

# What is in it for me: Reasons to Join the Teachers' Professional Association

## Abstract

*Agricultural Education relies heavily on national and state professional associations to serve School Based Agricultural Education (SBAE) teachers. Because there is not 100% membership in these organizations across the country, it is vital to learn what is holding teachers back from joining and identify the needs of current members to encourage continued membership. The purpose of this descriptive survey study was to determine teacher motivations to join their state ag teacher professional association and identify priority areas for initiatives. Data were collected from 245 SBAE teachers through a Qualtrics survey using skip logic to gather information from members and non-members. Results indicated most members were joining for networking opportunities and professional savvy. Cost and communication were indicated as limiting factors for non-members. Current members identified that curriculum resource sharing, new teacher resources, and teacher retention efforts should be very high on the list of priorities for the association. State association leaders should utilize this research to focus on networking and professional development initiatives as well as opening the lines of communication with stakeholders. Future research investigating demographic differences in decision to join and qualitative follow-up with members who have left may also be warranted.*

**Keywords:** professional association; SBAE; motivation; membership

## Introduction and Review of literature

Professional associations exist to support those employed within the association's field. According to Markova et al. (2013), for members to be enticed to join, professional associations must provide something of benefit to their members. The North Carolina Agriculture Teachers Association (NCATA) recognizes professional duty, benefits derived from additional membership to the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE), access to a state association managed online resource library, relevant professional development opportunities, and priority FFA chapter registration for FFA camp as benefits to the association (North Carolina Agriculture Teachers Association, 2021). Knowing there are many additional benefits of joining NCATA and the primary purpose of the professional association is to serve all members within a profession, why are North Carolina School Based Agricultural Education (SBAE) teachers not joining NCATA? What factors are influencing teachers to join and what topics are high priority to encourage renewed membership in future years?

## Benefits of Professional Associations

Since professional associations are specific to their fields, all benefits are not relevant to all other associations. There are common benefits between many associations such as (a) journals, (b) professional development opportunities, (c) legislative representation, (d) networking opportunities, (e) insurance coverage, and (f) marketing for the profession (Bauman, 2008; DeLeskey, 2003; Markova et al., 2013). For teachers specifically, professional development across their career is critical to career longevity and being able to continue to meet student needs (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Many of the benefits of professional associations can positively affect all professionals in a field, not just members of their association, like legislative representation, access to scholarly journals, and professional development opportunities (Bauman, 2008). For many early career professionals, membership in a professional association can provide a support system as well as help establish them

as a professional within their field (Markova et al., 2013; Mata et al., 2010). Conversely, more experienced professionals can place a higher value on the more concrete benefits of membership such as publications, conferences, etc. (Markova et al., 2013). In a study that reached across international organizations, Ki and Wang (2016) used structural equation modeling to determine that both personal and professional benefits offered, and members' satisfaction with the benefits, impacted the behavioral intention to join a professional association. Professional associations must keep in mind that each professional in the field is at a different point in their career and personal lives, and many work in varying professional climates which all impact what professionals view as personal benefits (Bauman, 2008).

### **Issues Faced by Professional Associations**

There are many issues that can keep potential members from joining a professional association. Often, cost of membership is a major factor in hesitancy to join and maintain membership over time in a professional association (Bauman, 2008; DeLeskey, 2003; Markova et al., 2013). Along with cost, some fields have multiple professional associations that serve them, such as a national teachers' association and a national school counselor's association, but a professional in that field may choose to join only one to save money (Bauman, 2008). Many professionals have indicated their availability of time limits their ability to fully participate in a professional association, therefore it is not valuable for them to become a member (Bauman, 2008; DeLeskey, 2003). Lack of easily accessible resources or events can also create a barrier for potential members to struggle to see the point in maintaining membership due to the amount of time that it takes to access these materials (Deleskey, 2003). Clear communication within the association and about the association are also vital to show members and potential members that their time is valued within the association (Bauman, 2008; Markova, 2013). Due to the variety of ages and work experience among a target audience in a professional association, if the leaders are not actively working to serve all demographics there can easily be groups within the profession that do not feel their membership is necessary (Markova, 2013). Professional associations should be aware of potential issues barring those in their field from joining or renewing membership and work to combat these issues within their organization.

