

Minnesota's AgEd Advocate



MAELC

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Kari Schwab, Editor

What's Inside:



From the Desk of the Executive Director

Page 2

Learn more about emerging key themes from the development of the 2030 Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources Education Blueprint, along with next steps.



Grant Spotlight - Launching Lake Park Audubon Agriculture

Page 5

Janelle Hueners, agriculture teacher at Lake Park Audubon High School, shares about innovative programming and positive impacts from their recent MAELC Strategic Initiative grant.



Supporting Agricultural Educators at All Levels

Page 6

MAELC supports several professional development and mentorship programs for educators through legislative funds.



New Leaders in Minnesota Agricultural Education

Page 7

Get to know several individuals in their new roles and how they are supporting agricultural education.



A Decade of Agricultural Education Interns

The Minnesota Agricultural Education Internship, established in 2015, just wrapped up its 10th year of programming! The internship was developed to address the agriculture teacher shortage by encouraging collegiate students to complete their teacher licensure program, and upon graduation, enter the teaching profession. In total, 59 college students have participated in the internship, with 39 agriculture teachers mentoring the interns at 30 AFNR education programs.

So, how did this internship come to be? You could say it was a perfect storm of opportunity. In early December, 2013 *The Star Tribune* published an article, "Crop of Minnesota ag teachers dwindles while need grows." About the same time, a delegation of Minnesota agricultural education leaders were attending the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE) conference where the topic of retaining college students majoring in Agricultural Education prior to their student-teaching experience was discussed at length. The initial details for the internship were literally jotted on a napkin.

Not long after, AgriBank approached MAELC about sponsoring initiatives related to recruiting and retaining agriculture teachers. After initial meetings, AgriBank committed to funding the internship in March, 2015. By that summer the first interns participated in the program; all three graduated with an Agricultural Education degree and are currently teaching.

(continued on page 3)

Upcoming Events

Grant Applications Due
November 15, 2024 &
April 15, 2025

MAELC Board Meeting
Forest Lake High School
December 19, 2024

Scholarship Applications Due
February 1, 2025

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MAELC is a 16-member legislative council that provides leadership to promote and expand agricultural education in Minnesota.



From the Desk of Sarah Dornink MAELC Executive Director

"To achieve great things, two things are needed: a plan, and not quite enough time." ~ Leonard Bernstein

MAELC believes that in order to achieve great things for Minnesota Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources Education, a roadmap is needed for all to know what direction we are heading over the coming years. That is why for the third time, MAELC is completing the process for creating the 2030 Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources (AFNR) Education Blueprint.

In June, we hosted listening sessions throughout the state for individuals to share input and develop strategies for improving Agricultural Literacy, School-Based Agricultural Education, Post-Secondary AFNR Education, Agriculture Teacher Preparation, and Farm Business Management. Although we heard similar concerns and aspirations at each of the sessions, we continued to hear new ideas at every single event about how to reach our goals for AFNR education around students, programming, and instructors. In August, we pulled together committees made up of subject matter experts to determine the final strategies that you will see published in the Blueprint. Although we were excited about many of the ideas presented during the listening sessions, this group had the difficult role of prioritizing the top strategies that will have the most impact over the next five years.

Which leads me to the second half of the quote, related to time. On one side, it is a good reminder that we don't have to accomplish all our goals within the first year. However, having a specific timeline adds a sense of urgency to focus our efforts. Small, actionable and consistent steps will help us make the most impact by 2030.

While work is still being finalized on the Blueprint and will provide specific details, common themes have emerged across all AFNR education sectors. Many were complimentary of the efforts that have been made over the years and encouraged maintaining programming and funding that support teachers and students. Additional ideas were brought forth for increasing capacity to support new programming, growing efforts to attract and retain quality instructors, increasing communications to students about opportunities available across all sectors, and securing resources to ensure Minnesota students at all levels have access to industry-aligned technology, equipment and facilities.

Once our plan is in place, we will share the Blueprint publicly and engage with our numerous partners to implement this vision over the next five years. Once again, thank you to those who took the time to share their feedback and ideas throughout this process. We look forward to sharing our final results with you in January!

