

GROWING OUR FUTURE

A TEXAS AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE EDUCATION MAGAZINE

SPRING 2026



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Growing Our Future:
A Texas Agricultural Education Magazine

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Austin, Texas 78701

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2025 Texas FFA Photography Contest Entry

FROM THE EDITOR



Ashley Dunkerley

The inspiration behind this magazine's theme for 2026 is the importance and impact of the local FFA chapter. While the district, area, state and national levels of Texas FFA play an important role, it is often at the local chapter level that students first discover their passion for agriculture and the FFA.

This issue highlights the importance of advocating for agriculture at the local level. Advocacy doesn't always happen on big stages. More often, it begins with small conversations, classroom lessons and community involvement that help students better understand the value of agriculture.

We hope you enjoy the Spring 2026 issue of Growing Our Future and feel inspired by the stories of local advocacy and impact happening in FFA chapters across Texas. ■



EARLY AG TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Hosted by Texas Farm Bureau

May 31-June 2, 2026 | Waco

FREE workshop for agricultural science teachers with 1-5 years of experience
Two tracks will be offered this year: Floral Design and Ag Mechanics

Presentations by agricultural experts who specialize in education

Site visits to explore agricultural operations in Central Texas

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Our association is now over 85 years old and continues to grow in size. Membership has reached 2,590 members as of November 4, 2025. As we grow, the age structure of our members also changes. The chart below contains a breakdown in the years of experience in teaching among our current membership.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE RANGE	PERCENT OF MEMBERSHIP
1-5 YEARS	36%
6-10 YEARS	24.2%
11-15 YEARS	13.5%
16-20 YEARS	9.5%
21-25 YEARS	7.7%
26-30 YEARS	5.3%
31-35 YEARS	2.6%
36 OR MORE	1.2%

It is clear that over 60% of our membership has less than 10 years of teaching experience. According to our membership statistics, almost 30 percent of our membership is alternatively certified with limited formal education training. As our membership continues to grow and welcome members with non-traditional backgrounds, the quote "If you cannot see where you are going, ask someone who has been there before," by J Loren Norris becomes even more important for our association.

We have to take the time to mentor our own, because the number of those who have been there before to share their experiences is shrinking. According to a Sarah D. Sparks article titled "New and Experienced Teachers Can All Benefit From Mentors: How That Looks," studies find that effective mentors can help shorten the learning curve for new teachers. With good mentoring, novice educators in their

first year can boost student learning to the same extent as a teacher with three years' classroom experience. (Sparks, Education Week)

One of the retired teachers in our mentor program recalled a statement from a retired AGED professor at Texas A&M University, Dr. Alvin Larke: "Our profession has a 'shark mentality' at times, in that we eat our young. It's more than just making the new ag teacher teach all the Ag classes we don't want to teach." Think about that statement. We have to find ways to make our new teaching partners feel accepted and comfortable stepping into a new role.

They need guidance to get through even the first inservice or new teacher training at their school. As a teacher in a department who has been there for more than a year (yes, in many cases, we have 2nd-year teachers who are the longest-tenured ag teachers in a school), you have to show them the way and support them so you have a future with your teaching partner. As Karen Jones, our ATAT membership coordinator, stated: "It would serve you better to work with your new teachers instead of having to start over with a new one every year."

It's okay to challenge a new teacher in the department to step up, but it's another to watch them fail without supporting them. Showing them the tricks of navigating district policies and protocols is a good start. As teachers grow in a district, they learn simpler ways to navigate policies and procedures. Share with them how to navigate these challenges so all students can succeed, not only the students of the veteran teacher.

According to Sparks, "While new teachers are the most likely to get coa-

ching and mentoring, studies find all teachers can benefit from it, particularly for changing instructional approaches and technology. In particular, one new study found that higher-performing novice teachers and veteran teachers still need, but often don't get, coaching to improve more advanced teaching skills like questioning students or facilitating group projects." Teaching methods are evolving daily. As we find new methods of teaching and learning, they need to be shared amongst all we teach. There are ways that old dogs can learn new tricks.

As we think about the teacher movement in our profession, we also need to realize that one great way to mentor new teachers in a program is to leave it behind when you leave the program. There is no need for you to continue to be involved in that program with students, parents or teachers at that school. Your best way to mentor is to stay out of the school's business. If the teacher needs your help, allow them to reach out and give them the help they need. If they do not reach out to you, then no need to reach out to them.

.....
"WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU LEAVE YOUR SCHOOL? WALK OUT THE DOOR."

JAMES CANNON, ARKANSAS AG TEACHER

We always want to call ourselves a family, so it's time we step up and make sure our family succeeds for the future of all our students. We are doing such great things with our students and need to keep that momentum going for the future of our programs. As we started the article with the Ben Franklin quote, the last line is most important: "involve me and I learn." ■



MENTORING OUR OWN

A GUIDE FOR THE TEACHING PARTNER TO AN EARLY CAREER TEACHER

SET THE PARTNERSHIP UP FOR SUCCESS

- Define “who owns what” in writing. Split responsibilities by strengths, not just fairness (e.g., livestock species SAE checks, school travel paperwork, FFA duties, etc).
- Weekly 15-minute check-in Same day, same time. Agenda: How are things in classroom, what’s coming up, deadlines, allotted time for questions. No venting spiral—problem solve.
- Shared digital hub One Google Drive/OneNote with lesson plans and resources, program documents, FFA calendars, budgets, and contacts. No “where is that file?” drama.

MODEL NOT MICROMANAGE

- Share the “why,” not just the “what” Explain why you manage something your way- instead of “this is the way we do it”. Be open to discussion-it accelerates growth fast.

FFA & SAE MENTORING

- Discuss strength and weaknesses prior to assigning duties. It is not always reasonable to assign all duties that a new teacher is inexperienced with.
- Split FFA advising roles clearly, a One advisor per team, officer group duty, SAE, etc. whenever possible. Students and parents need clarity on who to come to, and new teacher needs leadership role in the program.
- Do a few SAE visits jointly early on to model questioning, record review, and feedback style.

PROFESSIONAL GROWTH & LONGEVITY ENCOURAGE

- Introduce them to your network including; administration, ag boosters, local producers, vets, extension agents, ect.—relationships matter. Isolation only eliminates collaboration which impedes growth.
- Boundary setting early, model works life balance, saying yes to “everything,” and protecting personal time. This may actually HELP your balance!
- Present a united front to students, parents, and administration. Address disagreements privately.
- Celebrate small wins with them, even when feels ridiculous. First smooth lesson, first contest traveled to, first successful season—acknowledge it, it matters to them.

QUICK MENTOR MINDSET SHIFTS

Don’t rescue—coach

Don’t assume—ask

Stay aligned publicly—resolve differences privately

Don’t gatekeep—share & communicate

VIEW, PRINT, AND REFERENCE
FULL GUIDE HERE:



MENTOR PROGRAM

AGRICULTURE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

2025-2026



MENTORS

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CORSICANA FFA MEMBER STUDIES

HOW REFRIGERATOR PLACEMENT AFFECTS MILK SPOILAGE



After becoming concerned about the amount of milk discarded in American households, Savanna Swanson began working to address the food waste issue through agriscience research. The Corsicana FFA member designed a two-year research project to study how refrigerator placement affects the rate at which milk spoils.

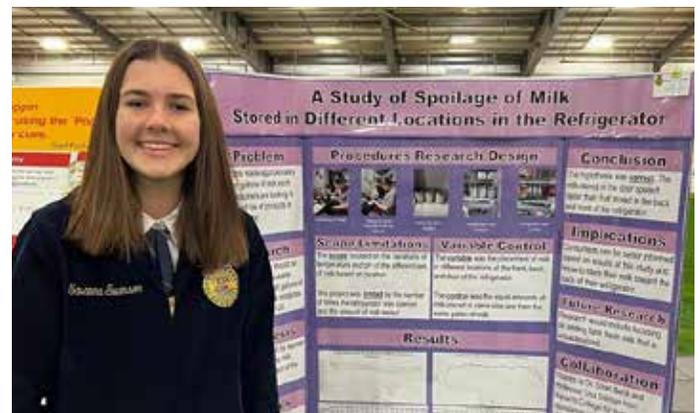
“One in six pints of milk is wasted,” Swanson said. “I wanted to research ways to reduce that waste, especially with the rising cost of food.”

