

**SUMMARY OF RESEARCH**

Recruiting students into agricultural education is critical component in maintaining and growing secondary agricultural education programs across the country. A national study of the supply and demand for Agricultural Education reported that almost half of new graduates chose careers other than teaching. This is problematic as a number of positions either are left unfilled, close entirely, or administrators are forced to hire uncertified or alternatively certified teachers.

For teacher educators to adequately recruit students into their programs, first factors that influence students' decision to teach must be learned. Therefore, this study sought to assess the beliefs, attitudes, and intentions of senior agricultural education majors. Nineteen institutions representing nine states throughout the Midwest (Arkansas, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Tennessee) that had senior agricultural education students enrolled during the winter 2008 semester were invited to participate in this study.

A paper questionnaire was distributed via mail to currently enrolled students. The instrument consisted of 15 items measuring belief, 40 items measuring attitude, and 6 items measuring intent. A total of 18 of 19 (93%) institutions that initially agreed to participated and returned questionnaires yielding 145 data points.

**Key Findings**

- The majority of students had been enrolled in high school agricultural education, were members of the FFA, had an SAE project, were members of 4-H, and perceive that they had relatively more agriculture experience than their peers.
- Students' beliefs about teaching reveal that they consider it as a highly skilled occupation that is emotionally demanding, and requires technical and expert knowledge (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Sub-constructs of Beliefs about Teaching (n = 145)*

| Construct Item | M    | SD  |
|----------------|------|-----|
| Expert Career  | 3.98 | .69 |
| Social Status  | 3.79 | .65 |
| Teacher Morale | 3.67 | .67 |
| Salary         | 2.94 | .97 |
| High Demand    | 2.54 | .56 |

Note. 1 = Definitely Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Not Sure, 4 = Agree, 5 = Definitely Agree

- Students' attitudes about teaching identify that they view teaching as a way to make social contributions, have positive prior teaching and learning experiences, have the ability to teach, enjoy working with adolescents, and intrinsically value the career (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Sub-constructs of Attitude about Teaching (n = 145)*

| Construct Item              | M    | SD  |
|-----------------------------|------|-----|
| Make a Social Contribution  | 4.38 | .46 |
| Prior Teaching and Learning | 4.27 | .63 |
| Ability                     | 4.20 | .48 |
| Work with Adolescents       | 4.13 | .61 |
| Intrinsic Career Value      | 4.12 | .57 |
| Job Security                | 3.94 | .58 |
| Enhance Social Equity       | 3.83 | .58 |
| Shape the Future            | 3.80 | .46 |
| Social Influence            | 3.78 | .72 |
| Job Transferability         | 3.26 | .70 |
| Time for Family             | 3.07 | .71 |
| Fallback Career             | 2.25 | .81 |
| Bludging <sup>a</sup>       | 2.02 | .75 |

Note. 1 = Definitely Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Not Sure, 4 = Agree, 5 = Definitely Agree, <sup>a</sup>Australian term meaning laziest approach possible.

- Students, on average, are satisfied with their choice to become an agriculture teacher ( $M = 4.29$ ,  $SD = .72$ ) (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Intent to Teach Sub-constructs (n = 145)*

| Construct Item           | M    | SD  |
|--------------------------|------|-----|
| Satisfaction with Choice | 4.29 | .72 |
| Social Dissuasion        | 3.48 | .70 |

Note. 1 = Definitely Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Not Sure, 4 = Agree, 5 = Definitely Agree

- Correlations between the sub-constructs of attitude, beliefs, intent and selected demographics revealed no strong relationships.
- Stepwise MLR revealed no variance in students' intent to teach and the selected characteristics of sex, perceived agriculture experience compared to their peers, years enrolled in school-based agricultural education courses, years of FFA membership, participation in SAE, and years of 4-H membership.
- Eleven percent of students' intent to teach can be explained by the belief sub-constructs of "teacher morale" and "expert career" (see Figure 1).

■ Intent to Teach ■ Unexplained

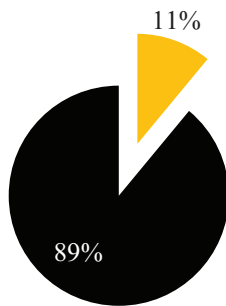


Figure 1. Intent to teach explained by beliefs about teaching

- Four sub-constructs of attitude including "fallback career," "working with adolescents," "intrinsic career value" and "job security" account for 61% of the variance in students' intent to teach (see Figure 2).

■ Intent to Teach ■ Unexplained

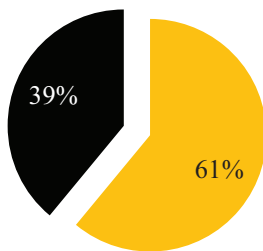


Figure 2. Intent to teach explained by attitude toward teaching

- Seventeen percent of students' intent to teach can be accounted for by the variance in attitude about teaching agriculture education when controlling for beliefs (see Figure 3).

■ Intent to Teach ■ Unexplained

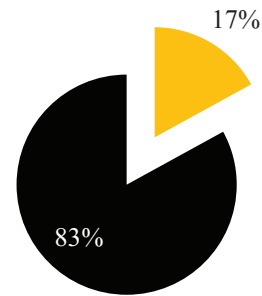


Figure 3. Intent to teach uniquely accounted for by attitude controlling for belief

### Recommendations

- Continue to recruit students from typical sources (i.e. existing agricultural education programs). Begin to explore recruiting from "atypical" populations including urban, suburban and rural areas where no agricultural education programs are offered.
- Concentrate on enhancing early, positive field experiences that maximize students' knowledge of teaching agriculture prior to student teaching.
- Promote positive aspects of the teaching agricultural education, such as the opportunity to work with adolescents, job security, etc.
- Create programs and promote the profession as a career that teachers enjoy and as one where teachers are well-respected.
- Tailor students' programs of study to incorporate technical coursework from areas that they are least experienced in and/or encourage students to seek out additional learning opportunities to enhance technical skills.
- Promote agricultural education as a career that is a match for students if they have a passion for teaching, want to work with adolescents and want a job that offers a steady career path.
- Continue to support the students' confidence in their career choice as it is not considered a fallback career
- Continue to seek understanding about the factors that influence students' choice to teach agricultural education.