

Job Satisfaction of Agriculture Teachers in Georgia and Selected Variables Indicating Their Risk of Leaving the Teaching Profession

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Abstract

Retention of Agricultural Education teachers is a problem in Georgia, and throughout the nation. Previous studies have concluded that job satisfaction is related to retention. This study was designed to determine to what extent Agricultural Education teachers in Georgia were satisfied with their current teaching position. Findings indicated that teachers were generally satisfied; however, several items indicated less satisfaction, including burnout, feeling that inappropriate students were placed in classes, inadequate opportunities for promotion, and inappropriate student-teacher ratios. Results from this study provide an understanding of factors causing teacher dissatisfaction that can be addressed through teacher preparation programs, inservice education, and informed administrators.

Introduction and Conceptual Framework

Retention of teachers is a problem throughout the nation (Southern Regional Education Board, 2001); this is also the case for teachers of agriculture. Camp (1998), in a study of the national supply and demand of Agricultural Education teachers for 1995, stated that the number of newly qualified, potential teachers of agriculture was below the number of replacements needed. He also noted that, of the number of potential teachers completing a teacher preparation program, nearly 25% were not actively seeking teaching positions, according to the teacher education faculty reporting the data. With a replacement rate for teachers of agriculture in 1995 of 60.2%, the profession could not meet the nationwide need for newly qualified teachers of Agricultural Education (Camp, 1998).

For example, in 1995, a total of 977 new teachers of agriculture were hired in the United States. This total represented 9.6% of the teaching corps nationally. However, these “new” teachers included 63 graduates of Agricultural Education teacher preparation programs who had graduated one or more years previously but who had not entered teaching at that time, and 115 former Agricultural Education teachers who were returning to teaching (Camp, 1998). One must also consider that each year a number of teachers move from one position to another within the profession. Accordingly, the “net loss” of Agricultural Education teachers for 1995 was 697 out of a total of 10,164 positions nationwide or 6.9% of that year’s agriculture teaching corps (Camp, 1998). Of the twelve teachers of agriculture hired in Georgia for 1995, five had moved from other schools (Camp, 1998), and seven were new to the agriculture teaching profession.

Retention of Agricultural Education teachers continues to be a problem in the state of Georgia. This study points to a need for determining causes of teacher loss and retention. According to records kept by the Agricultural Education program at the University of Georgia, for the 1999-2000 school year, there were 41 vacant position announcements statewide; for 1998-1999, 55 total openings, with 22 teachers moving to other schools and seven leaving the profession, while 1997-1998 saw 34 openings (M.J. Iverson, personal communication, June 22, 1999).

Job Satisfaction

Numerous researchers in various states have addressed the retention problem in Agricultural Education (Bryant, 1980; Cole, 1983; Dillon, 1978; Edwards & Briers, 2001; Flowers & Pepple, 1988; Froehlich, 1966; Grady, 1989; Hoerner, 1965; Howell & Martin, 1983; Knight & Bender, 1978; Moore & Camp, 1979; Reilly & Welton, 1980). A national study by Camp (1987) examined the relationship between job satisfaction of agriculture teachers and student behavior problems. He surveyed 605 teachers of agriculture who were teaching in the United States during the 1981-1982 school year. Camp noted that student behavior had a direct effect on the job satisfaction of Agricultural Education teachers, and that as teachers' perceived level of student misbehavior increased, teachers' job satisfaction decreased. He also noted that this decrease in job satisfaction occurred at a decreasing rate and that although student misbehavior contributed to lower job satisfaction, the effect became less pronounced as behavior problems increased. In addition, Camp found a significant relationship between job satisfaction and years of teaching experience. As years of teaching experience increased, so did one's level of job satisfaction (Camp, 1987).

Berns (1990) noted that the 745 current and former teachers of agriculture who participated in his research on the relationship between job satisfaction and retention agreed most with statements describing their enjoyment of teaching and their feelings of professional competency. However, these same teachers disagreed most with the following statements: appropriate students were placed in their classes, their salary was adequate, promotional opportunities existing in education were adequate, society had realistic expectations of them, they had appropriate professional status within society, and that they would remain in the profession even if they could live comfortably without teaching (Berns, 1990).

