

## **Ag Teacher of the Year Application Connie Lujan**

### **a. Overview – brief description of the agricultural education program and the community in which the program exists.**

I instituted the Mesa Vista agricultural program in 1988 when I came to work in our district. Since that time, I have grown the program with 1 agricultural class with 11 students to agricultural classes serving 130 students. Our school district is nestled in northern New Mexico in a small town called Ojo Caliente. The district serves roughly 324 students from a few surrounding areas such as El Rito, La Madera, Tres Piedras, Petaca, Carson, Abiquiu and Espanola. The students are 97% Hispanic with the other 3% being Native American, African American, and White. A large portion of the students' families work for governmental entities (Highway Dept., US Forest Service and Los Alamos National Laboratory). Other families are self-employed or own small ranches. This is a Title 1 school where most of the students receive 100 % free breakfast and lunch. There is a high percentage of below average income families in our district.

### **b. Teaching Philosophy – a brief reflective statement of the personal teaching philosophy.**

After much thought, I truly believe that I am a very student-oriented teacher. Why? Thirty plus years of teaching experience has taught me that my greatest accomplishments are the successes that I have observed through my students. I have never been one to “toot my own horn” as they say because my successes have not been measured by how well “I” have done but by the successes of the many students who have passed through my door. I have had the chance to instill in my student's work ethics, leadership and career skills, and the desire to pursue careers that will benefit themselves, society and their communities. Knowing this, I have done my job as an agricultural educator.

### **c. Instruction – examples of your effective classroom and laboratory instruction including curricula that are used or has been developed.**

The agricultural program at my school is not a typical program. I feel that our program is very diverse, it provides classes that meet the needs of our students. Most of my students do have a cultural relationship with the agriculture in our area but it is not what they will make a living doing. Therefore, we offer a wide variety of classes in hopes of allowing our students to take advantage of different aspects of the agricultural field.

First period is Food Science class, this course is designed for students who are interested in developing a better understanding of the food industry in the United States. They cover units in food safety, food handling ethics, the governmental role in the Food Industry, free enterprise and the global impact the food industry has.

Second period is Floriculture, during this course students will focus on learning the basic principles of floral design. Other units that are covered in this class are flower and plant

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identification, use of floral tools, floral design techniques, design fundamentals, corsage, and boutonniere construction, learn about wedding/special and bereavement arrangements, and floral business management. A heavy emphasis will be placed on the ability to enter the workforce after finishing this course. An example of a lesson in floriculture: This year since some students were online, I paired an online student with an in-person student in a cooperative learning activity where they would construct a corsage together. The students in class did the actual construction while the students online watched giving suggestions and feedback. Online students were required to write a one-page report on the pair's activity.

Third period is Wildlife & Forestry, since a few of the agricultural industries in our community are logging, forest thinning, forest product milling, hunting/guiding or working the forest service it was imperative that we offer this type of class. They will cover units in conservation, government regulations, safety, surveying, timber cruising, wildlife habitats management and much more.

Fourth period is a Welding I class where students are taught basic welding skills. They learn about metal, tools, and welding principles. They learn about measuring, planning projects, and applying the skills they have learned. They are required to demonstrate their abilities using the arc welder, mig welder, and plasma cutter.

Fifth period is Applied Agricultural which incorporates a variety of communication skills associated with agricultural leadership. They learn how to gather, organize, and present information from a variety of sources. Students learn how to present formal impromptu, prepared and extemporaneous speeches. They learn how to prepare a letter of application, a resume, and a job application. They will show the dos and don'ts of a job interview and lastly participate in a mock job interview. An example of a lesson in Agriculture Public Speaking: Throughout this class, students were tasked with writing and delivering short impromptu speeches about thought provoking subjects. They were encouraged to express their unique views and investigate their own ideas about each subject.

Sixth period is 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Agriscience, this course is designed to assist 7<sup>th</sup> grade students in exploring agriculture and how it relates to their everyday lives. Students will have the opportunity to develop an understanding of the importance of agriculture to society. They will learn about historical events and developments in agriculture, basic animal, and plant science. They will understand the importance of food and fiber, the importance of the quality of life and study the importance of an ecosystem and how it relates to agriculture. An example of a lesson in 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Agriscience: After completing a lesson on "Important Individual in Wildlife Conservation ", students were tasked with preparing and presenting slides for a PowerPoint. Students had the opportunity to apply their knowledge of computers to this activity.

Seventh period is 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Agriscience, the purpose of this course is to offer an agricultural class to middle students to generate interest in the agricultural industry. The content of this course will include an intense study of FFA (history, officer duties, running a meeting, the FFA Creed,

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opportunities, awards, degrees, and career development events). Other areas of study include basic animal science, wildlife management, production of food and fiber, processing systems, plant systems, principles of soil and forestry practices/management. An example of a lesson in 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Agriscience: Wood harvesting is an important way of life for many of my students' families to supplement their income or heat their homes. The students were asked to create a poster depicting safety in the forest. They had to choose a safety practice and put it on the poster. This was an excellent way to allow students with different abilities to showcase their drawing ability and their knowledge of safe forest practices.

