

CAREER EXPERIENCES OF NOVICE URBAN AGRICULTURE TEACHERS

By

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To my parents, Ron and Brenda Warner

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School  
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In an attempt to increase the number of Agricultural Education programs, diversify the enrollment of Agricultural Education students, and make an effort to increase the agricultural literacy of urban students, it is imperative to establish more agriculture programs in urban areas. As a result, there must be an adequate supply of agriculture teachers who are willing to pursue and maintain teaching positions in urban schools.

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the decisions of agriculture teachers to teach in urban schools. To carry out this study, a criterion sample was used to select nine individuals who graduated from a teacher education program and had been teaching in an urban school for one to eight years. Specifically, the interview process was used to investigate the factors that influenced agriculture teachers' decisions to teach in urban schools, the experiences that agriculture teachers have had while teaching in urban schools, and the outlook on the longevity of their careers in urban schools.

The categories relevant to the teachers' decisions to teach Agricultural Education included teacher background and decision to pursue teacher certification in Agricultural

Education. The categories significant to the teachers' decisions to teach Agricultural Education in an urban school included prior experience in urban schools, desired location, decision to teach in a particular school, level of influence from family, participants' perceptions of urban schools, and participants' perceptions of Agricultural Education in rural schools. The categories that emerged from the data specific to the participants' experiences while teaching in an urban school included benefits to the teacher, contribution of cultural diversity to the classroom environment, level of parental support, administrative support for Agricultural Education, administrative obstacles to teacher vision, Agricultural Education curriculum in urban schools, value of Agricultural Education to urban students, FFA in urban schools, obstacles to FFA involvement, Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) in urban schools, and school characteristics. The category pertinent to agriculture teachers' outlooks on their teaching tenure in an urban school identified multiple influences on the participants' decisions to continue teaching at their current schools.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The call to include Agricultural Education in urban schools is not recent. In 1999, the National Council for Agricultural Education published *Reinventing Agriculture for the Year 2020*. Goal two of this document stated that, “all students should have access to seamless, lifelong instruction in agriculture, food, fiber and natural resource systems through a wide variety of delivery methods and educational settings” (National Council for Agricultural Education, 1999, p. 4). In addition, one of the stated objectives is that “all students in urban, suburban, and rural schools, have access to high-quality agricultural education programs” (p.4). In 1988, the National Research Council recommended “specialized magnet high schools for the agricultural sciences in major urban and suburban areas” (p. 4).

Seven years after the distribution of *Reinventing Agriculture for the Year 2020*, it appears that little progress has been made towards the goal of expanding Agricultural Education programs in urban areas. The National FFA Organization (2004) estimated that nationwide approximately 162,000 FFA members reside in urban or suburban areas. Considering that there are 172,000 students enrolled in 10<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> grade in the New York City Public School District alone (Sable & Young, 2003), Agricultural Education is being offered to a minute proportion of urban students. While the National FFA Organization (2004) reported that there are FFA chapters in 11 of the 20 largest cities; including New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia; the exact number of Agricultural Education programs located in urban areas cannot be determined based on existing data.

### **Benefits of Including Agricultural Education in Urban Schools**

The potential increase of urban programs offers numerous benefits to Agricultural Education. A long range goal was issued at the National Agricultural Education Inservice, held in February 2006, to have 10,000 quality Agricultural Education programs by the year 2015. Currently, there are 7,210 Agriculture Education programs nationwide (National FFA Organization, 2006). Therefore, prospective areas of expansion must be identified.

Urban areas have witnessed a population explosion. The United States has seen an increase in the percentage of the total population residing in metropolitan areas, from 28% in 1910 to 80% in 2000. Approximately 226 million people live in United States metropolitan areas, which is nearly four times the population of non-metropolitan areas (Hobbs & Stoops, 2002). The growth of metropolitan areas has resulted in an increase in urban school student populations. During the 2001–02 school year, there were 47.7 million students enrolled in public schools. Fifty-seven percent of the schools were located in large or midsize cities or their accompanying fringe areas and accounted for 69% of all public school students. In 2001–02, an estimated 1 out of every 6 American students attended a large city school (Hoffman, 2003).

To account for the expanding student population, new schools are being built at a rapid pace. The growing number of classrooms in metropolitan areas is evidence that the need for new teachers will be the strongest in urban areas (Grant, 1989). On average, urban schools have larger student populations than both suburban and rural schools (Lippman, Burns, & McArthur, 1996; Sachs, 2004). In their study of rural and urban schools in Ohio, McCracken and Barcinas (1991) reported that the average senior class in rural schools consisted of 74 students compared to urban schools which averaged 333

senior class members. The inclusion of Agricultural Education classes in urban schools provides access to a large student population and provides immense potential to increase the current number of Agricultural Education programs.

While the inclusion of Agricultural Education in urban locations can potentially increase the number of agriculture programs, it can also help diversify student enrollment in agriculture classes. An objective included in *Reinventing Agricultural Education for the Year 2020* stated, “student enrollments in Agricultural Education should represent the diversity of the school-aged population” (p.4). Currently, the demographic composition of Agricultural Education students does not accurately reflect the demographics of the general student population. Approximately 39% of United States public school students are members of minority groups (Hoffman, 2003). Meanwhile, the National FFA Organization (2004) estimates that approximately 23% of FFA members are minority students. Considering 63% of students in large or midsize cities are minority students (Hoffman, 2003), the initiation of urban Agricultural Education programs offers the prospect of reaching a more culturally diverse group of students than is currently enrolled in agriculture programs.

Offering Agricultural Education courses in urban schools can assist in the efforts to increase the agricultural literacy of urban students. Agricultural literacy efforts are needed to ensure that the general population understands and values the contribution that agriculture makes to society. Malecki, Israel, and Toro (2004) contend that “increasing agricultural literacy is important because it can help citizens make informed choices as voters to support or oppose public policies on agriculture-related issues, such as genetically-modified organisms in food production, food safety, and on food security,

environmental quality, and land use” (p.1). As the urban population becomes increasingly removed from the farm, the promotion of agricultural awareness is a critical need. In a study of the agricultural literacy of urban/suburban and rural 12<sup>th</sup> grade students, Pense, Beebe, Leising, Wakefield, and Steffen (2006) reported that the rural students possessed higher levels of agricultural knowledge when compared to the urban/suburban students. While the aim of Agricultural Education is to educate society as a whole on the importance of agriculture, this cannot be accomplished by leaving urban youth out of the equation.

### **Challenges to the Inclusion of Agricultural Education in Urban Schools**

The goal of increasing the number of urban agriculture programs is hindered by a lack of prospective teachers. Agricultural Education is consistently faced with a shortage of competent teachers. In 2001, 67 agriculture teachers were needed nationwide, but not available and 35 agriculture departments did not operate due to the lack of a qualified teacher (Camp, Broyles, & Skelton, 2002). Likewise, urban schools are facing unique challenges related to school staffing due “to rapidly growing student enrollments, accelerating rates of teacher retirement, class size reduction initiatives, and demanding working conditions” (Urban Teacher Collaborative, 2000, p. 6). Administrators in urban schools have reported a decline in the size of the teacher applicant pools (Krei, 1998). They find it challenging to recruit new teachers when school districts in surrounding areas offer higher salaries, better facilities, a less challenging student body, and are perceived as less stressful working environments (Snipes, Doolittle, & Herlihy, 2002).

In addition to the challenges of teacher recruitment, teacher retention is another obstacle in urban schools which face high rates of teacher turnover (Bruno & Negrete, 1983). Nationally, approximately one-half of beginning teachers exit the classroom in the

first six years. In urban districts this turnover occurs in five years. In some urban districts, one-half of the beginners leave in a three to four year period (Haberman & Rickards, 1990). Using data from a study of teacher turnover, Rollefson (1990) concluded that rate of teacher attrition increases with the growth of the minority population in a school. Public schools with a 5% minority enrollment reported a teacher attrition rate of 7.4%. Teacher attrition increased to 10.5% in schools when minority student enrollment was 50% or more. The urban school vacancies that result from this rapid rate of teacher turnover are often filled with teachers who are not fully certified (Urban Teacher Collaborative, 2000). In order to establish and sustain agriculture programs in urban schools, a cadre of well-prepared Agricultural Education teachers who are willing to accept and retain teaching positions in urban locations is desperately needed.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In an attempt to increase the number of Agricultural Education programs, diversify the enrollment of Agricultural Education students to reflect the general student population, and make an effort to increase the agricultural literacy of urban students, it is imperative to establish more agriculture programs in urban areas. As a result, there must be an adequate supply of agriculture teachers who are willing to pursue and maintain teaching positions in urban schools. Due to the high attrition rates of novice teachers, it is important to examine why beginning teachers choose to teach in urban schools and the influences on their teaching tenure in urban locations.

Minimal research has been conducted on Agricultural Education in urban schools. Current literature focuses primarily on urban Agricultural Education *students*. The factors that influence agriculture teachers' decisions to obtain employment in an urban school, the unique experiences of urban agriculture teachers, and agriculture teachers'



expectations of their future teaching careers in urban schools have not been previously examined in the Agricultural Education literature.

### **Statement of Purpose and Exploratory Questions Guiding Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the decisions of agriculture teachers to teach in urban schools. Specifically, the interview process was used to investigate the factors that influenced agriculture teachers' decisions to teach in urban schools, the experiences that agriculture teachers have had while teaching in urban schools, and the outlook on the longevity of their careers in urban schools. The following questions were used to provide direction to the research process:

- Why did you decide to teach Agricultural Education?
- What influenced your initial decision to teach Agricultural Education in an urban school?
- What kind of experiences have you had while teaching agriculture in an urban school?
- What are your expectations of your future teaching career in an urban school?

### **Definition of Terms**

- **AXIAL CODING.** A set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.96).
- **NATIONAL FFA ORGANIZATION.** Leadership organization for students enrolled in Agricultural Education.
- **NOVICE URBAN AGRICULTURE TEACHERS.** Individuals with 1-8 years of teaching experience who are providing agriculture instruction in an urban school.
- **OPEN CODING.** The process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61).
- **SELECTIVE CODING.** The process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.116).

- SUPERVISED AGRICULTURAL EXPERIENCE (SAE). The actual, planned application of concepts and principles learned in agricultural education. Students are supervised by agriculture teachers in cooperation with parents/guardians, employers and other adults who assist them in the development and achievement of their educational goals. The purpose is to help students develop skills and abilities leading toward a career (Barrick et al., 1992, p.2).
- URBAN AREA. Population of at least 400,000 people (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000).
- URBAN AGRICULTURE PROGRAM. Students receive systematic instruction in an agriculturally related subject at a school located in an urban area (Soloninka, 2003).

### **Limitations and Assumptions of the Study**

This study sought to explain the unique experiences of each individual, so the findings cannot be generalized to a larger population. Also, the participants were selected from three different school districts and may not be representative of all urban agriscience teachers. During the interview process, it was assumed that the participants provided honest and accurate answers.

## CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

As stated in Chapter 1, there is a dearth of research about Agricultural Education in urban schools. The relevant literature examined the barriers preventing urban students from participating in successful Supervised Agricultural Experiences (Whaley & Lucero, 1993), the agriculture curriculum in urban programs (Russell, 1999; Russell & Trede, 1999; Soloninka, 2003; Soloninka & Connors, 2003; Trede & Russell, 1999), college and career choices of urban Agricultural Education students (Esters, 2003; Esters, 2005; Esters & Bowen, 2004), factors influencing urban students to enroll in an Agricultural Education program (Esters & Bowen, 2004), opinions of urban Agricultural Education students towards agriculture (Talbert, 1996; Talbert, 1997), and the major issues facing urban agriscience teachers (Warner & Washburn, 2005). The aforementioned studies focused primarily on urban Agricultural Education students, while research examining agriculture teachers' beliefs about teaching in urban schools, experiences while teaching agriculture in urban schools, and expectations about the future of Agricultural Education in urban schools is absent from the literature.

### **Context of Urban Schools**

In an effort to conduct an inquiry of Agricultural Education teachers' career experiences in urban schools, it is important to gain a better understanding of the unique context of urban schools. Urban schools commonly enroll students whose demographic characteristics and home environment are markedly different than those of rural and suburban students. These differences in student culture and experience have an inevitable

impact on the school environment. An ever-increasing population of racially diverse students can be found in urban schools. Over the past decade, there has been an increase in the number of urban school students who belonged to a Hispanic or “other” minority group (including Asians and Pacific Islanders), while the proportion of Caucasian students declined and the proportion of African American students remained stable (Lippman, Burns, & McArthur, 1996). In several urban schools, minority groups (American Indian/Alaska Natives, Asians/ Pacific Islanders, Hispanic, and African American) constitute the majority of the student population. According to the Urban Teacher Collaborative (2000), approximately 50% of the minority students in the nation are enrolled in urban schools. The distribution of ethnically diverse students in urban schools differs from student populations in non-urban communities. Over 80% of the eighth graders enrolled in rural and advantaged suburban schools were Caucasian (Peng, Wang, & Walberg, 1992). Likewise, the current Agricultural Education enrollment consists primarily of Caucasian students (National FFA Organization, 2004).

Urban schools are faced with large numbers of immigrant and limited English proficient students who require bilingual or ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) education (Montero-Sieburth, 1989). It is estimated that urban schools nationwide are responsible for educating almost half of the students who are not proficient in English (Urban Teacher Collaborative, 2000). Peng, Wang, and Walberg (1992) reported approximately one-quarter of students who were classified as ESOL, speak a language other than English in their homes. The number of students reported to have difficulty speaking English is steadily rising. During the 2002–03 school year, additional services were provided to 4 million ESOL students (Hoffman, Sable, Naum, &

Gray, 2005). According to Pallas, Natriello, and McDill (1989) the number of students who speak a primary language other than English will triple by 2020. Even with the assistance of full-time ESOL teachers and the inclusion of specific ESOL strategies in the classroom, students with limited English proficiency often lack the necessary language skills to be highly successful in the classroom and on standardized tests administered by the school.

In addition to the language barrier faced by many urban students, as a group they also face greater levels of economic hardship as compared to suburban and rural students. An estimated 30% of urban children were likely to be living in poverty, which is more than the 13% of suburban children or the 22% of rural children who lived in poverty. Furthermore, urban children were more likely to qualify for free or reduced lunches. Thirty-eight percent of urban students received a free or reduced lunch as compared to 16% of suburban students and 28% of rural students (Lippman, Burns, & McArthur, 1996).

Society has experienced a decline in the traditional family structure, especially in urban areas. Urban students were less likely to reside in two-parent families when compared to students in suburban and rural schools (Lippman, Burns, & McArthur, 1996). Similarly, the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 reported a lack of traditional family structure among urban eighth grade students. Approximately 44% of the urban students resided with both biological parents, while 62% of students in other communities lived with both their mother and father. Thirty-one percent of students in inner-city schools resided with only their mother. Parents of urban students were also more likely to be unmarried as a result of being divorced, separated, never married,

widowed or cohabiting (Peng, Wang, & Walberg, 1992). Lack of parental support can pose a serious problem to the educational success of a child (Corcoran, Walker and White, 1988).