During the first year of the project, she studied pasteurized milk using Braum’s A2 whole milk. The following year, the research expanded to examine raw, unpasteurized milk after partnering with the Dretel family, who operate a local dairy farm.

“I was able to experience the milking process firsthand,” the student said. “That helped me better understand where milk comes from and how it is handled before it reaches consumers.”

For both experiments, Swanson divided milk into nine glass jars, each containing 400 milliliters. The jars were placed in three different refrigerator locations, including the front, the back and the door.

Previous research suggested that the back of the refrigerator provides the most stable temperature, while the door tends to be the warmest and least consistent location.



“I wanted to see if the front of the refrigerator might provide a middle ground between the two,” Swanson said.

Using a calibrated pH meter and thermometer, she recorded the pH and temperature of each jar every night for 20 days. These measurements helped determine the rate of milk spoilage in each location.

“Learning about milk safety helped me understand how important proper handling and storage are,” Swanson said. ■



**AGRICULTURE
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POSTER PD

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF NATIONAL FFA CLASSROOM RESOURCES

THERE ARE MANY GREAT ACTIVITIES, LESSONS, AND SUPPORTING RESOURCES THROUGH NATIONAL FFA AND THE BEST PART IS THEY ARE FREE. WE STRONGLY SUGGEST RUNNING THROUGH AND BOOKMARKING RESOURCES YOU CAN USE OR CONSIDER SEARCHING THE SITE WHEN IN NEED OF SOMETHING SPECIFIC. LETS BREAK DOWN SOME OF THE MORE POPULAR RESOURCES AVAILABLE.

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LESSON PLANS

OVER ONE THOUSAND LESSON PLANS FOR HIGH SCHOOL AND MIDDLE SCHOOL COURSES. YOU CAN SEARCH BY LEVEL FOCUS AREA, OR EVEN TIME TO COMPLETE. A GREAT GO TO WHEN YOU ARE IN NEED OF SOMETHING SPECIFIC OR IF YOU ARE WANTING A NEW PLACE TO THUMB THOROUGH AND FIND NEW LESSONS.

SAE FOR ALL

A JAMMED PACK RESOURCE FOR SAES INCLUDING GUIDES, VIDEOS, IDEA CARDS, AND LESSON PLANS. IF SAE IS A TOPIC NEEDING STRENGTHENING HERE IS A GREAT PLACE TO LOOK.

NEW HORIZON TEACHING GUIDES

THE NEW HORIZON GETS MAILED TO YOUR MEMBERS AND TO YOU- USE IT AS A LESSON. HERE ARE GUIDES TO TAKE YOUR STUDENTS THROUGH THE ISSUE- AND THE ISSUES ARE EVEN AVAILABLE ONLINE FOR EASY ASSIGNMENTS.

SUBSTITUTE TEACHING GUIDES & LESSONS

MANY MADE FOR YOU SUBSTITUTE LESSON PLANS TO HELP YOUR TIME OUT FOR CONTEST, SHOW, OR LIFE LESS STRESSFUL.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

RESOURCES TO HELP WITH THE MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A TOTAL AGRICULTURE EDUCATION PROGRAM.

**FEEL FREE TO REACH OUT TO
US IF YOU NEED ANY HELP!**

**FOR ALL FFA
EDUCATOR
RESOURCES
VISIT**



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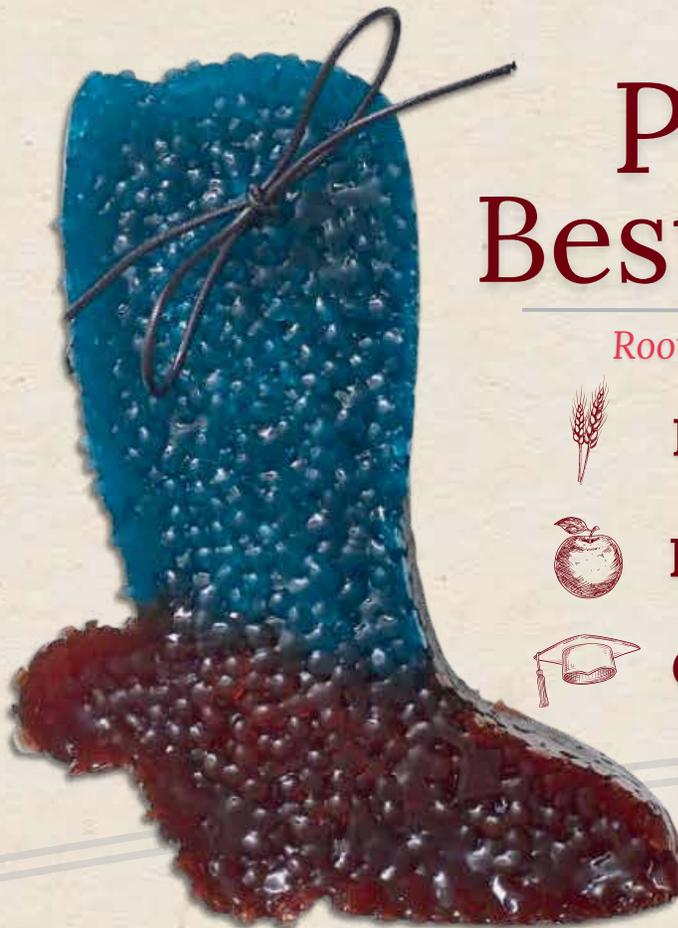
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LIVESTOCK MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE HELPS BURNET FFA MEMBER PREPARE FOR CAREER IN MEDICINE



Hannah Brooks is using hands-on experience at Evans Livestock to build the skills and knowledge that will support her future career in medicine

As an employee for Evans Livestock, a large-scale show goat operation, the Burnet FFA member works more than 40 hours each month assisting with daily livestock care and herd management.

"My [Supervised Agricultural Experience] SAE has taught me the importance of responsibility and paying attention to the smallest details," Brooks said. "Those skills are critical when caring for livestock, and they will also help me in my future career in medicine."

The operation, managed by multiple generations of family members, specializes in breeding and raising show goats. Working under the guidance of her grandfather, uncle and parents, she has developed skills in feeding, vaccinating, facility maintenance and recordkeeping.

"In this industry, when animals need help, everything else stops," Brooks said. "There have been times I've left school events and come straight to the barn to help deliver kids."

Beyond daily care, Evans Livestock also operates an advanced reproductive program that includes embryo flushing and embryo transfer procedures. These experiences have provided insight into the similarities between veterinary medicine and human healthcare.

"Some people don't realize how much animal anatomy and human anatomy overlap in the learning process," Brooks said. "Working with the embryo transfer program has helped me understand how anesthesia and surgical procedures work." The experience has also reinforced her long-term goals. After high school, she plans to attend The University of Texas to major in nursing and eventually become a Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA).

While she plans to pursue a career in medicine, agriculture will remain a lifelong connection.

"My goal is to build a career in healthcare while continuing to help manage our family's ranch," Brooks said. "The lessons I've learned through this SAE will stay with me for the rest of my life." ■



AGRICULTURE
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A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT GRANT HAS BEEN CREATED TO SUPPORT AGRICULTURE TEACHERS IN ATTENDING THE ATAT CONFERENCE BY PROVIDING FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR PROFESSIONAL GROWTH THAT BENEFITS STUDENTS, PROGRAMS, AND COMMUNITIES.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE GRANT

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- ✓ Three Meals
- ✓ Monday Workshop Registration



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ATAT CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE

- CREATE A COMPLETE SET OF CURRICULUM FOR POPULAR AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE COURSES.
- CREATE RESOURCES THAT CAN BE USED TO SUPPLEMENT LESSONS THROUGH SEVERAL AVENUES THAT WILL HELP RELIEVE TEACHER STRESS FROM PLANNING DAILY LESSONS.
- CREATE RESOURCES SO THAT NEW AND BEGINNING TEACHERS HAVE A DIVERSE SET OF LESSONS WHEN STARTING IN THE CLASSROOM.
- PROVIDE THE OPPORTUNITY FOR TEACHERS TO COLLABORATE WITH FELLOW TEACHERS TO CREATE A STRONG DIVERSE SET OF LESSONS TO FULFILL THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE FOCUSED COURSE.

