

**First Year SBAE Teachers: What do they really need?**

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### Introduction

New school-based agricultural education (SBAE) teachers are critical to the profession but experience consistently high rates teacher shortage (U.S. Department of Education, 2024). Supporting these educators early in their careers is essential for developing their professional identity and sense of belonging (Maslow, 1943). Increasing numbers of alternatively licensed teachers are also entering the SBAE workforce. While bringing valuable industry experience, they may need additional preparation in pedagogy, classroom management, and other practices. Despite the importance of supporting beginning agriculture teachers, little research has examined professional development needs by licensing type. This study identifies targeted professional development topics for traditionally and alternatively licensed first-year SBAE teachers.

### Conceptual Framework

The three-component model of school-based agricultural education (i.e., classroom and laboratory instruction, FFA, and SAE) served as the conceptual framework for this study. Because beginning teachers often struggle to balance these components and other program responsibilities (Sorensen et al., 2014), the study examined professional development needs aligned with the three-component model and program management. The findings can inform targeted professional development for first-year SBAE teachers.

### Methods

A survey was administered to first-year SBAE teachers in Utah to assess their professional development needs. Participants included teachers who entered the profession through traditional licensure, alternative licensure, or from another teaching discipline. The survey was distributed electronically via Qualtrics to 19 teachers with 16 of them completing the survey yielding an 84% response rate. Respondents rated their level of need for professional development using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Survey items addressed key areas of beginning teacher practice, including classroom instruction, FFA, SAE, and program management topics. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 31 to generate descriptive statistics and compare professional development needs across licensure pathways.

### Results

Participants were grouped into three categories: traditionally licensed through a university program (TL), alternatively licensed or endorsed (ARL), and traditionally licensed from another discipline (TFOD). Across all groups, the highest-rated classroom professional development needs included technology integration, curriculum development, preparing students for success after high school, and working with at-risk or special needs students (see Table 1). In FFA and SAE, all groups reported relatively high needs, with ARL teachers reporting the highest overall ( $M = 4.17$ - $4.83$ ). TFOD teachers also reported greater needs than TL teachers, particularly in preparing CDE/LDE teams and integrating FFA and SAE into the classroom. For program management, ARL teachers again reported the highest needs, especially in utilizing advisory committees and working with alumni, parents, and volunteers. All groups identified identifying funding sources and completing paperwork and reports as high-need areas, while TFOD teachers reported the lowest overall program management needs.

**Table 1**

*Professional Development Needs of Beginning SBAE Teachers by License Type*

|                    | Professional Development Topic                   | Total<br><i>M</i> | ARL<br><i>M</i> | TFOD<br><i>M</i> | TL<br><i>M</i> |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|------------------|----------------|
| Classroom          | Developing curriculum                            | 3.24              | 3.33            | 2.50             | 3.88           |
|                    | Preparing students for success after high school | 3.17              | 2.50            | 3.50             | 3.50           |
|                    | Working with at-risk or special needs students   | 3.13              | 3.50            | 2.50             | 3.38           |
|                    | Using technology in the classroom                | 2.85              | 3.67            | 2.00             | 2.88           |
|                    | Engaging and motivating students in lessons      | 2.81              | 3.17            | 2.00             | 3.25           |
|                    | Assessing students                               | 2.75              | 3.00            | 2.50             | 2.75           |
|                    | Classroom/behavior management                    | 2.73              | 3.33            | 2.00             | 2.87           |
|                    | Using a variety of teaching strategies           | 2.64              | 3.17            | 2.00             | 2.75           |
|                    | Differentiation                                  | 2.57              | 2.83            | 2.00             | 2.88           |
| FFA/ SAE           | Preparing FFA award applications                 | 4.32              | 4.83            | 4.00             | 4.13           |
|                    | Developing SAE opportunities for students        | 4.11              | 4.33            | 4.00             | 4.00           |
|                    | Integration of FFA and SAE in the classroom      | 4.08              | 4.50            | 4.50             | 3.25           |
|                    | Advising the FFA chapter                         | 4.07              | 4.33            | 4.00             | 3.88           |
|                    | Using the AET system                             | 4.03              | 4.33            | 4.50             | 3.25           |
|                    | Preparing CDE/LDE teams                          | 4.02              | 4.67            | 4.00             | 3.38           |
|                    | Conducting local FFA chapter activities          | 3.96              | 4.50            | 4.00             | 3.38           |
|                    | Supervising student SAE programs                 | 3.72              | 4.17            | 3.00             | 4.00           |
| Program Management | Identifying sources of funding for my program    | 3.89              | 4.17            | 3.50             | 4.00           |
|                    | Utilizing a local advisory committee             | 3.82              | 4.33            | 3.50             | 3.63           |
|                    | Completing paperwork and reports                 | 3.81              | 3.67            | 4.00             | 3.75           |
|                    | Working with alumni, parents, and volunteers     | 3.56              | 4.17            | 3.00             | 3.50           |
|                    | Communicating with parents                       | 3.46              | 3.00            | 3.50             | 3.87           |
|                    | Marketing the program and recruiting students    | 3.28              | 3.83            | 3.00             | 3.00           |
|                    | Establishing and maintaining budgets             | 3.21              | 3.50            | 2.50             | 3.63           |
|                    | Time management                                  | 3.08              | 2.50            | 3.50             | 3.25           |
|                    | Managing program equipment and supplies          | 2.83              | 3.50            | 2.00             | 3.00           |
|                    | Working with administrators                      | 2.58              | 2.50            | 2.00             | 3.25           |

*Note.* All items were measured on a 5-point scale with higher numbers indicating higher need

### Conclusions/Implications

The findings suggest that professional development needs vary by licensure pathway and that a one-size-fits-all induction approach may not adequately support beginning SBAE teachers (Toombs et al, 2025). Alternatively licensed teachers reported the highest overall needs across all categories, indicating a need for more intensive and sustained support during the first year. Traditionally licensed teachers showed lower needs in FFA/SAE but greater needs in classroom and program management. TFOD teachers reported higher FFA/SAE needs but fewer needs in classroom and program management, suggesting that prior teaching experience may transfer pedagogical skills. Across all groups, FFA/SAE emerged as the highest area of need. These results support differentiated induction and ongoing development aligned to licensure pathways. Practically, SBAE programs should tailor early-career support, with targeted emphasis on FFA/SAE for all teachers and additional scaffolding for ARL teachers in their first year. Future research should replicate this study with a larger population as sample size was a limitation of this study.

## References

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