### **Preferred Teaching Location**

In an attempt to increase the number of urban agriculture teachers, it is important to understand several factors that influence their selection of a teaching position. Prospective teachers have been found to highly value the location of the school when searching for employment and traditionally tend to seek jobs in schools located very close to where they were raised. In a study by Zimpher (1988), approximately 83% (n=605) of the prospective teacher respondents were raised in suburban or rural communities. When asked to express preferences regarding job placement, 84% (n=612) of the respondents wanted to secure a teaching position in a rural or suburban area. Only 16% (n=117) of the respondents expressed a desire to teach in an urban or major urban area.

Some preservice teachers are adamantly opposed to the idea of taking a job in an urban school. Gilbert (1995) conducted a study with preservice teachers who were primarily from rural, small towns, or suburban areas. Of the 71 preservice teachers who indicated that they attended rural schools, 47.9% (n=34) said they absolutely would not teach in an urban school. The students voiced concerns about violence, the atmosphere of urban schools, an inability to relate to urban students, and an aversion to city life (Gilbert, 1995).

This reluctance to teach in an urban environment is especially alarming when considering the demographics of preservice agriculture teachers. In his study, Rocca (2005) found that over 86% (n = 214) of preservice agriculture teachers grew up in a rural

setting; only 2.9% (n = 6) were raised in an urban location. Based on this finding, he recommended comparing the geographic location of a preservice teacher's upbringing with the location where they would consider living and teaching (Rocca, 2005).

Many prospective teachers believe that returning to their hometown or a nearby area will increase their rapport with the students due to similar backgrounds and comparable school experience (Werner, 1993). Also, preservice teachers from rural/suburban backgrounds feel they would be more efficacious when teaching in school environments similar to their own (Easter, Shultz, Neyhart, & Reck, 1999). As a result of their rural upbringing, many future Agricultural Education teachers may doubt their ability to establish and maintain a successful connection with urban students and achieve programmatic success in an urban school.

### **Preservice Teachers' Perceptions of Urban Schools**

The perceptions and beliefs of preservice teachers may promote their unwillingness to consider teaching in an urban area. An individual's beliefs about teaching effectiveness and student behavior often develop over the course of their primary and secondary school experiences and carry into their teacher preparation program (Pajares, 1992). It is very difficult to dispel the beliefs that students have formed based on their prior experiences. From a synthesis of research on beliefs, Pajares (1992) concluded, "beliefs are formed early and tend to self-perpetuate, persevering even against contradictions caused by reason, time, schooling, or experiences" (p. 324). The media may also be responsible for perceptions that individuals hold about the context of urban schools. With a lack of experience in urban schools and limited exposure to urban locations, individuals may use media images as the foundation for their beliefs. As explained by Grant (2002), "When the experiences of young people differ widely from those of inner-city youth, they rely on

images in popular culture for information about worlds different from their own. These images reflect and shape the assumptions with which preservice teachers enter urban classrooms...”(p.78) Several researchers have concluded preservice teachers have established beliefs about the students, teachers, and school environment in urban areas even though they may not have personal experiences with such environments.

### **Beliefs about Students**

Future teachers often regard urban students as apathetic individuals who possess negative attitudes toward education. When asked to describe the attitudes and behaviors of urban students, preservice teachers used adjectives such as, “lackadaisical, unmotivated, rougher, violent, more streetwise, emotionally unstable, and concerned with survival” (Shultz, Neyhart, & Reck, 1996, p.4). Additional descriptors of urban students included, “disruptive, disrespectful of teachers, having more problems, and exhibiting worse behavior than suburban children” (Aaronsohn, Carter, & Howell, 1995, p.6). Gilbert (1997) found that future teachers felt urban youth were more at-risk due to the potential for gang membership and exposure to violence in their surroundings. Preservice teachers also held opinions about the learning ability of urban students. Twenty percent (n=50) of the participants in a study by Shultz et al., (1996) thought urban students would have decreased academic ability when compared to other students.

### **Beliefs about Parents**

Preservice teachers also expressed negative beliefs regarding the parents of urban students. Parents have been viewed as unconcerned and unengaged partners in the education of their child, who provided minimal support and guidance (Aaronsohn et al., 1995). In a study of the attitudes of 140 preservice teachers, 24% (n=34) of the participants felt urban parents had a vested interest in the education of their children as



compared to 72% (n=101) of the participants who felt non-urban parents took interest in their children's education. Research has also indicated a notable difference in preservice teachers' perceptions regarding urban and non-urban parents support of teachers, assistance with the educational process, and support of their children (Socoski & Hynes, 1991).

### **Beliefs about Urban Teachers**

Gilbert (1997) asked 345 preservice teachers to describe their perceptions about urban teachers. Most of the responses focused on personal attributes of the teachers. The respondents identified urban teachers as "young, middle-class, mostly minority females who attended urban schools themselves" (p.86). The participants also predicted urban teachers would encounter problems beyond the curriculum such as crime, drug use, teen pregnancy, student behavior, and low socioeconomic status, so it was beneficial to be strong-willed and streetwise (Gilbert, 1997). In a study by Socoski and Hynes (1991) preservice teachers questioned the job satisfaction of urban teachers. Participants felt urban teachers were more likely to experience teacher burnout and disillusionment than teachers in non-urban areas (Socoski & Hynes, 1991). In addition, the true responsibilities of teachers in an urban classroom were questioned. Tiezzi and Cross (1997) concluded prospective teachers considered urban teachers to serve more "as problem solver rather than facilitator of learning" (p.117) or as a "police officer" or "baby sitter" (Aaronsohn et al., 1995).

### **Beliefs about Urban School Context**

In Gilbert's (1997) study of prospective teacher beliefs, the respondents pictured urban school buildings as aging, overcrowded buildings, comparable to jails. They also characterized urban schools as a dismal environment containing minimal facilities and

providing limited opportunities for students. Undergraduate students also described a bleak school location, in “a slum” with deteriorating buildings surrounding the school (Aaronsohn et al., 1995).

### **Beliefs about Cultural Diversity**

The majority of preservice teachers are single, Caucasian females, who are approximately 25 years old and grew up in either a rural or suburban community (Zimpher, 1988). In Agricultural Education, the typical preservice student is a Caucasian female from a rural community. Only 6.6% (n= 14) of the 215 Agricultural Education students who completed a teaching internship in Fall 2005 were members of minority groups (Rocca, 2005). Camp et al. (2002) reported that Agricultural Education teachers were predominately Caucasian males. Approximately 78% (n=7,536) of Agricultural Education teachers were male and 22% (n=2,079) of Agricultural Education teachers were female. Caucasian teachers represented 93.6% (n=9,067) of all Agricultural Education teachers, with Hispanic teachers and African American teachers representing 3.2% (n=303) and 2.5% (n=245) of the Agricultural Education teaching force respectively.

Often, students reported they had little interaction with individuals from other cultures. In Gilbert’s (1995) study of rural prospective teachers, 40% (n=77) of the respondents had minimal interaction with students of different races and cultures. A quarter of the students (n = 48) had not intermingled with an ethnically diverse group of students during their time as a university student (Gilbert, 1995). Individuals who welcome the contribution of cultural diversity to education generally have positive attitudes towards social interaction with culturally different others (Dee & Henkin, 2002). The monocultural upbringing of future teachers is likely to impact their perceptions of the

contribution that cultural diversity makes to the classroom environment. Some preservice teachers consider the incorporation of culture to have a negative impact on classrooms due to a lack of cross-cultural curriculum, potential prejudice of teachers, inconsistencies in performance expectations and standardized test scores among different racial groups, and negative effects of stereotypes (Shultz, Neyhart, & Reck, 1996). The cultural stereotypes some teachers maintain have been found to limit their encouragement of minority student participation in a variety of school activities and events. Larke (1990) reported that 88.3% (n=46) of female elementary school teachers thought they would be surprised if a minority student chose to participate in an activity that usually attracted non-minority students.

### **Influence of Preservice Teachers' Experiences in Urban Schools**

The socialization process that takes place during early field experiences and student teaching challenges the beliefs of preservice teachers and helps shape attitudes and knowledge that will inspire their teaching (Smith, 2003). Heinemann, Obi, Pagano, and Weiner (1992) stressed the value of early field experiences in an effort to diminish the stereotypes and uncertainties of preservice students.

Fry and McKinney (1997) described how early preservice teaching experiences at an urban school influenced the attitudes and teaching practices of 10 preservice elementary education teachers. The participants were all Caucasian females who reported that they had experienced minimal to virtually no contact with other racial groups. Prior to their field experience, none of the 10 participants expressed a preference to teach in an urban school and only two would consider working in urban settings. They attributed their opinions to fear, a lack of familiarity with other ethnic groups and a preference for residing in a rural or suburban area. The field experience site enrolled approximately 250

students and 99% of the students were African American. At the completion of the field experience, nine of the students stated that they would consider teaching in a culturally diverse, urban school. Two expressed their preference to teach in such a setting. The students who completed the field experience were compared to 21 Caucasian, female elementary education students who had a similar methods course, but did not complete a field experience. None of these students expressed a preference to teach in an urban environment and three of these students stated that they would consider teaching in a culturally diverse, urban school because they were willing to take a job in any setting. While the purpose of this study was not to generalize beyond the 31 participants, it does provide some evidence that the completion of field experiences can influence preservice teachers' beliefs about urban schools.

In an effort to examine the effect of an urban field experience on rural and suburban preservice teachers in Minnesota, twenty-five students completed an urban field placement for one week in elementary schools around Chicago (Marxen & Rudney, 1999). Six months after the conclusion of the field experience, the participants wrote two essays reflecting on their teaching experience in the city. From the responses, the researchers identified three main areas of focus: Self, Students, and School. Every participant described positive relations with the students in their classrooms. Many of the preservice teachers identified disparities in access to materials, technology, and adequate facilities among the different schools they were placed in among the city. Almost half of the participants were surprised by their expectations and the reality of the school environment. One of the preservice teachers discussed how the harsh environment of the school neighborhood disappeared when she entered the school building. Initially, 33%

(n=8) of the preservice teachers were nervous about being a minority, but their initial apprehension diminished as their comfort with the students and the school increased (Marxen & Rudney, 1999).

Wolffe (1996) assessed the influence of a two-day field experience in an urban school on the attitudes that preservice teachers had about urban students. The participants were junior elementary education majors who were enrolled in a small college in rural Indiana. Eighteen students participated in the field experience which took place in a magnet school with a population of nearly 50% African American students and 50% Caucasian students. The participants completed a ten question survey on two different occasions – a week prior to the urban experience and four days after returning from the field experience. The findings revealed the students had a reduced level of low expectations for urban schools, but they still held lower expectations for urban students compared to other students. A comparison was made with 18 sophomores who intended to major in elementary education. These students did not participate in the field experience and had no significant change in attitudes. In addition, written excerpts from the field experience participants provided the most convincing evidence of more positive expectations of urban students at the conclusion of the teaching experience (Wolffe, 1996).

Student teaching experiences in an urban school can assist in the growth of self-efficacy among preservice teachers. Rushton (2000) analyzed interviews, written reflections, and group discussions of five preservice teachers to gain a better understanding of their year-long internship experience in an inner-city school. Initially, the participants shared a feeling of culture shock. The preservice teachers expressed

disbelief concerning the challenging lives that students had, the prominent display of crime and violence in the community, and the disrespectful attitude of the students. As the participants became more familiar with the school environment, they reported feelings of increased self-efficacy. Rushton (2000) opined that “the severity of practice teaching in inner-city schools speeded up the development of self-efficacy. By accepting and embracing situations not normally considered conducive to building self-esteem the interns were forced to master the situation” (p.382). The findings of this study are similar to the findings of a later study by Rushton (2003).

Pagano, Weiner, Obi, and Swearingen (1995) examined the effect of an urban student teaching experience on the career motivations of future teachers. The preservice teachers credited their teaching experiences with a renewed commitment to a future career in teaching. From interviews conducted with 38 teacher candidates, the most common form of motivation cited by the teachers was their commitment to the students. They also responded positively to the cultural diversity found in urban classrooms, which encouraged several student teachers to desire a teaching position in an urban school (Pagano et al., 1995). A follow-up study was conducted with the same group of individuals two years after they had started teaching. The teachers’ dedication to their students was the factor deemed responsible for their continued commitment to teaching in an urban location. Four teachers expressed a decreased level of motivation citing unmotivated students and lack of support from the school administration (Pagano, Weiner, & Rand, 1997).

In contrast, Haberman and Post (1992) found direct experience in urban schools reinforced the preconceptions that preservice student had about urban students. Upon

completion of 100 hours of direct experience with low-income, minority students, the preservice teachers reported increased negative attitudes towards the students.

**Exposure to cultural diversity through experience.** Prospective urban teachers must be prepared and willing to embrace the cultural context of their classroom. Garmon (2004) conducted extensive interviews with a teacher candidate who hailed from a small rural community with a 1% minority population. Over the course of the teacher education program, the researcher noted a dramatic change in the participant's beliefs and attitudes towards racial/cultural diversity. Initially the participant intended to teach in a community that reflected the community where she was raised. However, during the last year of the teacher preparation program, the participant expressed an interest in teaching in an urban location. From the interviews, the researcher deduced that six factors consisting of both personal characteristics and relevant experiences facilitated a substantial change in the participant's viewpoint towards cultural diversity. The six important factors posited by Garmon (2004) were

- **OPENNESS.** Receptiveness to others' ideas or arguments, as well as receptiveness to diversity (p.204).
- **SELF-AWARENESS/SELF-REFLECTIVENESS.** Awareness and willingness to critically evaluate one's own beliefs and attitudes (p.205).
- **COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL JUSTICE.** A commitment to equity and equality for all people in society (p. 206).
- **INTERCULTURAL EXPERIENCES.** Opportunity for direct interaction with one or more individuals from a cultural group different than one's own (p. 207).
- **SUPPORT GROUP EXPERIENCES.** Individuals who encourage a person's growth through the use of various activities and provide feelings of acceptance, caring, safety, and support (p.209).
- **EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES.** Class-related experiences that support and extend learning (p. 210).

Considering the rural backgrounds of a majority of the preservice Agricultural Education teachers, personal characteristics and appropriate experiences are crucial factors in broadening perspectives about cultural diversity in the classroom. Only about half of the Agricultural Education programs require teacher education students to complete field experiences in schools with a diverse student population. Over 50% (n=28) of the student teaching sites lack student diversity commonly found in urban schools (Wakefield & Talbert, 1999).

