



# THE GOLDEN SLATE

The official newsletter of the California  
Agricultural Teachers' Association

## I Am Proud of My Profession

*By Kristin Sheehan, Agricultural Educator at Madera South High School*

"I am proud of my profession," is the first statement of the CATA Code of Ethics. This statement arguably sets the foundation for the other ethics statements. It serves as the basis for establishing and engaging in the agricultural education profession. At the New Professionals Conference and the San Joaquin Regional Road Show, professionals discussed ways in which we, as agricultural educators, can demonstrate pride in our profession. The purpose of this article is to take a closer look at each of the following recommendations:

- Be an active participant in professional development and collaboration.
- Dedicate personal time to ensure the success of students through the three-ring model.
- Be an advocate for the profession and individuals within.

### **Be an active participant in professional development and collaboration.**

Former National FFA Advisor, Steve Brown stated, "FFA is not a spectator sport." The same sentiment should apply to the California Agricultural Teachers' Association (CATA)—CATA is not a spectator sport. As a member-driven organization, its foundation and success rely on us, the professional educators.

The vision, direction, and achievements of CATA depend on the active participation of its members. As educators, we are the voice of this organization, and one of the most direct ways to exercise this voice is by being a dues-paying member of CATA and the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE). Membership demonstrates a commitment to investing in our profession, but the impact of this investment grows through active involvement. Examples of such engagement include:

- Serving as a sectional, regional, or state officer.
- Attending, engaging in, and/or facilitating professional development opportunities. Opportunities include regional road shows, CATA Agriskills sessions, NAAE regional and national conferences, the New Professionals Conference, the Cooperating Teachers Conference, the Germinate Virtual Conference, and more.

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- Engage in mentorship opportunities. For example, Jeff Kirby and Tammy Pilcher saw specific needs within the profession and acted on them. Jeff established a welding fabrication competition where he partnered a veteran teacher with a newer teacher. Tammy established several animal clinics to expand knowledge of livestock species among ag teachers. Both of these individuals intentionally widened their circle to enhance ag education.
- Judge SAE grants, NAAE/CATA award applications, proficiency award applications, and chapter award applications.
- Apply and nominate others for awards in CATA and NAAE.

### **Dedicate personal time to ensure the success of students through the three-ring model.**

There is no debate that we, as a society, are busy. This is even more true in agricultural education. Giving of ourselves and our time to our students and profession nourishes success. Evaluating how we implement the three-ring model can provide balance in our work and personal life. When implemented with fidelity, the three-ring model can foster student growth, success, diversity, and inclusiveness. Our commitment to this model drives our profession and the National FFA Organization.

If you're feeling overwhelmed and underpaid, you're in good company. This is not unique to agricultural education. It is a societal issue in the workforce. That said, we must consider our students' needs and our own. Many would reference this as a "work-life balance." There is nothing wrong with this statement. However, I challenge you to recognize that balance may not be the key. In reality, personal matters in our lives may require more of us, such as illness, family, and personal and spiritual care. Then, there will be seasons where we need to invest more heavily into our students. This can be true when preparing degree applications and attending CDE/LDE field days and fairs.

Perhaps we can consider another viewpoint, and that is purpose over balance. What is your purpose, personally and professionally? How can you implement both into your life to create a balance that stretches and grows you but does not lead to fatigue and burnout? Fulfillment comes from establishing a purpose and reflecting on the difference you're making. To quote Matt Patton, "Are you making a difference with your students, with your community, and with your family?" With this, you will be able to meet your life's personal and professional demands, thus leading to an impactful education for your students.

### **Be an advocate for the profession and individuals within.**

We all need a cheerleader who advocates for us. When I reflect on my career, my biggest advocates were Jim Bompreszi, Stan Williams, Crystal Luera, and Julie Luxon. These individuals, among many others, saw potential in me that I didn't see in myself. Recognizing value in others is an expression of pride within our profession. It implies that you are intentionally highlighting the contributions of others, thus fostering a positive culture that is unique to the agricultural education sector.



Ways to acknowledge others include talking positively about others, sending a note of thank you or recognition, nominating others for awards, asking for help from someone who is more skilled than yourself, and/or teaming up with colleagues to present a skill or information through professional development. Recognition on a personal level can be and should be expanded throughout the profession, stemming from your department and reaching throughout your section, region, and state. With recognition comes awareness and promotion.

As agricultural educators, we formulate pride in the promotion of our industry. Pride in the workforce can be accomplished through positive and intentional conversations in person and through social media. Furthermore, you can advocate for our profession through active involvement in leadership roles and professional development. Your voice is important, and your participation is vital to the growth and success of our organization.

*What makes you proud of our profession?* I am proud of the leaders in our organization. They are progressive and innovative. State supervisors, officers, and teachers like yourself are shaping CATA through service. I am proud of this profession, which is highly adaptive, inclusive, and competitive. I am proud of our profession because it has a unique closeness and support for its members. We challenge our students to be active and engaged members who advocate for FFA and the agriculture sector. Shouldn't we hold ourselves accountable to the same expectations? CATA, I challenge you to be an active participant in our organization, dedicate personal time to ensure student success through the three-ring model, and advocate for the profession and others in the profession.