A Decade of Agricultural Education Interns

(continued from front page)

During the internship, students are matched with a licensed agricultural education instructor, receiving experiences that are offered during the summer months at their specific program. They can participate in summer activities such as FFA chapter officer training, county fair, leadership camps, career exploration tours and community service activities. Experiential learning visits, known as Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAE), are also conducted, and interns have the opportunity to assist their cooperating teacher with program and curriculum objectives.

On a statewide level, each intern is offered the chance to participate as an advisor in an FFA summer conference, attend additional professional development workshops, and join an agriculture, food and natural resources program and industry tour. They also spend one week at the Minnesota Association of Agricultural Educators (MAAE) summer conference, which provides opportunities for professional development and networking with current agriculture teachers.

To highlight their internship, college, and agricultural education experiences, each intern participates in a "Social Media Takeover" of the Minnesota Teach Ag Facebook and Instagram pages. Paul Aarsvold, agriculture teacher for Plainview-Elgin-Millville High School, serves as the coordinator of the program.



2024 Interns touring Bushel Boy Farms

Over the past ten years, several components have been added to improve the internship experience such as the AFNR program and industry tour, extra professional development and chaperoning opportunities, a planning document to better structure summer plans, training in the safety of minors, the social media takeover, and a pre/post internship assessment.

The internship program continues to prove successful, which is determined by the number of interns retained in the Agricultural Education major and entering the teaching profession. Of the previous interns who have graduated, approximately 84% have taken teaching positions. Interns also complete a pre and post-internship survey, based on a University of Missouri study whose purpose was to determine the factors that influence a student's choice to enter a career as a high school agricultural education teacher. Of past interns, 91% were still firmly committed to becoming agriculture teachers after their internship.

Other indicators of success include positive feedback from the interns:

"My cooperating teachers were absolutely fabulous in providing opportunities and making sure that this experience was full of constructive learning that will greatly help in my near future as an educator."

"This internship truly gave me the motivation I needed to finish out my collegiate career. It reminded me why I want to be an agriculture teacher, which was just what I needed."

This internship would not be possible without numerous partners, and we thank everyone who has supported and participated in this program. MAELC is the main partner, providing in-kind services for administering the program including recruiting, selecting, hiring, and supervising interns. The University of Minnesota serves as the fiscal agent and employer. The local school district and agricultural instructor are significant partners for the program as well. In 2024, the internship was made possible by generous donations from AgCountry Farm Credit Services, the CHS Foundation, Christensen Farms, and Compeer Financial. MAELC, through the state legislature, also committed \$20,000 in financial resources to support the program in 2024 and 2025. These funds were new after receiving a special, one-time legislative appropriation. MAELC will look to continue this investment of future teachers with continued funding during the next biennium.

The Agricultural Education Internship has grown and evolved over the past ten years, and we are proud to offer a great opportunity for students to gain first-hand experience being an agriculture teacher. If you or someone you know is interested in learning more, visit z.umn.edu/AgEdInternship. Applications for students are due November 18; individuals will be considered from Minnesota universities and other regional institutions that offer Agricultural Education, as long as they intend to teach in Minnesota. November 25 is the deadline for agriculture teachers interested in hosting an intern to submit a hosting application.



First cohort of Agricultural Education Interns
(L to R: Traci Walkowski, Jack Roessler, Michaela Gallup)

Instructor Spotlight - Katie Shaw

Lincoln High School (Thief River Falls)



Tell us about yourself: I grew up on a beef cattle farm in central Minnesota. In high school, I was involved in FFA and developed a passion for agriculture, which led me to my career today. I attended the University of Minnesota, Crookston, and received B.S. in Agricultural Education, then obtained my M.Ed. from the University of Minnesota, St. Paul. I started with Thief River Falls Public Schools in 2008; this is my 17th school year!

What does Thief River Falls' program look like? -



Our agriculture program is a single-person department. I teach a variety of classes, including Animal Science, Crop Science, Greenhouse Management, Agricultural Business, Exploring Agriculture, Companion Animal 1 & 2, Horse and Horsemanship,

Wildlife Resources, Natural Resources, Livestock Management, and Floral Design. I truly enjoy my job, but my favorite classes involve animals as I have always enjoyed them!