Bruening and Hoover (1991) studied 363 teachers of agriculture to discover possible relationships between agriculture teachers' personal lives and their effectiveness and satisfaction. Their research resulted in four conclusions. First, the subject group perceived the lack of sufficient financial rewards as a negative aspect of the teaching profession. Second, the subjects' sense of fulfillment in teaching was found to be the highest factor of job satisfaction. Third, the researchers noted that being a parent while teaching was the highest negative factor related to the subjects' personal lives and satisfaction. Fourth, they found that those subjects participating in the study who were satisfied with their teaching positions perceived themselves to be effective teachers.

Cano and Miller (1992) studied the relationship between gender and job satisfaction, as well as dissatisfaction. They found that the 37 females and 299 males participating in their study were similarly satisfied with their positions as teachers of agriculture. Further, they noted that the male subjects were, in general, older and had more experience than their female counterparts. Among the females studied, it was noted that those with tenure were more satisfied with their position than those without. The highest factor in job satisfaction for the subject group was found to be interpersonal relationships with others. However, male and female subjects were not in agreement as to the highest factor of job dissatisfaction. Females in this study were most dissatisfied with the supervision they received, while males were most dissatisfied with their working conditions (Cano & Miller, 1992).

Berns (1990) conducted research in Ohio to determine the relationship between job satisfaction and teacher turnover of agriculture teachers who were then in the profession, teachers who had left the profession, and teachers who had retired from the profession. He found that the agriculture teachers participating in his study were generally satisfied with their profession, but that each of the three groups studied showed some disagreement with certain job satisfaction statements. Those Agricultural Education teachers who had remained in the teaching profession until retirement were significantly more satisfied with the support they had received from school personnel, with their (then) current teaching position, and with the challenge of their (then) current teaching position, than those teachers who left the profession prior to retirement. Additionally, Berns suggested that the instrument he developed could be used to determine the possibility of a teacher of Agricultural Education leaving the profession or remaining in it until retirement.

As replacement rates for teachers of agriculture hover around 60% and with a significant number of teaching positions being filled by instructors who are returning to the profession (e.g., 12% in 1995), it is important for the Agricultural Education community in the state of Georgia

and nationally to understand better the reasons for which teachers of agriculture leave the profession prior to retirement.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to describe the job satisfaction levels of teachers of agriculture in Georgia, and to determine what percentage of surveyed Agricultural Education teachers were likely to exit the agriculture teaching profession prior to retirement. Specific objectives of the study were as follows.

1. Describe selected personal and school setting characteristics of Agricultural Education teachers in Georgia.
2. Determine the extent to which Agricultural Education teachers in Georgia were satisfied with their current teaching position.
3. Determine if selected personal and school setting characteristics of Georgia Agriculture Education teachers were associated with the 44 job satisfaction indicators developed by Berns.
4. Determine the percentage of Agricultural Education teachers in Georgia who were “at risk” of leaving the profession prior to retirement.

Methods and Procedures

This was a descriptive study of the job-related attitudes of Georgia teachers of agriculture—attitudes thought to be related to job satisfaction and teacher retention. The random sample for this study was derived from the Georgia Department of Education Agricultural Education Teachers’ Directory for the 1998-99 school year (Georgia Agricultural Education, 1998). In the directory, all teachers of Agricultural Education in Georgia were listed by area of the state and in alphabetical order. To ensure that the sample was large enough to be representative of Georgia’s Agricultural Education teachers, one-half of the state’s Agricultural Education teachers (144) were sent a questionnaire and asked to complete and return it using the return-addressed, stamped envelope provided (Dillman, 1978). A coin flip was used to determine whether even or odd numbered teachers were selected. Participants were given three weeks to respond before a second instrument was mailed to the non-respondents. The instruments were coded to respondents’ identities, with the master list of respondents kept under lock and key. Once data collection was completed, the master list was destroyed to ensure confidentiality. The master list was used only to secure a high rate of response from the participants and to follow-up non-respondents. Eighty-three teachers responded to the survey instrument, yielding a response rate of 57.6%.