### **Decision to Teach**

With a shortage of teachers, it is important to examine the impetus behind the decision to pursue a teaching career. According to Moran, Kilpatrick, Abbott, Dallat, and McClune (2001) factors that individuals credit for their decision to teach can be classified into three areas as defined by Kyriacou and Coulthard (2000),

- ALTRUISTIC REASONS. Reasons that deal with seeing teaching as a socially worthwhile and important job, a desire to help children succeed, and a desire to help society improve (p. 117).
- INTRINSIC REASONS: Reasons that cover aspects of the job activity itself, such as the activity of teaching children, and an interest in using their subject matter knowledge and expertise (p.117).
- EXTRINSIC REASONS: Reasons that cover aspects of the job which are not inherent in the work itself, such as long holidays, level of pay, and status (p. 117).

The motivation of altruistic, intrinsic, and extrinsic reasons is commonly acknowledged in the literature on the career decisions of prospective teachers. In Lortie's (1975) sociological study of teaching, he concluded that individuals were attracted to the teaching profession because they had a desire to work with young people, viewed teaching as a valuable service, felt they could express interests in the school setting,



preferred the hours and vacation time, and felt a sense of job security. Using Lortie's study as a framework, Morales (1994) investigated the career decision of 102 teacher education majors from four different counties. The participants indicated that the major reasons influencing their career choice were needs for service and power and the ability to influence others.

In a study of education students at Northwestern Oklahoma State University, Hayes (1990) reported that the most frequently mentioned reason for entering the teaching profession was the opportunity to provide a positive and nurturing environment for the students. The college students also expressed a love of children and felt that they would have the opportunity to express their creative abilities in a classroom. Contrary to the Lortie study, none of the participants mentioned the promise of job security as a factor that influenced their decision to teach. The students also acknowledged the influence of others on their personal decision to teach. Thirty-two percent of the students had at least one parent that was a teacher and 54% were encouraged to enter teaching by a former teacher.

While African American teachers indicated intrinsic motives for their pursuit of a teaching career, they also embraced the opportunity to serve as a social change agent and contribute to the improvement of the educational system for minorities. King (1993) examined why a cohort of African American teachers decided to enter teaching. Initially, the primary attraction to teaching for 83% of the participants was the opportunity to work with young people. However, the factors that they cited as most influential in their decision to actually teach was the lack of minority teachers who could serve as exemplary role models for the students. When comparing Caucasian and minority students' reasons

for entering teaching, both groups indicated intrinsic motives, but had distinctly different ideas as to their contributions to students (Su, 1996). Caucasian students believed that they could exert a positive influence on the lives of their students and make a significant contribution to society. Minority students felt a need to enter teaching in an effort to provide adequate educational opportunities for poor and minority students and offer a curriculum that would be relevant to minority students' experiences (Su, 1996).

Science teachers who participated in Eick's (2002) study described their initial intrinsic reasons for selecting a teaching career. They expressed a desire to exert a positive influence on their students. Females felt they should teach for learning and success, while males felt that they should help prepare students to become productive citizens.

### **Decision to Teach in an Urban School.**

After the completion of a field experience in a multicultural setting with students of varying ages and academic abilities, preservice teachers were asked to respond to the following question: "What aspects of your teaching experience would encourage you to consider teaching in an urban setting?" (Proctor, Rentz, & Jackson, 2001, p. 223). Responses to this question indicated preservice teachers possessed a desire to help underprivileged students by supporting their academic learning and establishing a concerned and loving relationship. They also appreciated urban students' responsiveness and enthusiasm and valued the multicultural differences among the elementary school students (Proctor, Rentz, & Jackson, 2001). Urban elementary teachers considered their decisions to take jobs in urban locations as a contribution to society through their assistance to students and devotion to providing quality learning opportunities to students of low socioeconomic backgrounds (Olsen & Anderson, 2004).

When Gilbert (1995) examined the beliefs that rural students had towards teaching in urban schools, 95 of the 193 participants expressed an interest in teaching in an urban school. Twenty-six of the students were motivated to teach in an urban area due to social or altruistic reasons. They indicated a belief that, “urban children deserved good teachers and good teaching and wanted to help the children or give back to the area where they had grown up” (p. 297). The respondents also identified several personal reasons that would help their decision to teach in an urban school including satisfaction with any teaching job, desire of a personal challenge, increased quality of life, and the potential opportunity for a higher income.

### **Decision to Teach Agricultural Education.**

Several studies in Agricultural Education focus on the academic abilities, such as high school rank, ACT scores, grade point average, of preservice teachers who enter the teaching profession compared to preservice teachers who enter a different career (McCoy & Mortensen, 1983; Muller & Miller, 1993; Wardlow, 1986). In an effort to examine the impact of student teaching experience and other personal characteristics, Hovatter (2002) surveyed 75 preservice Agricultural Education teachers about their decision to pursue a teaching career. The most influential factors on the teachers’ career decisions were a desire to interact with people and the opportunity to teach students valuable life skills through different components of the program.

### **Decision to Continue Teaching**

If long term retention of teachers is a potential solution for the teacher shortage, research findings paint a bleak picture about the length of teacher tenure. Typically teachers exit the profession early in their careers. Henke, Zahn, and Carroll (2001) found that 20% of new teachers leave within their first three years of teaching. In order to

maintain the current number of Agricultural Education programs, a high percentage of teacher retention is necessary. The exit of qualified Agricultural Education teachers coupled with the inability to produce enough graduates to fill current teacher openings could have negative consequences. Existing programs could potentially close and school districts may be dissuaded from starting new programs due to a lack of well-prepared teachers. To help combat such a problem, there is a need to examine why a teacher decides to continue teaching.

Johnson and Birkeland (2002) conducted interviews with 50 first and second year teachers who obtained teacher certification through a variety of methods (teacher preparation programs at public or private universities, state-sponsored or within-district charter schools, or alternative certification) and who decided to accept teaching positions in a wide range of public schools (urban and suburban; elementary, middle, and high school; large and small student populations; conventional and charter). Follow-up interviews with 13 teachers who were satisfied with teaching and planned to stay in the school where they began teaching for an indefinite amount of time revealed that these participants were highly efficacious in their ability to be successful teachers and sought out opportunities for professional growth and development.

The administration also contributed to the teachers' career satisfaction. The principals encouraged assistance from outside sources and established expectations that supported an orderly learning environment and maximized student achievement. This study also identified the importance of providing new teachers with an appropriate assignment and realistic workload, accessibility to adequate educational resources, and a school environment that promoted collegiality (Johnson & Birkeland, 2002).

Wilhelm, Dewhurst-Savellis, and Parker (2000) conducted a 15 year longitudinal study with 156 teachers. Every five years, the researchers collected data on careers, social networks, and coping styles used when stressed or depressed to make comparisons between individuals that remained in the teaching profession and those individuals who left the teaching profession. Teachers cited income, holiday and leave conditions, making a difference in students' lives, and student feedback as influential factors in their decisions to continue teaching.

### **Decision to Continue Teaching Agricultural Education.**

In 1980, Reilly and Welton conducted a study to determine why vocational agriculture teachers remained in the teaching profession. In a survey of 80 Kansas teachers, factors that encouraged teachers to continue teaching were specific to people in general, students, and the teaching environment. The participants expressed that they enjoyed working with a few specific groups of people: rural people, young people, and other vocational agriculture teachers. As well, the teachers attributed intrinsic rewards such as the satisfaction associated with helping students mature and learn and providing guidance to young people (Reilly & Welton, 1980).

By comparing Agricultural Education teachers who remained in the profession with Agricultural Education teachers who left teaching, Grady (1990) concluded that experience and perceived self-efficacy can influence career decisions. Individuals who continued teaching credited a positive learning experience and sound educational preparation for their competence in the classroom. Furthermore, the teachers who remained in the classroom described a much more positive experience during their first year of teaching when compared to the recollections of the teachers who left (Grady, 1990).

Cole (1984) conducted a similar study using certified Agricultural Education teachers who had graduated from Oregon State University over a 12 year period. Respondents included graduates who had never entered teaching, graduates who started teaching and left the profession, and teachers who remained teaching at the time of the study. Similar to the Grady (1990) study, teachers who were still teaching recognized the contribution of their teacher education program in curriculum development and teaching methods and the experience gained through student teaching. These teachers also enjoyed the hands-on and scientific aspects of teaching agriculture mechanics (Cole, 1984).

Edwards and Briers (2001) identified several characteristics that helped explain teachers' predictions about the longevity of their teaching career. Gender and agricultural work experience were identified as significant predictors of the number of years that teachers' anticipated remaining in the profession. Males and individuals with a higher level of agricultural work experience expected to remain agriculture teachers for the longest period of time. If this study holds true broadly throughout the profession, the dramatic increase of female preservice teachers and female agriculture teachers could create future concerns for teacher retention.

**Decision to continue teaching in an urban school.** Using interviews and questionnaires, Shann (1998) evaluated the satisfaction of urban middle school teachers. The participants identified the students as the most enjoyable aspect of their job. They stressed the importance of maintaining a good relationship between teachers and students and felt most satisfied with this facet of their teaching careers (Shann, 1998).

Teacher confidence and competence in the classroom can help extend the length of a teaching career. Chester and Beaudin (1996) were interested in how teacher

characteristics and school practices affected self-efficacy beliefs of novice teachers in urban schools. New teachers who perceived high levels of cooperation among faculty and administration reported higher levels of self-efficacy than new teachers who were isolated from other teachers in the school. As well, new teachers who were observed by an administrator multiple times throughout the school year reported a positive change in their self-efficacy as compared to their counterparts who were not observed. The supportive and collaborative nature of a school, in addition to observation and feedback from administrators can successfully support the induction process of new urban teachers.

### **Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a review of research that is relevant to the research study. Urban schools commonly enroll students whose demographic characteristics and home environment are different than those of rural and suburban students. The populations of urban schools are often composed of a large percentage of culturally diverse students. Additionally, urban schools reported higher levels of ESOL students and students residing in non-traditional families.

Preservice teachers often seek teaching positions near their hometowns. Due to the rural or suburban upbringing of many preservice teachers, they are often disinclined to consider teaching positions in urban areas. The perceptions and beliefs of preservice teachers could support their aversion to teaching in urban schools. Literature documents the beliefs that preservice teachers had regarding urban students, the parents of urban students, urban teachers, the urban school context, and cultural diversity. The inclusion of field experiences in teacher preparation courses challenged some of the pre-existing beliefs of preservice teachers and encouraged some preservice teachers to consider

teaching positions in urban schools. Also, field experiences exposed preservice teachers to the cultural diversity commonly found in urban classrooms.

There are multiple influences on teachers' decisions to teach. Teachers often cite the impact of altruistic, intrinsic, and extrinsic reasons on their career decisions. Preservice teachers are often attracted to urban schools because they feel they are able to make a contribution to society by assisting with the academic growth of urban students. Other factors that encouraged preservice teachers to accept teaching positions in urban schools included job opportunities, desire for personal challenge, increased quality of life, and possibility of a higher income. Most of the research literature on individuals' decisions to teach Agricultural Education focus on academic measures such as standardized test scores and grades. However, Hovatter (2002) reported that Agricultural Education preservice teachers were drawn to the profession by a desire to work with students.

Teacher retention is a challenge facing the education profession. Research reports have indicated a high percentage of teacher attrition. Teachers who continued to teach reported high levels of self-efficacy, support from administration, desire to participate in professional development offerings, opportunity to influence the lives of students, and personal benefits. Agricultural education teachers were encouraged to continue in their profession by the opportunity to work with students, people in the community, and in a particular teaching environment. The influence of agriculture teacher's teacher preparation courses and the success of their first year of teaching also contributed to their decisions to continue teaching. Similarly, teachers in urban schools credited rapport with students and confidence in the classroom for their decisions to continue teaching.



In summary, this chapter details many of the characteristics that are unique to urban schools and to Agricultural Education. However, as previously mentioned, minimal research has been conducted on Agricultural Education programs in urban schools. In order to advance efforts to place and retain urban agriculture teachers, research is needed on the distinct characteristics of Agricultural Education programs in urban schools and how these characteristics influence preservice teachers' decisions to teach in an urban school, their urban teaching experiences, and their decisions to continue their teaching career in an urban school.

## CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

In order to better understand why an agriculture teacher chooses to teach Agricultural Education in an urban school, a qualitative approach was utilized for this study. As defined by Denzin and Lincoln (1994), qualitative research is

multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals' lives. (p.2)

More specifically, in-depth interviews were used to develop an understanding of career decisions of urban Agricultural Education teachers by exploring: the perceptions that the teachers held prior to accepting a teaching position in an urban school, the teachers' experiences while teaching in an urban school, and the teacher's outlook on their future career within an urban school context.

This chapter describes the research design and methods that were employed during this study. A discussion of researcher subjectivity, theoretical perspective, measures of validity and reliability, participant selection, data collection, and data analysis are included in the chapter.

### **Researcher Subjectivity**

When contrasting the positivist and naturalist paradigms, there are several widely accepted principles that are in conflict. The belief about the role of values in inquiry has incompatible views on the function of the research methodology and the researcher

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The positivist approach promotes the use of research methodology that is objective and value-free. Conversely, the naturalist approach acknowledges the multiple influences that the researcher imposes on a research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As a result, it is essential that the researcher becomes personally aware of his/her subjectivities and allows the reader to understand the subjectivity of the researcher. By documenting tacit knowledge and beliefs, the researcher is better able to monitor perspectives that could manipulate the interview process and distort the data analysis and research findings (Glesne, 1999). The subjectivity of the researcher is detailed below:

I was born and raised in Fayette County, Ohio. When I looked out any of the windows of my childhood home, I saw acres of corn and soybeans. A gravel lane stretched a quarter of a mile behind my house. At the end of the lane was my grandparent's house, which was surrounded by a barn, feeding floors, and several fields that my dad and grandpa used to raise pigs. On the mile stretch of road where I grew up, there were a total of six houses. My family lived about eight miles from the county seat, Washington Court House, which had a population of about 15,000. On the outside of the city limits lived another 15,000 residents.

From 1990–1994, I attended high school at Miami Trace High School. Built in 1962, the high school was the newest of all nine schools in the district. My rural high school enrolled approximately 800 students in grades 9–12. With a student body that was 99% Caucasian, I received minimal exposure to other cultures. There was not much for teenagers to do in a small town, so my friends and I stayed busy with extracurricular

clubs. On the weekends, we attended local sporting events such as football or basketball, or spent a few hours burning gas while cruising around town.

When I started ninth grade, I was excited to enroll in an Agricultural Education class and join FFA. During my four years as an FFA member, I had the opportunity to participate in a variety of FFA activities. I was a member of the parliamentary procedure and dairy foods judging teams, served as a chapter officer, attended FFA camp for four summers, and traveled to Kansas City for the National FFA Convention. My active involvement in FFA encouraged my decision to major in Agricultural Education while at Ohio State.

