailored workshops specific to early career teachers, as well as turn-key resources (e.g., sub plans, scope and sequences, unit plans) for all teachers to utilize. To explore the implementation of the LTS program, we conducted 21 *stay* interviews. Stay interviews are

designed to gain insight into how to proactively increase retention by identifying what keeps employees engaged and motivated, and any potential issues that might lead to someone leaving (Mani, 2023; Raison, 2022). Additionally, the LTS Specialist collected specific program data throughout the year that will be presented here.

Results to Date

Since June 2025, the LTS Specialist reported 224 individual contacts with current teachers and 43 program visits across the state, impacting approximately 6,300 high school agriculture students. In addition, 21 professional development workshops were held, serving 352 teachers. Impressively, all 23 first-year teachers were visited in person, and all statewide travel combined totaled over 23,000 miles. Impacts can be hard to measure in a new position like this, but we feel these data show it has been a wise investment in supporting agriculture teachers.

Teachers indicated having someone easily contacted who was experienced, not a current teacher, and approachable, were key benefits of the program. Rachel said, “It is helpful to have a resource...just knowing you are available is nice.” Rebekah said, “[Specialist] always helps and makes me feel more comfortable.” Sandy stated, “before the visit, I was a little lost on curriculum,” and Samantha added, “I really thought I was lost in the curriculum department but after her visit, I did not feel that way.” Alexandra said, “Your availability and willingness to respond and answer questions” were most helpful, while Maria said it was nice to “have a safety net where there are no dumb questions.” Angie said, “it saved me...”.

When asked about specific aspects of the LTS programming, teachers stated their appreciation for the turn-key resources they could utilize in their classrooms, the email newsletters which contained helpful resources and deadline reminders, the constant check-ins and communication, the one-on-one coaching and program visits, as well as the professional development opportunities, especially those tailored to early career teachers. Mary mentioned, “I always get good ideas from your visits”; Michelle said, “I applied all of the knowledge and content gained from the Boot Camp”; and Heather expressed that she felt a strong bond with other early career teachers through participating in the LTS initiatives.

Future Plans / Advice for Others

There is a networking event for new teachers at the [State Teachers’ Association] Summer Conference, along with a goal-setting workshop for first and second-year teachers. The second Summer Boot Camp will happen in July 2026, and program visits are already being scheduled for the Fall. One piece of advice to others is to create an advisory committee to direct the creation of the position description and provide ongoing support for the specialist. If a specialist position is not an option, find other ways to support teachers and let them know they are needed.

Costs / Resources Needed

While this program does come with significant financial costs (e.g., salary, vehicle, travel), these data do represent a positive outcome. The FFA Foundation purchased a vehicle and helps cover some expenses for the program, in addition to a significant grant that funds most of the costs for the position for this year and the next two years. The advisory committee is exploring funding models to sustain, and hopefully multiply, the position in the future.

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