

Testimony for House Career and Technical Education Sub-Committee
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Good morning ladies and gentlemen of the House Education Sub-Committee for Career and Technical Education. My name is David Bittner and I am the President of the Pennsylvania Association of Agricultural Educators. Thank you for the providing this opportunity for me to articulate the impacts of formal, school-based agricultural education as a premiere vector for workforce development and a model for career and technical education.

I teach agricultural science at Midd-West High School in Middleburg, Snyder County. Midd-West has two agricultural education or Ag Ed programs with 335 students enrolled full-time in agricultural science and engineering courses. By night, I represent the collective interests of the 238 agricultural education teachers who work in the 163 schools throughout the Commonwealth that offer formal agricultural education programs. PA

Each agricultural education or Ag Ed program consist of three components, the core of which is a strategically-planned classroom and laboratory instruction by a certified Ag Ed teacher. This provides students with foundational knowledge and skills in agriculture, food, and natural resources. The curricula that guides the instruction is approved by the school's occupational advisory committee and based on the workforce development needs of the local community.

In the second component, the classroom and laboratory instruction is applied through a Supervised Agricultural Experience or SAE. An SAE is a student-managed program where Ag ed students own and operate an agricultural business, get a job or internship, plan and conduct scientific experiments, or explore careers within the agricultural industry. The Ag Ed teacher reinforces this experience with class instruction, supervises the outside of class programs, and customizes the learning experience to the student's career objective.

Finally, the third component of an Ag Ed program is a Career and Technical Student Organization known as the FFA, formerly the Future Farmers of America. Perhaps the most iconic symbol of Ag Ed is the blue corduroy jacket worn by FFA members for the past 80 years. FFA provides premiere leadership, personal growth, and career success for students through agricultural education. Therefore, FFA members must be enrolled in an Ag Ed program and conduct an SAE.

There are over 12,000 students in grades 8-12 enrolled in Ag Ed programs in Pennsylvania. Seventy percent of these students attend comprehensive high schools, 25% attend Career and Technical Education Centers, and 5% attend private, middle, or charter schools. These programs are diverse, offering courses in animal science, food science, plant science, environmental science, and agricultural engineering. Graduates of Ag Ed programs are career and college ready for some of the most highly-demanded occupations in Pennsylvania, such as Landscapers, Veterinary Technicians, Farm Equipment Service Technicians, Soil and Water Conservationists, and Transportation Specialists. Recent estimates by the Department of Agriculture project 75,000-130,000 job openings in the next 10 years. Students that complete an Ag Ed program are poised with the STEM-based and 21st Century Skills necessary to fulfill the needs of Pennsylvania's workforce.

One hundred years ago, formal, school-based agricultural education programs taught students the basics of agriculture, with programs in animal husbandry, botany, and equipment repair to make students fit for employment on the farm or in the farmhouse. Today, our agricultural education programs teach biotechnology, sustainable engineering, and veterinary medicine to prepare students for highly-skilled occupations in the agribusinesses that fuel our state's primary economic driver, agriculture.

Thank you, once again, for the opportunity to speak with you today. I look forward to your questions about Ag Ed in PA.