

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 Krista Pontius and I am currently serving as the National Association of Agricultural Educators Region VI Vice-President. Thank you for this opportunity to meet with you and discuss the advantages of career and technical education, specifically secondary school based agricultural education.

I teach at agriscience at Greenwood High School, which is located in Millerstown, Perry County. Greenwood has two agriscience teachers. Collectively, we teach 14 courses of agricultural sciences which reaches 152 high school students and 86 junior high students. Those 238 students make up 68% of our middle/high school population. As I mentioned, I am currently serving in a leadership role for the National Association of Agricultural Educators. Our members are involved in school-based agricultural education at all grade levels. We advocate for agricultural education, provide professional development and work to recruit and retain agricultural educators in the profession.

Agricultural education is an important component of public school instruction in the United States. There are approximately one million agricultural education students in the nation, taught by nearly 12,000 secondary teachers. It is estimated that the contact hours of in-school instruction in and about agriculture exceeds 10 million hours annually. As David mentioned, school-based agricultural education consists of three closely-related components including classroom/laboratory instruction, experiential learning, and leadership development. The interaction of these three components helps to ensure student's career success or continuation with higher education related to agriscience following high school graduation. I truly believe that agricultural educational is so appealing to so many students because it provides them with a unique opportunity to apply core content concepts in an agriculturally related context.

For example, when using the STEM model, a student learning about hydrogen and covalent bonding in chemistry is able to apply these concepts when examining the chemistry of food processing. These connections occur daily and help students retain important core concepts. Pennsylvania is fortunate to have agriscience teachers who strive to increase the relevance and rigor in their classrooms and make impacts on our profession as a whole. For example, my teaching partner, Michael Clark, has worked with the DuPont National Agriscience Teachers Ambassadors Academy where he has served as an instructor for four years. Several PA teachers have attended this inquiry-based training academy over the past 10 years. Additionally, 10 current teachers are serving on national education committees. Of those 10 teachers, four of them serve in leadership positions on the committees.

In 2015, the USDA published a report showing tremendous demand for recent college graduates with a degree in agriculture. In fact, there is an expected 57,900 openings annually in the food, agriculture, renewable natural resources, and environment fields. These graduates will have ample opportunities for career choices and will have the satisfaction of working in a field that addresses some of the world's most pressing issues such as world hunger. These jobs will only continue to become more essential as the agricultural industry works to find solutions to feed our growing world.

School-based agricultural education, and all of Career and Technical Education, provides rigorous and relevant career pathways that engage students, grow academic, technical and employability skills and include opportunities for work-based learning. Because of the proven success of the three circle model of agricultural education, we are positive that school-based agricultural education will continue to allow students to achieve their full potential and, most importantly, develop a prepared future workforce.