

New Mexico School-based Agricultural Educators’ Inspirations to Teach

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Abstract

The desire to become an agricultural teacher often starts long before entering a teacher education program. This study investigated the factors that inspire individuals to pursue a career in agricultural education, focusing on the potential influence of their teachers, participation in student organizations, and current views about teaching. Understanding these inspirations is crucial for addressing the agricultural teacher shortage in the United States, where proactive recruitment is necessary to meet the increasing demand for new teachers. This quantitative study surveyed 82 school-based agricultural educators from New Mexico. The survey utilized a 40-question Likert instrument to gather data on the factors that motivated them to pursue teaching, whether they encouraged their students to consider teaching careers, and if their teachers inspired them to choose the school-based agricultural educator profession. The study also explored the relationship between feeling inspired to teach and desire to inspire others to choose the profession. Along with the teacher's perceptions of the teaching profession and how it impacts their inspiration. Additionally, the study examined the schools' demographics and the participating teachers' backgrounds. The findings offer insight into the factors that drive individuals to pursue a career in agricultural education and emphasize the importance of existing agriculture teachers in attracting the next wave of educators. This understanding is crucial for creating successful recruitment tactics to address the teacher shortage and guarantee a consistent stream of enthusiastic and committed school-based agricultural educators.

Introduction

School-based agricultural education programs continue to grow and expand, while simultaneously many school-based agricultural educators (SBAE) are choosing to leave the field. Recent data continues to demonstrate the need for more school-based agricultural educators across 45 states, with many states reporting the closing programs within their state (Smith et al., 2024). Throughout the United States numerous SBAE positions remain unfilled resulting in programs being closed (Smith et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2019). This shortfall of school-based agricultural educators is nothing new, with a deficit being demonstrated every year since 1965 (Kantrovich, 2007).

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Numerous studies have been conducted on what motivates individuals to choose the SBAE profession (Bakar et al., 2022; Frost & Rayfield, 2020; Hur et al., 2024; Ismail & Miller, 2021; Marx et al., 2017; Watt & Richardson, 2007), as well as factors affecting retention within the profession (Crutchfield, 2013; McKim & Velez, 2015; Moser & McKim, 2020; Norris et al., 2024; Solomonson et al., 2018). Further, many programs have been created to increase interest among secondary students in becoming school-based agricultural educators (Stubbs & Myers, 2015). Even with increased interest, Kantrovich (2007) found that of those recently certified as agricultural educators, only 53% actually became practicing professionals.

Research has shown that school-based agricultural educators decide to teach based on both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators (Ismail & Miller, 2021). The question we must ask is “What inspires them?” According to Thrash and Elliot (2004), inspiration consists of transcendence, evocation, and motivation. Transcendence alludes to the individual gravitating towards something more important, seeing the chance for better opportunities (Thrash & Elliot, 2004). Transcendence can be further broken down to passion and resilience. Educators need to have resilience along with passion in order to be effective in managing the multiple tasks and roles required (Allison, 2012; Byrne, 1994). Evocation alludes to the fact that an individual is not responsible for becoming inspired, it is unwilling (Thrash & Elliot, 2004). Motivation is to articulate what has been recently learned. Further, Oleynick et al. (2014) describe inspiration as the state of motivation that allows individuals to take action on ideas. Inspiration is then further transferred to other individuals, such as students within the classroom (Thrash & Elliot, 2004). Not many studies have investigated what inspires individuals to become school-based agricultural educators.

This study aimed to determine what inspires individuals to pursue a career in agricultural education, focusing on the potential influence of their teachers, participation in student organizations, and current views about teaching. Understanding these inspirations is crucial for addressing the agricultural teacher shortage in the United States, where proactive recruitment is necessary to meet the increasing demand for new teachers.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the inspirations that led individuals to become school-based agricultural educators in New Mexico. The following objectives were utilized to address this purpose:

1. Identify the demographic characteristics of New Mexico SBAE teachers.
2. Determine New Mexico SBAE teachers' current view of the profession.
3. Determine New Mexico SBAE teachers' motivation factors to enter the profession.
4. Determine New Mexico SBAE teachers' perceptions on inspiring others to enter the profession.
5. Determine relationships between New Mexico agricultural teachers' characteristics and their current view of the profession, motivation factors to enter the profession, and perception on inspiring others to enter the profession.