SMALL ANIMAL MANAGEMENT CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT TEAM

- LANE BAKER, LUBBOCK ISD AGRI-STEM CENTER
- AUTUMN HAGEN, RUDDER
- ERYNNE JENSCHKE, TOMBALL
- RYAN PIENIAZEK, FRENSHIP
- AMY PODLEWSKI, BECKVILLE
- LILY PRUITT WEST, BAYTOWN LEE

EQUINE SCIENCE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT TEAM

- BECKY MAASS, ELGIN
- MAGAN ESCAMILLA, VANDEGRIFT
- BAYLEE ADAMS, BRENHAM

SMALL ANIMAL MANAGEMENT

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EQUINE SCIENCE MANAGEMENT

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2026 INDUCTEE NOMINATIONS



WE ARE NOW ACCEPTING NOMINATIONS FOR THE 2026
AGRICULTURE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS HALL OF FAME

This award exists to recognize and honor agricultural science teachers whose careers, achievements, and contributions stand exemplary. Inductees are known as well-rounded professionals who have proven their success with FFA activities, in the classroom, as well as community involvement. They have proven their desire to provide students with opportunities for premier leadership, personal growth and career success over a significant period of time.

NOMINATION DEADLINE IS MAY 1



AG TEACHER TALK

AN AG ED PODCAST

**AG TEACHER TALK
IS NOW A MONTHLY
PODCAST!**

These podcasts provide monthly discussions, professional development, association updates, and idea sharing to our members.

SCAN TO SUGGEST A TOPIC



CULTIVATING COMMUNITY SUPPORT

BY: MICHELLE VASBINDER
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR
AGRICULTURE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

Agriculture science teachers are uniquely positioned as both educators and advocates. You stand at the intersection of agriculture education and community, making your voice one of the most trusted and impactful in local conversations about agriculture. Advocacy doesn't have to just mean lobbying or politics. At its core, it is about telling agriculture's story accurately, confidently, and consistently. This article outlines practical ways for agricultural science teachers to advocate for agriculture at the local level, as well as classroom activities that empower your students to become advocates themselves.

WHY LOCAL ADVOCACY MATTERS

The majority of the population is at least three generations removed from the farm. Misinformation about food production, animal welfare, sustainability, and agricultural careers spreads quickly, especially through social media. This reaches our school boards and community leaders, impacting the discussion surrounding local agriculture. Local advocacy matters because it:

- Builds trust between producers and consumers
- Protects and strengthens agricultural education programs
- Shapes how agriculture is perceived by future voters, parents, and leaders
- Creates student ownership and pride in agriculture
- When advocacy starts in the class-

room, it multiplies through students, families, and the wider community.

WAYS AGRICULTURE SCIENCE TEACHERS CAN ADVOCATE LOCALLY

BE A VISIBLE RESOURCE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Position yourself as the "go-to" agriculture expert. Offer to speak at local groups, PTO meetings or activities, or local clubs. Always share accurate agriculture information with school administrators, be their go to source and replace social media searches. Write short agriculture features for school or local newsletters or newspapers. This not only highlights agriculture but your program as well. Keep explanations simple, relatable, and tied to everyday life—food, clothing, fuel, and the environment.

ADVOCATE THROUGH STUDENT VOICE

Students are powerful messengers. When they speak about agriculture, people listen. Following your schools guidelines encourage students to share their ag experiences on social media. Support and encourage FFA members to speaking engagements locally. Highlight your student projects and successes at school board meetings or community events.

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH LOCAL LEADERS

Strong relationships protect programs before issues arise. Invite school board members, principals, and city leaders to your classroom. Host an agriculture education open house sharing with others what your program does highlighting your students projects and successes. Always share your program outcomes, even when they do not meet your competitive goals. Share your student success stories as well as the classroom and workforce connections you make.

USE SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN ADVOCACY TOOL

You don't need a massive following, you just need consistency and accuracy. Share classroom activities, labs, and experiences. Your everyday impact is more than mundane, its world changing. Highlight agricultural careers and local producers, this

being more than shout out its connecting your local industry to future employees. As agriculture myths and misinformation circulate, address them respectfully with facts.

CONNECT AGRICULTURE TO LOCAL ISSUES

Advocacy resonates most when it's local. Discuss local water use and conservation, land use and urban growth, local food access and nutrition, and overall local environmental stewardship.

ADVOCATE FOR AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION ITSELF

Agriculture programs don't sustain themselves, they're sustained by awareness. Share your program successes and highlight agriculture as a STEM and workforce pathway with counselors and administrators, this helps them learn the impact as well as needs of your program. Along the same lines, advocate for schedule access and funding. You get further working alongside as a team.

PARTNER WITH LOCAL PRODUCERS AND AGRIBUSINESSES

Local partnerships strengthen credibility and community trust. Invite local producers, veterinarians, and ag professionals to speak. Collaborate with these individuals on classroom labs, demonstrations, or facility tours highlighting local agriculture in curriculum examples.

ADVOCATE THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN THE COMMUNITY

Hands-on learning becomes advocacy when it is visible and purposeful. Conduct labs and demonstrations or display student projects at community events like farmers markets, fairs, or school showcases.

INTEGRATE AGRICULTURE INTO CROSS-CURRICULAR SPACES

Advocacy expands when agriculture appears beyond the ag classroom. Collaborate with science, math, and other CTE teachers to provide agriculture examples for core subjects and support school-wide STEM initiatives.

MODEL ADVOCACY THROUGH PROFESSIONALISM AND PRESENCE

Teachers themselves are advocates through everyday actions. It is important to always use professional language, wear program or industry appropriate apparel to events and always address misinformation calmly and factually.

TEACHING ADVOCACY SKILLS EXPLICITLY

Advocacy is a skill that can be taught. Incorporate lessons in the classroom on civil discourse and respectful disagreement, how to evaluate sources credibility, communication strategies for science and non-scientific audiences, and ethics and transparency in agriculture.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Agriculture science teachers are among the most credible advocates agriculture has. Every lesson, lab, and conversation is an opportunity to shape understanding and build trust. When students leave your classroom equipped with knowledge and confidence, advocacy extends far beyond the school walls. By intentionally integrating advocacy into your teaching, you're not just educating students, you're cultivating informed voices for the future of agriculture. ■



**SCAN TO VIEW
ACCOMPANYING
CLASSROOM
ACTIVITIES**

WEATHERFORD FFA MEMBER'S BEEFMASTER SAE INSPIRES CAREER IN ANIMAL HEALTH



2025 STAR CHAPTER FARMER

For Layne Seal, years of raising and managing cattle through her Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) has helped build both a successful Beefmaster herd and a strong foundation for a future career in animal health.

The Weatherford FFA member purchased her first heifers at the age of seven, which sparked the beginning of her Beefmaster breeding operation. Over the years, her herd has grown and today her operation includes 13 cows, two bulls and a lamb.

"I'm responsible for managing my livestock and making decisions about feeding, breeding, marketing and selling," Seal said.

Beyond managing her herd, her SAE has also helped guide her career goals.

Seal plans to pursue a career in the veterinary or large-animal health industry. Through her livestock operation, she regularly works with veterinarians and reproductive specialists.

"I've been able to learn directly from the professionals who help manage my cattle," Seal said.

She has also joined her chapter's veteri-

nary science career development event team and enrolled in multiple animal science courses. This year, she will take Veterinary Medical Applications and earn her Certified Veterinary Assistant credential.



Seal has also secured an internship with her local veterinarian to gain firsthand experience working in a clinic.

"Through my SAE and these opportunities, I've been able to see how animal health professionals work and how important they are to the livestock industry," Seal said. ■

FFA FRIDAY

FFA FRIDAY ALLOWS TEACHERS TO SATISFY THE SAE/RECORD BOOK REQUIREMENT FOR COURSES WHILE ALSO CREATING LEARNING EXPERIENCES FROM STUDENTS THAT LIE WITHIN THE CORE OF THE 3-COMPONENT MODEL.

Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss the significance of agriculture. (What Does Agriculture Mean?) How does FFA contribute to agriculture? 	130.2.(c) (4) (5)
Week 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SAE Show and Tell Have experienced members discuss their SAE with classes. Have them bring in animals or items that assist in explaining their SAE. Explore the various SAE opportunities. 	130.2.(c) (2) (4) (5)
Week 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AET Profile Set-up, AFNR Courses, and Resume 	130.2. (c) (1) (2) (4) (5)
Week 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the Various Types of SAEs 	130.2. (c) (1) (2)
Week 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-Traditional SAEs 	130.2. (c) (1) (2)
Week 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce Leadership Development Opportunities 	130.2. (c) (1) (5)
Week 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setting Up Your Experiences in AET 	130.2. (c) (1) (5)
Week 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adding Expenses/Income to Your SAE 	130.2. (c) (1) (2)
Week 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Career/Personality Profile 	130.2. (c) (1) (2)
Week 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students complete modules over SAE For All in order to develop their roadmap. 	130.2. (c) (1) (2)
Week 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update Record Books 	130.2. (c) (1) (2)
Week 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resume Development 	130.2. (c) (1) (2) (6) (9)
Week 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing A Cover Letter 	130.2. (c) (1) (2) (6) (9)
Week 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mock Interviews 	130.2. (c) (1) (2) (6) (9)
Week 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speech Writing Update Record Books 	130.2. (c) (1) (2) (5) (6) (7) (9)
Week 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule a visit to a local elementary classroom to share an agricultural lesson and promote your FFA chapter. 	130.2. (c) (1) (2) (5) (6) (9)
Week 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present Speech to Class Plan Elementary Visit 	130.2. (c) (1) (2) (4) (5) (6) (7) (9)
Week 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present Speech to Class Update Record Books 	130.2. (c) (1) (2) (5) (6) (7) (9)
Week 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce Career Development Events 	130.2. (c) (1) (2) (5) (6) (9)
Week 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update Record Books and Prepare to Submit any Applications 	130.2. (c) (1) (2) (5) (6) (9)



LISTEN TO THE
FFA UNRAVELED PODCAST EP. 7
 FOR MORE FFA FRIDAY RESOURCES

KRUM FFA MEMBER TURNS PASSION FOR LIVESTOCK INTO PHOTOGRAPHY BUSINESS



2025 STAR GREENHAND AGRIBUSINESS

Jaylee Gilbreath is combining her creativity with her passion for agriculture by building her own livestock photography business.

At just 13 years old, the Krum FFA member founded Jaylee Gilbreath Livestock Photography, a business focused on capturing memorable moments in the show ring.

"Watching students succeed in the ring brings me a lot of joy," Gilbreath said. "I love being able to capture those moments so families can keep those memories."

After spending years raising and exhibiting livestock herself, Gilbreath noticed that backdrop photos taken at livestock shows could be expensive for many families. With encouragement from her parents, she decided to start her own photography business to offer exhibitors a more affordable option.

Gilbreath began developing her skills by learning the basics of photography and photo editing while building the foundation for her business. She created a business name, designed a watermark and developed marketing materials to promote her work.

She also sought guidance from industry professionals, who provided mentorship as she began growing her business.



"I began booking my first events through connections with agriculture teachers and supporters within my local agricultural education community," Gilbreath said.

As her photography business continues to grow, Gilbreath hopes to keep expanding her skills while serving livestock exhibitors and their families. ■

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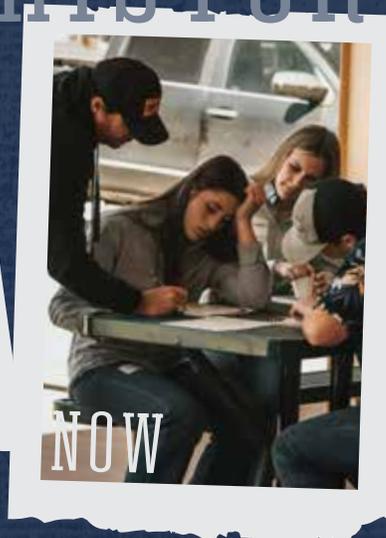
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A bit of TEXAS FFA HISTORY



Agricultural education in Texas has evolved in incredible ways over the years. But while the tools, technology, and career pathways have grown, the heart of agricultural education has remained the same.

At its core, ag education has always been about dedicated ag teachers who believe in their students. They are more than teachers. They are coaches, advisors, encouragers, and role models, helping students discover confidence, responsibility, and a passion for agriculture and service.

Texas FFA is working on a history project to capture stories and historical data. One that will tell the story of the past century. We look forward to continuing this initiative to share the history of the Texas FFA! If you have any historical information or artifacts pertaining to our organization's various initiatives, we would love to hear from you!



ADVOCATING FOR YOURSELF IN A SCHOOL SYSTEM

KNOW YOUR STUFF

RESEARCH POLICIES, CONTRACTS, AND RELEVANT REGULATIONS BEFORE TAKING ACTION.

SCHOOL BOARD POLICY

SEARCH YOUR SCHOOL WEBSITE AND LOOK FOR BOARD POLICY ONLINE. LEGAL AND LOCAL. (LOCAL IS MOST IMPORTANT.)

CONTRACT

ALWAYS HAVE IT READY AND KNOW WHAT IT SAYS - DAYS, MONTHS, OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS

TEACHER HANDBOOK

ASK FOR A PAPER COPY

DOCUMENT EVERYTHING

KEEP RECORDS OF COMMUNICATIONS, INCIDENTS, AND ANY RELEVANT INFORMATION.

CHOOSE YOUR BATTLES WISELY

PRIORITIZE ISSUES THAT ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU AND/OR HAVE THE GREATEST IMPACT.

COMMUNICATE CLEARLY AND RESPECTFULLY

EXPRESS YOUR CONCERNS IN A CALM, PROFESSIONAL, AND SOLUTION-ORIENTED MANNER. AVOID ACCUSATORY LANGUAGE. ASK ADMINISTRATORS IF YOU HAVE TO RESPOND TO PARENTS WHO ARE CAUSING ISSUES.

FIND ALLIES

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH SUPPORTIVE COLLEAGUES, MENTORS, OR ADMINISTRATORS WHO CAN OFFER ADVICE AND SUPPORT.

PREPARE FOR MEETINGS

OUTLINE YOUR CONCERNS, DESIRED OUTCOMES, AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS IN ADVANCE.

KNOW WHEN TO ESCALATE

UNDERSTAND THE PROPER CHANNELS FOR ADDRESSING CONCERNS AND WHEN TO INVOLVE HIGHER AUTHORITIES. KNOW WHAT THE GRIEVANCE POLICY IS. KNOWING WHEN YOU CAN FILE A GRIEVANCE - USUALLY, IF THE ADMINISTRATOR DOES NOT FOLLOW POLICY OR FAILS TO SUPPORT YOU AFTER A REQUEST.

CONSIDER MEDIATION

EXPLORE MEDIATION AS A WAY TO RESOLVE CONFLICTS AND REACH MUTUALLY AGREEABLE SOLUTIONS.

SUPPORT

YOU CAN TAKE SOMEONE TO A MEETING AS AN ADVOCATE, THAT IS STANDARD POLICY AND HAS BEEN PROVEN IN COURT. IT COULD BE ANOTHER TEACHER OR ANOTHER ADMINISTRATOR.

SCHOOL BUDGET

UNDERSTAND WHAT IS ALLOCATED FOR YOU WITHIN THE SCHOOL BUDGET AND HOW IT PERTAINS TO YOUR RESOURCES. KNOWING WHO CONTROLS YOUR BUDGET IS CRUCIAL GIVEN TODAY'S SHORTFALLS. EQUALLY IMPORTANT IS UNDERSTANDING HOW YOUR BUDGETS ARE CALCULATED AND DIVIDED.