### **Agricultural Education Profession**

There has been little recent research focused on SBAE teacher association membership and no known empirical work with this particular state association. Lawver and Lee (1990) identified four major factors that positively influenced a SBAE teacher's likelihood to join what is now the National Association of Agricultural Education. Those four factors included not being a member of a teacher union, having experience in production agriculture, teaching in a traditional secondary school, and having been student members of a professional organization (Lawver & Lee, 1990). Since the demographics of the SBAE teacher population in North Carolina is different today compared to 30 years ago, there is reason to believe these four factors may not be the major influences in current SBAE teachers' decisions to join their professional association (Foster et al., 2020). The National Supply and Demand Project (Foster et al., 2020) identified that female SBAE teachers have outnumbered males in North Carolina increasingly since 2017. This is a stark difference compared to the 14% of the state SBAE teacher population of females in 1995 (Camp, 1998). King et al. (2013) established that along with their long working hours and expectations at work, the majority of female teachers in the southeast are also balancing family responsibilities. The National Supply and Demand Project (Foster et al., 2020) also identified that in North Carolina, between 20-30 (roughly 5%) SBAE teachers annually are alternatively certified. Because these teachers are not entering the profession through a traditional teacher preparation program, they are likely not exposed to the opportunity to become a student member of the professional organization. SBAE teachers are young-over 65% of current NC SBAE teachers have 10 or less years of experience in the classroom (Joshua Bledsoe, State Director, email

communication, January 2022). Early career teachers need different support compared to mid and late-career teachers. It is valuable to learn the needs of SBAE teachers in North Carolina so that NCATA can work to meet those needs to ensure that all SBAE teachers are finding value in the organization, joining annually, and feel supported at a professional level to encourage longevity in the profession.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The decision to join a professional association can be framed through multiple theories and all are valuable in understanding the human decision to join, and remain, a member. Exchange Theory (Ritzer & Goodman, 2003) postulated a person is making an economic decision when considering membership and must see more value (personal or professional) than cost (money, time, etc.). This is closely related to Bandura (1997) and the Expectancy Value Theory which would postulate that a person will make the decision to join a professional association when they anticipate a positive and valuable outcome. Lastly, membership in a professional organization can be framed through Social Identity Theory (Turner, 1982). This theory would postulate that a person affiliates with a particular organization if they see that group as a method to increase their self-esteem. This theory indicates membership is more likely to occur when the perception of the professional group is positive such that a person would want to associate with the group. When taken together, these theories help illuminate the complex decision-making process a person undertakes when choosing to join a professional association.

### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this study was to determine teacher motivations to join their state agriculture teachers' professional association. We also sought to determine how they wanted state leadership to prioritize new initiatives.

The specific objectives of this study were to:

- 1) Determine why North Carolina SBAE teachers choose to join their professional association;
- 2) Determine why North Carolina SBAE teachers choose not to join their professional association; and,
- 3) Rank the priority tasks to be undertaken by the organizations' leadership team to address needs of all members and specific to the needs of middle school teachers.

### **Methods**

This study utilized a descriptive survey design. The accessible population included all teachers in the North Carolina agriculture teacher directory ( $N=555$ ) as of May 2021. A census of the population was attempted. Teachers were contacted with the survey link, regardless of whether they were members of the state professional association. First emails were sent via Qualtrics in May 2021 with two follow-up reminders sent via email in June. Upon completion of data collection, 245 complete responses were received for a 44% response rate. To assess the potential of non-response error, respondents were compared to available state agriculture teacher population data. The population data is only available in aggregate form from the state, so we were only able to compare summated totals. Our respondents and our aggregate statewide data were similar or equal when compared on demographic characteristics including gender, membership status and middle vs high school teaching position. Since the data appeared representative, we continued with our analysis.