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

Teacher Recruitment and Retention Theories:

This study employs a comprehensive theoretical framework that integrates several key theories relevant to teacher recruitment, retention, and motivation. These theories are directly connected to empirical studies that illuminate the complex dynamics of entering and sustaining a career in school-based agricultural education.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention Theories:

The challenges of recruiting and retaining teachers in high-need and rural areas are well documented. Guarino et al. (2006) discuss the broad spectrum of factors that impact teacher recruitment and retention, emphasizing the role of administrative support and professional development opportunities. Ingersoll (2003) adds that organizational conditions are significant predictors of teacher turnover. These insights are particularly relevant to agricultural education, where schools often face unique challenges related to geographic isolation and limited resources. This framework is supported by Norris et al. (2024), who explore the stability of agricultural educators and identify key factors contributing to their decision to remain in the profession.

Motivational Theories:

Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations play crucial roles in the decision to pursue teaching. According to Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory, intrinsic motivations such as personal growth and fulfillment are vital (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Extrinsic motivations, including job security and benefits, are detailed by Allegretto & Mishel (2018) who highlight the impact of external rewards on career choices. Ismail & Miller (2021) specifically link these motivational theories to agricultural educators, noting that factors like community respect and passion for agriculture significantly influence career paths.

Social Learning Theory:

Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) provides a robust framework for understanding how observing others influences career choices. This theory posits that individuals often emulate behaviors demonstrated by role models and mentors whom they admire, especially in fields where early exposure can significantly shape career trajectories. In the context of agricultural education, the role of such figures is critical, as they not only model professional behaviors but also directly encourage and inspire students to pursue similar paths.

Empirical studies reinforce the relevance of this theory to agriculture education. Ingram et al. (2018) found that agricultural educators who actively encourage their students and involve them in organizations like FFA play a pivotal role in motivating these students to consider careers in this field. This finding underscores the importance of positive interactions and active mentorship in influencing career decisions. Additionally, research by Coffey et al. (2019) and Gist et al. (2019) highlights the significant impact that early exposure to teaching, through programs like Educators Rising, has on fostering a desire to teach. These studies collectively demonstrate that the presence of inspirational role models and active engagement in educational communities are key determinants in the decision to pursue teaching as a profession.

This enhanced understanding of Social Learning Theory and its application to agricultural education illuminates the routes through which students are drawn to this career and offers valuable guidance for designing interventions aimed at recruiting and retaining the next generation of agricultural educators. By leveraging the influence of mentors and structured programs that expose students to the teaching profession, educational policymakers and practitioners can more effectively cultivate interest and commitment among potential educators.

Teacher Attrition and Retention Framework:

The framework provided by Glazer (2018) and Ingersoll and Smith (2003) examines the reasons why educators leave the profession, such as dissatisfaction and inadequate support, and proposes solutions to improve retention. Applying this framework to agricultural education, McKim and Velez (2015)

investigate the self-efficacy and career commitment of early career agriculture teachers, providing insights into the retention challenges and strategies specific to this field.

Integrating these theoretical perspectives with empirical studies provides a robust foundation for this research, allowing for a deeper understanding of the specific motivators and challenges faced by agricultural educators. This strengthened theoretical framework not only supports the study's objectives but also enriches its contribution to the literature on teacher recruitment and retention in specialized educational fields.

Methodology

Participants

The participants in this study included school-based agricultural educators in New Mexico ($N = 130$). Individuals were selected utilizing the agricultural educator directory maintained by the state agricultural education staff. This study had 82 respondents for a response rate of 63% ($n = 82$).

Instrumentation

This study utilized a 40-question Likert survey instrument to gather data from 82 school-based agricultural educators in New Mexico, similar to the approach used by Petrone et al. (2024) in their survey of 613 K-12 public school teachers in New Mexico. Both studies aimed to explore the factors that inspire individuals to pursue teaching careers and the role of educators in motivating their students to consider teaching. The questionnaire was conducted through Qualtrics and sent via email following the Tailored Design Method for Internet Surveys (Dillman et al., 2014). The questionnaire consisted of eight multiple choice questions and 32 Likert-type questions. All Likert-type questions used a four-point scale with 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *agree*, and 4 = *strongly agree*. Multiple choice questions collected data on teachers' current schools' population, demographics, and context. The Likert-type questions were divided into three categories: current view of the profession, motivation factors, and inspiring others to teach.

