



THE GOLDEN SLATE

The official newsletter of the California
Agricultural Teachers' Association

Connections Within

by Amber Layne, Agriculture Teacher at Liberty High School

The mission of the California Agricultural Teachers' Association (CATA) is simple yet powerful; to promote and improve the teaching of agriculture in California. As a first-year teacher still finding my footing both inside and outside the classroom, I can say with certainty that this mission matters now more than ever.

Organizations like CATA, along with campaigns such as GoAgEd and Teach Ag California, play a crucial role in planting the seed of inspiration in high school students who are considering a future in agricultural education. Though teaching ag was always part of my long-term plan, I was raised with a mindset of creating opportunities for myself, and during my college years, I did just that.

It was through my connections within the livestock industry and profession that I was able to pursue internships with Superior Farms in Dixon, CA, and Harris Ranch Beef Company in Selma, CA. Those experiences solidified my passion for animal agriculture, specifically within food processing. I even accepted a full-time role with Harris Ranch as a Training Supervisor. But even while immersed in the industry, teaching was never “off the table.”

After two years in the workforce, I felt a pull to return to education, and that decision has never felt more right. It was the encouragement and example of CATA members and officers that helped me realize the importance of inspiring others and continuing the cycle of growth in agricultural education.

Improving ag education is no small feat—but thanks to CATA, young professionals like myself have the support we need every step of the way.

It all starts at the sectional level, where meetings offer new teachers the chance to meet local colleagues, learn the structure of our region, and share creative ideas.

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Moving into the regional level, the benefits multiply with professional development workshops led by ag teachers who are passionate about helping others grow. It's in these settings where I've gained valuable resources—contacts, strategies, and support—from fellow educators who understand the challenges and rewards of the job.

But it's at the state level where the magic really happens. Attending my first state CATA summer conference as an ag teacher was incredibly inspiring. No matter who I spoke with—veteran teacher, first-year member, or retired educator—everyone was eager to offer help, share curriculum, or suggest engaging activities to bring back to my classroom. That level of community is powerful.

People often say that the network you build through CATA lasts a lifetime. After attending just one state conference, I can confidently say that's true. Growing up, I remember my mom talking about CATA—she'd call it her “summer vacation” because she got to watch her dad reconnect with colleagues, swap stories, and reenergize for the school year ahead. Now that I'm living it myself, I understand exactly what she meant.

A lot happens at the CATA Summer Conference—from updates to CDE and LDE codes to curriculum development—but the most important thing that happens is connection. Connection to others. Connection to the profession. And connection to the purpose that brought us here in the first place: to promote and improve the teaching of agriculture in California.