### **Instrumentation**

The instrument was designed using skip logic to gather information from both members and non-members. The instrument contained four sections, after an initial screening question to determine membership. Section one, asked of members only, utilized scale items from an instrument validated by Price (1993) and reviewed by a panel of researchers for content and face validity. These scales contained items where members were asked to rank the importance in their decision to join on a scale from 1-5 with 1= Extremely important, 2= Very important, 3= Moderately important, 4= Slightly important, and 5= Not at all important. The items were established as reliable by Price (1993), but since the context of the statements was updated to be specific to the agriculture teacher association post-hoc reliability was also calculated. Values for the four subscales ranged from .83 to .92 (see Table 1) which are all acceptable values (Nunnally, 1978). Section two asked non-members to indicate all the reasons they were not joining from a pre-populated list. This list was established using information informally collected by the North Carolina teachers' association in an earlier survey. We also included an *other* option and the opportunity to add open-ended responses. The third section was asked of all respondents regardless of membership status and utilized ranks to prioritize initiatives the state ag teachers' association has received as suggestions in the past. Finally, in the fourth section, all respondents were asked some demographic characteristics including years teaching, level taught (middle school or high school or both), sex, and teaching certification type.

Table 1

*Post-hoc Construct Reliabilities*

Construct	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha
Networking	6	.87
Education	7	.86
Professional Savvy	8	.83
Leadership	10	.92

Of those responding to the survey, 74 were not current members and 155 were members. The proportion of respondents who were male and female aligned with the larger population data for the state and the average years of experience gathered from respondents aligned with available state data. The average respondent was 37 years of age ( $SD = 11.12$ ) with the females averaging 34 years of age and the males averaging 41 years of age, again mirroring the wider state data. Data were analyzed using frequency counts, means and standard deviations. A census was attempted, but because of the 44% response rate and self-selection, there may be a selection bias that has impacted the findings.

## Findings

When determining why those respondents who were members were joining NCATA, the data indicated networking was rated as very important, professional savvy as moderately important, and education and leadership as slightly important (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Constructs impacting members decision to join*

Construct	M <sup>a</sup>	SD
Networking	2.25	0.79
Professional savvy	2.56	0.71
Education	4.04	0.79
Leadership	4.12	0.86

Note: Coded: 1= Extremely important, 2= Very important, 3= Moderately important, 4=Slightly important, 5= Not at all important

<sup>a</sup>Real limits: 1-1.50 extremely important; 1.51-2.49 very important; 2.50-3.49 moderately important; 3.50-4.49 slightly important; 4.50-5.00 not at all important

Examples of statements for the networking construct included “networking with other ag teachers” and “NCATA is where I get to see people I know”. Examples of items from the professional savvy construct included “making contacts that increase my employment opportunities” and “learning more about the profession including salaries and opportunities”. Examples of items from the education construct included “NCATA is where I learn new skills” and “hearing speakers of national prominence in agricultural education”. Examples of items from the leadership construct included “I want to serve in a leadership position (officer) within NCATA” and “influencing the future direction of NCATA”.

We also asked some individual items about the benefits offered through state membership to see how that might be impacting the decision to join. Many participants indicated that protecting 12-month employment was extremely or very important in motivating them to pay their membership dues (85.72%). The other benefits included liability insurance through NAAE, which 69% of teachers indicated was extremely or very important and funding a lobbyist in the legislature to focus on the interests of agricultural education which was rated as extremely or very important by 68% of members. Lastly, programs where 100% of the SBAE teachers are NCATA members get priority registration for the limited spots at the NC FFA summer camping program. This benefit of being able to register students early for FFA camp was widely varied with nearly 29% ( $f = 44$ ) indicating it was extremely important while nearly 18% ( $f = 27$ ) said it was not important at all. See Table 3.