Data Analysis

The Likert survey questions were evaluated based on central tendencies through mean scores and standard deviations. The statistical package SPSS was utilized for bivariate correlation analysis to explore the correlations between variables.

Profile of Respondents

This study's respondents were agricultural educators from New Mexico. Eighty-two participants completed the survey, all of whom were agricultural teachers within the New Mexico's public school system. The respondents had varying levels of teaching experience, ranging from one to over 16 years. A significant portion (32%, $n = 26$) had over 16 years of experience. Newer teachers, with 1 year of experience, made up 11% ($n = 9$), while those with 2-3 years accounted for 17% ($n = 14$). Teachers with 4-5 years of experience comprised 14% ($n = 12$), and those with 6-10 years and 11-15 years constituted 16% ($n = 13$) and 10% ($n = 8$) respectively.

For the educational background, 30% ($n = 24$) of respondents held a bachelor's degree, and 26% ($n = 21$) had a bachelor's degree plus additional graduate hours. A further 26% ($n = 21$) held a master's degree, and 16% ($n = 13$) had a master's degree plus additional graduate hours. One respondent held an educational specialist degree, and none held a doctoral degree. Most respondents (99%, $n = 80$) were teaching in public

traditional schools, with a small minority (1%, n = 1) in public charter schools. There was one with no response.

The majority of respondents (55%, n = 45) teach in rural towns with populations of less than 2,500. Small towns with populations between 2,500 and 25,000 accounted for 27% (n = 22) of the responses. Only 13% (n = 11) taught in large towns, while 2% (n = 2) were in suburban areas. Cities with populations over 100,000 and small cities with populations less than 100,000 each had 1% (n = 1) representation.

School demographics: 46% (n = 38) of the respondents taught in schools where the majority of students were Hispanic. Schools with a majority of White/non-Hispanic students comprised 23% (n = 19), while schools with a majority of American Indian/Alaska Native students accounted for 9% (n = 8). Heterogeneous ethnic populations were reported by 16% (n = 13) of respondents, and 4% (n = 4) were unsure of their school demographics.

Regarding socioeconomic context, 41% (n = 34) of the schools were described as low socioeconomic, and 37% (n = 30) as lower to middle-income. Middle-income schools comprised 17% (n = 14) of the sample, with middle to upper-income schools at 5% (n = 4).

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of New Mexico Agriculture Teachers (n = 82)

Characteristics	<i>f</i>	%
Years Teaching	82	
1 year	9	11
2-3 years	14	17.1
4-5 years	12	14.6
6-10 years	13	15.9
11-15 years	8	9.8
16 or more years	26	31.7
Certification Type		
Traditional undergraduate program	57	69.5
Alternative licensure program at a University	4	4.9
State alternative licensure program	13	15.9
Other	8	9.8
Educational Background		
Bachelor's	24	29.3
Bachelor's plus graduate hours	21	25.6
Master's	21	25.6
Master's plus graduate hours	13	15.9
Educational specialist	1	1.2
Doctoral degree	-	-

Characteristics	<i>f</i>	%
School Location		
City (population > 100,000)	1	1.2
Small City (population 50,000-100,000)	1	1.2
Suburban (territory outside a principal city)	2	2.4
Large Town (population 25,000 -49,999)	11	13.4
Small Town (population 2500-24,999)	22	26.8
Rural (population <2500)	45	54.9
School Demographics		
Majority Hispanics (>50%)	38	46.3
Majority American Indian/Alaskan Native (>50%)	8	9.8
Majority White/non-Hispanic (>50%)	19	23.2
No Majority, Heterogeneous ethnic population	13	15.9
Unknown	4	4.9
Socioeconomic Status		
Low socioeconomic	34	41.5
Lower to middle-income	30	36.6
Middle income	14	17.1
Middle to upper-income	4	4.9

Findings

The educators expressed positive opinions about agricultural teaching. The vast majority (98%, n = 80) agreed or strongly agreed that being an agricultural teacher is an honorable profession, and 95% (n = 77) stated they were proud of their occupation. However, only 75% (n = 61) felt that agricultural teaching deserved the same professional status as fields like medicine and law (Table 2).