The instrument was adapted from one developed by Robert G. Berns (1990) for use in his study of job satisfaction and teacher retention of agriculture teachers in Ohio. Certain statements (indicators) were modified so that all items were stated positively. Two items were further clarified to improve their readability, and two items were combined due to their similarity and restated as one item (Bennett, 2001). The modified instrument was given to the faculty of the

Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communications, University of Georgia to test for content validity as well as clarity. The modified instrument included 44 job satisfaction indicators. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the 44 items using a 5-point Likert-type rating scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Undecided or No Opinion, 4 = Agree, or 5 = Strongly Agree. In addition, teachers were asked to respond to 15 items describing selected personal and school setting characteristics. Where no response was given, or the response was unclear to the researcher due to multiple responses being circled, the item for that individual was not included in the statistical analysis of the data.

Data received from the subjects were analyzed using the *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences*, v. 8.0. Research objective one was analyzed descriptively with frequencies and percentages, and objectives two, three, and four were analyzed with means and standard deviations. A cross tabulation procedure was used to explore relationships between variables. Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha reliability estimate for the 44 job satisfaction items was .95. A follow-up mailing of the instrument was made to non-respondents to increase generalizability of the findings. Early versus late respondents were tested for similarity on dependent variables using *t*-tests (Miller & Smith, 1983); no significant differences were detected.

Findings

Selected Personal and School Setting Characteristics

Table 1 reports selected personal and school setting characteristics of the respondents. Eighty-five percent of the teachers were male. Nearly two-thirds of the instructors (66%) were between the ages of 31 and 50. Most respondents were Caucasian (87%). All three major administrative regions of the State of Georgia were well represented in the study. Regular certification was held by more than 93% of the teachers. Seven-in-ten of the participants were high school teachers and about one-half were employed on twelve-month contracts. Approximately two-thirds of the respondents had taught 20 years or less and a similar number had earned advanced degrees: Masters, Education Specialist or Doctorate. About six-in-ten of the teachers had class loads of four or more classes per day, three-fourths reported student enrollments between 29 and 140, and more than half had been at their current school nine years or less. A majority (52.4%) of the teachers were the only instructor of agriculture at their school and less than half (45.8%) had been employed in an agricultural occupation prior to teaching.

Level of Job Satisfaction

A primary objective of this study was to determine to what extent agriculture teachers in Georgia were satisfied with their current teaching position. This objective was achieved by examining responses for 44 job satisfaction indicators (items) (Berns, 1990). Table 2 reports the mean for each of the 44 job satisfaction items. Of the 44 items, none had a grand mean of less than 2.60, indicating that as a group, Agricultural Education teachers in Georgia were not dissatisfied with their current teaching position. However, while nineteen of the job satisfaction indicators had a mean response of 3.5 or greater, indicating overall satisfaction with selected aspects of the teaching profession, twenty-four of the indicators (54.5%) had a mean response

between 2.6 and 3.5, indicating that agriculture teachers were undecided about their level of satisfaction with those aspects of their profession.

Table 1

*Selected Personal and School Setting Characteristics of Agriculture Teachers in Georgia
(N = 83)*

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Gender		
Male	69	85.2
Female	12	14.8
Age in Years		
Less than 26 years of age	7	8.9
26 – 30 years of age	8	10.1
31 – 40 years of age	19	24.0
41 – 50 years of age	33	41.8
51 years of age or older	12	15.2
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	69	87.3
African American	8	10.1
Other	2	2.6
Location of School by Region		
North	26	31.3
Central	24	28.9
South	33	39.8
Certification		
Regular	76	93.8
Provisional	5	6.2
Teaching Position		
High School	57	70.4
Young Farmer	12	14.5
Middle School	11	13.6
Other	1	1.2
Length of Contract		
12 month	42	51.9
11 month	20	24.7
10 month	19	23.4

(table continues)

