

Ag Educators: Strengthening Agriculture

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The dictionary defines the word strong as “able to withstand great force or pressure; well-built, indestructible, and solid.” (Strong) What is the strongest material on Earth? It is a manmade material that was discovered in 2004 during a lab explosion. This material is microscopic, but extremely durable. The strongest material on Earth is graphene. Graphene is a monolayer of carbon atoms, tightly bound in a hexagonal pattern. It’s the thinnest, lightest, most durable material on Earth. What makes graphene so strong? Graphene is full of covalent bonds. These bonds share their electrons in order to strengthen the atom as a whole. The uses for graphene are expanding everyday. From graphene water filters to super strong phone screens, the possibilities are limitless. (Graphenea)

What is the strongest industry in the world? It feeds over 300 million people in the United States. (Population) It has withstood hardships and attacks, yet has persevered. Based upon the dictionary definition of “strong”, the strongest industry in the world is agriculture.

What makes agriculture so strong? Individuals, such as ag teachers, who share their passion and build tight bonds in every facet of their lives. Just like graphene, these teachers are tightly bound and promote the limitless need for agriculture. Agriculture teachers create covalent bonds in the classroom, in the community, and in FFA. These bonds make agriculture stronger.

In the classroom, ag teachers are the frontline of defense, planting seeds of knowledge and weeding out misconceptions. This year, there are nearly 30,000 students enrolled in ag classes in Missouri. (Missouri) That’s almost twice as many students as the entire population of my home county. (Census) Imagine the impact if all of those students grew up to be advocates. Agriculture curriculum isn’t just “cows and plows.” Students learn real life skills that they will take with them into the future. From floriculture to forestry and economics to entomology, students and teachers alike can find something to interest them. Even teachers find favorite and

least favorite subjects. A former teacher told me he loved teaching animal science but dreaded the greenhouse. (McGruder) Last year, I took a small engines class, and thanks to my ag teacher, I know how to take apart an engine. However, putting the engine back together is different story. Agriculture teachers are strengthening agriculture one student at a time by shaping our future consumers, leaders, and voters.

A retired agriculture teacher said the most valuable bond he created in 34 years of teaching was the bond with his students. Former students still visit him for guidance, advice, and trips down memory lane. Ag teachers have the opportunity to get to know their students in a way that regular teachers do not. (McGruder)

Ag teachers do occasionally get out of the classroom, and when they do, they spend their time advocating for agriculture in their communities. Many agriculture teachers join agriculture organizations such as Missouri Farm Bureau and Missouri Cattlemen's Association for opportunities to interact with farmers and legislators. In turn, they take these experiences and information back into the classroom to share with their students. Ag educators are also involved on fair boards and community outreach programs. Today, ag teachers are active on social media, too. They share the story of agriculture through snaps, tweets, comments, and blogs. They are the link between communities and agriculture. Ag teachers strengthen agriculture by living to serve their communities.

Ag teachers are not just teachers and community leaders; they are also FFA chapter advisors. Missouri is home to over 350 FFA chapters. Advisors serve many roles in the FFA organization such as coach, CEO, and chaperone. Advisors simultaneously direct contests, fundraisers, and service projects. They build a network among themselves for friendship, support, and friendly competition. Just as graphene is strengthened by the sharing of electrons,

agriculture is strengthened by advisors sharing their knowledge, experiences, and resources with each other. One advisor says that the bond between advisors is so special because they all share expertise. He said, "It's like a mutual exchange of knowledge. When we come together, it not only benefits my students, but the area as a whole." (Nelson)

The FFA opening ceremony truly captures the importance of ag teachers in the agriculture industry. They "practice brotherhood, honor agricultural opportunities and responsibilities, and demonstrate those qualities of leadership which an FFA member should possess." (Motto) Agriculture is one of the strongest industries in the world, thanks to the covalent bonds created in the classroom, in the community, and in FFA.

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