Table 2

New Mexico Agricultural Educators' Current View of the Profession (n = 82)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)
Agricultural teaching is an honorable profession.	2 2.44	0 0	18 21.95	65 75.61
Agricultural teaching warrants the same professional status as other fields such as medicine, law, etc.	6 7.41	14 17.28	26 32.10	35 43.21
I am proud of my occupation as an agricultural teacher.	2 2.44	2 2.44	17 20.73	61 74.39
I believe that being informed by educational theory is important in agricultural teaching.	4 4.94	7 8.64	38 46.91	32 39.51
I am concerned with declining public perceptions of agricultural teaching.	2 2.44	11 13.41	29 35.37	40 48.78
I believe agricultural teaching is a professional occupation, not a vocational occupation.	2 2.44	11 13.41	18 21.95	51 62.20
I believe that being informed by agricultural educational research is important in teaching.	1 1.23	5 6.17	37 45.68	38 46.91
I believe that a high code of conduct is a hallmark of agricultural teaching.	1 1.22	1 1.22	25 30.49	55 67.07
Agricultural teachers should be vested in their students' overall welfare.	1 1.22	0 0	12 14.63	69 84.15

Of the factors that motivated respondents to become teachers, 72% (n = 58) stated that a teacher influenced them, while 78% (n = 60) had positive student teaching experiences. Only 22% (n = 18) were inspired by negative school experiences as students. Additionally, 73% (n = 59) mentioned that being an FFA member influenced their decision to become a teacher (Table 3).

Table 3*Factors that Inspired New Mexico Agricultural Educators to Teach (n = 82)*

	Strongly Disagree <i>f</i> (%)	Disagree <i>f</i> (%)	Agree <i>f</i> (%)	Strongly Agree <i>f</i> (%)
I was encouraged by a teacher to become a teacher.	11 13.58	12 14.81	26 32.10	32 39.51
An elementary (grades K-5) school teacher inspired me to become a teacher.	25 30.86	40 49.38	11 13.58	5 6.17
A secondary (grades 6-12) teacher inspired me to become a teacher.	15 18.29	12 14.63	25 30.49	30 36.59
My decision to become an ag teacher was impacted by my cooperating teacher.	17 20.73	19 23.17	28 34.15	18 21.95
I had a positive student teaching experience.	9 11.69	8 10.39	30 38.96	30 38.96
I was given an opportunity to view myself in a teaching role, such as tutoring, teacher's aide, group leader, etc.	9 11.25	13 16.25	27 33.75	31 38.75
I was given an opportunity outside of school to view myself in a teaching role, such as church, community involvement, employment, etc.	8 9.88	12 14.81	27 33.33	34 41.98
I was inspired to become an educator as a result of negative school experience(s) as a student.	39 48.15	24 29.63	11 13.58	7 8.64
I was inspired to become an educator as a result of negative school experience(s) with my teachers.	35 43.21	23 28.40	12 14.81	11 13.58
I was inspired to become an educator as a result of a school experience(s) as a parent or community member.	26 32.50	22 27.50	33 28.75	9 11.25
Being an FFA member influenced me to become a teacher.	9 11.11	13 16.05	15 18.52	44 54.32
Having an SAE influenced me to become a teacher.	13 16.05	25 30.86	14 17.28	29 35.80

Most respondents saw themselves as role models for the agricultural teaching profession (99%, n = 81), and 77% (n = 62) actively encouraged their students to consider agricultural teaching careers. Additionally, 84% (n = 69) believed that agricultural teachers play a vital role in shaping the nation's future (Table 4).

