



# THE GOLDEN SLATE

The official newsletter of the California  
Agricultural Teachers' Association

## Experienced Teachers...Leave the Profession Better Than You Found It

*By Travis Cardoso, CATA State Treasurer*

In agriculture, we understand stewardship. We know what it means to care for the land so that it produces—not just for us, but for those who will farm it long after we're gone. We teach our students that good farmers leave the soil healthier than they found it. The same principle applies to agricultural education.

I write this from the "in-between" stage of the profession—not a rookie anymore, but still learning, still growing, still leaning on those who paved the way. I have enough experience now to recognize what I didn't know early on, and enough humility to realize how much more there is to learn. From this vantage point, I can see something clearly:

*The strength of our profession tomorrow depends on what our most experienced educators do today.*

### **Seasoned Teachers Carry the Knowledge the Profession Cannot Afford to Lose**

Every experienced agriculture teacher holds a wealth of knowledge that is nearly impossible to capture in textbooks, credential coursework, or professional development sessions. It is knowledge built in the shop at 10pm, in the greenhouse before sunrise, in the FFA van on a lonely stretch of highway coming home from a contest.

You have lived the three-ring model in a way new teachers cannot yet imagine. You know:

- How to manage 150 students and 150 personalities.
- How to cultivate a program, not just teach a class.
- How to navigate administrators, parents, donors, and advisory boards.
- How to balance classroom instruction, FFA events, and SAE projects without losing hope—or your sanity.
- How to transform a struggling program into a flourishing one.
- How to persevere in a career where the hours are long, the expectations enormous, and the impact immeasurable.

CALIFORNIA AGRICULTURAL TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

[CALAGTEACHERS.ORG](http://CALAGTEACHERS.ORG)



This practical wisdom is the backbone of California agricultural education, and unless it is intentionally passed down, it disappears the moment a veteran teacher hangs up the keys to the ag truck for the last time.

### **The New Teachers Walking Into Our Profession Face a Different Landscape**

Today's beginning ag teachers are stepping into a profession that is more demanding, more complex, and more scrutinized than ever before. They are expected to:

- Be experts in multiple agricultural pathways
- Manage large student leadership programs
- Run comprehensive labs, school farms, and competitive teams
- Master new technologies
- Know every rule, every deadline, every form, every expectation
- Build a network from scratch
- Earn the trust of their community
- Do it all with the confidence of someone who has been teaching for decades

And they are asked to do this in the first year.

Some rise.

Some survive.

Too many leave.

The most significant difference between those who stay and those who walk away is often not talent, passion, or preparation—it's whether an experienced teacher took the time to guide them.

### **Mentorship Isn't Extra—It's the Lifeline That Preserves Our Profession**

Every veteran teacher knows what it's like to struggle. Every veteran teacher also knows what it means to have someone—maybe one person—offer a hand, a resource, a word of reassurance. For many, that small spark of support became the difference between burning out and burning brighter.

Imagine if every experienced teacher chose just one or two new educators to mentor intentionally—not casually, not accidentally, but with purpose.

Imagine the stability that would follow.

Imagine the longevity.

Imagine the programs that wouldn't close.

Imagine the teachers who would stay long enough to find their footing, their confidence, and their calling.

Mentorship is legacy work. It is how you ensure that what you built does not end with you.



## **Your Influence Doesn't End at Retirement—Unless You Choose Not to Share It**

When experienced teachers mentor, they plant seeds that will outlive them:

- A lesson plan shared becomes thousands of lessons taught.
- A conversation over coffee becomes courage for the next decade.
- A piece of advice becomes a standard for an entire program.
- A small act of guidance becomes a career.

This is how you leave the profession better than you found it—not by what you accumulate, but by what you pass on.

Experienced teachers, the newer generation isn't asking you to fix everything for them. They aren't asking you to take on more contests, committees, or all the items off their plate. They're simply asking for the wisdom you already possess and the willingness to share it.

### **A Foundation for Decades to Come**

Every time you invest in a new teacher, you lay a brick in the foundation of agricultural education that will support students, schools, communities, and programs far into the future.

Twenty years from now, when a confident, capable teacher takes a group of students to their first competition—your influence will be there.

When a beginning teacher steps into their classroom with a sense of purpose and clarity—your guidance will echo in their decisions.

When the next generation of educators begins mentoring others—your legacy will multiply.

You may never see the full harvest of the seeds you plant, but that is the nature of meaningful work.

### **In the End, Legacy Is Measured in People**

Your banners will fade.

Your trophies will tarnish.

Your plaques will gather dust.

*But the teachers you influence?*

They will carry your impact into classrooms you will never step into, shaping students you will never meet.



*That is the legacy that endures.*

So, to the experienced teachers of California agricultural education:

**Mentor boldly. Give generously. Invest deeply. And leave this profession better than you found it—not for your sake, but for the sake of those who will inherit the work you began.**

The future of agricultural education is in your hands today.  
Decades from now... it will be clear who chose to shape it.