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Years Taught Agriculture		
1 – 3 years	15	18.1
4 – 9 years	15	18.1
10 – 20 years	25	30.1
21 – 30 years	23	27.7
31 or more years	5	6.0
Level of Education		
Bachelors Degree	18	23.1
Masters Degree	34	43.6
Education Specialist	19	24.4
Doctorate	7	8.9
Extended-Day Status^a		
More than one hour per day	1	1.7
One hour per day	68	84.0
Less than one hour per day	3	3.7
No extended day	9	11.1
Class Load (per day)^b		
One class	10	18.2
Two classes	2	3.6
Three classes	15	27.3
Four classes	5	9.1
Five classes	8	14.5
Six or more classes	15	27.3
Number of Students Taught each Year		
More than 196	3	3.7
141 – 196	5	6.1
85 – 140	34	42.1
29 – 84	28	34.6
Fewer than 29	11	13.6
Years at Current School		
1 – 3 years	20	24.7
4 – 9 years	26	32.1
10 – 12 years	22	27.2
21 – 30 years	9	11.1
More than 30 years	4	4.9
Number of Teachers in Department		
One teacher	43	52.4
Two teachers	28	34.1
Three teachers	5	5.7
Four teachers	3	3.7

(table continues)

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Five or more teachers	3	3.7
Years Employed in an Agricultural Occupation Prior to Teaching		
None	45	54.2
1 – 5 years	18	21.7
6 – 10 years	13	15.7
10 – 15 years	2	2.4
More than 15 years	5	6.0

Note: ^aMany employment contracts for Georgia agriculture teachers include supplemental pay to support after-school supervision of students' supervised agricultural experiences (SAEs) as well as related FFA activities. ^bOnly 55 respondents answered this question.

Table 2 also reports the five items teachers of agriculture agreed with *most*: “I like teaching” ($M = 4.28$; $SD = 0.83$), “This job offers adequate challenges” ($M = 4.24$; $SD = 0.98$), “I feel competent in my teaching position” ($M = 4.17$; $SD = 0.87$), “My job as an educator gives me a great deal of personal satisfaction” ($M = 4.11$; $SD = 0.90$), and “I am rarely bored in this teaching position” ($M = 4.11$; $SD = 1.07$).

The five items teachers of agriculture were in *least* agreement with (Table 2) were “Appropriate students are placed in my classes” ($M = 2.60$; $SD = 1.24$), “I seldom feel a sense of burnout” ($M = 2.60$; $SD = 1.17$), “Adequate promotional opportunities in education exist” ($M = 2.82$; $SD = 1.28$), “Even if I were to come into enough money so that I can live comfortably without working, I will remain in this position” ($M = 2.82$; $SD = 1.28$), and “Teachers have appropriate professional status within society” ($M = 3.06$; $SD = 1.15$).

Table 2

Indicators of Agriculture Teachers' Level of Job Satisfaction (N=83)

<i>Indicators</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I like teaching.	4.28	0.83
This job offers adequate challenges.	4.24	0.98
I feel competent in my teaching position.	4.17	0.87
My job as an educator gives me a great deal of personal satisfaction.	4.11	0.90
I am rarely bored in this teaching position.	4.11	1.07
I feel adequately prepared to teach this program.	4.02	0.91
My state staff provides strong educational leadership.	3.92	1.01
I feel encouragement from my state staff for my initiatives.	3.87	0.78
I am satisfied with the location of the school.	3.86	1.09

(table continues)