During my undergraduate career, I fulfilled the requirements necessary to complete my degree, but I did not have a vested interest in teaching agriculture. In my first two years of the program, I assumed that I would find a job teaching in a small town close to my hometown, teach for a few years, and then enter a new career path. As my graduation date got closer, I decided to explore job opportunities beyond the state of Ohio. My family thought I would relocate to either Indiana or Missouri and were very surprised when I expressed an interest in finding a job in Florida.

In May 1998, I flew to Orlando to interview for agriculture teaching positions. I had four interviews; one for a middle school position and three for high school positions. I departed Orlando with a job at Corner Lake Middle School, which was a brand new school located on the east side of Orlando. I would be teaching agriculture as an exploratory subject to approximately 500 6<sup>th</sup>-, 7<sup>th</sup>-, and 8<sup>th</sup>- grade students.

I was excited to teach in Orlando. My aunt and uncle lived on a golf course in an affluent suburb of Orlando, so I assumed that all my students would come from similar

environments. Was I in for a surprise! During the middle of the pre-planning frenzy, my principal loaded all of the teachers on school buses so we could become acquainted with the area where our students lived. The homes ranged from small, dilapidated houses, to crowded apartment complexes, to extravagant homes with well manicured lawns and swimming pools in the backyard. The make-up of my classes was just as diverse as the homes that we saw on the bus tour. My students were from diverse cultures, family structures, and economic backgrounds.

My two years of teaching at Corner Lake were challenging. I was faced with large class sizes and students who lacked skills that were appropriate for their grade level. Our school was on a 9-week block schedule, so it was often difficult to build rapport with each student in only 22 days. At the end of my second year of teaching, I decided that I wanted to teach high school and obtained a job at Robert Hungerford Preparatory High School. This school was a stark contrast to the high school that I had attended. The campus was located in Eatonville, Florida, which is the oldest incorporated black municipality in the United States. The student population was made up of 42% African American students, 33% Caucasian students, and 23% Hispanic students. Over half of the students qualified for free or reduced lunches.

Initially, I was a little nervous about how my lack of cultural exposure might influence my interaction with the students in my program. I was also worried about my ability to deliver an agriscience curriculum that would meet the expectations of the students and administration. The three years I spent teaching at Hungerford Prep were extremely demanding, but rewarding. My students were enthusiastic and involved in many activities and projects. In addition to the day-to-day routine of the classroom, the

program housed a plethora of animals: chickens, sheep, hamsters, rabbits, fish, and a prairie dog. We were fortunate to receive administrative approval to travel the state and beyond the state line. We attended the National FFA Convention in Louisville, Kentucky; visited many sites in Central Florida; and spent a few weeks every summer at leadership and forestry camps. The students were also enthusiastic FFA members. They loved competing in the forestry contest, the parliamentary procedure contest, and in ornamental horticulture demonstrations. The students also enjoyed contributing to the community through involvement in community service events, from serving dinner in a homeless shelter to assisting with the Adopt-A-Highway program.

Teaching agriculture in an urban school was an enriching experience for me. My students were so thoughtful and appreciative of even the smallest things that I would do for them. The students invited me to attend activities that were significant to them, such as church services, sporting events, and music recitals. At one church service I attended, I was one of only two Caucasians in the entire sanctuary. I had grown used to teaching in a school where over half the student population was comprised of African American and Hispanic students. Nevertheless, during that church service I was able to identify with feelings of being a minority.

As an urban agriscience teacher, I truly felt like I was able to make a difference in the lives of my students. I felt like more than just a teacher, I filled the role of a parent or an older sister for many of my students. I often find myself looking at pictures of my former students to remind myself of the positive impact that a diverse group of Orlando high school students made on my life.

The use of a qualitative methodology allowed for the human as instrument (Guba & Lincoln, 1981), in the retelling of the participants' career stories. While the researcher attempted to maintain objectivity throughout data collection and data analysis, the researcher's prior experience as an urban agriculture teacher could have potentially influenced the probing questions included in the interview process. However, the researcher employed several measures that are discussed later in the chapter, in an attempt to provide an accurate representation of the participants' career decisions and career experiences.

### **Epistemology and Theoretical Perspective**

Epistemology is concerned with "the nature of knowledge, its possibility, scope, and general basis" (Hamlyn, 1995, p. 242). Constructionism recognizes that meaning occurs as a result of our engagement with the realities in our world. As described by Schwandt (1994), "knowledge and truth are created, not discovered by the mind" (p.125).

A theoretical perspective is "a way of looking at the world and making sense of it. It involves knowledge and embodies a certain understanding of what is entailed in knowing, that is, how we know what we know" (Crotty, 2003, p.8). Constructivism was the theoretical perspective guiding this research study. The use of constructivism focuses on the unique experiences of each individual and acknowledges the validity of each person's method of making sense of the world (Crotty, 2003). Through the use of in-depth interviews, the researcher and the participants were engaged in the construction of a narrative to detail the participants' perspectives of their teaching experiences in an urban agriculture program. Each of the participating teachers had the opportunity to share their distinct beliefs and individual experiences specific to their career in an urban school.

### **Qualitative Measures of Validity and Reliability**

In quantitative research, the quality of the research is measured using the following criteria: internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) pointed out, “criteria defined from one perspective may not be appropriate for judging actions taken from another perspective” (p.293). Guba (1981) proposes four criteria that are more appropriate for qualitative research: “credibility in place of internal validity, transferability in place of external validity, dependability in place of reliability, and confirmability in place of objectivity” (p.219).

When considering the credibility of a qualitative research inquiry, “it is assumed that reality is constructed, multidimensional, and ever-changing; there is no such thing as a single reality to be observed and measured. In a sense, the researcher offers his or her interpretation of someone else’s interpretation of reality” (Merriam, 1995, p. 54).

Member checks, peer/colleague examination, and the creation of a subjectivity statement were used in order to strengthen the credibility of the current study. Prior to beginning the study, the researcher articulated her personal experiences and biases so that the reader would better understand the interpretation of the data. After the interviews were transcribed, the participants were asked to complete a member check and verify the accuracy of the transcripts. Throughout the process of axial coding and selective coding and during the stages of theory development, a colleague scrutinized the data and critiqued the emerging theory and research findings (Merriam, 1995).

Dependability seeks to ensure the findings of a study reflect the data collected from the interview participants. In addition to using peer examinations, an audit trail was maintained to establish consistency between the interview data and the proposed findings (Merriam, 1995). The researcher documented the data collection process, the



development of the open codes, selective codes, and axial codes, the progression of theory development, and any other decisions pertinent to the research process (Merriam, 1998).

While quantitative research stresses the importance of generalizability, the goal of the qualitative approach is “to understand the particular in depth, rather than finding out what is generally true of many” (Merriam, 1995, p.57). In order to achieve a sound understanding of the research, thick description was used to detail the participants’ beliefs and experiences. The inclusion of detailed description allows readers to easily transfer the research findings to comparable situations (Merriam, 1995).

### **Participant Selection**

Purposeful sampling was used to identify and select potential interview participants for the study. This type of sampling advocates the selection of information-rich cases for study to provide thorough understanding and insight rather than empirical generalizations generated by quantitative studies (Patton, 2002). More specifically, a criterion sample (Patton, 2002) was used to select nine individuals who had graduated from a teacher education program and had been teaching in an urban school for one to eight years. The potential interview participants were initially contacted through email to explain the purpose and importance of the study, the value of their participation, and the data collection methods. After receipt of the initial email, interview dates and times were arranged using the telephone or email. Email correspondence can be found in Appendix C.

### **Data Collection**

The first step in the data collection process was to create research questions that were appropriate for the theoretical perspective guiding this study. The use of

constructivism allowed for the participants to express their perceptions about the decision to take a job in an urban school and continue teaching in an urban school. Also, the inclusion of questions about the teachers' experiences in an urban school allowed them to explain how pertinent experiences impacted their perceptions of their current careers and future tenure in urban schools. After the interview question guide was designed and reviewed by a panel of experts, the IRB protocol and informed consent was submitted to IRB for approval. The interview informed consent document can be found in Appendix D, IRB protocol approval can be found in Appendix E, and the interview question guide can be found in Appendix F. In early February 2006, the protocol was followed in a pilot study conducted with three middle school urban agriculture teachers. This allowed the researcher to make appropriate modifications to probing questions that were asked in the interviews.

For the present study, nine interviews were conducted from February – April 2006. The use of interviewing allowed the researcher to understand the experience of other people and the meaning they construct of that experience (Seidman, 1998). Interviews were conducted in order to describe how each teacher made meaning of their teaching experience in an urban school. A semistructured format was used to organize the one-hour interview. The researcher used a set of guiding questions during the interview, but used probing questions to expand and clarify statements made by the participants (Hatch, 2002). Seven of the interviews were conducted in the teacher's classroom. Due to extenuating circumstances, one interview was conducted in the teacher's home and one interview was conducted in a restaurant selected by the teacher. With the consent of the participants, all of the interviews were audio taped for transcription at a later time.

### **Data Analysis**

The process of grounded theory allows for the development of theory using data that were systematically gathered and analyzed. This method allows for the establishment of a close connection between the data collection, analysis, and resulting theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and encourages the researcher to create a conceptual understanding of concrete realities that were expressed during interviews (Charmaz, 2003). The use of grounded theory offers the following benefits to a research study,

Theory derived from data is more likely to resemble "reality" than is theory derived by putting together a series of concepts based on experience or solely through speculation. Grounded theories, because they are drawn from the data, are likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 12).

The use of grounded theory requires a concurrent effort to collect and analyze data in the initial stages of the research process. A benefit to this effort is that it “keeps researchers close to their gathered data rather than to what they may have previously assumed or wished was the case” (Charmaz, 2003, p.312).

Two different approaches to grounded theory are commonly used. When using objectivist grounded theory, the researcher takes a positivist approach to uncover an external reality that is already in existence. This method requires the researcher to remain distant from the research participants and serve as an external and detached authority on the participants and their realities (Charmaz, 2003). In contrast, the constructivist approach to grounded theory acknowledges that the data and analysis are co-constructed using the shared experiences of the researcher and participants. The researcher does not seek to discover an external reality using only the collected data. Instead, the data analysis is a reflection of researcher’s thinking which may not strictly adhere to the data alone (Charmaz, 2003). Due to the researcher’s prior teaching experience in an urban

school, objectivist grounded theory was used to ensure that the data and analysis were a collective representation of the participants without manipulation from the researcher.

After the data were collected and transcribed, open coding was used to break the data down into smaller, more distinct segments that could be used to identify similarities and differences in the data from each individual interview and across all nine interviews (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Once the researcher completed open codes of all the interview data, axial coding was used to create a category that encompassed all of the codes that were appropriately related. Finally, selective coding was used to begin integrating the identified categories into an initial theory. The open codes, axial codes, and selective codes generated from the data can be found in Appendix A. Memos and diagrams were used to assist in the process of data analysis and help create a conceptual understanding of the developed theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter described the research design and methods that were employed during this study. A discussion of researcher subjectivity, theoretical perspective, measures of validity and reliability, participant selection, data collection, and data analysis was also included in the chapter.

## CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the decisions of agriculture teachers to teach in an urban school. At the conclusion of the transcription process, 178 pages of text were included in the data analysis process. From the data, categories emerged specific to the teachers' decisions to teach Agricultural Education, the teachers' decisions to teach Agricultural Education in an urban location, the experiences of the teachers while teaching agriculture classes to urban students, and the teachers' outlook on their teaching tenure in an urban school. The use of coding resulted in the emergence of two selective codes relevant to teachers' initial decisions to teach Agricultural Education, six selective codes relevant to the influences on teachers' initial decisions to teach Agricultural Education in an urban area, eleven selective codes relevant to agriculture teachers' current experiences in urban schools, and one selective code relevant to agriculture teachers' outlook on their teaching tenure in an urban school. The figures included in Appendix A depict the relationships between the open codes, axial codes, and selective codes. Also presented in this chapter is a grounded theory to illustrate the career experiences of the nine participants in the study.

### **Description of Participants**

To provide more detail of the participants' backgrounds and teaching careers, brief biographical sketches of each participant have been included below and in Table 4-1. In an effort to protect the confidentiality of the participants, pseudonyms have been used.

**Ms. Brown**

Ms. Brown has always lived in a metropolitan area of Florida. She attended a suburban high school where she was enrolled in Agricultural Education and was a member of FFA. She completed her student teaching experience in an urban middle school and has been teaching at her current school for three years. Currently, Ms. Brown is teaching agriculture as a semester long elective class at an inner city, Title I school to 6<sup>th</sup>-, 7<sup>th</sup>-, and 8<sup>th</sup>- graders. In addition to her responsibilities as an agriculture teacher and FFA advisor, Ms. Brown has served as the head track coach for the last two years.

**Ms. Campbell**

Ms. Campbell grew up in a suburb of a Midwestern city and never had the opportunity to enroll in Agricultural Education as a high school student. She relocated to Florida to attend college. She initially majored in Food Science and Human Nutrition, but was encouraged by her faculty advisor to consider a career in Agricultural Education. She completed her student teaching experience in a rural school, but has been teaching in an urban district for five years. Ms. Campbell began her teaching career in a middle school, where she taught for four years, before transferring to her present middle school prior to the 2005–2006 school year.

**Ms. Carter**

Ms. Carter grew up in a small town and did not enroll in Agricultural Education while in high school. After earning her bachelors degree in animal science, she worked on a swine farm in a Midwestern state prior to earning her teaching certification. Ms. Carter returned to the high school she attended to complete her student teaching. She first moved to an urban area to take a position teaching agriculture as part of an exploratory wheel to middle school students. After teaching middle school for four years, Ms. Carter

accepted a position at a high school in the same county, teaching Veterinary Assisting. Currently, she is teaching Veterinary Assisting to 10<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> grade students.

**Mr. Hill**

Mr. Hill was raised in a rural area of a Midwestern state, but did not grow up on a farm. He was enrolled in Agricultural Education classes throughout all four years of high school. After graduating from a land-grant institution, he worked in agribusiness for one year then returned to the university to complete his teacher certification. His student teaching experience was completed in a rural high school. Mr. Hill started his teaching career at a charter middle school. After one year, he moved to his current district and has been teaching for four years. Mr. Hill's program is an Agricultural Biotechnology magnet program that has approximately 90 students enrolled. He teaches Agriscience Foundations, Agricultural Biotechnology 2, Plant Biotechnology, and Animal Biotechnology.

**Ms. Fritz**

Ms. Fritz was raised in a rural area, but did not grow up on a farm. She attended a high school with a large Agricultural Education program and enrolled in an agriculture class during her junior year of high school. During college, she changed her major from animal science to Agricultural Education and completed her student teaching in a rural school. Ms. Fritz began her teaching career at the high school where she is currently teaching and has been there for five years. She teaches an agriculture class for Exceptional Student Education (ESE) students, Agriscience Foundations, and Veterinary Assisting.