Table 3

*Importance of Benefits by Frequency*

Item	Extremely important		Very important		Moderately important		Slightly important		Not important	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Protecting 12-month employment	98	63.64	34	22.08	11	7.14	4	2.60	7	4.55
Liability insurance	60	38.71	47	30.32	32	20.65	12	7.74	4	2.58
Legislative activist/ lobbyist	59	38.56	46	30.07	35	22.88	11	7.19	2	1.31
Registering early for camp	44	28.76	38	24.84	31	20.26	13	8.50	27	17.65

We had a set of questions for those who completed the survey and were not current members. Specifically, we wanted to know why they were not joining, and they could check all statements that applied to them. This list was constructed from past open-ended responses from non-members. We also gave them the ability to indicate “other” reasons they were not joining (see Table 4). The top reason not to join was cost ( $f = 23$ ).

Table 4

*Responses from non-members as to why they did not join*

Response	<i>f</i>
The cost is too high	23
I missed my window to pay and/or I wasn't sure who or how to pay	18
I forgot to join	15
I do not see any value in NCATA	13
I was a member, but became unhappy	9
I am not looking for awards for what I do	9
I am only working part-time in SBAE and/or have another professional association serving my needs.	1
Other – please indicate	22

The *other* item provided a location to indicate what else was connected to their decision NOT to join. Those responses could be grouped into a few categories. Some talked about the impact of

COVID (“COVID made things just crazy”) and indicated that “with no in-person NCATA for 2020-2021 school year” they “did not see the value this year.” Some indicated that cost was a challenge but used this open-ended opportunity to indicate more detail. Those explanations varied from spending their money on a wedding this year to joining another professional association (NC Association of Educators) or not being reimbursed by their schools for dues. A few indicated they were so new to the profession they had not paid their dues yet but intended to pay soon. There were also a few comments indicating they did not know about the group and or had not been asked to join. A few respondents expressed negative opinions. These included “They seem out of touch with reality and work too hard to protect their traditions” and “Lack of Diversity across the board with awards and hiring of the state staff.”

Another question asked, “Of these suggestions generated by NCATA in a survey in 2020, where should NCATA prioritize its efforts”? Participants were asked to rank the items from 1-15 (with 1 indicating a very high priority – do immediately and 15 was the lowest priority or an item that could wait/never be done, in their opinion). Table 5 shows the mean and standard deviation, but also the number of times the item was ranked number one by a respondent. The item with the lowest mean and therefore highest priority was creating programming specifically for new teachers ( $M = 5.34$ ,  $SD = 3.33$ ). The item that was ranked number one by the most respondents was increased curriculum resources and sharing on the website with 34 people indicating this would be their top priority for NCATA leadership. It is also worth noting the fourth item when ordered by mean value was improving the new teacher mentoring program ( $M = 5.98$ ,  $SD = 3.21$ ).

Table 5

*All teacher rankings of association priorities (N = 205)*

Statement	#1 rank	Mean	SD
Creating programming specifically for new teachers	26	5.34	3.33
Increased curriculum resources and sharing on the website	34	5.70	4.01
Coordinating regional or area NCATA workshops	15	5.91	3.33
Improving the new teacher mentoring program	12	5.98	3.21
Increasing teacher retention efforts (state level XLR8, addressing burnout)	22	6.97	4.39
Providing CDE specific workshops	15	7.03	4.28
Recruiting membership from all ag teachers	16	7.48	3.75
Monthly or on demand professional development for CEUs	6	7.49	3.99
Support for middle schools (a MS committee, MS rep on the board, MS specific PD)	15	7.88	4.43
Increasing transparency and communication	23	8.56	5.02