Table 4

New Mexico Agricultural Educators' Perceptions on Inspiring Others to Teach (n = 82)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)
I see myself as a role model to my students for the agricultural teaching profession.	1 1.22	0 0	30 36.59	51 62.20
Elementary (grades K-5) teachers should encourage students to become teachers.	6 7.50	16 20.00	44 55.00	14 17.50
Secondary (grades K-12) teachers should encourage students to become a teacher.	4 4.94	12 14.81	45 55.56	20 24.69
I actively encourage my students to become agricultural teachers.	6 7.41	20 24.69	36 44.44	19 23.46
I initiate positive conversations about the agricultural teaching profession with my students.	4 4.94	6 7.41	43 53.09	28 34.57
I discourage my students from becoming agricultural teachers.	39 48.15	35 43.21	5 6.17	2 2.47
I provide opportunities for my students to assume a teaching role, such as tutoring, student-led instruction, etc.	1 1.23	8 9.88	46 56.79	26 32.10
I talk about the agricultural teaching profession in a way that will inspire students to consider becoming a teacher.	1 1.23	11 13.58	47 58.02	22 27.16
I believe that agricultural teachers play a vital role in shaping our nation's future.	0 0	0 0	24 29.27	58 71.95

The purpose of objective five was to determine the relationships between New Mexico agricultural teachers' characteristics and their current view of the profession, motivation factors to enter the profession, and perception on inspiring others to enter the profession. To determine this relationship, Pearson's product moment correlation was calculated. The significance of the impact of correlations was interpreted using the conventions of Davis (1971). Significance was reported at $\alpha = .05$ level.

A correlation was analyzed between agricultural educators' current view of the profession and their years teaching, level of education, their participation in FFA or 4-H, and school location. When looking at the relationship between years of teaching and the views of the profession only one significant correlation emerged. There was a slight positive correlation of $r = .25$ observed between years teaching and the view that agricultural teaching is an honorable profession. This result indicates that the longer individuals teach agriculture their view of the profession as honorable may increase.

Two significant correlations were found between participation in FFA and views of the profession. FFA participation had a moderate positive correlation of $r = .32$ with the view that agricultural teaching is

an honorable profession. There was also a moderate positive correlation of $r = .32$ with the view they are proud of their occupation as an agricultural teacher. These results suggest that participating in FFA may increase respect for the profession.

Participation in 4-H yielded two significant correlations with agricultural educators' view of the profession. A low positive correlation of $r = .27$ was found in regard to agricultural teaching being an honorable profession. There was also a low positive correlation of $r = .27$ with being proud of their occupation as an agricultural teacher. This suggests that participation in 4-H may also enhance the level of respect for the profession.

The correlation between agricultural educators' view of the profession and their school location yielded three significant correlations. A moderate positive correlation of $r = .30$ was found with agricultural educators' view that agricultural teaching is an honorable profession. Additionally, a moderate positive correlation of $r = .33$ was discovered with agricultural educators' view that they are proud of their occupation. These two findings suggest that agricultural educators working in locations with smaller populations may have more respect for agricultural education as a profession. Further, a low positive correlation of $r = .24$ was discovered with the view that agricultural teachers should be invested in their students' overall welfare. This finding suggests that agricultural educators in locations with smaller populations may believe more in their role in their students' overall welfare (Table 5).

Table 5

Bivariate Correlations Between View of the Profession and Number of Years Teaching Agriculture, Level of Education, FFA participation, 4-H participation, School location (n = 82)

View of the Profession	Years Teaching	Level of Education	FFA Participation	4-H Participation	School Location
Agricultural teaching is an honorable profession	.25*	.19	.32*	.27*	.30**
Agricultural teaching warrants the same professional status as other fields such as medicine, law, etc.	.21	.11	.10	.12	.06
I am proud of my occupation as an agricultural teacher.	.20	.17	.32*	.26*	.33**
I believe that being informed by educational theory is important in agricultural teaching.	.17	.13	.18	.21	.13

View of the Profession	Years Teaching	Level of Education	FFA Participation	4-H Participation	School Location
I believe that being informed by agricultural educational research is important in teaching.	-.08	<-.01	<-0.1	.28*	.06
I am concerned with the declining public perception of agricultural teaching.	-0.11	-.17	.09	.07	.06
I believe agricultural teaching is a professional occupation, not a vocational occupation.	.10	.21	.09	.02	-.03
I believe that a high code of conduct is a hallmark of agricultural teaching.	.20	.13	.22	.18	.16
Agricultural teachers should be vested in their students' overall welfare	.07	.09	.17	.06	.24*