DISTRICT FINANCES

USE A SUMMARY OF FINANCES REPORT TO DETERMINE WHAT THE SCHOOL IS GETTING FUNDED FOR CTE.

DISTRICT FINANCES EXAMPLE

#4 - TELLS YOU FTE (FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT). ONE FTE IS ABOUT 1/6 OF A STUDENT.

#27 TELLS YOU TOTAL CTE FUNDING (ALL CTE PROGRAMS-MUST SPEND 55% ON DIRECT FUNDS)



IF YOU NEED HELP CALCULATING WHAT YOU GENERATE IN YOUR CLASSES, USE THE CALCULATOR ON THE ATAT WEBSITE.

IT IS THE MCA CALCULATOR IN THE PROGRAM FUNDING SECTION. YOU WILL INPUT THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS YOUR AG DEPARTMENT HAS IN EACH LEVEL OF YOUR PROGRAM IN ALL PROGRAMS OF STUDY. THEN GO TO THE RESULTS PAGE TO KNOW WHAT YOU ARE GENERATING. IF YOU AREN'T SURE IF THAT AMOUNT IS BEING USED CORRECTLY, ASK OR KAREN@TEXAS-AGTEACHERS.ORG ME, AND WE WILL PUT YOUR DISTRICT IN A REPORT THAT WILL SHOW WHAT PERCENTAGE OF THE FUNDING IS BEING USED FOR CTE. AN EXAMPLE IS ATTACHED.

CANUTILLO FFA HOSTS NATIONAL FFA CEO DURING LONE STAR STATE VISIT



Canutillo FFA students and advisors had the opportunity to host National FFA Organization CEO Scott Stump during his recent visit to the Lone Star State.

This past January, the westernmost FFA chapter in Texas showcased its program and highlighted the work of its members while connecting with the head of the National FFA Organization.

Stump began the visit by addressing chapter members, emphasizing the significance of the blue FFA jacket and its role in uniting members across the country. He also shared his personal path within the organization, which began as an agricultural science teacher.

The visit was especially meaningful for the chapter's underclassmen, many of whom are early in their FFA journeys.

"Here in El Paso, we don't often get the opportunity to see individuals in higher

positions within the agriculture industry," said Allison Schneider, Chapter President and Area II Vice President. "For Mr. Stump to choose our school out of all the schools in Texas was very heartfelt and inspiring for our younger members, showing them that they can achieve success in their futures."

Later during the visit, Stump joined Canutillo's senior Veterinary Science classes for a tour of the Santa Teresa Border Patrol Horse Facility in Santa Teresa, New Mexico. During the visit, students learned about the daily care and training of the horses and met several animals and their handlers.

Canutillo FFA members said the experience reinforced the organization's mission to develop future leaders and strengthened members' connection to the FFA community. ■

WAYS TO STAY INFORMED

THE FOLLOWING ARE SOME RESOURCES THAT WILL GIVE YOU INFORMATION RELATED TO PUBLIC EDUCATION HAPPENINGS AND POLITICAL AFFAIRS.

JOIN THE AGRICULTURE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

DURING LEGISLATIVE YEARS, EMAILS WILL BE SENT OUT RELATED TO CURRENT LEGISLATION THAT MAY BE WORKING ITS WAY THROUGH THE STATE. IF YOUR HELP IS NEEDED TO CALL LEGISLATORS, AN EMAIL WILL BE SENT OUT ASKING FOR YOU TO CALL OR EMAIL. EACH LEGISLATOR'S WEBSITE WILL HAVE AN EMAIL LINK. PHONE CALLS ARE ALSO GREAT, AND LET THEM KNOW WHO THEY ARE WORKING FOR IN THEIR DISTRICT.



TEA EMAIL UPDATES



CTE NEWSLETTERS

THE TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY



TEXAS TRIBUNE



BALLOTPEDIA

GENERAL STATE HAPPENINGS AND TEXAS POLITICS

PROFESSIONAL GROWTH BUILT FOR **BUSY EDUCATORS**



10 STRATEGIES FOR MORE STUDENT PARTICIPATION



3 REASONS STUDENT DON'T PARTICIPATE

CHASE MIELKE



ADVOCATING LOCAL AGRICULTURE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

BY: RAY PIENIAZEK
AGRICULTURE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As teachers and supporters of agricultural education, we know its value of in our high schools. Many times, we don't promote our programs and agricultural education enough in our local communities. Advocating for your local agricultural education program is essential to ensure its continued growth, relevance, and impact on students and the community. Advocacy helps stakeholders understand the value of this model and why continued support is vital.

Understanding and connecting with community supporters is essential for agricultural science teachers from the very first day. When speaking to student teachers at Tarleton and Sam Houston last week, we discussed the importance of identifying key local supporters and program influencers during job interviews. During my first year at Poth High School, the people who would help our students and support the local stock show quickly stood out. Recognizing your network makes achieving classroom and FFA goals easier. If you haven't identified your supporters, now is the time to reach out and build those connections.

So now let's reverse that thought: what if you don't know who is behind your program? As an agricultural community and department, we can train our students as advocates and engage with the community in many ways. Some of our best leadership development teams—ag issues forum, public relations, and agriculture advocacy—showcase our students' public speaking skills while promoting our local programs. Your ag advocacy team or ag issues forum could take a local topic and help promote that idea, topic, or program to members of the community. I have always believed that taking your teams out to speak at local businesses, clubs, and community groups is the greatest way to promote agricultural topics and display our students' abilities.

Teachers and administrators also serve as powerful advocates. Agricultural science teachers can promote their programs by maintaining strong relationships with school leadership, counselors, and other faculty members. By clearly communicating enrollment numbers, student achievements, industry certifications, and career placement outcomes,

educators can show how agricultural education supports school and district goals. Administrators who understand the value of these programs are more likely to support funding for facilities, equipment, and addi

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"AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE TEACHERS CAN PROMOTE THEIR PROGRAMS BY MAINTAINING STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH SCHOOL LEADERSHIP, COUNSELORS, AND OTHER FACULTY MEMBERS."

tional course offerings. If your principal or superintendent does not know you well, start developing your relationship with them as soon as possible.

Community partnerships are another essential element of local advocacy. Agricultural education thrives when local businesses, producers, alumni, and organizations become involved. If you do not have an advisory committee for your program, start one. Advisory committees can provide input on curriculum, donate resources, sponsor events, and offer internships or job-shadowing opportunities. These partnerships not only enhance student learning but also reinforce the program's importance to the local economy. When community members see students developing real-world skills that benefit the workforce, they are more inclined to support the program. It is a great way to develop a training pathway for your local community.

Parents and alumni should be your strongest advocates. Parents who see their children grow in confidence, responsibility, and leadership through agricultural education can help spread the message. Alumni who credit FFA or ag classes for their success can speak authentically about the program's long-term impact.

Encouraging them to share testimonials, attend events, or communicate with school leaders strengthens advocacy efforts. Having them speak at school board meetings and even civic groups for your program can be effective.

If you're not involved with local and state policymakers like your county commissioners, judges, mayor, or even your state representative and senators, you are missing some key connections that could be promoting the importance of your program and CTE. Staying informed about education policies, funding opportunities, and Career and Technical Education (CTE) initiatives allows educators and students to advocate effectively at the local and state levels. Writing letters to or inviting legislators to visit classrooms and FFA events helps decision-makers see firsthand how agricultural education benefits our local students.

What story are you telling your community about your program? Tell the story of the values and skills you are building in your students. Highlight how the program is building leadership, responsibility, technical skills, and a strong work ethic—qualities which Texas employers highly value. By engaging students, educators, administrators, parents, and community members, your local programs can continue to thrive and adapt to the changing needs of the local and state industries.

.....

"HIGHLIGHT HOW THE PROGRAM IS BUILDING LEADERSHIP, RESPONSIBILITY, TECHNICAL SKILLS, AND A STRONG WORK ETHIC—QUALITIES WHICH TEXAS EMPLOYERS HIGHLY VALUE."