*Table Continued*

Compiling and maintaining a NC teacher directory with contact information	4	9.55	3.80
“Teacher of the month” or “ag program of the month” program	2	10.29	3.68
Increasing diversity in NCATA leadership	7	10.42	3.74
Hosting a trade show with vendors	6	10.43	4.02
Increased engagement with NAAE	2	10.97	3.18

When looking at this same ranked data, selecting for responses from middle school teachers only, they ranked the support for middle school teachers as their number one priority by a large margin. After that item, the data then largely aligns with the whole group data presented in table 5 including focus on new teacher programming ( $M = 5.32$ ,  $SD = 3.71$ ) and mentoring ( $M = 6.21$ ,  $SD = 2.12$ ) as well as resources for all teachers ( $M = 5.32$ ,  $SD = 2.89$ ). See table 6.

**Table 6**

*Middle School teacher rankings for priorities of the association (n = 22)*

Statement	Mean	SD
Support for Middle schools (MS) (a MS committee, MS specific PD, MS rep on the NCATA board)	1.74	1.05
Creating programming specifically for new teachers	5.32	3.71
Increased curriculum resource sharing and improved resources on the website	5.32	2.89
Coordinating regional or area NCATA workshops	5.95	3.72
Improving the new teacher mentoring program	6.21	2.12
Recruiting membership from all ag teachers	8.63	3.53
Providing CDE specific workshops	8.74	3.84
Increasing transparency and communication	8.74	5.34
Increasing teacher retention efforts (state level XLR8, addressing burnout)	9.26	4.32
Monthly or on-demand professional development for CEUs	9.37	3.55
Teacher or Agriculture Program of the month program	9.42	4.48
Compiling and maintaining a NC teacher directory with contact information	9.74	3.49
Increasing diversity in the NCATA leadership	9.74	3.87

*Table Continued*

Increased engagement with NAAE	10.53	3.69
Hosting a trade show with vendors	11.32	3.11

### Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Members valued networking over the other categories of benefits. This aligns with a Stryker (1980) finding that members join to build their social network. When talking to teachers about the benefits of NCATA, leadership should play up the networking aspect of the organization and find ways to expand those opportunities. Efforts were begun at the 2019 state summer conference to have a social event for members and an “Owls’ Night Out” was added to the 2022 winter conference on the evening before the professional development sessions. Virtual owls night professional development calls have begun in fall of 2022 to allow the group to get together online over a varying monthly topic. COVID has presented challenges in physically gathering together, but activities which build the agriculture teaching community should still be prioritized. Leadership should look to other state associations to identify programs and practices that are successful in providing networking opportunities for members.

Cost was indicated as a barrier. The current annual dues cost is \$160 for state dues as well as NAAE membership with a total cost of \$280 for a membership that adds on national and state level Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) membership. As indicated by Ritzer and Goodman’s (2003) Exchange Theory, members need to see what they are receiving is worth the money they are spending to become a member. Eighty five percent of teachers indicated that protecting their 12-month employment was extremely important or very important in their decision to join.

This may need a little explanation for those not from the state. North Carolina passed legislation in 2017 whereby all SBAE teachers at the high school level shall be employed for 12 calendar months (North Carolina General Statutes 115C, 2017). The lobbyist funded by NCATA dues was a critical piece of passing this legislation. Currently, 435 of 460 high school SBAE teachers in North Carolina are 12-month employees (Joshua Bledsoe, State Director, email communication, October 2021). It is important to note this legislation does not apply to the state’s 96 middle school teachers, 93 of whom are 10-month employees. The teacher professional association funds a portion of a lobbyist’s time for about \$16,000 a year. If every agriculture teacher in the state was paying their NCATA dues, NCATA would fund the lobbyist for less than \$30 per person. Since not everyone joins, a larger portion of the current dues is going to support the legislative agenda for the group.