<i>Indicators</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I am provided adequate administrative support and backing by my state staff.	3.83	1.02
I feel appreciated by my state staff (Region Coordinator and Area Teachers) for my work.	3.80	1.07
I am assigned an appropriate amount of school activities (e.g., bus duty and/or lunchroom duty).	3.80	1.25
I am assigned appropriate extracurricular activities (i.e., those which pertain to my program).	3.78	1.09
I am satisfied with this job.	3.75	1.23
I am an effective teacher (able to get students to learn as desired).	3.73	0.99
My long-range goal is to continue teaching this program.	3.70	1.24
I rarely feel that most other educators are more satisfied with their jobs than I am.	3.66	1.10
I rarely feel vulnerable to criticism in my teaching.	3.59	1.25
I seldom feel isolated.	3.58	1.19
I feel appreciated by parents for my work with students.	3.48	1.19
Students are interested in what I teach.	3.46	0.98
I feel appreciated by my colleagues for my work.	3.40	1.17
*I am provided adequate administrative support and backing.	3.40	1.41
I feel appreciated by students for my work.	3.37	1.12
The school's facilities are adequate.	3.35	1.25
My school has adequate supplies for my program.	3.35	1.27
*The administrators in my school are strong educational leaders.	3.34	1.24
*I feel encouragement from my administrators for my initiatives.	3.34	1.36
The salary of this job is adequate.	3.29	1.24
Society has realistic expectations of me.	3.27	1.11
The amount of preparation time required for this program is adequate.	3.22	1.25
What is expected of me is realistic.	3.21	1.24
*I feel appreciated by my administrators for my work.	3.20	1.41
The hours of this job are satisfactory.	3.17	1.20
The materials at my disposal are adequate for the needs of my program.	3.14	1.28
The equipment at my school is adequate.	3.13	1.36
I seldom think of changing jobs.	3.12	1.32
The student to teacher ratio in my classes is appropriate.	3.11	1.31
*The students in my program are well behaved.	3.08	1.12
*Teachers have appropriate professional status within society.	3.06	1.15
Even if I come into enough money so that I can live comfortably without working, I will remain in this position.	2.82	1.28
Adequate promotional opportunities in education exist.	2.82	1.28
I seldom feel a sense of burnout.	2.60	1.17
Appropriate students are placed in my classes.	2.60	1.24

Note: Scale used was 1 = Strongly Disagree . . . 5 = Strongly Agree. *Items used to identify teachers who were considered "at risk" for leaving the teaching profession.

Relationships Between Selected Teacher Characteristics and Indicators of Job Satisfaction

Relationships between selected teacher characteristics and job satisfaction were examined using cross tabulation. Two characteristics were found to be significantly related ($p \leq .05$) to a teacher's level of job satisfaction: (1) the agriculture teachers' extended-day status and (2) the number of years the teacher had spent in an agricultural occupation prior to teaching. That is, agriculture teachers with extended-day status reported that they were more satisfied with their jobs. Also, the longer teachers had worked in agricultural occupations prior to teaching, the higher their level of job satisfaction.

Teachers Considered to be "At Risk" of Leaving the Profession

Berns' (1990) study was designed to determine the "at risk" group of teachers; his research revealed that teachers who had left the teaching profession disagreed most with the following job satisfaction indicators (Scale: "1" = "Strongly Disagree" . . . "4" = "Strongly Agree"): "Teachers have appropriate professional status within society" ($M = 2.36$), "The administrators in my school were strong" ($M = 2.42$), "I felt appreciated by administrators for my work" ($M = 2.43$), "I felt encouragement for my initiatives" ($M = 2.43$), "Student discipline was fine" ($M = 2.43$), and "I was provided adequate administrative support and backing" ($M = 2.51$).

In an attempt to err on the side of caution in this study, a composite mean of less than 2.5 for six "corresponding" job satisfaction indicators (see asterisked items in Table 2) was chosen to determine if an Agricultural Education teacher in Georgia was "at risk" of leaving the teaching profession. Accordingly, 12 teachers of agriculture were found to have a composite mean score of less than 2.5 for these items. It was determined that these teachers were "at risk" of leaving the teaching profession; they represented 14.5% of the teachers responding to the questionnaire.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were reached.

1. Agricultural Education teachers in Georgia, as a group, were generally satisfied with their current teaching position. Cano and Miller (1992) reached a similar conclusion for agriculture teachers in Ohio.
2. A teacher's extended-day status and the number of years the agriculture teacher had spent in an agricultural occupation prior to teaching were significantly related to a teacher's level of job satisfaction ($p \leq .05$). Similarly, other researchers (Edwards & Briers, 2001) have found that entry-phase agriculture teachers in Texas who reported higher levels of agricultural work experience also indicated a greater expectation for teaching longevity. Cole (1984) reported comparable findings for agriculture teachers in Oregon.
3. Using the conclusions from Berns' (1990) study as a "basis," it was determined that 14.5% of the teachers participating in this study were "at risk" of leaving the teaching profession at the end of the 1998-1999 school.
4. The percentage of teachers participating in this research determined to be "at risk" of leaving the teaching profession (14.5%) was slightly higher than the percentage of Agricultural

Education teaching position announcements in Georgia prior to the 1999-2000 school year (14.2%).