**Ms. Taylor**

Ms. Taylor grew up in a rural area, but attended elementary school and middle school in town because she had access to after-school care. Ms. Taylor entered a rural high school and enrolled in an agriculture class as a freshman. While in college, she considered majoring in nursing, but selected a major in Agricultural Education. Ms. Taylor completed her student teaching experience at the urban high school where she currently teaches. Upon her graduation from college, Ms. Taylor moved to a western state to work as a horse trainer. In January 2006, Ms. Taylor started her teaching career in Florida. Her teaching responsibilities include an ESE Agriscience Foundations class, Agriscience Foundations, and Aquaculture Foundations.

**Mr. Flood**

Mr. Flood was born and raised in a metropolitan area. In sixth grade, he enrolled in the agriculture magnet program at the middle school where he currently teaches and attended an agriculture magnet program during high school. He completed his student teaching internship at an urban middle school and then returned to his hometown to accept a teaching position. Mr. Flood has been teaching 8<sup>th</sup> grade for two years. The magnet program in which he teaches enrolls approximately 440 of the school's 1200 middle school students. During his first year, Mr. Flood had the opportunity to teach three exploratory agriculture classes for students in the general school population. However, due to an increase in student numbers, he is currently only teaching magnet students.

**Mr. Gall**

Mr. Gall grew up in a rural area and was a student and FFA member in a very active Agricultural Education program. He completed his student teaching experience in



a rural high school, but relocated to an urban area to teach in a newly opened school. This is Mr. Gall's second year of teaching. He is currently teaching Agriscience Foundations, Agricultural Biotechnology, an ESE Agriscience Foundations course, and two sections of Biology.

### **Mr. Linder**

Mr. Linder grew up in a small, rural town with a rich tradition of Agricultural Education programs and FFA involvement. He estimated that there were 21 agriculture teachers in his hometown of 27,000 people. Mr. Linder was very active in FFA during middle school and high school. He completed his student teaching experience at a magnet program in an urban high school and accepted a teaching position at a new middle school in the same urban district. Mr. Linder is in his first year of teaching and teaches a year-long agriculture elective class to a mix of 6<sup>th</sup>-, 7<sup>th</sup>-, and 8<sup>th</sup>- graders. Currently, he has about 190 students in his agriculture classes.

Table 4-1 Description of Participants

Name	Teaching Experience (years)	High School Attended	Student Teaching Location	Ag Ed/FFA Involvement as Student
Ms. Brown	3	Suburban	Urban M.S.	Yes
Ms. Campbell	5	Suburban	Rural H.S.	No
Ms. Carter	6	Rural	Rural H.S.	No
Mr. Hill	5	Rural	Rural H.S.	Yes
Ms. Fritz	5	Rural	Rural H.S.	Yes
Ms. Taylor	1	Rural	Urban H.S.	Yes
Mr. Flood	2	Urban	Urban M.S.	Yes
Mr. Gall	2	Rural	Rural H.S.	Yes
Mr. Linder	1	Rural	Urban H.S.	Yes

### **Teachers' Decisions to Teach Agricultural Education**

The categories relevant to the teachers' decisions to teach Agricultural Education included teacher background and decision to pursue teacher certification in Agricultural

Education. A framework detailing the relationships between the open codes, axial codes, and selective codes is shown in Figure A-1. Each specific category is detailed below.

**Teacher background.** The category, teacher background, was comprised of three axial codes including involvement in Agricultural Education, involvement in FFA, and lack of involvement in Agricultural Education/FFA. All of the participating teachers who had been enrolled in Agricultural Education in middle school and/or high school reflected on their individual experiences in Agricultural Education and FFA. However, enrollment in Agricultural Education and participation in FFA was not an influential factor on all of the teachers' decisions to teach as two had not been enrolled as students.

The axial code, involvement in Agricultural Education, emerged based on the discussion of seven participants regarding their personal experiences as Agricultural Education students. While the paths taken to enroll in Agricultural Education were found to be unique for all participants, Mr. Flood described the unusual circumstances that led to his enrollment in Agricultural Education,

I landed in the class by accident. I think what happened was I was in physical education and we had to buy a uniform and that kind of thing and a student, I think, stole my uniform, so I didn't have anything to dress out in and I got a zero for the day and then they had this new agriscience class but they didn't have any enrollment so they came to us and said look some of you guys probably don't want to be here and so we have this new class, they go on field trips and have a lot of fun. I said sure why not. And ended up in the class. Knew nothing about agriculture at all.

Although this participant did not have prior knowledge about agriculture, he found the curriculum to be novel and exciting. Similarly, Mr. Hill also ended up in an 8th grade agriculture class by chance, but his respect for the teacher and interest in the subject matter encouraged him to enroll in high school agriculture classes,

The last nine weeks of 8<sup>th</sup> grade, we were on an exploration wheel and they stuck me in this ag class. Everybody had to take it, but it was my last nine weeks and I

liked the teacher, I thought it was interesting. I didn't grow up on a farm, I mean I grew up in the country, but it wasn't by any means farming and I just liked the way the classroom was. I liked the teacher and realized that was a good place for me.

Another teacher who was recruited into a high school agriculture class by her friend revealed that she "loved ag class" and "loved being around the animals." Mr. Hill felt a sense of comfort and security that was established through strong bonds with the one agriculture teacher that he had for four years and referred to his Agricultural Education class as a "home base."

The seven former Agricultural Education students also discussed their involvement in FFA. In the hometown of Mr. Linder, "FFA is very, very big and basically dominates the culture." In this same community, there was an expectation for high-achieving students to "just join FFA." Ms. Brown touted her former FFA chapter as an "amazing FFA program." The seven participants took part in a variety of FFA activities ranging from competing in Career Development Events (CDEs), to showing livestock, to serving as a chapter FFA officer and as a state FFA officer. One participant even credited her FFA involvement for "forming who I am today." The prior experiences that these seven participants had in Agricultural Education and FFA influenced their decisions to teach Agricultural Education.

In contrast, two of the participants never enrolled in an agriculture class while they were in school. For Ms. Campbell, there was never an opportunity to take an agriculture class. Due to the increasing urbanization of her hometown, the agriculture program was eliminated prior to her entry into high school. Ms. Carter had aspirations of becoming a veterinarian, but expressed a lack of knowledge about the course offerings, "no one ever talked to me about FFA or agriculture" and a lack of interest in large animals, "I didn't want to have anything to do with cows or pigs." Consequently, she never enrolled in the

agriculture classes offered at her high school. These participants' lack of experience in Agricultural Education and FFA did not deter their decisions to become an agriculture teacher. Both participants were encouraged to pursue a teaching certificate by faculty advisors, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

**Decision to pursue teacher certification in Agricultural Education.** The category, decision to pursue teacher certification in Agricultural Education, was comprised of three axial codes including opportunity to work with kids and animals, influence of agriculture teacher, and influence of college advisor. Several of the participants anticipated the opportunities a career in Agricultural Education would afford them to work with an audience of interest, either children or animals. Also, recommendations and advice from former agriculture teachers and college advisors encouraged the teachers to prepare for a teaching career.

Two of the participants credited their love of children for their decision to pursue a teaching career in Agricultural Education. Ms. Brown stated, "basically the key thing is that I enjoy being around kids" and Ms. Taylor described her lasting affinity for working with children, "I've always loved kids. Children are my passion". When considering obtaining a degree in education, Mr. Hill thought that as an agriculture teacher he could make the biggest difference in the lives of his students, "if I want to influence children, where else can you do it except in the ag classroom because you see them for four years. You don't see those kids in an English classroom or a math classroom." Ms. Carter thought teaching agriculture would allow her to interact with animals, "I wanted to teach animal science because even though I wasn't going to be a vet, I still wanted to work with animals."

Former agriculture teachers made a lasting impact on five of the participants and helped shape the participants' career decisions. While Mr. Flood was enrolled in agricultural education for seven years, he initially had no intention of becoming a teacher, yet, his Agriculture Education teacher's promotion of teaching influenced Mr. Flood's career choice,

Up until my senior year of (high school), I had no interest in teaching at all, but after talking to several of my agriculture teachers who kind of convinced me or kind of gave me some of the benefits of teaching ag...I thought what a better thing to do than teach agriculture?

While wrestling with the decision of what to do at the conclusion of high school, Ms. Brown consulted with her agriculture teacher and took his advice,

One day I went to my agriculture teacher and said I don't know what I want to do when I graduate and he told me, you should be an agriculture teacher. I was like are you serious? That changed me. I decided, okay this is what I want to do.

Three additional participants described the positive impact and lasting impression that their agriculture teachers made on their lives. As described by Mr. Linder, "my teacher really inspired me, he believed in me and treated me like I had never been treated before."

College advisors were responsible for the transition of three participants from other majors or careers into the Agricultural Education major. Ms. Carter had already been working on a pig farm in another state when she became interested in the possibility of becoming an agriculture teacher and contacted a faculty member in the Agricultural Education department, "and told him I was interested in maybe teaching ... we talked on email and said what I needed to do, how I need to get certified, so I just decided to do that." For Ms. Fritz, her work experience made her realize she was pursuing the wrong career path, "I was going to go into the dairy industry and the more I worked at the dairy

research unit, the more I realized I did not want to be on a dairy.” Her faculty advisor in the Agricultural Education department assisted her in developing a schedule that would allow her to complete her teacher certification in a reasonable amount of time. Ms. Campbell had always considered becoming a teacher, but she was concerned that she would be “stuck in a classroom.” When she was contemplating a possible major change, Ms. Campbell’s advisor from the Food Science and Human Nutrition department happened to be a former agriculture teacher and suggested that she consider teaching Agricultural Education. Since Ms. Campbell had no prior experience in Agricultural Education, her advisor recommended that she visit a few agriculture programs. While visiting the programs, Ms. Campbell realized that teaching Agricultural Education did not adhere to her initial perception of teaching and appealed to her as a future career,

The moment I walked in, I was hooked. I was like these kids are outside, they’re getting their hands dirty. Oh my gosh, it’s hands-on, this is perfect, this is everyday life, that’s where I want to be.

The opportunity to work with a particular audience of interest and encouragement from a former agriculture teacher or a college advisor encouraged the participants to pursue teacher certification in Agricultural Education.

### **Teachers’ Decisions to Teach Agricultural Education in Urban Schools**

The six categories relevant to the teacher’s decisions to teach Agricultural Education in an urban school included prior experience in urban schools, desired location, decision to teach in a particular school, level of influence from family, participants’ perceptions of urban schools, and participants’ perceptions of Agricultural Education in rural schools. A framework detailing the relationships between the open codes, axial codes, and selective codes is shown in Figure A-2. Each specific category is detailed below.

**Prior experience in urban schools.** The category of prior experience in urban schools consisted of the axial codes including no prior experience, “guest” experience, and internship experience. Two of the participants stated that they did not have any prior experiences in urban schools. Mr. Hill and Mr. Gall both grew up in rural areas and completed student teaching internships in rural schools.

Several of the participants gained exposure to urban schools through various “guest experiences”. While Ms. Campbell and Ms. Fritz completed their student teaching in rural schools, they participated in an Agricultural Education field trip to urban schools. Ms. Brown took the initiative to visit other inner-city schools and urban schools while looking for a job in the urban county where she currently teaches. Mr. Linder spent about three weeks volunteering in urban schools to gain some initial experience in an urban classroom. The participants did not reflect on the impact of this “guest” experience on their eventual career decision.

Four of the participants had the opportunity to complete their student teaching experience in an urban school. For Ms. Taylor, she returned to teach in the same urban program where she completed her student teaching. Mr. Linder described the impact that his student teaching experience in an urban school had on his eventual career decision,

My original plan, up until student teaching, was to go to (state) and teach there. I student taught and I just liked it a lot, way more than I thought I would. I thought it was very, very productive. I thought the FFA was even better than I realized, as a teacher. I enjoyed it a lot more because I was able to see it from a different perspective how much children can be helped by it.

Ms. Brown felt that the exposure she had to students with “different ethnic backgrounds” helped prepare her for an urban teaching position. While not all of the participants correlated their internship experience in an urban school with their decision to teach in an

urban school, their internship experience did not discourage them from seeking a teaching position in an urban program.

**Desired Location.** The category of desired location was comprised of the following axial codes: desired teaching location and desired living location. The environment where the participants wanted to live combined with the location of the school resulted in the teachers' desired locations to look for job opportunities.

Four of the participants expressed a desire to live in an urban area due to their prior experience in an urban area, their reluctance to live in a rural area, or for a change from their current living location. Ms. Brown expressed her preference for a city lifestyle, "I like living in the city, I don't want to be living out in the middle of nowhere." Ms. Fritz also wanted to avoid moving to a rural area, "I don't want to be in a big farming area." Mr. Hill thought that relocating to an urban area would be a "neat place" in closer proximity to the ocean and would offer a better climate, "I just got tired of the snow." As well, Ms. Carter couldn't specifically explain what led her to seek employment in a city, but noted "I just wanted to get away from where I grew up." Even though Ms. Carter, who teaches in Orlando, was eager to move away from her hometown, she would have been reluctant to move to certain cities in Florida, "Orlando is a big city, but it's not really a big city...Miami would scare me." One participant, who teaches in Miami, explained that he would have never imagined himself living in an urban area, "I didn't really want to be a part of it. Like when I think about really metropolitan urban areas, like downtown Miami and New York City, LA, I still can't see myself living in those places." He further explained that he did not want to live in close proximity to others, "When you grow up on a farm and your closest neighbor besides your grandma is a half a mile away,



having somebody to the right and left and above and below, that is kind of restrictive.” Eventually, this participant decided to move to an urban center to teach a specific curriculum offering, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

**Decision to teach in a particular school.** The category decision to teach in a particular school was comprised of the following seven axial codes: the need for an agriculture teacher, influence of agriculture supervisor, influence of other teacher(s), curriculum offerings, professional network, social network, and personal control.

Six of the participants responded to the publicized need for an agriculture teacher. At her first school, Ms. Campbell was compelled to take the job because the “program was being threatened to close.” The position at another school was “posted for two or three years” before Ms. Brown accepted the job. Ms. Taylor felt the other agriculture teachers “needed my help” after another agriculture teacher left the school early in the academic year. Although Mr. Hill attended college in a Midwestern state, he learned about the job opportunities in Florida through a job posting board,

I walked through the hallways at (land grant institution) and they had postings for the teaching jobs and there was a job in Orlando...I said, you know that’s a good idea, maybe I’ll just teach in Orlando or maybe I’ll just teach in Florida.

Four of the participants discussed the influence of the Agricultural Education supervisor in their respective school districts. Ms. Carter described the effective recruiting strategies used by the supervisor in her county, “I think (supervisor’s name) was one of the main reasons that I came to (city). She contacted me, she was very helpful, and she sold the program in the county.” Mr. Gall was recruited by the county supervisor during his student teaching experience and the supervisor “took me to a couple different schools”, one of the three schools that the participant visited is where he eventually accepted a teaching position. These participants would not have been aware of the

teaching possibilities in urban counties without the communication from the county supervisor.