Scale. 1.00=perfect, .70-.99 = very high, .50-.69 = substantial, .30-.49 =, moderate, .10-.29 = low, .01 - .09 = negligible

**p* < .05

A correlation was analyzed between motivation factors and the number of years teaching agriculture. Only one significant correlation emerged. A low positive correlation of *r* = .26 was found between having a positive student teaching experience and the number of years teaching. This suggests that the number of positive student teaching experiences has decreased over the years (Table 6).

Table 6

Bivariate Correlations Between Motivation Factors and Number of Years Teaching Agriculture, (n = 82)

Motivation Factors	Years Teaching
I was encouraged by a teacher to become a teacher.	-.06
An elementary (K-5) school teacher inspired me to become a teacher.	.11
A secondary (6-12) teacher inspired me to become a teacher.	-.01
My decision to become an ag teacher was impacted by my cooperating teacher.	.11
I had a positive student teaching experience.	.26*
I was given an opportunity in school to view myself in a teaching role, such as tutoring, teacher's aide, group leader, etc.	-.04
I was given an opportunity outside of school to view myself in a teaching role, such as church, community involvement, employment.	-.12
I was inspired to become an educator as a result of negative school experience(s) as a student.	<.01
I was inspired to become an educator as a result of school experience(s) as a parent or community member.	-.07
Being an FFA member influenced me to become a teacher.	.05
Having an SAE influenced me to become a teacher.	-.01

Scale. 1.00=perfect, .70-.99 = very high, .50-.69 = substantial, .30-.49 =, moderate, .10-.29 = low, .01 - .09 = negligible

**p* < .05

A correlation was analyzed between agricultural educators' thoughts on inspiring others to teach and their years teaching, level of education, and their participation in FFA or 4-H. There were two significant correlations that emerged. A low positive correlation of $r = .22$ was found between participation in FFA and actively encouraging students to become agricultural teachers. This suggests that participation in FFA may instill a positive image of agricultural teaching in students. Additionally, there was a low positive correlation of $r = .26$ between FFA participation and the belief that teachers play a vital role in shaping the nation's future. This finding suggests that participation in FFA may increase the level of respect for the teaching profession (Table 7).

Table 7

Bivariate Correlations Between Inspiring Others to Teach and Number of Years Teaching Agriculture, Level of Education, FFA participation, 4-H participation (n = 82)

Inspiring Others to Teach	Years Teaching	Level of Education	FFA Participation	4-H Participation
I see myself as a role model to my students for the agricultural teaching profession.	.10	-.03	.12	.06
Elementary (grades K-5) teachers should encourage students to become teachers.	.11	.08	.14	.20
Secondary (grades 6-12) teachers should encourage students to become teachers.	.08	.21	.11	.20
I actively encourage my students to become agricultural teachers.	.02	-.03	.22*	.14
I initiate positive conversations about the agricultural teaching profession with my students.	.03	-.04	.04	.10
I discourage my students from becoming agricultural teachers.	.03	-.07	-.10	.05
I provide opportunities for my students to assume a teaching role, such as tutoring, student-led instruction, etc.	.11	-.02	.02	.05
I talk about the agricultural teaching profession in a way that will inspire students to consider becoming a teacher.	-.01	-.10	<-.01	-.09
I believe teachers play a vital role in shaping our nation's future.	-.09	-.03	.26*	.06

Scale. 1.00=perfect, .70-.99 = very high, .50-.69 = substantial, .30-.49 =, moderate, .10-.29 = low, .01 - .09 = negligible

*p < .05

Conclusions

This study provided a comprehensive examination of the factors influencing individuals to pursue careers in school-based agricultural education in New Mexico, with a focus on the roles of prior teachers, involvement in student organizations like FFA, and personal roles in inspiring the next generation. Also analyzed was New Mexico agricultural educators' current view of agricultural education as a profession.