We should be proud of the programs we have in Texas and of what you are doing in your local communities to prepare students with life-changing experiences to be ready for the future. ■

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EDUCATOR RESOURCES



**FEEL FREE TO REACH OUT TO
US IF YOU NEED ANY HELP!**

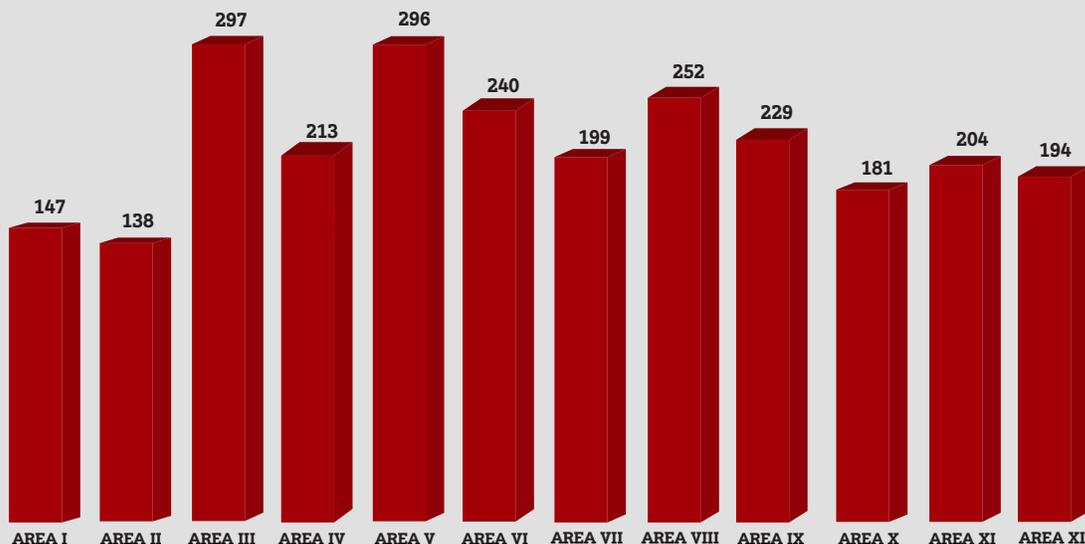
2025-2026 MEMBERSHIP

AGRICULTURE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

2,590

MEMBERS

93 STUDENT MEMBERS
77 ASSOCIATE MEMBERS



STUDENT TEACHERS

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

OLIVIA KURTIN
 REAGAN GUADARRAMA
 CAMPBELL KURYK
 KASON BAYER
 REAGHAN GREENE
 MADISON RATCLIFF
 RILEY ROGDE
 MAKAILA KOSLAN
 MADISON LEBROCK
 SARA SHARP
 KAYLA MCCALL
 KAYLA DRIVER
 SOPHIA CASAREZ
 OLIVIA DRISKELL
 PAMELA BROWN
 KALYN PATRANELLA
 BRIDGETTE FOIT
 AVERY MAAS
 KYLIE MCCALED
 ELIZABETH MOORE
 SOPHIE KRUEGER

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY - KINGSVILLE

EMMA KOTZUR
 EVIE MARTINEZ
 VICTORIA FUENTES
 RYAN GONZALES
 KAYLA GARZA

STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY

JOSH POWELL POWELL
 J. D. KELLEY
 JAIDYN MINOR
 ASHLEY PITTS
 BRENNA THOMAS
 HALEY LEITA
 KLOE STOKES

WEST TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

KAYLEE TRAIL
 JARED DURAN
 RYLAN SIMS
 LANEY GATES
 TRISTYN REED
 STELEIGH MARKHAM
 ACELYN BRINK
 LIBERTY HEIDENREICH
 EMILY MONTGOMERY
 KADENCE FANGMAN
 TRACE BRYANT
 CHEVI CAMDEN
 MIA KEY
 CAMPBELL OFFIELD
 KERSTIN WOLFE
 BRETT YOUNG

EAST TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

ABIGAIL HEARD
 HAILEY KNIGHT
 EMMIE STANSBURY
 KAITLYN ANDERSON

TARLETON STATE UNIVERSITY

JESSICA DEVILLE
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 CALEB RICHES
 CARLEIGH O'POLKA
 LUCAS NAGY
 KYNADI BLACKMORE
 ARIANNA FROSCH
 ABIGAIL EDWARDS
 KATELYN KELLEY
 STEPHEN HEWETT
 KORI GILILLAND
 DAKOTAH AUDIBERT
 MORGAN PORUBSKY
 EMMA MCMILLAN
 KATELYN NOBLITT
 REBEKAH HAWKINS
 ASHLEY ROSSER
 KOLE MAY
 RYAN SMITH
 KATHERINE TALLENT

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EMMA YURKO
 KATELYN LOTHINGER
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TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

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 EMILY SPIESS
 BERLIN SAXTON
 BRITNI ROBERTS
 LANCE NICHOLAS
 MAKAYLA MILES
 BAILEY MCENTEE
 TAHA LEE
 KASON KNIGHT
 MADDILYNN KELLY
 SYDNI GARZA
 JADEN EASLEY
 KASEY DUNN
 EMORIE DORNAK
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SAM HOUSTON STATE UNIVERSITY

RYANN MURPHY
 MONIQUE GONZALEZ
 JACKSON MILLER
 KENNEDY MCDONALD
 OWEN HOGE
 TAYLOR REJCEK
 MCKENNA WATTHUBER
 MADELYN RIDDLE
 ALAYNE STANCIK
 HALEY PHILLIPS
 KATIE PAVLICEK
 HAILEY GORDON
 ANNA MILLER



THE HEART OF FFA BEATS LOCALLY

BY: JENNIFER JACKSON
TEXAS FFA ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

We've always heard that the heart of FFA is at the local level. I've been in classrooms, chapters, and local events, and I've seen time and time again how one intentional action by an FFA member can make a ripple that reaches far beyond the chapter. Advocating for agriculture doesn't have to be complicated. It starts with small, meaningful actions that educate, raise awareness, and show people what FFA is all about.

While it's really amazing when it happens, you don't have to be a national champion or have students earning buckles and banners to make a real impact as an FFA Advisor. Some of the most meaningful work happens right in your own classroom, where you might even have students who aren't FFA members yet..and that's okay! What matters is taking the opportunity to help every student understand and appreciate agriculture. You have the chance to introduce them to agricultural careers, show them where their food comes from, and help them understand the dedication, care, and technology that goes into feeding the world. When a stu-

dent explains to a friend or family member where their food comes from, they aren't just teaching random facts they learned in an ag class, they're helping others understand the dedication, care, and technology behind every meal. That connection is powerful.

When your students begin their FFA career, they are introduced to the fundamentals of agriculture. They learn what it takes to raise an animal, grow crops, and participate in contests that sharpen their knowledge and communication skills.

These experiences do more than educate, they empower your students to share what they know, turning classmates, family members, and community members into informed supporters of agriculture.

The impact doesn't stop in the classroom. Every time your students share what they've learned, they start conversations at home and in your community. Parents, siblings, neighbors, and local leaders gain insight into the work it takes to feed the nation and sustain the pla-

net. These simple acts of sharing knowledge are advocacy in action, creating awareness and appreciation for agriculture and for FFA.

Local chapters are the heartbeat of FFA. They foster leadership. They cultivate passion. They grow advocates. Your chapter is where leadership develops, passion for agriculture takes root, and students learn that their voice matters. Advocacy doesn't have to be flashy. Every conversation counts. Every project matters. Every student has a voice.

You can make your chapter visible in countless ways. From classroom lessons and community service to inviting local leaders to events, every action matters. Simple initiatives, like hosting a teacher breakfast, leaving Ag facts in staff mailboxes, or showcasing student projects during FFA Week, educate others and strengthen your relationships. Each small action demonstrates what your students are capable of and shows your chapter's commitment to giving back.

This is where your chapter's Program of Activities can be the most impactful to you and your members. Your POA isn't just about making sure you have all the necessary elements in place to be successful at the National Chapter Aware. The POA is intended to have well rounded FFA Chapters who address all elements of the agricultural education model. When you are intentional about how your students interact with each other, staff at your school, and members of your community, not only are you creating wise and informed advocates for the agricultural industry, you are also adding value to your program.

