

Ag Teacher of the Year Application: TONY JOHNSON

a. Overview –

I am fortunate to teach in the rural ranching community of Corona, America which boasts a population of 143. Yet the school district of Corona is one of the largest in the state in terms of square miles. Kids get on the bus from 68 miles east to 58 miles west of town, while others travel from entirely different communities to take advantage of learning at a smaller school with great Student: Teacher ratios.

Upon arrival 18 years ago the Ag program was pretty basic. All classes were titled Ag. No grade level separation and basically no differences in curriculums. In other words “Either go to the shop and weld something or do homework.” Now I feel we have a genuine General Agricultural Education Program. Classes are as follows:

7th grade = Exploratory Agriculture

8th grade = Introduction to the Science of Agriculture

9th grade = Horticulture/Botany/Landscape Design

10th grade = Small Animal Science/ Large Animal Science

11th-12th grade = Rotating Curriculums – Agribusiness, Leadership, Forestry, Natural Resources, Range Management, Futures Markets, International Agriculture, Ag Law, Meat Science, Ag Communications.

11th-12th grade = Ag Mechanics – Rotating Curriculums – GMAW, SMAW, Oxy-Fuel, Electricity, Plumbing, Drafting, Sheet Metal, Carpentry, Hot/Cold Metals, Surveying, Wind and Solar Installation, Concrete.

b. Teaching Philosophy –

My teaching philosophy is fairly simple; “I love to Teach”. Four simple words that have guided me for the last 28 years. I was told a long time ago that “above all else you are hired to teach. They don’t hire you to put plaques on the wall or banners in the building, they hire you to teach.” No truer words were ever spoken when it comes to the business of schools. Therefore, it has always been important to me to teach every day, from bell to bell, week to week, semester to semester. I would have kids trying to ditch core classes to come to Ag. Not because we were sitting around shooting the breeze, but because they got to be a part of an active and positive learning environment. They were treated like individuals, not student numbers, and their opinion could and would be heard regardless of the ending outcome. I love to teach.

c. Instruction –

When I first started teaching 28 years ago I was confused. We taught in New Mexico but our 4 curriculums (AG I, Ag II, AG III, Ag VI) then focused on Oklahoma. What we were doing was “borrowing” the Oklahoma Core, tearing off the title page, and replacing it with one that said New Mexico! So at my first MFE Conference (now NMLC) I asked for time to survey Ag teachers and begin to develop an outline of New Mexico Agricultural Education Curriculum that was tied to the required Standards and Benchmarks of the state. Since that time I have continued to work with the State Office in the development of curriculums and even the dreaded End of Course Exams. I feel that it is imperative as an association that we remain pro-active in what we teach rather than reactive to PED requirements. Now with CAERT, CASE, ICEV, or a host of other curricula available we owe it to our students to use whatever tools necessary to help them succeed. Over the years I have strived to keep the 3 circles of Agriculture

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Education the same size in my program: Classroom/Lab=FFA=SAE. My Ag teacher was great at training judging teams, okay in the classroom, and would just send you to the shop and say "Don't kill yourselves". And while I thought Mr. Dennis was the greatest person on earth, when I became stationed by the owl I knew I wanted to be different. To me there is no reason why judging should be more important teaching in than teaching in the classroom or that shop projects are less important than showing livestock. All kids need and deserve our best in every area every time.

d. Experiential Learning –

I set a goal early on to teach kids about real life. And real life is hard. But you can make it easier if you have an SAE. There is no better tool to teach financial responsibility, common sense, and real life experiences than the Supervised Agricultural Experience Program. So therefore, I made it my goal, in all 3 of the chapters where I have taught, to provide each one with the opportunity to receive their New Mexico State FFA Degree by the time they graduate from my program. Has it worked? Almost. In the past 20 years I have had 2 students not receive their State degree. (One is still pursuing an acting career and lives with his parents and the other decided to make money the easy way and is a full time resident of the State of New Mexico) My point being is that I feel that every kid can and should have an SAE. Is it a requirement for my program...no. But after a year or two the young individual comes to realize that when they are working or conducting research in a field of study, if they keep track of those hours and/or finances, and then record those events in his or her record books they have an SAE! Every member of **any** FFA chapter can have and benefit from an SAE.

e. Leadership Development –

The best examples of Leadership Development are my kids, and how successful they are. My former students now range in a variety of careers that include: Doctors, Lawyers, Homemakers, Preachers, Chefs, Veterinarians, Police officers, College Professors, Scientists, Investment Brokers, Communication Coordinators, Actors, Musicians, Farmers, Ranchers, Cowboys and Cowgirls, Moms, and Dads. The FFA Chapters have had Star State Farmers, Star State Greenhand, 70+ State Degree recipients, 14 American Degree recipients, 16 State Championships, 24 Superior Chapter Awards, 14 National Chapter Awards, and was a National Runner-up Model of Innovation Chapter in Student Development. I am very lucky to have advised 8 State FFA Officers and have had 28 years of 100% FFA membership.

f. Professional Growth –

I have been a member of the NMAETA my entire teaching career and have made my way through the ranks of the officer team on 2 different occasions. I have or currently serve on a host of Advisory and Organizational boards including: NMSU Corona Research Station, NMSU AXED Department , Cowboys for Cancer Research, New Mexico State Fair, Southern New Mexico State Fair, and NMACTE to name a few. I've been fortunate enough to have served 9 times on the State FFA Board of Trustees and/or Board of Governors. But probably some of the brightest moments as a professional have been the opportunity to oversee 13 Student Teachers of which 11 are still teaching Agriculture or Agri-Science in 5 States.