Five of the participants taught in single teacher departments, while only three of the participants were teachers in a two-teacher agriculture department and one of the participants worked with four other agriculture teachers. Two of the participants were attracted to an urban school through the influence of the other teacher(s). When interviewing for the teaching position at her current school, Ms. Fritz had the chance to meet the other agriculture teacher who made the position “very attractive. He offered me class choices on whatever I wanted to teach. He said you can coach whichever FFA teams. I knew I would have a lot of choices and options for what I wanted to do here.” Ms. Taylor considered her colleagues, “awesome people to work with” and stated, “I chose to come here because I chose to work with the kind of people that work here.” This level of comfort with the other teacher(s) made the urban teaching positions appealing for the participants.

Three of the participants wanted to teach specific curricula that were not offered in all Agricultural Education programs. Due to his interest in plant biotechnology, Mr. Flood knew he would have limited job opportunities,

I knew that the track that I wanted to teach was plant biotechnology and I pretty much knew that if I wanted to teach that, I was going to have to go to a more urban setting because most of the rural schools were still very traditional in their program tracks.

Although he had been a student in a production-focused agriculture class in a rural area, Mr. Hill thought he would be well-suited for his teaching position because “it was very science based and not necessarily your traditional agriculture program.” Ms. Carter believed teaching the vet science curriculum would be the “perfect job” due to her love of

animals. The ability for urban schools to offer very specialized curriculums assisted in the recruitment of the three participants.

An established professional network helped three participants transition into their teaching career in an urban school. Ms. Campbell credited the success of her first year to teachers she had become acquainted with during her teacher preparation program, "I was very fortunate that some teachers here are some teachers I had classes with, so I already had some teacher base or some help. If it wasn't for them...the first year would not have been successful." She also appreciated the guidance she received from the other middle school agriculture teachers in the county when she was planning her curriculum. Mr. Flood returned to teach in the middle school that he attended because "my mentors were here." He also felt the school would be an ideal place to teach because "I'd have a lot of support in this school versus going to a school where I didn't know anybody and start from scratch." The reassurance of having an established professional network helped ease the fears of these new teachers.

Mr. Flood also described the comfort of having an established social network in the city where he returned to work. Although he considered teaching jobs in another urban location, he felt "compelled to come back" to this particular city because "I've always had family down here and my whole life is down here." Also, the idea of relocating to a new and unfamiliar area concerned Mr. Flood. He explained, "getting started and not really having much to start with, it would be very difficult for me to make a living in (city), not ever being from (city) or having anybody there who could help me out."

Mr. Gall and Mr. Hill felt that the opportunity to be a single teacher in a new program allowed them a great deal of personal control. Mr. Gall liked that he would be

responsible for the success or failure of the program without having any established expectations created by the former agriculture teacher,

I wanted basically to start my own program that I could say at the end if it was a success, then that was not because of what was already there. If it was a failure then it was my failure. I wasn't being set up for failure by a previous teacher. I knew there weren't really many opportunities for that, usually you have to deal with the teacher before that was great or the teacher before that was horrible.

Mr. Hill also believed that students benefited from the exclusive rapport they could establish and maintain with one agriculture teacher, "I feel like the kids, even though they are getting more opportunities at these big schools who have seven ag teachers, I feel like those kids are missing out a little bit too because they're not developing those strong bonds necessarily with one teacher." The expansion of Agricultural Education programs in urban areas allowed these two participants the opportunity to be the sole Agriculture Education teacher in a brand new program.

The participants cited a variety of factors that compelled them to seek employment in a specific urban school. These factors included the response to a publicized need for an agriculture teacher, the influence of the agriculture supervisor for the county, recruitment from the other teacher(s), the opportunity to teach a particular curriculum, the existence of a professional and social network, and personal control over the program.

**Level of influence from family.** The category level of influence from family was comprised of axial codes including experiences of family, support from family, and opinions of family. Only Ms. Brown discussed the career experiences that her family members had in urban areas, "My mom taught in an inner-city school so that kind of got me prepared. My brother works in inner-city Miami as a police officer." Not even the "horror stories" that her mother had from her teaching career in an urban school, deterred Ms. Brown from obtaining employment in an inner-city school.

The families of three of the participants were quite surprised by their decisions to become Agricultural Education teachers. Members of Ms. Campbell's family even made jokes about her career choice, "my mother's joke was, what you are going to teach cows how to read?" Her family members were also unaware of the job responsibilities associated with teaching agriculture and inquired, "What are you going to do in teaching agriculture?" The family of Mr. Gall, "thought I had lost my mind when I said I wanted to be a teacher in the first place" and Ms. Brown's mother "was quite surprised when I said I wanted to be an agriculture teacher." The families of these participants seemed so shocked at the career choice of these participants that they did not question their desire to teach in an urban school.

Even though the families of some of the participants questioned their career paths, several of the participants felt their families were supportive of their decisions to move to a city. While Mr. Hill's mother "was a little bit sad in her own way", she supported her son's relocation because she "wanted me to do whatever was going to make me happy." The families of Ms. Carter and Mr. Gall did not express any opinions about life in an urban area but were concerned about the distance from home. As Mr. Gall explained, "for my family it was a matter of being six hours away. I'd never lived that far away since I grew up literally 45 minutes from where I attended college." Only Ms. Fritz described how her parents tried to reverse her decision to teach in an urban school,

My parents wanted me at a rural school. They wanted me at (name of rural high school), they wanted me at (name of rural high school) because they thought I would be happiest there. The perception is that if you teach agriculture, you need to go where agriculture teachers belong. That was their perception.

Mr. Hill and Mr. Gall also described how the support of their spouses allowed them to accept teaching positions in urban schools. The wife of Mr. Gall had already been

accepted to a master's program at the University of Florida. When the participant initially interviewed at his current school, his wife "sat in on my interview and agreed to apply to a local university. That was one of her biggest drawbacks to moving down." Mr. Hill expressed his surprise at the decision of his girlfriend (now wife) to move from the Midwest to a city in Florida,

She just up and moved. She's crazy. I have no idea why she moved with me. I guess she loved me. Guess she just wanted to adventure. We were kids, we were young and we had lived a simple life and we just wanted some adventure.

The families of the participants had minimal input on their decisions to teach in urban areas. This implied support of the family made it easier for the participants to relocate or return to urban areas for a teaching position.

**Participants' perceptions of urban schools.** The category teachers' perceptions of urban schools consisted of axial codes including perceptions of school environment, perceived student interest in FFA, and expectations of student demographics. Four of the participants shared the perceptions of urban schools that they had prior to starting to teach in urban schools. The perceptions they previously held focused on the school environment and student demographics. When considering the school environment, Mr. Linder thought it "could be more challenging" to teach in an urban school and "more difficult than working with a bunch of country white folks like myself." Ms. Taylor predicted that her school "would have more problems inside" and "would be a whole lot rougher." She felt that teaching at her current school would adequately prepare her to teach at other schools in the future, "my philosophy is, if you can teach at a rough school, you can teach anywhere."

Two of the participants believed that urban programs would not have much FFA involvement and were surprised at the student interest in FFA. Ms. Fritz was impressed

with all the activities in which FFA members participated, "...there was one point where I remember being surprised that there was as much FFA interest as there was. The other teacher would start telling me about the stuff that they did and I was like, Wow!"

Likewise, Mr. Hill found that his students were eager to take part in FFA activities such as land judging,

One of the things that I thought was surprising was that kids were willing to jump on the FFA scenario...they were willing to participate in things like land judging where you are digging a hole and going outside and so I think it surprised me, their willingness to participate.

Unfortunately, not all of the participants found it so easy to secure student participation in FFA.

In relation to student demographics, Ms. Brown thought "being White was going to be hard for me because 85% of our school is Black. That kind of intimidated me, I guess. I thought there would be problems and I've never had a problem." Mr. Hill did not "expect the ethnic diversity, maybe naively I thought that there would be more white people." He expressed his initial shock at his first experience with feeling like the minority, "my first day of school, homeroom is first here at (school name) and I was the only White person in the room. I wasn't ready for that. I wasn't expecting that." While the participants had some preconceived ideas about the school environment, student interest in FFA, and student demographics, their perceptions failed to discourage them from accepting employment in an urban school.

**Participants' perceptions of Agricultural Education in rural schools.** The category participants' perceptions of Agricultural Education in rural schools consisted of axial codes including perceptions of rural students and perceptions of rural schools. Four of the participants questioned their own ability to teach in a rural school because they felt

rural students would be more knowledgeable than the teacher about agriculture due to the students' likely involvement in production agriculture. As Ms. Fritz explained,

If I had gone to a rural school, I would have had all those kids telling me what I needed to know. They would have all known more than me about producing a steer or if I'm trying to talk about landscaping in class, there's going to be somebody in there who's been doing that since they were young. They're going to know more than I do.

Although he was raised in an rural area, but not on a farm, Mr. Hill felt more comfortable teaching in a city school because he thought most of the students would possess little prior knowledge about agriculture,

One thing that I guess made me feel better about teaching in an urban school was just maybe the ignorance of the students when it comes to agriculture and that anything was educational to them versus if I'm in rural (state) teaching and I want to talk about a moldboard plow, well everyone in the room knows what it is.

Mr. Hill was concerned that if he did teach in a rural school, "there was going to be some kids sitting there knowing more than I did." Ms. Brown, who was raised in a city, echoed the previous statement,

Like schools like (school names), it just didn't interest me. It's like you have all these kids that have an agricultural and farming background. I was never raised on a farm and it just bothers me that maybe the kids know more than me. Like over the weekend, I went to the state fair and kind of helped with the dairy skill-a-thon and I never knew how to tag a cow and the kids taught me how to tag a cow. I just think, hey I'm an ag teacher, I should know how to do that.

Contrary to the beliefs of the aforementioned participants, when Mr. Flood had the opportunity to work with rural students, he found "many students in the rural programs surprisingly just didn't know anything about agriculture." Mr. Gall also felt that "even in rural areas there's ignorance about the breadth of agriculture. People just see what's out in the fields and they associate that with agriculture."

Ms. Carter elaborated on her perception of the role of FFA in the agriculture curriculum at a rural school compared to an urban school. She felt that "some rural



programs were relying too much on FFA” and some rural teachers consider themselves to be “an FFA teacher” whereas she is “an ag teacher.” Ms. Carter also mentioned how some of the emphasis on FFA is a result of parent expectations, “If I were sent to a rural school, I would be expected by the parents to be an FFA teacher. Well, where’s this team, where’s this team, where’s this team...” In contrast, Mr. Linder thought it would be much easier to establish an active FFA program in a rural area because “the principal’s probably been in FFA.” The participants’ perceptions of rural students and rural schools encouraged their decision to teach Agricultural Education in an urban area.

### **Teachers’ Experiences while Teaching in Urban Schools**

The current experiences of an agriculture teacher in an urban school can influence their eventual decision to remain teaching at their current school, depart for another teaching position or even consider a new career path. The categories that emerged from the data specific to the participants’ experiences while teaching in an urban school included benefits to the teacher, contribution of cultural diversity to the classroom environment, level of parental support, administrative support for Agricultural Education, administrative obstacles to teacher vision, Agricultural Education curriculum in urban schools, value of Agricultural Education to urban students, FFA in urban schools, obstacles to FFA involvement, Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) in urban schools, and school characteristics. A framework detailing the relationships between the open codes, axial codes and selective codes is shown in Figure A-3. Each specific category is detailed below.

**Benefits to the teacher.** The category benefits to the teacher were comprised of three axial codes including urban teachers can separate personal life from professional life, personal rewards, and collaboration with other agriculture teachers. Ms. Brown

appreciated that she could “leave the students at the end of the day” and “go home and have another life.” If she had decided to teach in an rural area, Ms. Carter thought that she would not be able to achieve a division between her personal life and her career. She further explained, “at a small school you are under a microscope whereas in a large school there is more autonomy and less parental pressure. In a small school, parents expect Agricultural Education to be your life.” The two participants valued the ability to isolate their personal life from their professional life and determine their level of engagement in the community.

Two participants shared opinions about the personal rewards they received from teaching in an urban school. Ms. Brown found her interaction with students to be gratifying,

I guess I can tell just everyday that I make a change. I feel like I make a difference in somebody's life. A lot of the kids, they don't have families at home, so they look to me like I'm their mom...I can see why because either the mom or dad is in jail or you're raised by grandma and grandpa and aunts and uncles.

Mr. Linder enjoyed the urban environment and emphasized how “fun” it was to “teach and live in an urban area.” Such personal rewards made it very satisfying for the two participants to work in an urban location.

Three of the participants discussed the support and assistance they received from other agriculture teachers, either in their school or within their county. Ms. Brown, a middle school teacher, appreciated the assistance she received from a high school agriculture teacher, “he's awesome and I get a lot of good stuff from him” and the exchange of ideas with another middle school teacher, “I'm really close with (teacher name), me and her have always shared ideas and she always has good ideas.” In Ms. Campbell's school district, informal meetings were held among the middle school

agriculture teachers to plan for FFA events, welcome new agriculture teachers to the county, share lesson plans and curriculum ideas, and locate appropriate resources and materials. She elaborated on the benefit of these meetings,

at the beginning of the year, we always try to have the middle school ag teachers meet. The big thing is all of us work together about sub-districts because we always put on one big event. So we always talk about that. And then we always...especially with new teachers, we try and introduce all of ourselves. We also bring in lesson plans and ideas and make sure we are all using the same book we need to, so we do some curriculum alignment across the board and if something's working here, why isn't it working there, what can you do different, swap, and exchange lesson plans...pool resources and materials because (teacher name) has this whole shed of knowledge, I need to check out this and borrow that. You have your veteran teachers who have been doing it for 30 years and knows what works and doesn't work.

Knowing that another agriculture teacher would always be willing to help was reassuring to Ms. Taylor, "There's a lot of assistance, like if I need help with something, it is readily available, somebody will help me." While only two of the participants identified the existence of a professional network as an influence on their decision to teach in an urban school, several participants discussed the personal benefits that resulted from collaboration with other agriculture teachers in the county.

**Contribution of cultural diversity to the classroom environment.** The category contribution of cultural diversity to the classroom environment was comprised of the axial codes cultural diversity of students, teacher appreciation of cultural diversity, and contribution of individual student culture to the classroom. All of the schools were composed of students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Mr. Linder estimated his school to be "98% minority." Mr. Gall and Ms. Carter reported a high enrollment of Hispanic students. At Mr. Gall's school, approximately "84% of the students were Hispanic" while Ms. Carter estimated that half (n=1750) of the student body at her school were Hispanic. At both Ms. Brown and Mr. Hill's schools, over 75% of the student

population was African American. The cultural diversity of the general student population was reflected in most of the participants' classes. Mr. Flood noted the importance of recognizing students' individual heritage, "Some of everybody is here. There's a Venezuelan, and a Honduran, a Cuban, a Puerto Rican, a Jamaican, and no one wants to be grouped with anybody else." He also stressed the importance of "understanding the different cultures and why students do the things they do and why parents behave the way they do sometimes."