How many FFA chapters are in communities where people don't even know the local high school has FFA? A few weeks ago, I was at the dentist and struck up a casual conversation with the hygienist. I asked if she had been in FFA. She smiled

and said she'd seen the blue jackets and knew they were Future Farmers of America, but she didn't think her high school even had agriculture or FFA. When I asked where she grew up, it turned out she came from a community with an active FFA chapter for over 50 years.

That conversation stuck with me. It made me think about how often we focus on our active members and families, and how often we miss opportunities to educate and inform the broader community. And that's really our job as FFA members and advisors. If we don't do it, who will? Your Program of Activities (POA) is a powerful tool to do just that. Using it intentionally can have a huge impact, not only on your chapter and students but also on the community around you. Plus, it can strengthen support for your program when you need to justify courses at risk, request funding for essential equipment, or advocate for contests that matter to your members.

Start by identifying true needs in your community. For those elements of your POA, you can give back while providing meaningful experiences for your students, and build a network of people who truly value what your chapter is doing.

Your Program of Activities (POA) is a powerful tool to make an impact. Using it intentionally can strengthen your chapter, support your students, and create a network of people who truly value what you do. And, it can help when you need to justify courses, request funding for essential equipment, or advocate for programs that matter.

On the next few pages, you'll find a list of ideas that will help you and your chapter ADVOCATE bring value to all of your efforts.

Every small action: volunteering, presenting, supporting a local event, is advocacy in action. By using your POA

thoughtfully, you're helping your students grow, strengthening your chapter, and planting seeds of awareness and support for agriculture that can last a lifetime. These interactions also help in teaching them to be kind, responsible, and strong students capable of meaningful interaction... We hear it all the time but we raise some great kids!

Imagine the ripple effect when every student in your chapter, and even the ones not in FFA yet, takes one small action

to share what they know. That ripple is advocacy. That ripple is the heart of FFA. Every conversation, every project, every small moment your students educate someone about agriculture matters. When your students are intentional, visible, and engaged, they become true ambassadors for agriculture and for FFA. You don't need grand gestures. Every day, your chapter has the power to plant seeds of awareness, education, and advocacy that will grow for years to come. ■

PROGRAM OF ACTIVITIES

CHAPTER IDEAS

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	GROWING LEADERS	BUILDING COMMUNITIES	STRENGTHENING AGRICULTURE
FAIR VOLUNTEERING	VOLUNTEER AT LOCAL FAIRS OR LIVESTOCK EXHIBITIONS AS RING STEWARDS OR OFFICE ASSISTANTS.	LEADERSHIP	CITIZENSHIP, STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT	
MEDIA OUTREACH	DOCUMENT AND SHARE CHAPTER ACTIVITIES VIA LOCAL MEDIA OUTLETS OR SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS.	LEADERSHIP		SUPPORT GROUP, AG LITERACY
AG ESCAPE ROOM	HOST AN "AG ESCAPE ROOM" OR SCAVENGER HUNT AT SCHOOL TO SHOWCASE AG CONCEPTS.	LEADERSHIP, PERSONAL GROWTH		
TASTE OF TEXAS AG	ORGANIZE A COMMUNITY-WIDE EVENT TO SAMPLE AND LEARN ABOUT LOCAL AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS.	LEADERSHIP	CITIZENSHIP, STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT	AG LITERACY
CHAPTER SHOWCASE	LEAD A SHOWCASE DURING FFA WEEK OR OTHER CAMPUS EVENTS TO HIGHLIGHT CHAPTER ACHIEVEMENTS. OR SHOWCASE CDES, LDES, AND SDES OR AGRISCIENCE FAIR FOR STUDENTS TO SHOWCASE WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED OR DELIVER THEIR PRESENTATIONS TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND LEADERS.	LEADERSHIP, CAREER SUCCESS		AG LITERACY

PROGRAM OF ACTIVITIES

CHAPTER IDEAS

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	GROWING LEADERS	BUILDING COMMUNITIES	STRENGTHENING AGRICULTURE
STADIUM CLEAN-UP	VOLUNTEER TO HELP CLEAN UP FOOTBALL BLEACHERS AFTER HOME GAMES TO SUPPORT SCHOOL MAINTENANCE.	LEADERSHIP	CITIZENSHIP, HUMAN RESOURCES	
SCHOLARSHIP BANQUET	ASSIST AT A LOCAL SCHOLARSHIP BANQUET BY GREETING GUESTS, SERVING, OR ASSISTING WITH THE PROGRAM.	LEADERSHIP	STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT	SUPPORT GROUP
TEACHER APPRECIATION	HOST A TEACHER BREAKFAST OR LEAVE AG FACTS IN STAFF MAILBOXES TO BUILD CAMPUS RELATIONSHIPS.	PERSONAL GROWTH		SUPPORT GROUP, AG LITERACY
YOUTH AG LESSONS	PRESENT INTERACTIVE AGRICULTURE LESSONS (TEXAS FARM BUREAU AG IN THE CLASSROOM) TO ELEMENTARY OR MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS.	SCHOLARSHIP	CITIZENSHIP	AG LITERACY
COMMUNITY SIGNAGE	HELP MAINTAIN OR UPDATE COMMUNITY "WELCOME" SIGNS, PARK MARKERS, AND LOCAL LANDSCAPING.		CITIZENSHIP, HUMAN RESOURCES, ENVIRONMENTAL	
RECYCLING/ CLEAN-UP	LEAD OR PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITY-WIDE CLEAN-UP DAYS OR SPECIALIZED RECYCLING PROJECTS.	LEADERSHIP	ENVIRONMENTAL, HUMAN RESOURCES	
CIVIC ORGANIZATION SUPPORT	PROVIDE HANDS-ON SUPPORT FOR ROTARY, CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, OR HISTORICAL SOCIETY EVENTS.		CITIZENSHIP, HUMAN RESOURCES, STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT	
FARM-TO-TABLE/ GARDEN	ORGANIZE A STUDENT-LED FARM-TO-TABLE DEMONSTRATION OR A COMMUNITY GARDEN PROJECT.	LEADERSHIP, CAREER SUCCESS	ENVIRONMENTAL	



SCAN TO VIEW MORE



IT'S NOT WHAT WE SAY... IT'S WHAT THEY HEAR

BY: AARON ALEJANDRO
TEXAS FFA FOUNDATION EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

"It's not what you say, it's what they hear" is a communication principle popularized by political strategist Frank Luntz in his book *Words That Work*, highlighting that a message is defined by the listener's interpretation and may not reflect the speaker's intent. Effective communication requires crafting messages to connect with the audience's emotions, experiences, and preconceptions.

America and Texas have three vital, and renewable resources: agriculture, youth, and leadership. The FFA combines all three to create well-rounded leaders today who will become dynamic influencers tomorrow. Agricultural science education and the FFA are making students ready for tomorrow...today. Our history is checkered with strong commentary about agriculture.

Thomas Jefferson

"Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens."

"Agriculture is our wisest pursuit, because it will in the end contribute most to real wealth, good morals, and happiness."

George Washington

"I know of no pursuit in which more real and important services can be rendered to any country than by improving its agriculture. I would rather be on my farm than be emperor of the world."

Theodore Roosevelt

"Agriculture is now, as it's always been, the basis of civilization."

Daniel Webster

"When tillage begins, other arts follow. The farmers, therefore, are the founders of human civilization."

We are all advocates. It is a natural trait associated with attention, emotion, security, or possible influence. Advocacy is an activity to influence. Our advocacy may be to influence policies, decisions, or public opinion. I also believe we are all educators, too. We are informing, teaching, and providing knowledge to increase understanding of agricultural science education and FFA opportunities. While advocacy pushes for a specific outcome,

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"WE ARE ALL ADVOCATES. IT IS A NATURAL TRAIT ASSOCIATED WITH ATTENTION, EMOTION, SECURITY, OR POSSIBLE INFLUENCE."

education provides the evidence for informed decisions.

Bryan Daniel

President of the NYSE Texas and former Texas FFA member

"Stop trying to become important and start becoming influential."

