



# THE GOLDEN SLATE

The official newsletter of the California  
Agricultural Teachers' Association

## A Book Report on Professionalism in Ag Education?

By Matt Patton, CATA Executive Director

[What Does Professionalism Look Like in Ag Education](#) was published in the Journal of Agricultural Education in January of 2025. The paper was authored by Erin Gorter, Nicole Ray, Ann De Lay, Lauren MacDonald, Issac Lopez, Ashley Crabtree, and Daniela Rodriquez-Ruiz.

This research paper looked at agricultural educators' perceptions of professionalism. Below is my summary and interpretation of that research. However, please note that the whole article is linked above for your reference. It is worth the read.

Professionalism is a word we hear often in agricultural education—but what does it mean in our classrooms, in the FFA program, and through Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAEs)? A recent study aimed to explore this question, asking California agricultural teachers to define what professionalism looks like in their day-to-day work.

Using a method called photovoice, teachers submitted photos and brief reflections that highlighted professional practices across the three components of agricultural education: classroom instruction, leadership development (FFA), and SAE. The goal was to gain a better understanding of how educators themselves interpret and display professionalism. Here's what teachers said:

*In the classroom, professionalism was most often reflected in:*

- Creating safe, hands-on learning environments
- Working collaboratively with colleagues and students
- Demonstrating strong content knowledge
- Encouraging peer-to-peer engagement and support

*In the leadership (FFA) component, teachers described professionalism as:*

- Providing meaningful student opportunities, such as public speaking events or award banquets
- Modeling respectful behavior and fostering teamwork
- Promoting a culture of respect and unity within the chapter

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*When it came to SAEs, teachers pointed to:*

- High-quality, real-world student projects (like ag mechanics, businesses or livestock teams)
- Helping students connect their projects to actual industry needs
- Emphasizing outward appearance and public presentation of the program

### **Common Themes Across All Areas**

Some themes showed up in more than one part of agricultural education. For example:

- Relationships were important in both the classroom and leadership areas.
- Public perception (how the program looks to others) was important in both leadership and SAE. Teachers wanted to create a positive image for things like community events, student recognition, and program sponsors.
- Organization—like keeping materials and schedules in order—was seen as professional in both classroom and SAE settings.

Across all three areas—classroom, leadership, and SAE—two big ideas stood out: How teachers dress and how they model professional behavior for students.

### **Why It Matters**

Organizations like CATA and NAAE often emphasize the importance of professionalism in agricultural education; however, a clear and unified definition is still lacking. This study underscores the personal and diverse interpretations of professionalism among educators in this field.

By gaining deeper insights into teachers' perspectives, we can improve pre-service and in-service training programs and support systems, ultimately fostering the professional growth of educators.

### **What's Next?**

The study suggests that professional development efforts should concentrate on common themes, including dress, modeling, organization, relationships, and public perception. It emphasizes the need for more self-reflection from both teachers and leaders regarding what professionalism truly looks like in practice.

Maintaining the strength and reputation of agricultural education in California requires all agriculture teachers and leaders, not just the next generation, to engage in both explicit conversations and intentional self-reflection around professionalism.