Three of the participants felt that the cultural diversity of their students was a valuable asset to both the teacher and the students. Ms. Brown appreciated "hearing about different places" and "learning about different cultures." Ms. Campbell and Mr. Linder also "enjoyed the diversity of urban students." These three teachers explained how the incorporation of the various backgrounds of the students improved their classroom curriculum. Several of Ms. Brown's students shared about their families involvement in agriculture in Puerto Rico, "I've had a few kids that lived on farms in Puerto Rico...their experiences help out a lot, bringing that in here." Students in Ms. Campbell's classroom also shared about agriculture from their cultural perspective, "because you are in (city) and you have every single race possible, that enhances culture. It's really neat agricultural wise...this is how my grandparents or great-grandparents did this or this is how we've done this, my culture, my history." When the students in Mr. Linder's class completed horticulture demonstrations, he encouraged them to draw upon their cultural heritage,

I specifically told them that one of their main advantages that they have over country white folks like me is to bring a dish or technique or something that is used in their home country. I don't really even know my heritage 100% and these kids are either first or second generation from whatever country they're from.

The participants found that their personal interest in cultural diversity and the mix of cultures among their students was an asset to the classroom environment.

**Level of parental support.** The category level of parental support was comprised of the axial codes including low level of parental support and high level of parental support. There was an evident disparity in the parental involvement at some schools compared to others. Ms. Brown tried unsuccessfully to get the parents involved with the FFA chapter, “I tried the first two years to have a parent FFA meeting. I’ve seen other chapters have parent meetings, but that doesn’t work here. The only way to get a parent out here is to have some kind of feast.” Not only was Ms. Brown frustrated by a lack of parental interest in FFA, she was surprised at their disinterest in the education of their children, “I’m amazed by parents, lack of parent support here and even with field trips, it’s so hard to get any kind of parent out here.”

Mr. Flood had a much different experience with the level of parental involvement. He explained the tremendous amount of support that parents provided to the school,

parents are here all the time. I think that these are the types of parents who are pro-education for their students. No matter what, it’s for their child and it involves me having to come out here on a Saturday and help out, they’re usually here.

It is important to note that this overwhelming support was provided by the parents of the magnet students at Mr. Flood’s school. When teaching an exploratory class for the general student population, Mr. Flood faced struggles with parental involvement, similar to what was described by Ms. Brown. He attributed this difference to the work schedules of parents, “My parents in the standard program are parents who are working all day, can’t come in.”

**Administrative support for Agricultural Education.** Most of the participants were positive about the amount of support that was provided to the program by their

principals. However, Ms. Brown explained how the level of administrative support increased when her first principal left the school. She doubted that the first principal “would have hired me” and thought “that he didn’t want agriculture.” In contrast, Ms. Brown’s current principal “really supports the ag program” and “really enjoys what I do.” Mr. Gall credited his principal’s “farming background” and previous administrative experience at a high school with a very traditional agriculture program for the support of his current program.

Mr. Flood explained how his administration was extremely supportive of the program because they considered FFA to be a retention tool for students in the magnet program. When Mr. Flood offered to cancel a trip to an FFA event because it was being held a few days before the FCAT (standardized exam), his principal responded, “No, whatever keeps those kids happy and in the program.”

Two participants shared the methods they used to try and garner the support of their principals. Ms. Carter and her FFA officers met with the principal to “do a song and dance” and share information about the agriculture program and FFA. Due to his concern about standardized testing, the principal was more interested in “Well, how is your class affecting FCAT scores? What are you doing strategically for FCAT?” In return, Ms. Carter provided her principal with a chart that displayed the FCAT performance of all her students. Ms. Brown tried to gain the support of her principal by integrating other subjects into her curriculum, “there is science and I am doing math and I am doing reading and doing all this stuff, so I want you to keep me”. These two participants found that documenting their efforts to include other curriculum subject areas and prepare students for FCAT were helpful in obtaining additional support from their principals.

The level of support from assistant principals was deemed important by three of the participants. Even while Ms. Brown struggled with her principal, her assistant principal was “really, really, really, supportive. Without him I wouldn’t be able to do anything.” She further explained how her assistant principal made an effort to learn more about Agricultural Education,

The assistant principal, he’s kind of got a clue of everything that’s going on. He’s gone and visited schools with me. He’s gone to FFA events with me, he’s gone to workshops and stuff like that with me, so he kind of has a clue of what is involved. He’s gone over and seen several schools.

Likewise, when Mr. Linder was trying to start his FFA chapter and encountered some initial reluctance from his principal, he found support from his assistant principal who had been at another middle school with an active FFA chapter and had “a very positive image in his mind of what FFA is and what agriscience is.” One of Ms. Fritz’s assistant principals had been one of the agriculture teachers at that school and was very helpful with the agriculture facilities, especially when Ms. Fritz encountered problems with the greenhouse. Many of the participants communicated more frequently with an assistant principal than a principal and found the assistant principals to be very supportive of the program.

**Administrative obstacles to teacher vision.** The category administrative obstacles to teacher vision was comprised of six axial codes including administrative transition, administration’s vision for the program, lead teacher’s vision for the program, county supervisor’s vision for program, absence of appropriate equipment and supplies, and misperceptions at district level. The five participants that had been teaching for over three years expressed high levels of administrative turnover. In Mr. Hill’s school, “we have seven administrators in the front office, one of them was here on my first day. In (my)

five years (here), we will have completely rolled over the administration, some of them more than once.” For Ms. Brown, the departure of her first principal was seen as fortunate because the replacement principal was much more supportive of the agriculture program. However, in Ms. Carter’s school, the principal who was instrumental in the implementation of the vet science curriculum was replaced by a principal who was not perceived to have a vested interest in the success of the agriculture program. This rapid rate of administrative turnover made it difficult for the participants to maintain consistent levels of administrative support.

Three of the participants faced challenges related to the principal’s vision for the program. Mr. Hill’s principal had been a former agriculture teacher at the school and looked at the program from “a definite production agriculture side. He feels that there needs to be more outside, getting dirty here. He feels that these kids that are even from this area can gain something from learning a little bit about hard work.” Yet, Mr. Hill desired to have an agriscience curriculum that was relevant to the students, so he challenged the vision of his principal,

I say we are not going to raise cows in the ghetto. I just tell him that’s not where this program is going. This is a magnet program and if you get a kid to ride the school bus for two hours and then he goes home and tells mommy that we were outside playing in the garden all day...I think that’s going to cause some problems.

When she started teaching at her current school, Ms. Brown was looking forward to keeping animals on campus to supplement her curriculum. She valued the experience she gained from working with animals while she was a student in Agricultural Education and hoped to provide her students with a similar opportunity. However, the principal would not allow animals on campus which “crushed her a bit.”



In addition to principals, other administrators can have an impact on the vision of the program. The vision that Mr. Gall's lead teacher had for the agriculture program caused her to question the necessity of an agriculture class. Mr. Gall described his attempts to educate her about the importance of agriculture to the county and to the state,

She's been a real challenge to try and educate on what I'm trying to do as far as what the vision of where the program should be going. She sees the program as very, very traditional. Once she said that her grandfather grew up on a farm and grew tomatoes in his backyard, so she knew what agriculture was. She told me one time that she didn't really understand why they started my program because there wasn't any agriculture in (county) so there was no need for jobs, for students to be trained in agriculture. When I told her there was, (county) was number two in receipts for agricultural sales, she said that didn't really matter because there wasn't any agriculture in Florida.

When planning facilities and ordering supplies, Mr. Hill's county supervisor had a different perspective on what was needed in the program. Mr. Hill desired to have an innovative agriscience program, while the county supervisor was perceived as trying to establish a program similar to other programs that were already in the county. Mr. Hill further explained,

I think we still hold on to that this is the way that it's always been idea. Just like when my supervisor, who is a great man, was wanting to build this school, he had on his plans, this is the way that it's always been done, so we have got to have it. We've always had drill presses, so you need one. He wanted to give me a welder and I said I'm not going to be splicing genes with a welder, so I don't know why I need one.

With his knowledge of plant molecular biology, Mr. Gall was looking forward to teaching plant biotechnology. When he arrived at his school he found that there was an absence of appropriate equipment and supplies to begin the program that he had envisioned,

It wasn't really set up to be a biotechnology lab. It was kind of like the view of what plant biotechnology was supposed to be, very limited around plant tissue culture and that was pretty much it. Even then a lot of the equipment that was ordered was not even sufficient to teach that.

Mr. Gall had a different idea of the essential equipment, “When I think about plant biotechnology, I think about genetic engineering and transformation and analyzing DNA and the equipment to do that”, but the necessary equipment had not been ordered by the administration.

Mr. Gall also shared the misperceptions that county level administrators had about the potential careers in the agricultural industry, which was evident when they created a proposed list of career academies,

they did include agricultural science... it was an academy in basically food and agriculture related...the first option was a culinary option...the other one was agriculture. The first career that they listed there was farming and not as agriculture production or anything but farming. That’s just not, from a marketing standpoint, that’s not very good because of the agriculture illiteracy of the public, but also that is very unrepresentative of what career paths are available for students in an agricultural career. There was no mention of the science, the biotechnology, geomatics.

This publication reinforced the perception that students who enroll in agriculture classes are preparing to be farmers, which was a stereotype that Mr. Gall was trying to overcome in his urban classroom.

Several obstacles including administrative transition, the principal’s vision for the Agricultural Education program, the lead teacher’s vision for the program, and the absence of appropriate equipment and supplies hindered the teacher’s vision for the Agricultural Education program.

**Agricultural Education curriculum in urban schools.** The category Agricultural Education curriculum in urban schools was comprised of axial codes including teacher flexibility within school restrictions, student-centered curriculum, and curriculum content. As previously mentioned, Ms. Brown was eager to teach about animal science, but her principal would not allow animals to be housed on the school campus. Although

she was initially discouraged by this administrative mandate, it did not deter Ms. Brown from going “gung ho about plants” and focusing on horticulture and aquaculture. She realized that “we are going a different route because I can’t have the barn I really thought I would have.”

Ms. Fritz and Mr. Linder stressed the importance of a student-centered curriculum in an urban Agricultural Education program. Mr. Linder involved his students in curriculum planning by asking for their input on what they would like to learn about specific topics, “The first thing I do before I’m going to teach about plants, animals, or the environment is I ask them what they want to know. Then I just combine that with what I think they should know.” Ms. Fritz described her goals for trying to make the curriculum more relevant for her students,

I’m trying to get a dog grooming business going here because I feel like that’s the future of agriculture at (school) and this area, it’s getting the kids working with small animals. I don’t think the future is there in those cows and stuff...I think the focus as far as me appealing to the masses of this student population, it’s going to have to be through the small animals stuff. Most of my kids, 90% of my kids have never been within five feet of a bovine animal in their life. Probably never will be after they leave my class. But 80 to 85% of them have a cat or dog at home. I think it’s making agriculture relatable to those kids and it’s not through production. Definitely not in the urban area.

Through his teaching experience, Mr. Flood learned the importance of having a practical application so students could comprehend and retain the subject matter,

I don’t have the resources to have large animals here or a very large animal facility, so it’s very hard for me to convey my message when I don’t have anything for students to apply it to. And I’m learning that as the year goes by that I need to...if I’m going to teach something I need to have an application. That’s the purpose of me teaching an applied science, if the students can be able to apply what they’re learning somewhere else. And when I was teaching last year, I was teaching more production. I was teaching the production of large animals...I talked about the beef industry, the hog industry and I had nothing to apply it to. I felt like it just went through one ear and out the other for some students.

Mr. Gall and Mr. Linder also offered their opinions on the appropriate curriculum content for urban schools. Mr. Linder discussed the importance of making the subject matter relevant to the students, while incorporating traditional agriculture, “I mean I think it is important to work in traditional agriculture. That can’t be your main focus, you know you have to teach it from the community or the consumer based.” Mr. Gall re-emphasized the value of implementing “more relevant, consumer based programs.” He described several changes that could be made to the agriculture curriculum to ensure that it was appropriate for urban students,

Changing some of the other programs even that we have like the environmental horticulture programs, they can be good for students in urban settings, but as long as there is a focus on interiorscaping, small-scale specialty production of things, basically in places where there is not a lot of space. Hundred acre shade houses of two or three different crops, that’s not practical for an urban student. They can’t really wrap their mind around operating something like that. If you are talking about animals then more companion animals. Plants need to be houseplants, ornamental plants and just keeping the science in it and get back to the business side as well. Honestly, I don’t know if I can justify teaching my students about ruminant nutrition in-depth because none of them have ever had any experience raising cattle. It is beneficial for them to have kind of an understanding of how that is different, but I’m not going to spend a lot of time telling them about roughage to grain ratios...because they are never going to be doing that. Just making it more relevant to urban settings.

Mr. Hill argued that agriculture programs needed to move away from a more traditional curriculum with an agriculture production focus to a curriculum that emphasized science concepts,

I think agriculture itself, education has to get out of the good old boy mentality. We have to step back and make this the science that it is. Agriculture is the original science. We’ve got to let people know that Agriculture Education is about everyone and not some country thing. We have got to focus on the kinds of programs like I have...we’ve got to get rid of those ag welding classes and stuff like that that are just promoting a stereotype. We’ve got to train students to become scientists, not production farmers. Nobody needs training in being a production farmer, they are already doing it. If somebody is going to be a farmer, then they are coming from a farm and they already know how to do it. So we need to focus our vocation on scientists who are going to better our plants and animals.

In contrast, Ms. Taylor promoted the inclusion of production agriculture in the curriculum,

I know the big fad is not production ag, but consumption ag, but I don't think the interest is there for consumption ag. There is to an extent, but we need to change things and not be so old-fashioned that it's just a crop field and it's just steers and heifers. I don't think we need to sacrifice our roots for urban schools by any means. We are living proof that you can have kids in the ghetto in an ag class, playing in the dirt. I don't think we need to get so far away from that to change everything to consumption ag. I don't think that's the way.

While Ms. Taylor felt that urban students were interested in production agriculture, Mr. Hill was not so optimistic about the level of student interest in a traditional agriculture curriculum in his school,

I just think the kids interests are not in agriculture...so it's an elective. They don't have to take it. When it comes to, do I take art and sit inside where it's air conditioned all day or go outside and get sweaty and dirty, the kids that go to this school don't want to get sweaty and dirty. Period.

The participants reinforced the importance of implementing and delivering a student-centered curriculum, but reported conflicting views on the appropriate curriculum content for an urban agriculture classroom.