Our FFA chapter has 40 members this year. We are off to a great start with the poultry team, placing first at the regional competition and advancing to state.

What are a few highlights of your career so far?

One major accomplishment is having our horse team compete at nationals last year. They pushed me to be a better advisor and find resources to help them be competitive at the national level. I don't know of anything comparable to the excitement of watching the team on stage waiting to find out their ranking.

Our program has also gained a greenhouse and garden since I have been with the district. We were fortunate to be awarded a \$25,000 grant to help with the greenhouse expenses. Overall, we have incredible community partnerships that help support our program and students.

What are you most proud of as an agriculture teacher? -

I am most proud when students tell me that they want to be an agricultural educator! It is a humbling experience and makes me feel like I have truly made an impact on them.



MAELC Awards Nearly \$100,000 in Grants

This past summer, MAELC awarded Strategic Initiative grants to high schools and post-secondary institutions that work to improve agricultural education across the state.

Institution	Amount	Project Description
Braham Area High School	\$10,734	Braham Metals Shop Upgrade
Caledonia Area Public Schools	\$9,572	Renewal of Arc & Gas Welding Equipment
Holdingford High School	\$5,000	Greenhouse Climate Control System Upgrade
Little Falls Community Schools	\$6,968	CASE Implementation
Nicollet Public Schools	\$9,274	Welding Shop Upgrade
Sibley East High School	\$1,500	Plant System Pathway Expansion
South Central College	\$11,036	Automation in Agriculture
Tri-City United-Le Center & Montgomery (K-8)	\$3,911	Implementation of AFNR & Ag Explore
United South Central High School	\$3,400	Metal Fabrication Equipment Update
University of Minnesota-Agricultural Education	\$16,893	UMN Agricultural Mechanics Enhancement
West Central Area Schools	\$8,583	Meeting Community Needs through Hydroponic Education
Willmar High School	\$12,597	Welding the Future: Expanding Access & Skills in AFNR Education

MAELC will award \$300,000 in grants over the next two rounds of deadlines.

Grant applications are due
November 15, 2024 & April 15, 2025

For more information, visit:
mn.gov/maelc/grants.html

Grant Spotlight - Launching Lake Park Audubon Agriculture



Written by Janelle Hueners, Agriculture Teacher - Lake Park Audubon High School



The Lake Park Audubon agriculture, food and natural resources (AFNR) education program, now in its second year, offers courses ranging from welding and agriculture mechanics to animal science and greenhouse management, along with a summer work-based learning course. In spring 2024, we chartered the Lake Park Audubon FFA chapter. The MAELC Strategic Initiative grant provided funding so we could implement hands-on activities within classes such as Agricultural Technology and Introduction to Agriculture, as well as support our new FFA chapter. With these activities in place, we had a solid foundation to build a high quality advisory board.



Providing students with hands-on practice of industry relevant skills is a key component within agriculture classes. This grant enabled us to purchase equipment like a hydroponic tower, swine simulators, and plant models, which have empowered students in their learning.

We have also leveraged community resources and industry partnerships. Local businesses, such as Alsager Meats, have been key partners in expanding Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAEs) for with students in the Introduction to Agriculture class, with four being placed at the business last spring. TEAM Industries, MNDOT, and NDSU also contributed to our Agricultural Technology class by advising on classroom technology implementation, speaking at our school, and offering student tours.



Finally, the FFA officer team worked hard this past year to familiarize themselves with FFA operations and promote our chapter in the school and community utilizing items such as banners, scrapbook materials, a cash box, and a prize wheel. Our increased visibility has opened new opportunities for growth in FFA.



This grant truly made it possible to get our program off the ground. It has allowed me to engage students and build connections in the community, which will help our program to continually grow.

MAELC Common Fund Projects

In its seventeenth year, MAELC again provided agricultural education grants for statewide projects in Minnesota through the Common Fund grant program.

Mini Sota Agricultural Children's Museum - \$22,200

Agriculture Exhibits for the Mini Sota Museum

The Mini Sota Agricultural Children's Museum is currently being developed and will be located in Benson, Minnesota. This grant supports the creation of agriculturally-themed, interactive exhibits for visitors, including child-led exploration, STEM concepts, agricultural literacy, and career exploration.