Transparency in how dues are spent and how programs and students benefit from a legislative lobbyist in ways other than 12-month employment may make members more willing to join. Taking the time to educate members and potential members about where their dues go and the ways a legislative lobbyist benefits them may make the cost to join appear more reasonable. One example of the output of these efforts includes advocating successfully for a one-time infusion of \$1.5 million dollars in renovations to the NC FFA Center facilities and recurring funding for two more state staff positions to support state level agricultural education curriculum and student development in the 2021 state budget. Additionally, providing the first-year members a reduced rate can help with the cost barrier for newly hired teachers and allow them to see the benefits of the association.

The organization needs to work towards transparency and organizational justice. In responding to the open-ended prompt about why they were choosing not to join, a few statements arose about a lack of diversity or a commitment to tradition over the needs of members. This may indicate a potential

issue with organizational justice as operationalized by Skarlicki et al (2000). An organization operating with organizational justice would be “applying decision rules with consistency, providing members with a voice in the decision-making processes, and ensuring that processes are representative of the views of the membership, rather than the interests of a select few” (Skarlicki et al., 2000, p. 69). Research should be conducted to explore this area further.

Teachers want resources. Respondents made clear the organization should prioritize resources and access to resources as well as support for new teachers. With the data in NC indicating that approximately 50% of all teachers are in years 1-5 and approximately 65% are in years 1-10, early career teachers hold the majority of positions within the state (Joshua Bledsoe, State Director, email communication, January 2022). NCATA maintains a digital repository of curriculum resources and professional development on demand for members only on their website, but communication about these resources and ease of access may be lacking. Similar to issues identified by Bauman (2008), SBAE teachers are a giving community and if a non-member asked for a resource that was behind the member login, it would no doubt be shared with them in another way whether through the state’s Facebook group or via email. Keeping the resources behind a log-in does not make them truly member restricted. Touting this access as a benefit may not be generating membership. Professional development is also not member specific. In fact, the agriculture teachers summer conference is run by the state career and technical education division of the NC Department of Public Instruction, not NCATA, and membership is not required for any portion except voting in the NCATA business meeting and attending the NCATA awards banquet. The midwinter professional development conference is put on by NCATA, but you do not need to be a member to attend - only pay an additional \$15 non-member fee at registration. In fact, in nearly every area NCATA benefits agriculture teachers in NC, members and non-members are benefitting equally, aligning with past findings by Bauman (2008).

Mentoring needs attention. Improving the new teacher mentoring program within the state was indicated by respondents as a high priority. There has been an attempt at a mentoring process within the state for years, but effective implementation has been unsuccessful. This may be due to lack of potential mentors since the majority of teachers in the state have less than 10 years teaching experience. It would be advisable to consider utilizing members in the 5–10-year range as potential mentors for earlier career teachers. These teachers have been through the beginning teacher years more recently and should be able to empathize well while providing advice and resources that worked for them in similar situations. Leners et al. (2006) posited mentors are more satisfied when assisting professionals less experienced than themselves and benefit from developing their own skills in the process. Therefore, it is recommended for NCATA to identify states where effective mentoring programs are being implemented to glean ideas to utilize as well as encouraging teachers with 5-10 years of experience to take on mentoring roles. Lastly, these mentoring efforts will never be successful unless a specific person or group takes ownership for implementing the programming. Perhaps a committee or officer role could be created with this priority in mind.

A sizable portion of respondents expressed teacher retention should be a priority ( $f = 22$ ). NCATA should encourage stronger member engagement at the regional and national levels. Through participation in NAAE programs like Teacher Turn the Key or XLR8, teachers receive specific professional development designed for early and mid-career professionals. There is also great value in attending regional and national conferences, but the cost to attend may be prohibitive for the majority of teachers. NCATA should investigate offering multiple scholarships to increase the number of members attending these conferences annually. Assisting in providing these opportunities to members aligns with Turner’s (1982) Social Identity Theory in building a teacher’s self-esteem through participation which could ultimately lead to greater job satisfaction and teacher retention.