I use the ICEV program as the main part of my curriculum. I supplement with CAERT and other lessons that I have generated over the years. I have learned to search the internet for new lessons that can easily fit into my classes. I also incorporate Career Development lessons in all of my classes whenever possible.

### **d. Experiential Learning – examples of the accomplishments in getting students involved in work-based learning such as supervised agricultural experience programs, cooperative education, and internships.**

Experiential Learning:

The program I created is ideal for experiential learning. The many activities my students participate in are evident by the many awards and recognition our chapter and school has received. First, the participation in Career Development Events at the state and national levels. Our floriculture and nursery landscape teams have competed in the national FFA competitions eight times between the two teams. We have placed in the top five with our entomology, forestry, milk quality and floriculture at the state level numerous times. My students have learned skills that they can use in the workforce. Several of my students have used these skills to secure jobs at the US Forest Service (summer internships), work at floral shop (former student is a shop manager), work at the local historical mineral springs and spa, and others work at Los Clinicas del Norte (medical clinic). I also have students who have received internships with world renowned scientists at Los Alamos National Laboratory and asked to work each summer. I have received many compliments about their job interviewing skills, their ability to communicate and deal with the public, work ethics and values. I believe that my students' work ethics and values are attributed to their participation in the many school and community activities like Holiday Baskets, Bus Clean-up, Food Drives, Pet Food Drives, building Bat Houses and Pinecone Bird Feeders, Rio Arriba Pancake Breakfast, Ag in the Classroom just to name a few.

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**e. Leadership Development – examples of the accomplishments in developing leadership skills of the students. Students’ participation and successes in student organization activities, such as FFA, PAS, and NYFEA but not limited to these organizations may also be included.**

My program strives to make my students leaders in and out of our community. Many community activities and leadership team development events help my students earn scholarships and awards. Some of my students have been featured in the New Mexico Farm Bureau Magazine for participating in the “Ag in the Classroom” program. As a true believer in a well-rounded program, I require that my members and officer team compile a Program of Activities and apply for the National Chapter Award application yearly. I can proudly say that twenty-five out of thirty-one years that our chapter has existed, we have submitted both. Our chapter has received recognition nine times as a Superior Chapter or a winner for our Program of Activities during those twenty-five years. Most recently, we have been voted as New Mexico’s Superior Chapter two out of three times and our chapter name is proudly placed on the new traveling trophy. I have had numerous top five individuals in leadership development events. One of our proudest accomplishments is having the first-place winner in the employability skills participate at the National FFA contest, not to mention that he now serves as our school board president at the ripe old age of twenty. This leadership serves students well in their collegiate and post collegiate careers, as well. One of my students was mentioned in both NM Magazine and on local news as the bedrock for one of the NM True Heroes, serving her community and teaching girls from the local community how to become leaders in STEM. Another one of my students works directly with the top virus modeler in the world; she currently helps to track both the Zika and Corona viruses during her summer internship with Los Alamos National Laboratory.

**f. Professional Growth – examples of how they stay professionally prepared and up-to-date in teaching techniques and technical content including information regarding their participation in professional organizations such as NMAETA, NAAE and programs sponsored by NAAE.**

As part of being a good teacher it is imperative that we stay up on training and personal development. I am continuously attending staff development training in a wide variety of subject areas. The district has provided numerous training such as: Rhythm, Formative and Summative Assessment, PLC, Autism, Simple K-12, Image Learning, Blood Borne Pathogens, Common Core Curriculum, Social Emotional Learning, and numerous technology training. I have attended a few technology training sessions hosted by the New Mexico FFA state office such as how to use Zoom, Go Guardian, Google Classroom, Canvas and Kahoot. Through our New Mexico Agriculture Education Teachers Association, I have attended many workshops ranging from Market Sheep & Swine Production, Parliamentary Procedure, Agri-science Fair, Ag Issues, Ag Marketing, numerous Floriculture components just to name a few.

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My biggest accomplishment throughout this year has been the knowledge that I have gained about computers. I have become a lot more confident in my ability to navigate throughout my curriculum. Without the ICEV program I would have never gotten through this year. I honestly felt like retiring this year because I had no idea how I was going to get through this pandemic so I could be better at my job. I truly believe that a person never stops learning no matter how old they are. To “practice what I preach”, I know that it is important to gain as much knowledge as possible

Throughout my teaching career, I have served on the New Mexico Board of Trustees 7 times, received my Honorary State Farmer Degree and my American Farmer Degree. I have 6 state officers, 3 American Farmer Degree recipients and over 150 state farmer degree recipients over the past 30 years. Not too bad for a small northern New Mexico school that serves approximately 324 students K-12.