Minnesota Agriculture in the Classroom - \$23,660

Strengthening the Food for Thought Geography Resource

Grant funds support an update to the "Food for Thought" curriculum, including teacher and student-friendly maps for K-12 grade levels, utilizing GIS/GPS experts for map updates and new educational features. This will be the sixth edition of the "Food for Thought" geography resource, and is based on statistics from the most recent Census of Agriculture (2022).



Supporting Agricultural Educators at All Levels

Recognizing how important professional development and mentoring are in retaining agricultural educators and helping them excel in the classroom, MAELC invests annually in several programs to support instructors at the secondary, post-secondary and Farm Business Management levels.

Professional Development

School-Based Agricultural Education - \$32,500



The Minnesota Association of Agricultural Educators (MAAE) organizes professional development workshops over the summer for agriculture teachers, helping them

increase their knowledge and confidence in the classroom, lab and shop. This helps retain them in the profession and positively impacts the students in their classrooms. Topics are determined through an annual survey, assessing the priority needs of the teachers. The most recent set of workshops included Meat Processing, Landscape Management, Women in the Shop, Wildlife Management, Welding, and more! In 2024, nearly 70 current and future educators participated in workshops.

Post-Secondary Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources (AFNR) Professional Development Conference - \$5,000

The Post-Secondary Summit brings together AFNR post-secondary instructors from Minnesota State and the University of Minnesota to share best practices, determine common needs, and leverage resources between faculty. In 2024, over 40 faculty participated, representing 11 Minnesota post-secondary institutions. Attendees heard a presentation about using artificial intelligence in the classroom, and Minnesota Commissioner of Agriculture, Thom Petersen, moderated an agricultural industry panel.

Farm Business Management (FBM) Professional Development - \$7,500

The purpose of the FBM Fall Conference is to provide professional development for FBM faculty and administration, with FBM partners also attending. This annual event covers topics related to farmer-students, including mental health resources, state and federal programs, curriculum updates, and policy initiatives that impact FBM programs. It also provides networking opportunities and peer mentorship to foster statewide program improvement.



Mentor Programs

AFNR Teacher Induction Program (TIP) - \$70,000

The Minnesota Teacher Induction Program (TIP) serves as a professional learning community for new school-based agricultural education teachers. Each participant is provided an instructional coach, regional mentor, and monthly professional development. At the end of the 2023-2024 school year, TIP participants indicated they were satisfied being an agriculture teacher, with 84% planning to return for their second year of teaching.



TIP started in 1999 and has supported nearly 500 new agriculture teachers. TIP is facilitated by University of Minnesota Agricultural Education with Dr. Amy Smith serving as

Director and Dr. Laura Rice serving as the Mentorship Coordinator. Dr. Lavyne Rada is the contracted Career & Technical Education (CTE) Teacher Support Specialist.

Post-Secondary Instructor Mentoring (PIM) - \$10,000

The Post-Secondary Instructor Mentoring (PIM) program supports new AFNR college faculty by providing professional development, which improves the retention and effectiveness of these faculty. Participants meet every other month and share challenges and opportunities, technology resources, classroom management strategies, and hands-on activity ideas, while networking with their peers across both the Minnesota State system and University of Minnesota.

The PIM program started in 2016, and had 35 educators participate during the 2023-2024 school year. Dr. T.J. Brown, South Central College, and Kari Slinden, Ridgewater College, provide leadership for PIM.

Professional Excellence Program (PEP) - \$45,000

The Professional Excellence Program (PEP) provides professional development for early-career Farm Business Management (FBM) instructors. PEP meets four times per year with participants developing technical knowledge and skills pertaining to FBM, including curricula design, instructional best-practices, and program management.

The first PEP cohort started in 2000. Betsy Jensen, Northland Community and Technical College, is the Project Leader for PEP and Denise Reeser, South Central College, serves as the Assistant Project Leader.

New Leaders in Minnesota Agricultural Education



While these individuals are not new to Agricultural Education, they are new to their positions. Let's get to know more about them and their role in supporting Minnesota Agricultural Education.



