

Teach Ag - Will Travel?

*Steven J. Rocca
California State University, Fresno*

Agricultural Education has suffered from an ongoing shortage of qualified candidates to accept teaching positions for at least the last 37 years (Camp, Broyles, & Skelton, 2002). Camp et al. (2002) found that of those qualified candidates that “probably wanted to teach”, 72.5 to 77.9% were placed in teaching positions between 1994 and 2001. However, during the same period, the number of qualified teacher candidates finding placement ranged from 48.4 to 63.8%. This raised the question of why there is such a disparity between those who wanted to teach and those who actually found a teaching position. One possible explanation was proposed by Rocca and Washburn (2006), who found that preservice agriculture teachers indicated the most likely barriers to preservice teachers taking a teaching position were responsibilities for family and relationships, desire to live in a certain area, and unwillingness to relocate. They concluded that if a substantial number of preservice teachers’ job opportunities are limited to a given area within a state, the question arises of whether teacher supply and demand is a national, state, or regional concern. Even with multiple openings left unfilled in other regions of the state, a newly qualified teacher may decide to pursue other occupations rather than having to relocate. This phenomenon provided the impetus for this study.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the mobility of newly qualified agriculture teachers. The following objectives guided this study: 1) describe the relationship between the geographic region where a student teacher wanted to teach and the region where they attended high school and student taught, and 2) describe the relationship between the geographic region where a student teacher took a job and the region where they attended high school, student taught, and wanted to teach.

Methodology

The population for this descriptive census study consisted of all preservice agriculture teachers completing their final student teaching experience during the fall of 2006 at California State Universities (Chico, Fresno, Pomona, and San Luis Obispo). Twenty-eight student teachers were identified by contacting teacher educators at each institution. Participants were contacted via three emails sent over a five week period. An online questionnaire consisting of 9-items was used to collect data. Respondents were asked to indicate in which of the six geographic regions they attended high school, student taught, and where they would like to teach. The California Agriculture Teachers Directory was used to determine which participants took teaching jobs in California and the geographic region of their job.

Results

Completed questionnaires were received from 24 of the 28 student teachers for a response rate of 86%. Of the respondents, 75% ($n = 18$) were female. Approximately one-third of the respondents were Caucasian ($n = 15$), 21% Hispanic ($n = 5$), 25% other ($n = 3$), and 4% Native American ($n = 1$). The average age of the respondents was 24.87 years ($SD = 4.64$).

Objective one sought to describe the relationship between the geographic region where the respondents wanted to teach and the region in which they attended high school and student taught. Findings showed that 79% of respondents ($n = 19$) attended high school in the same region where they wanted to teach. Only 42% ($n = 10$) of the respondents wanted to teach in the region in which they completed their student teaching.

In objective two, the researcher examined the relationship between the geographic region where the respondents took a position teaching agriculture and the region in which they attended high school, student taught, and where they wanted to teach. The researcher found that 8 of the respondents were not listed in the California Agriculture Teachers Directory, which meant these respondents did not take a teaching position or they took a position in another state. Of the 16 respondents who were teaching in California, 44% ($n = 7$) were teaching in the region in which they attended high school, 63% ($n = 10$) were teaching in the same region where they student taught, and 38% ($n = 6$) were teaching in the region in which they wanted to teach. When respondents indicated their first through third choices of geographic regions where they wished to work, the researcher found that 38% ($n = 6$) were teaching in the region that was their first choice, while 25% ($n = 4$) of the respondents were teaching in their second choice, and 19% ($n = 3$) were teaching in their third choice. Only three respondents (19%) were teaching in a geographic region that was not one of their top three choices.

Conclusions

Prior to taking a teaching position most of the preservice teachers in this study wanted to teach in the region where they attended high school. However, this doesn't appear to hold true when examining the actual region in which respondents decided to take a teaching position. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents were working in the region where they had completed their student teaching, while less than half of respondents were working in the region where they had attended high school. This would lead the researcher to conclude that the location of their student teaching experience may have a greater impact on where the respondents decided to teach rather than where they attended high school.

Given the small size of the study population, a replication is warranted to investigate if similar results are found with other preservice agriculture teachers. With additional evidence, the conclusions of this study may have important implications for researchers and practitioners. Further research needs to be conducted to see if a relationship exists between the location of student teaching and the region in which a teacher accepts a position. Such research could help in solving some of the regional teacher shortages that exist in states such as California. It may be possible to place more student teachers in regions that continually struggle to fill positions in hopes of increasing the number of newly qualified teachers seeking teaching positions in those regions.

References

- Camp, W. G., Broyles, T., & Skelton, N. S. (2002). *A national study of the supply and demand of teachers of agricultural education in 1999-2001*. Retrieved June 10, 2004, from <http://www.aged.vt.edu/Report01.doc>

Rocca, S. J. & Washburn, S. G. (May 2006). *Preservice agriculture teachers' perceptions of career barriers and support*. Proceedings of the 33rd annual National Agricultural Education Research Conference, Charlotte, NC.