Influence is the capacity to indirectly shape, change, or affect behaviors, beliefs, or actions. Influence can be derived from inspiration, reputation, or even persuasion. Tools such as social media to drive trends, mentoring to guide behavior, or leadership that affects an organization's culture.

Here's some examples:

Social Media: Content creators using their platform to sway consumer purchasing decisions or engage in a dialogue.

Leadership / Management: can inspire staff, a team, or colleagues to meet goals.

Mentoring: A mentor influencing a protégé's career path, goals, professional network, or decision-making.

Governance / Policy Making: Lobbying or advocating to alter a public policy or opinion. (NOTE: since FFA is a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization, we should refrain from directly lobbying and focus more on educating for more informed decisions.)

Relationship building is one of the most effective ways to help advocate by becoming the subject matter expert (SME)

who in turn becomes a trusted advisor to a friend, colleague, family member, or even policy / decision maker. One of the best at building effective relationships was the late Zig Ziglar.

Zig Ziglar's philosophy on advocacy centers on the principle of serving others as the ultimate path to personal and professional success. His famous quote, "You can have everything in life you want if you will just help other people get what they want," defines advocacy as creating value, building relationships, and solving problems for others.

Key aspects of Ziglar's approach include:

Service-First Mindset: Advocacy is not about selfish gain; it is about focusing on the needs of our stakeholders i.e. teachers, student members, employees, elected officials, and even family members.

Moral Obligation: Ziglar believed that if a product or service provides a true benefit, one has a moral duty to promote and sure its optimum assimilation.

Building Relationships: Deep connections are formed by helping others reduce suffering or remove obstacles in their lives.

Integrity-Driven Action: True advocacy requires demonstrating integrity, honesty, and character, as people follow examples, not just words.

Goal Setting for Others: By helping enough people achieve their goals, you will inevitably achieve your own.

Ziglar's approach turns professional advocacy into a trusting, long-term relationship, rather than a short-term transaction.

What terminology do we use? Have you ever noticed in agriculture or the FFA we use a set of words that sometimes our

AGED ACRONYMS

FFA

SAE	Supervised Agricultural Experience
CDE	Career Development Event
LDE	Leadership Development Event
WLC	Washington Leadership Conference
FFA	Future Farmers of America

LEADERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT

ALD	Advanced Leadership Development Conference
ALDC	Area Leadership Development Coordinator
MFE	Made for Excellence
EDGE	Experiencing Discovery, Growth and Excellence
BLAST Off	Building Leaders and Strong Teams of Officers
NLC SO	National Leadership Conference for State Officers
SPC	State Presidents' Conference
ALC	Area Leadership Conference / Camp
SLC	State Leadership Conference
MVP	Mission, Values, and Purpose

AGRICULTURE

AMS	Agricultural Marketing Service
APHIS	Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
CCC	Commodity Credit Corporation
CRP	Conservation Reserve Program
EQIP	Environmental Quality Incentives Program
FSA	Farm Service Agency
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
RMA	Risk Management Agency
APH	Actual Production History
ARC	Agriculture Risk Coverage
PLC	Price Loss Coverage
SCO	Supplemental Coverage Option
CEC	Cation Exchange Capacity
IPM	Integrated Pest Management
NPK	Nitrogen, Phosphorus, and Potassium
VPD	Vapor-Pressure Deficit

audiences look at us puzzled because they're not sure they understand what we're saying?

Let's look at some of those.

To be an effective communicator for agriculture, agricultural science education, or the FFA, be sure to explain content and not assume the public understands all the acronyms we use to discuss professional development opportunities, operations, or activities.

Finally, remember that pictures tell stories and tap into the listener's emotional intelligence (EI). Emotional intelligence in imagery refers to the use of visual content, or mental visualization, to recognize, interpret, express, and regulate emotions, boosting empathy and self-awareness. It bridges emotional understanding with visual storytelling, therapeutic techniques, and mental rehearsal to improve emotional balance and decision-making. Remember to use the best in EI when telling the story of agriculture, farming, ranching, or the FFA ... not just what we share during stock show season.

73% of Americans see a cat or dog every day. Very few will see a horse, cow, pig, sheep, or goat daily. Be sure to share images that depict the best practices in animal husbandry and the care we give to an important food supply.

A final thought from Texas FFA Foundation board member.

Cleophus P. Franklin Jr.

"I've watched brilliant executives kill million-dollar deals with PowerPoints full of data. Meanwhile, the person who told the story about their customer's transformation got the contract. Competence gets you in the room. Storytelling gets you the signature." ■

TEXAS FFA ALUMNI

BY: KELLY WHITE
TEXAS FFA ALUMNI PRESIDENT



Headache or Handshake. This was the title of a letter I handed out at the beginning of the year at the first school where I would begin my teaching career. There was discord amongst the group. They were bickering about how things were to be done and who was responsible for getting the job done. There were major personality conflicts that spread to the students. It was almost like a soap opera if you were looking in from the outside. Although I must admit it, it was sometimes even comedic. But why did a 23-year-old have to referee adults/supporters?

And so the letter begins something like this...

"Webster defines the word boost as 'to raise or lift by pushing up from behind or below,'" I added. "It does not mean to put down or hold back." I even mentioned that if they could not support the program, there may be a need for this "booster club" to disband. I passed out the letters and asked them to take time to read what I had written. I would be glad to discuss more of my expectations for this group and their children.

And the discussion began...

We discussed the direction that we wanted to take and the steps that it would take to get us there. We talked about how we need to forget the negatives from the past, focus on the positives that were there, and build on them. We started talking about fundraising, the local chapter show,

and what major shows we would attend. I thought things were going well. Don't get me wrong. We did not break out and sing "Kumbaya" or anything like that. But I felt that we were accomplishing something.

But not everyone was happy with my letter. A small minority openly asked who I thought I was talking to them the way I did, and they had children my age. I bit my tongue, said nothing, and soon the meeting adjourned. There was still a split in the group. Did I accomplish what I set out to do, or did I not? The next meeting would be the determining factor.

The next month, the meeting was called to order. The room was divided into its cliques. And the opposition responded to my letter and asked how to go about disbanding the group. It took me by surprise when the group was disbanded in the first few minutes of that meeting. Even those who I felt had supported me voted in favor of disbanding, but what happened next was astounding. One of those who supported me stood up and stated, "I do not need a name or a title to support an organization that means so much to my children and does so much for them in the long run. Mr. White, if you need me to bake a cake to raise money, I will. I will work in the concession stand as I have for years. I am here for the FFA kids. I do not need a title!"

That momma was advocating for her kid, her kid's FFA chapter, and the program's future. ■

YOUNG FARMERS OF TEXAS UPDATES



First, I would like to share a big thank you to the Texas Young Farmers' past Executive Secretary, Sandra Choate! She has worked hard, and we will miss her. We wish her luck in her future endeavors.

My name is Larry Mendenhall. I know a lot of you, but don't the biggest part of you. I hope to meet more and more of you as time goes by. We are in the transition phase for the secretary job, and believe me, there is a lot to learn.

I live near Mont Belvieu and in the Barbers Hill school district, which is where I first joined the Young Farmers in 1997. I was guided to the association by Ralph and Mary Wilson, which I'm sure some of the longer-term folks will probably know about. I served as chapter president, area IX state vice president, and state president in 2001. So the Young Farmers have been a part of my life for a long time now.

My agricultural experience goes way back. My maternal grandparents were dairy farmers. I used to help there a lot. My paternal grandparents were ranchers. My grandfather was an order buyer, so every purchase that had to come to our ranch was an adventure to say the least. Today, I retired from the chemical world in 2022 and look forward to helping the Young Farmers grow.

Let this sink in, I don't make a living in agriculture, but I'm living because of agriculture. There are many trade deals, import and export restrictions, and even the weather that pose hurdles in the agricultural world. Hurdles are made to be jumped. Perseverance pays off.

Keep our future, the kids of today, in your mind all the time. Help them learn by leading, nurturing, and teaching.

YOUNG FARMERS OF TEXAS

Incoming Executive Secretary

Larry Mendenhall
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