Lindsey Brockberg is the new Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources (AFNR) Education Specialist at the Minnesota Department of Education. Brockberg spent 13 years in Minnesota classrooms, most of which

was at Mountain Lake High School, where she taught a wide range of AFNR education classes across multiple career pathways. She holds an M.A. in Agricultural Education from South Dakota State University and a B.S. in Agricultural Education through what was formerly known as the 2+2 program between Ridgewater College (Willmar) and the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.

Outside of work, Lindsey and her husband, Ryan, raise cattle and operate a small engine repair and sales business alongside their four children – Cora, Camille, Briggs, and Claire.



SARAH LEE has been named the Director of Recruitment and Outreach for Agriculture and Business programs at Southwest Minnesota State University (SMSU). In this role, she represents the School of Agriculture, Culinology® and Hospitality Management, and the NorthStar Mutual School of Business.

As a high school agriculture teacher for the past nine years, Lee is passionate about helping students find a path that is the best fit for them. At SMSU she is able to do that in a different capacity by sharing programs or opportunities with perspective students and working with the SMSU Ag Club members as they navigate career connections moving forward.

Lee is excited to support Agricultural Education in Minnesota while helping to grow programs at SMSU.



Dr. T.J. Brown recently joined the Minnesota FFA Association as Executive Director, bringing nearly 20 years experience in agricultural education. His academic background includes a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership from Minnesota State University-

Moorhead, an MBA from Bemidji State University, and an M.S. in Agricultural Education from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Dr. Brown previously worked as a high school instructor in Springfield, Minnesota and an Agribusiness Instructor and Department Chair at South Central College in North Mankato, Minnesota.

As the new Executive Director, Dr. Brown is eager to guide and grow Minnesota FFA. His vision and passion for agricultural education will be invaluable as Minnesota FFA continues to empower the next generation of leaders in agriculture.



Dr. Michael Martin is an Assistant Professor of Agricultural Education at the University of Minnesota, Crookston. Martin previously taught high school agriculture in Illinois before attending the University of Missouri for his Ph.D. in Agricultural Education. He spent eight years at Colorado State University and three

years at Iowa State University, working in Agricultural Education at both institutions.

Martin has been active in professional development and research related to diversity, equity, and inclusion topics in agricultural education, as well as teaching critical agricultural issues in high school classrooms.

Martin lives on a small hobby farm with his wife, and is looking forward to meeting and serving Minnesota's agriculture teachers and students.

Sawatzke Joins MAELC Board



Eric Sawatzke is an agriculture teacher at West Central Area High School and currently serves as President-Elect for the Minnesota Association of Agricultural Educators. He joined the MAELC board in July, serving a two-year term. Sawatzke earned both a B.S. and M.S. in Agricultural Education from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. He began his teaching career at Marshall High School, then moved to Dassel-Cokato before his current position. Sawatzke and his wife, Erica, along with their daughters, Emma and Charlotte, raise turkeys for Ferndale Market and grow corn and soybeans north of Kensington, MN.

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2030 Blueprint for AFNR Education

For the past several months, MAELC has been working to create the 2030 Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources (AFNR) Education Blueprint. Every five years, leaders who are engaged in education, government, non-profits, community groups, and business and industry come together to determine the future of Minnesota AFNR Education.

In June, six listening sessions were held across Minnesota with over 140 individuals attending who shared their input and helped brainstorm strategies to improve AFNR education.

Their discussions focused on three overarching goals, including:

1. Increasing student access, awareness and participation in the AFNR educational sectors
2. Ensuring that content, facilities/equipment and methods of instruction meet the needs of the AFNR industry
3. Recruiting, retaining and supporting highly qualified instructors

Additional input was gathered through surveys and an abbreviated session with high school educators during the Minnesota Association of Agricultural Educators' summer conference. Then, in mid-August, individuals came together to form committees based on their subject-matter expertise. They spent time reviewing future trends and strategies suggested during the listening sessions, along with survey feedback, and began to develop the highest priority strategies for the 2030 AFNR Education Blueprint.

Committee members finished their work, and MAELC staff are currently writing the final document. The 2030 AFNR Education Blueprint will be available on the MAELC website in early 2025!