Recommendations for Practice

1. The results of this study should be disseminated at the Summer and the Mid-Winter Georgia Agricultural Education Teachers' Conferences.
2. Results of this research should be disseminated at Regional and National Agricultural Education teachers' meetings and through professional publications directed at teachers of agriculture and teacher educators.
3. Inservice education programs, addressing the issues of job satisfaction and other factors affecting "at risk" teachers, should be offered at the Summer and Mid-Winter Georgia Agricultural Education Teachers' Conferences.
4. The job satisfaction indicators used in this study should be incorporated into the *Georgia Standards Manual for Agricultural Education*.

Recommendations for Further Research

A longitudinal study, using a similar instrument, should be conducted in the state of Georgia to determine if a conclusive relationship between the job satisfaction and "at risk" status of teachers of agriculture exists, and to determine the effects of time on a teacher's job satisfaction and one's choice to stay in or leave the teaching profession prior to retirement. In addition, further research should be conducted to examine the relationship between an agriculture teacher's current extended-day status and one's level of job satisfaction. It is also recommended that studies be conducted to explore the relationship between agriculture teachers' prior agricultural work experience and their level of job satisfaction (Cole, 1984; Edwards & Briers, 2001).

In addition, greater insight should be sought about the effects of (perceived) professional status of agriculture teachers in society, the strength of administrators in schools with agriculture programs, the amount of appreciation teachers of agriculture receive from their administrators, the amount of encouragement agriculture teachers receive for their initiatives, the perceptions of agriculture teachers regarding student discipline, and the amount of administrative support and backing that agriculture teachers receive (Southern Regional Education Board, 2001).

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In this time of continuing urgency within agricultural education to recruit and retain effective teachers—across the country—the authors have developed a set of baseline data related to Georgia teachers in order to further examine the problem in that state and to identify possible solutions. There is sufficient information provided in the literature review to document the relevance of the study as well as the selection of a variety of variables for study. Several key areas of the literature, however, could be added to enhance the conceptual framework. First of all, the problem of teacher recruitment and retention to agricultural education is an issue across the disciplines. What factors have been cited as related to the nationwide teacher shortage, in general? What are the more cognitive, societal, and historical influences on job satisfaction across the board? Do these relate to items identified in the previous research on job satisfaction within agricultural education? Given the fact that workers are more mobile today than ever, can we expect teachers/agriculture teachers to behave differently than the general population? I think including some of these areas of discussion in the literature review would have helped clarify the importance of the study beyond just the classroom of the agricultural educator.

The Methods section was fairly well-written, but could have included less information about specifics (e.g., use of SPSS) so that more space would be available for discussion of the findings. Also, some indication of why the particular instrumentation was chosen would be helpful as well as reliability information from the previous studies in which the instrument was used. The Findings section was also fairly well-written. I would, however, ask whether the amount of space used for Table 1 is warranted for this manuscript and whether the information could be better presented in a summary to more space is available for a more in-depth discussion of the job satisfaction issues, especially as they relate to the literature. Of importance is an in-depth discussion of some teacher characteristics as related to the various indicators of satisfaction. Again, I would encourage the authors to consider why these factors are important, whether they are similar to factors identified for the general population (teaching or otherwise) and how they impact teacher education in agriculture.

Building on comments from the previous paragraph, providing a carefully crafted summary of the raw data would permit the authors to add in-depth discussion, conclusions, etc. to this paper. The raw materials are certainly there to do so and being able to relate the findings to the literature on overall job satisfaction, problems in the teaching profession as a whole, and overall changes in the labor market would provide us with some detailed information to tackle the problems with recruitment and retention of agriculture teachers.

The authors are to be commended for conducting a timely and informative study.