



THE GOLDEN SLATE

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Agricultural Teachers' Association

Supporting Female Ag Teachers: What Keeps Them in the Classroom

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California's agricultural education system is facing a critical teacher shortage, with 12 positions going unfilled for the 2024–2025 school year. Recognizing the urgent need to retain teachers, especially the growing number of women entering the field, this mixed-methods study (qualitative and quantitative) explored the key factors contributing to female agricultural teacher retention in California.

The Study Approach

Using both personal interviews and surveys, Patton gathered insights from six veteran female ag teachers (20+ years of experience)—one from each California FFA Region, and 29 early-career teachers (under 5 years). Transcriptions and data analysis focused on identifying consistent themes (holistic and thematic) that contribute to teacher longevity and professional satisfaction.

Findings from Veteran Teachers

Veteran educators cited several key factors that supported their long-term commitment to the profession:

- Strong personal and professional support systems;
- Sustainable integration of personal and professional responsibilities;
- Passion for teaching and student development;
- Resilience and adaptability; and
- Mentorship and professional community.

These findings informed the design of a follow-up survey for novice teachers to assess whether these supports are currently in place.

Insights from New Teachers

Despite some challenges, the majority of early-career teachers reported encouraging levels of support. Notably:

- 84% said they had access to mentorship, and most reported it positively impacted their growth.

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- 80% felt supported in their professional development.
- 76% believed their contributions to student development were valued.
- 88% said they find meaning in their work and feel they make a difference.
- 68% reported feeling supported by colleagues and part of a collaborative environment.

However, survey results also revealed areas of concern:

- 16% felt they had a healthy integration of personal and professional time
- 20% believed their workload was manageable
- 44% reported receiving support for time management
- 52% felt administrative communication and resource support could be improved

These challenges are particularly concerning because veteran teachers identified these exact factors—balance, manageable workload, and administrative support—as essential to their long-term success.

Conclusion and Call to Action

To strengthen retention efforts, early-career teachers need greater support in managing workload, achieving personal-professional balance, and receiving consistent administrative backing. These supports were identified by long-serving teachers as critical to their career longevity.

As my research highlights, the future of agricultural education depends not only on attracting new teachers, but on building the conditions that allow them to thrive and continue in the profession.

