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Topic: Declining Rates in Agriculture Education

According to the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE) and their supply and demand profile for Agriculture Educators in the state of South Carolina, the number of programs lost and positions to fill was at an all time high in 2023. The last time these numbers were at this level was 2017. Every educator will find themselves stressed, overwhelmed, or burn out at some point in time, but when does it become all too much?

The FFA, which stands for, “Future Farmers of America” and since being expanded across continental boundaries, has grown expediently in the past 10 years. From 2016 to 2024, the member count jumped from an already astounding 650,000, to now being over a million members worldwide. The National FFA Advisor, Dr. Travis Park, stated, “As FFA membership and ag programs have grown in the last 10 years, we really feel the pinch for ag teachers.” The FFA and agriculture programs at schools all over are in desperate need of agricultural educators and something needs to be done to fix this. Teacher retention rates are already a highly controversial topic in general education, but not many consider the need for these CTE (Career and Technical Education) instructors, who ultimately better the future of the next generation.

As per a recent study titled, “Preventing Teacher Burnout in Agricultural Education” by Savannah J. Scott, Sarah Bush, and Debra Barry, there are numerous factors that can contribute to an agriculture teacher’s stress level. These include but are not limited to, creating lessons based on specific curricula, assisting in FFA chapter activities, training CDE (Career Development Event) and LDE (Leadership Development Event) teams, and much more. With the pressure increasing, FFA advisors and agricultural educators are extremely likely to experience burnout in their first 5 years of teaching.

In my opinion, the most important factor in all of this is the fact that without these educators being passionate about their work and remaining in the classroom, agriculture programs could slowly begin to die out. Without students learning about agriculture, this passion of mine and the topic I hold so dear to my heart will slowly begin to deteriorate further, until we reach the point of no longer having farmers to provide our food. This would lead to only being able to obtain lab-processed, chemical filled nutrition. On a worldwide scale, only around 1.5 to 2% of the entire 8.3 billion individuals on this planet are farmers or produce some sort of crop for the good of humanity. If these programs and opportunities continue to lack involvement, so could the nutritional benefits of humanity.

In my own personal experience, I have witnessed the negative effects and tolls that these demanding occupations can have on those who possess them. My own agricultural instructor,

Mrs. Katie Gilson, has juggled two different FFA chapters for the past eight years. Alongside this, in the past two years she has accepted the role as the “Introduction to Teaching 1 & 2” teacher, now with her involvement in Educators Rising. While these roles have been extremely fulfilling and rewarding for her, these experiences have become stressful and time consuming. Leading up to this school year, she has decided to take a step back and pursue middle school agricultural education alone, leaving openings for a high school Agriculture Teacher and a high school Introduction to Teaching instructor. Stepping away from these positions is going to give her the time and opportunity to stress less and most importantly, have more time with her children.

Based on these factors regarding the declining rate of agricultural education involvement, students and teachers should become inspired to move forward and engage others in their communities' agricultural pursuits. Agricultural education majors should rise throughout the coming years to be the catalyst for the younger generations' passions within agriculture. Without agriculture, I myself would not be the person I am today.