The nuances of motivation—both intrinsic, such as personal satisfaction and professional pride, and extrinsic, such as community respect and career stability—play critical roles in these career decisions. Overall participants in this study had positive views of the profession and were proud to be agricultural educators. As agricultural educators find fulfillment and pride in their work, they are more likely to encourage their students to consider teaching as a viable and rewarding career path. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in career decisions is grounded in motivation theory, specifically Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Korte and Simonsen (2018) found that agricultural educators who experienced fulfillment and recognition in their roles were more likely to remain in the profession and inspire students to consider teaching careers. This reinforces the idea that motivation factors—both intrinsic and extrinsic are essential to career commitment and recruitment.

Park and Rudd (2005) suggest students' positive interactions with their agricultural educator can influence their decision to enter the profession. Marx et al. (2017) posited that the simple gesturing of telling students they would be good agricultural educators influenced their decision to become a teacher. Findings from this study support the influence of not only agriculture educators on the choice to enter the profession, but also that of their cooperating teacher and other secondary teachers. As we continue to educate the next generation of agricultural educators it is important to keep in mind the influence teachers can have starting during secondary school and continuing throughout post-secondary education.

Involvement in FFA influenced the majority of this study's participants' choice to become an agricultural educator. Individuals who participate in FFA and SAE activities are more likely to choose agricultural education as a major (Cole, 1984; Ingram et al., 2018; Miller et al., 1984). According to Hur et al. (2024), participants' positive involvement in SBAE programs improved their confidence in teaching agriculture due to the knowledge and experience that was gained in agricultural education. However, Lawver and Torres (2012) found that participation in FFA and SAEs did not influence students' self-efficacy to teach agriculture. The lack of experience with SBAE programs has been found to be a detractor from choosing agricultural education as a career field (Marx et al., 2017). By participating in FFA and SAE activities students potentially gain knowledge and skill sets that improve their self-efficacy to teach and influence their decision to become an agricultural educator.

Our findings underscore the profound impact of inspirational teachers and positive experiences within student organizations on the decision to enter the teaching profession. Importantly, the study highlights the role of agricultural educators as pivotal mentors, shaping not only the future of the profession but also the broader agricultural landscape of the country. Being a role model for youth has been identified as an altruistic motive for influencing individuals' decision to become a teacher (Ingram et al., 2018; Lawver & Torres, 2012). New Mexico agricultural educators indicated they believe they see themselves as important role models for their students and identified their importance in shaping our nation's future. The social utility value of agricultural education as a career due to the ability to have positive effects on students' lives is an influential factor in choosing to join the profession (Marx et al., 2017).

While this study did not investigate social influence on the decision to become a teacher, it is a valid influencer to be considered. Alternatively licensed agricultural educators have reported that social influence led to their decision to enter the profession (Cannon et al., 2022). By identifying the key motivators that drive individuals to choose and stay in the agricultural teaching profession, this research

contributes to the broader discourse on teacher recruitment and retention, offering insights that may help mitigate the persistent teacher shortage affecting the United States.

This study's revelation of the intricate interplay between personal experience and professional aspiration provides essential clues for developing targeted interventions aimed at recruiting the next generation of agricultural educators.

Recommendations

Practice

As we continue to find ways to recruit more students into SBAE pre-service programs, we recommend adjusting our focus to aiding our current secondary teachers, both SBAE and core classroom, with strategies to inspire their current students. Teachers need to be made aware of the influence they have on students choosing teaching as a profession. Furthermore, when selecting school sites for pre-service candidates, selection of cooperating teachers needs to be done with intention. The FFA programs within each state need to continue to implement career development events, as well as leadership training, which will encourage and motivate students to become SBAE teachers. Additionally, we need to continue to find ways to support agricultural educators to ensure a continued positive view of the profession for future generations.

Further Research

As we continue to battle a shortage of SBAE teachers it is important to continue to research how we can inspire individuals to not only enter the profession, but to remain in the profession. With more and more alternatively licensed agricultural educators entering the profession research needs to continue to investigate what influences them to enter the profession, as well as their choices to not pursue an agricultural education degree.

Additionally, research needs to be conducted to determine the needs of our mid-career SBAE teachers so they can gain the support needed to continue successfully educating our students and inspiring them to become SBAE teachers.

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