



THE GOLDEN SLATE

The official newsletter of the California
Agricultural Teachers' Association

Survival Hacks for Ag Teachers: Thriving in a Demanding Career

By Amanda Boyer, Agricultural Teacher, Visalia High School

As ag teachers, we pour our hearts and souls into the classroom, the farm, and the lives of our students. The work is rewarding, but let's face it: it's also demanding, stressful, and never-ending. After nearly a decade in this profession, I've learned that survival isn't about finding shortcuts—it's about making smart choices, building a solid support network, and maintaining your well-being. Here are a few "survival hacks" that have helped me thrive and find joy in this challenging career.

1. Love Your Team

Let's be real: as ag teachers, we spend a lot of time with our coworkers. It's essential for our sanity that we like them. Build camaraderie through team bonding activities, get to know each other's families, and genuinely invest in one another. When you work alongside people as much as we do, it's easy to take each other for granted. But remember, every colleague brings their own strengths to the team and deserves grace for their weaknesses. My coworkers are some of my best friends, not by chance but because we worked hard to make it that way. Surviving the day-to-day is much better when you get to do it with your bestie by your side.

2. Don't Do What a Student Can Do

A piece of advice I'll never forget came from Mr. Beard during a student teacher conclave: "Don't do something a student can do." As ag teachers, our plates are always full. We juggle hundreds of tasks at once, so it's crucial to delegate what we can. Take our school's Farm Manager Program as an example. We have around 50 school animals that need to be fed daily. We hire farm managers who, in turn, hire farm feeders—students managing other students. This allows us to create leadership opportunities while offloading responsibilities. Empowering students to solve problems not only lightens our load, but also gives them valuable experience. It's a win-win.

3. Question Yourself

Before diving into any new project or event, ask yourself: *Why are we doing this?* Consider the costs—not just the financial ones, but the impact on your time, energy,

CALIFORNIA AGRICULTURAL TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

CALAGTEACHERS.ORG



and mental well-being. If the answer isn't a clear, purposeful "yes," then maybe it's time to take a closer look. Just because something has been done for years or someone else suggests it, doesn't mean it's necessary. If an activity doesn't benefit your students, reconsider its place in your calendar.

4. No is a Complete Sentence

Here's a piece of advice I still struggle with: "No" is a complete sentence. We often want to do everything—help with contests, coach every event, create every opportunity. But the reality is, we can't do it all. The more we take on, the less we do well. Saying "no" is not a sign of failure—it's a sign of wisdom. Prioritize what truly matters, and remember, it's okay to say no to extra commitments that don't align with your goals for your program or your well-being.

5. Get Involved in CATA

One of the best ways to grow as an educator is to get involved with the California Agricultural Teachers' Association (CATA). Run for office, lead a workshop, volunteer at an event—whatever you can do, dive in. The more you engage, the more connections you'll make, and the easier this career becomes. Networking with others in the field gives you access to resources, advice, and support when you need it most. The more you invest, the more you'll gain.

6. Apply for Awards

You deserve recognition. For years, I didn't apply for awards, thinking it wasn't worth the time. But I've learned that applying for awards isn't just about self-promotion—it's about creating opportunities for your program to be recognized. The more recognition your program gets, the more support you'll receive from your administration and district. When you fill out an award application, you're giving your school something to brag about. And let's face it—administrators love to have something positive to highlight.

7. Bring Your Family Along

Ag teaching demands long hours, and it's easy for work to take over your personal life. But one of the best survival hacks I've found is to bring your family along for the ride. Whether it's a chapter meeting or a sectional activity, there's no reason why your loved ones can't be involved. By blending work and family life, you create balance and foster deeper connections with both.

8. Ask for Help

It's easy to feel overwhelmed or unsure who to ask, especially with over 1,000 ag teachers in California. But remember: there are people out there willing to help—even if they don't know you personally. Start by reaching out to your regional supervisor, or even someone you admire



in the field. We are all part of one big ag teaching family, and people are often more than willing to lend a hand.

9. Mindset Matters

It may sound simple, but a positive mindset can make all the difference. Every morning, take a moment to set your intention for the day. If you wake up thinking, “Today is going to be great,” you’re more likely to make it so. On the flip side, if you expect the worst, you’ll probably get it. Set yourself up for success with the power of positivity.

10. There Are No Hacks

Let’s be honest: there are no shortcuts to success as an ag teacher. This job is hard. There will be days when it feels like you’re drowning in responsibilities, and no matter how many survival hacks you apply, it won’t make the challenges disappear. But here’s the thing: we get through it together. And in the end, that’s what makes it all worthwhile—supporting each other, finding joy in the little moments, and hopefully coming out of it with our sanity intact!