Communication was a barrier. NCATA leadership should strive to increase lines of communication with SBAE teachers across the state. Strong communication aligns with the Expectancy Value Theory (Bandura, 1997) showcasing the value placed on member input in the overall association. Working closely with state agricultural education staff can assist in staying up to date on all new teachers and movement of teachers between schools so no one is inadvertently overlooked. The current NCATA structure utilizes a vice president within each of the eight regions to coordinate membership recruitment and dues collection. Regional Vice Presidents need to be intentional in their communication with all teachers within their respective regions multiple times a year, especially beginning and alternatively certified teachers due to their growing numbers. By requiring the regional representative to reach out to their peers with a cohesive message can encourage participation from all teachers and help build a sense of camaraderie within the organization.

Many teachers indicated protecting 12-month employment was extremely or very important in their decision to join. NCATA should clarify their role in providing and maintaining twelve-month employment as a benefit to high school teachers but use caution when touting this benefit as most middle school teachers are not eligible. The percentage of middle school teachers in NC has exponentially increased in recent years and currently makes up 17% of all SBAE teachers in the state (Joshua Bledsoe, State Director, email communication, October 2021). In fact, it is worth further investigation to learn if teachers are choosing to teach at the middle school level to have the summer break, which could be influenced by things like life stage, hobbies, or family responsibilities. Due to the increase in middle school programs, more specific strides need to be made to serve the needs of middle school teachers. Specific suggestions could include having a middle school representative on the association board and within the committees, creating specific middle school teacher and program awards, as well as differentiating professional development sessions for middle school teachers during winter and summer conferences.

If Lawver and Lee's (1990) findings still hold true, student membership in their professional organization is a strong indicator of willingness to join once they are SBAE teachers. NCATA should strive to establish stronger communication with pre-service teachers and encourage student membership. It is advised to include specific opportunities at the state level for professional development for student members and to network between the various teacher preparation programs. In recent years, the state has been using a portion of their STAR grant funds from the National Teach Ag Campaign to send every spring student teacher to the winter teachers' conference from all five SBAE teacher preparation institutions. Due to the large number of pre-service teachers attending the winter teachers' conference, NCATA should consider including specific programming for this group at the event that would provide an opportunity for relationship building between pre-service teachers and current NCATA members.

Teacher preparation programs should be encouraging active student membership in NCATA to expose them to the association. NAAE student dues could be connected to the departmental student organization or specific classes, creating a connection to eligible scholarships and the organization. Teacher educators should also utilize NCATA leadership as guest speakers in classes regularly and encourage students to participate in NCATA and NAAE opportunities such as the National Pre-Service Agriscience Teacher Program and Future Agriscience Teacher (FAST) symposium which could help build enthusiasm for the association among pre-service teachers.

Current members can and should assist NCATA leadership in communication among their peers. Advocating for NCATA among SBAE teachers could encourage more non-members to join and reach those that stated they were not aware of the association. Often, new and alternatively certified

teachers build relationships with other local SBAE teachers, therefore current members should be intentional in inviting and encouraging these new SBAE teachers and peers to join the professional association. NCATA is designed to serve SBAE teachers, therefore current members should also actively participate in leadership opportunities and serve on committees to be an advocate for teachers' needs.

This study attempted a census but was unsuccessful in gathering responses from all teachers in the state, but because demographics of non-respondents and respondents were found to be similar, we believe the data gathered and the findings accurately represent the population. Other researchers are encouraged to conduct similar studies within their state and/or region, but caution should be taken when generalizing these specific findings outside of the target population. This study should be replicated on a larger scale to gather more generalizable data. Due to the changing demographics of SBAE teachers in the state, it is recommended to conduct research to identify if and how gender responsibilities are impacting the decision to join. It is also recommended for qualitative follow-up research with those who were once members but have chosen to not renew their membership.

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