

WAAE 2011 Spring Newsletter

Wisconsin Association of Agricultural Educators

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Dates to Remember:

Early March WAAE PDC Registration Opens

April 29 State FFA CDE Contest in Madison & WAAE Board Meeting

June 27-30 WAAE Professional Development Conference at the Hotel Sierra/KI Center, Green Bay

Presidents Message by Marty Nowak



I was really wondering how I would develop a positive message for my fellow agriscience teachers, with all of the drama that is happening in the state right now. But, it did not take me long to find a positive message. It is all of the hard work and many hours that you put into your programs to make your programs and your students successful. Last week I delivered a speech to my FFA Alumni. As I talked to them about the struggles that Agricultural Education will encounter with possible drastic budget cuts, I told them how serving as the President of WAAE has reinvigorated me. After being able to see all of the great things that Wisconsin Agricultural Education and FFA have done, I am proud to say that I am part of such a wonderful organization. I look at our young teachers and am so impressed with the work they do and the positive attitude and image they bring to Agricultural Education. Unfortunately, I also see a lot of fear and uncertainty in our young teachers during this time of despair. It is okay to be scared as you are not alone. Many of the veteran teachers are scared and uncertain as well. During this time of uncertainty, I ask that we make sure we are there for one another. If you have questions or problems, do not be afraid to ask.

My message did not stop there for my alumni and does not stop there for you. I told them that I need them to be advocates for not only my program, but for every program in the state. I need them to tell their story about how Agricultural Education and the FFA have positively affected them, their children and their grandchildren to school and government officials. Tell the story about how Agricultural Education and FFA has given them leadership skills and career skills that they bring with them to work everyday.

I can remember back to my first year of teaching, which now seems like a long time ago, listening to Paul Larson speak about advocacy. He said it then and has reiterated it every year since then that tomorrow is too late to advocate for your program. Build a network of people that will help promote and tell your story. This past January, your state FFA Officers presented workshops on advocacy at the FFA Halftime Conference. Make sure you use these materials and have your FFA members present to your school board. Nicole Nelson has developed some excellent brochures that are great for school board members to help them understand Agricultural Education and the FFA. There is a cost for the brochures, but they are well worth the investment. The Halftime workshops and brochures were ideas that were thought up by Team Ag Ed, as we realized after the November elections that we would be going through some rough waters.

As I speak about rough waters, I think of Garth Brooks' song "The River". Every word of the song fits the situation Agricultural Education is in right now. If you do not know the words, or have never heard the song, I strongly encourage you to look it up.

Please Watch for 2011 WAAE PDC Registration information later this week!

Update from President Elect David Kruse

Wisconsin Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Council (WAEWDC)

I have the privilege of being appointed by the Department of Public Instruction to serve on the Wisconsin Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Council. In January, I attended my first meeting and am very pleased with what I saw and heard.

As a WAAE board member I have had a chance to see this council develop from the perspective of an observer. WAAE and its members have been key partners in helping this council get started in Wisconsin. Our investment of resources such as time, effort and finances is a wise one.

As a newcomer to the council, I immediately felt a sense of purpose and forward movement from the council and its members. WAEWDC has a number of initiatives that are underway or near release. One major initiative of the council is the development of a "Why Ag" campaign. The council has been working with Filament Marketing to develop the components of the "Why Ag" campaign designed to encourage individuals seeking or considering now job opportunities to look to the agriculture industry.

In February, the Department of Workforce Development and the WAEWDC partnered to offer the Wisconsin Agribusiness Academy. The academy was designed for Wisconsin agribusinesses to identify employees and send them from leadership development within the Wisconsin agribusiness industry.

One of the early visions for this council included the opportunity for various agriculture industry stakeholders to come together to help solidify the supply of a qualified agriculture workforce. The WAEWDC does provide a broad representation of Wisconsin agriculture and the power of discussion among the different sectors is critical to the council's success. As a representative for the education sector, it is refreshing to hear that agricultural business leaders recognize both secondary and post-secondary schools as partners in developing the agriculture industry and its employees.

As the business of education changes in Wisconsin, agricultural education will need to look more and more to the support of business and industry. The Wisconsin Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Council will be a critical partner in helping develop that support on local and state levels.

Thoughts from Past President, Jeff Zobeck

Advocacy 101

We've heard a lot about the need to advocate for Agricultural Education and the FFA not only recently, but for quite a few years now. Most of the talk about it has been at the National level and of course most recently at the State level. We of course have been reminded to advocate at the grass roots local level as well. This is where I would like to address in this article.

Many times I think we may not take advantage of all of the opportunities we have to advocate for our programs. I don't want to spend time harping on the need to advocate in this article. I think we all get that. Instead I would like to outline a few simple ways to advocate as a reminder on how easy it is to do, especially at the local level. Maybe you do some of these or maybe you will find something in here that will help you advocate better. I am not claiming to have come up with any of these myself of course.

- 1) Newspaper – Send articles and pictures of things going on in your program. This is an old standard I know, but seemed like a logical starting point. This should be done routinely, not just for big things like FFA Week, etc..
- 2) Radio – Some stations have times where they will bring in members of the community to discuss upcoming events or activities. I like to take an officer or two as well for these opportunities.
- 3) Civic groups – Get your kids on their agenda and go in and tell them what is going on in agriculture and the FFA. This is surprisingly well received. We try to do this so we aren't always just going in to ask them for financial support all the time. They see the benefit to supporting us.
- 4) FFA Alumni events, meetings and banquets – We have had a long standing tradition for our chapter president at the minimum, attend every Alumni meeting. Obviously we help at every Alumni event

there is and probably the most important, we attend the Alumni Banquet each year to give them a year in review and thank them for their support. I even spoke this year to the Alumni members about how they can be involved in advocacy and what the issues that may be forthcoming to advocate for. Educating them about what today's FFA and Agricultural Education classroom looks like is also important. It's surprising how many may not know simple things we take for granted like the three circle model, why the creed now has different words, why we don't have a Dairy Production class anymore, etc.

- 5) School Board Meetings – Having members attend school board meetings is an incredibly valuable tool I think. Have them give an update of what the FFA is doing and what is going on in the classroom. They are always grateful for the update and it makes it easier in the end to get approval for projects, trips, etc. when the time comes.

In conclusion, I would like to remind our secondary programs in particular of the training your chapter members attending Half-Time Conference received in this area and the presentation that was provided to both you and your students as a tool to use in preparing presentations in the public. A template like that is a good starting point and don't forget to personalize it to your own school and community to make that valuable personal connection.

Today's Politics Impact on Today's Agriculture Programs by David Kruse

Thank you to those of you that have responded about your districts positions on non-renewals and lay-off notices. Although this is not a complete list, it is helpful to provide some perspective to WAAE as we develop an action plan to assist agricultural education programs throughout the state.

A number of you also asked for an update, so I would like to take this opportunity to share the following with you. As of 4 PM on Monday, February 28th I have received notice that 29 Wisconsin school districts have proposed non-renewals, lay-offs, or program reductions of some level. I fully anticipate that we will hear of more lay-off notices and staff reductions in the near future. If you have been similarly impacted in your school district and have yet communicated with me, I would appreciate an update so we too can try to provide some assistance to you and your program.

Activating your local support in the next few weeks will be a critical priority for each of us. Begin talking to your key supporters that are willing to share their opinions with local decision makers. Hang in there everyone, agriculture programs are not the only ones facing challenges, but we may have the best infrastructure to weather this storm.

Please contact your WAAE board members if you have any questions, concerns or ideas on how we can provide assistance to each of you.