**Value of Agricultural Education to urban students.** The category value of Agricultural Education to urban students consisted of axial codes comprised of students enrolled in Agricultural Education classes, students' perceptions of agriculture, student reaction to subject matter, and student application of subject matter. When asked about their students, the participants responded very positively with statements such as "these are the best kids I've worked with and I've worked with over 250,000 kids", "great kids", "awesome students", "well-behaved", "love students", and "I look forward to the students." Ms. Campbell even appreciated her "urban students' lack of agricultural knowledge." This limited awareness could contribute to the students' perceptions of

agriculture that they carried into the classroom. The participants felt that the students entering their classrooms have “no concept of agriculture”, “no understanding of the everyday impact on their lives”, and consider agriculture synonymous with “farming.”

Mr. Hill explained the confusion that one of his students experienced when she received her class schedule,

When she was recruited to be here, in the biotech program, the word agriculture wasn't mentioned. When she came in for her first day of classes or got her schedule and it said Agriculture Foundations, she almost left (school name) and she is one of our most active FFA members.

Likewise, Mr. Linder's students were “really upset” when they were placed in his elective agriculture class at the beginning of the school year.

Despite the initial perceptions that students may have about agriculture, three of the participants discussed the positive reaction of the students to the subject matter. Ms. Fritz stated,

I like the fact that these kids are hungry for what we are trying to teach them. Joe Smith that has grown up on a dairy farm is not going to be that excited about learning about strawberries. But most of my kids here are. When I show these kids something, it would be minimal more than likely at a rural school, but to them it's very exciting and it's very new and it's something that they don't know.

Mr. Flood had the opportunity to teach agriculture to both magnet students and students in the general school population. He found that both groups of students “embraced the subject matter and wanted to learn more about it.” Even after the initial disappointment that Mr. Linder's students expressed towards being enrolled in an agriculture class, he witnessed a drastic change in the students' attitudes toward learning about agriculture. He felt his class gave the students “the chance to experience something different.” The students in Ms. Fritz's class were very excited about learning and receptive to the veterinary science curriculum, “I attract the kids that want to learn, that want to know

what I am talking about, that are hungry to learn that material, that want to know about small animals, that want to learn dog breeds..." Ms. Brown was proud when she witnessed a former student applying the subject matter that she learned in her middle school agriculture class,

She works at a daycare now and the kids are always landscaping the daycare, they are always playing with plants and she's invited me over there to see. She works with their five year olds, they are little kids and they are always playing in the dirt and growing plants and flowers and it's just great to see, hey she's doing something that I taught her.

Although Ms. Brown's former student was not involved in the agriculture industry, she was able to transfer skills that she had learned in her agriculture class to her current job. The value of Agricultural Education to urban students was demonstrated by the quality of the students enrolled in the Agricultural Education classes, the students' previous misperceptions of the agriculture industry, the positive reaction of the students to the subject matter, and student application of the subject matter.

**FFA in urban schools.** The category FFA in urban schools was comprised of four axial codes consisting of FFA activities, student involvement, student achievement and alternative view of the importance of FFA. There were varying FFA enrollments among the nine schools, from a chapter with 10 to 12 active members, to a chapter with 438 middle school FFA members.

The FFA members in each of the participants' schools participated in a variety of FFA events including opening and closing ceremony contest, public speaking, vegetable identification, horse judging, quiz bowl, ornamental horticulture demonstrations, and land judging. Due to the active involvement of his FFA members, Mr. Flood was better able to identify the contests that his students did not participate in,

We haven't done forestry in awhile, we haven't done citrus, or the land judging, but everything else we've done. And we have students who are interested to do that. It's kind of hard to prove to our administration that we're going to do two contests a year with 437 students. It just doesn't make any sense, so we do almost all of them.

Ms. Fritz stated that she found that the students' interests in particular FFA events fluctuated from year to year and she was willing to help them prepare for any contests that they were interested in, "I tell my kids I'll do any contest they want to do and I'll say all it takes is for you to get four people together and show up for practice twice a week and we'll do it."

Several of the participants were excited to share about their students' successes in FFA, despite the students' limited agricultural experience. Ms. Campbell was pleased with the accomplishments of her extemporaneous speaker, "our state winner in extemporaneous, she had no prior ag background and she gets to go to state. So seeing that is a huge accomplishment in itself ...she was nervous like anyone would be, but she did great." Mr. Hill bragged on his land judging team,

Try this on for size, in the middle of the city and a bunch of kids that have never had any experience with agriculture, we have one of the most successful land judging teams in (city). (School name), they are the kings, they have been doing this for many years, but the last two years in a row we have come in second only to (school name) in land judging. We have a very strong land judging team.

Even though her extemporaneous speaker did not win a speaking contest, Ms. Brown was proud of her speaker's desire to compete in the event, in spite of her limited English proficiency,

The girl that did do extemporaneous, she's mainly a Spanish speaking girl, so it was really cool for her to learn all the stuff and be speaking in English. That was a challenge for her. Her English is not very good, so it was really cool, you always remember after.



Ms. Campbell summed up how rewarding FFA success could be for agriculture students, “seeing their reaction when they place or get an award, they see all their hard work pay off...seeing them get so excited about that recognition or that acknowledgement of their hard work.”

While Ms. Brown’s FFA members participated in traditional FFA activities, she also had an alternative perspective on the value of FFA for her students. FFA meetings were an opportunity to “keep them (students) off the streets mainly.” She explained the structure of the bi-monthly FFA meetings,

We have fun. We’ve played soccer before. They like playing Uno, Monopoly. We’ll always order a pizza and just chill and hang out. Usually we do it on Fridays...we’ll stay until like 7:30, playing...It’s fun, it gives them something to do, keep them out of trouble. Whatever they decide they want to do, I’m all about it.

Ms. Brown felt that this unconventional approach to FFA meetings was the most effective in getting her students involved in the organization.

**Obstacles to FFA involvement.** The category, obstacles to FFA involvement, was comprised of four axial codes consisting of student opportunities and involvement, turnover of student population, transportation obstacles, and promoting involvement in FFA. Mr. Gall felt that the multitude of extracurricular activities and social opportunities available to students hindered their involvement in FFA. He explained, “they have so many different things that they can do on the weekends or after school” and “they have so many other opportunities at school competing for their time.” Similarly, Ms. Carter explained that not all paid FFA members attended FFA meetings because “they’re high school kids, they’ve got lives and jobs and things like that.” Ms. Brown found it difficult to maintain an active FFA chapter due to the high turnover of the student population,

“since Christmas, I’ve had four of my six officers move and it’s like okay, I have two kids left, what do I do? Do I go out and start and get new officers?”

Transportation obstacles also limited student involvement in FFA. Both Mr. Hill and Mr. Flood taught in magnet programs and had students enrolled in their programs who lived in all areas of the county and often far away from the school. Mr. Flood explained the reluctance of the parents to allow their children to participate in after-school activities, “The parents are like no, you need to be on that bus at 3:40 and get home because if I have to leave you at school till 4:30 or 5:00, you’re not getting home until 6 or 7 and that’s hard to sit in traffic and everything else it takes to get back down there. I lose a lot of students because of transportation.” Ms. Taylor elaborated on the challenges of preparing a horse judging team, “a lot of these kids don’t have a ride to get anywhere. They can’t even stay after school because they don’t have anybody to pick them up.”

Three of the teachers discussed some of the misconceptions that they had to overcome in order to promote student involvement in the FFA. At her first school, Ms. Campbell found it very difficult to educate the students about FFA,

About breaking down the stereotypical redneck farmers that I guess condescending lingo, um, it was difficult trying to come over that barrier and educate them. This is the benefit of this and this is the...what the leadership of that, this is how much fun you can have doing this and showing them and ...it was difficult every year.

In comparison, at Ms. Campbell’s current school the FFA membership is four times (n=45) the FFA enrollment of her first school, an increase she credits to family involvement, “a lot of their families are vested in it and they came in wanting to be in FFA.” She emphasized the importance of “showing them other avenues and options that FFA has to offer” because often her students are under the impression that they “have to

show an animal at the fair to be in FFA.” Mr. Gall faced similar obstacles when trying to organize the FFA chapter at his school. He had three students who had been FFA members in middle schools and were excited about continuing their participation in high school, but encountered reluctance from his other students,

Everybody else was just kind of like this is the farming club and that was an automatic perception. So defeating that perception even amongst students that I would consider more open-minded and thinking, being able to think outside the box or beyond themselves have had trouble getting past that perception of it’s the farming club.

Multiple obstacles to FFA involvement were identified including multiple student opportunities, high turnover of student population, transportation obstacles, and FFA promotion to urban students.

**Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) in urban schools.** The category SAE in urban schools consisted of SAE opportunities for students and lack of parental involvement in SAE. The SAE involvement of the students varied among the nine schools. Three of the teachers required all of their students to complete SAE projects. Mr. Flood required his students to “identify an SAE they can do at home and bring a report in.” Mr. Linder offered his students two options for completing their SAE projects. The students could choose to complete either an “agriscience project or a community service project.” Likewise, the students in Ms. Campbell’s classes could select an activity to complete for their SAE. The seventh graders could either research an agricultural career or detail the care that they provided for their pet (s). Ms. Campbell explained how a project as simple as raising a turtle could become an appropriate SAE,

But with turtles, there’s not as much care as caring for a dog, so I always add a little bit more research aspect to them, what’s the breed of turtle, how do you clean the tank, more care aspects....what’s their diet, what happens if they do get sick and what are the illnesses of that breed, a little bit more research-based than the care.

The 8<sup>th</sup> graders also had two options related to pet care or home improvement,

They can do a very similar animal care, animal training, but a little more in-depth or if they don't have a pet, there's three home improvement options. They can do lawn care, you know mow lawns, they have to do the proper maintenance or their lawn equipment, talk about related jobs, things like that. There's landscaping where they can re-landscape an area of their house and talk about plants, are they native, non-native, seasons, why would you plant this here and then the last would be a garden. They could do a vegetable or herb garden and why did they choose that, is it the right season, are they getting pesticides or herbicides if so, if not, what's the benefits and non-benefits of that.

Three of the participants described how many of their students' SAEs were conducted at school due to the limited amount of space they had at home. Mr. Gall explained that the most common SAEs for his students were,

agriscience projects and then some others doing small animal projects for the fair like a chicken or a rabbit or raising plants for the fair. Most of the students either live in apartments or condos or houses that are built on 60 by 100 square foot lots and so there's not much space for them to be able to have any kind of project at home.

The barn facilities on the school campus made it possible for the "subdivision and apartment kids" at Ms. Fritz's school to have large animal SAEs, which were more popular than small animal SAEs. Many of the students at Ms. Taylor's school also kept their SAE projects at school, which "puts a whole lot more work on the teachers." Ms. Carter emphasized the importance of helping students identify practical SAEs that would be beneficial in the future,

Like these kids that are doing pig projects, unless you live in Iowa or Kansas or some place you're not going into the pig industry. So having a SAE in a vet project, you know, we're working with aquaculture maybe breeding fish or doing horticulture stuff, that's so much more practical as far as whether you go to college or not, but you know, a lot of the kids...I have maybe five kids that work at vet offices. So they're able to apply what they're learning.

Two of the participants felt that a lack of parental involvement was a major barrier to the implementation and completion of SAE projects. Ms. Fritz described the

“resistance on the parent’s part” as “one of the biggest barriers to the kids doing a project.” She thought that since “it is not a way of life for these kids, it’s not something that these parents did when they were in school and they realize the value of.” Ms. Fritz also shared her perception about rural parents increased involvement in SAE,

it’s almost like in a lot of rural schools it’s understood, if you want your steer to be weighed at the market, you’re going to find a truck and a trailer and you’re going to take it over there. For us it’s more of the student coming to you and saying, can you haul my steer?

Ms. Taylor also attributed the lack of parental interest for limiting SAE opportunities, “you can’t really get too creative with SAEs because no one is going to help. I mean you can only help so much as their advisor.”

**School characteristics.** The category school characteristics was comprised of two axial codes including size of school and pride in school. All nine of the schools had large student enrollments. Mr. Flood’s middle school had 1,200 students enrolled, with almost 440 students in the magnet program. Currently in its third year, Mr. Gall’s school had 2,600 students. What he found surprising was,

My high school that I teach at now, I can stand on the roof of that and I can see three other high schools that have 5,000 students. By the time it is all said and done, my high school is also expected to be 5,000 students.

With 3,500 students, Ms. Carter’s school was so large that they divided the campuses into a campus specifically for 9<sup>th</sup>- grade students and a campus for 10<sup>th</sup>- – 12<sup>th</sup>- grade students. This division of the campuses eliminated the opportunity for 9<sup>th</sup> grade students to enroll in her vet science course, “freshman can’t come over to the main campus which is where my class is, so they can’t take vet one until they are sophomores” which “hurts our program big time.” The large student enrollment in Ms. Brown’s school resulted in class sizes so large that not every student could have a chair,

I have one [class] that's 30 and I may have one that is 31. Every day we just pray that somebody is absent so everybody can have a seat. When they are getting their new schedules in January, I had like 40 and I'm like okay, let's start sitting on the ground. It was terrible and I finally had to complain, I'm like I can't have kids sitting on the ground.

Two participants discussed the impact of the school culture and the physical environment of the school on school pride. Mr. Hill attributed the high rate of teacher turnover at his school to recurring problems in the school environment. One specific problem that was identified was related to student behavior, "our school has had more referrals and more suspensions than any other school in the county." Even though Mr. Hill did not encounter any student problems in his classroom, he was still affected by the total school environment,

If I could have my kids and never leave my room, I would teach at this school forever. What gets under your skin, the thorn in your side at this school, is when you have to leave the room and when you have to go deal with those discipline and problems that exist outside this classroom that you don't see in here.

Ms. Brown felt that the level of school pride was diminished due to the physical appearance of the school campus. Initially, she thought the school "was a jail. It was horrible. It's kind of scary." Also, she discussed how landscaping would improve the appearance of the school grounds, "this year I think definitely we need to do [landscape] our own school. Our own school is looking trashier and trashier, it looks terrible and for them to have an ag program and look terrible."

### **Agriculture Teachers' Outlooks on their Teaching Tenures in Urban Schools**

The category relevant to the agriculture teachers' outlook on their teaching tenure in an urban school was influences on decision to continue teaching at current school. A framework detailing the relationship between the open codes, axial codes, and selective codes is shown in Figure A-4.

### **Influences on Decision to Continue Teaching at Current School**

The category of influences on decision to continue teaching at current school was comprised of eight axial codes including desired characteristics of new school, current outlook on continuation of urban teaching career, current outlook on departure from urban teaching career, curriculum offerings, influence of family, concern for job security at particular school, opportunity to educate urban students about agriculture, and level of administrative support. Three of the participants had differing outlooks on their future careers in an urban school. Ms. Fritz intended to “stay as long as they let me” while Mr. Linder “would not teach forever in an urban school.” Although Ms. Brown predicted that she would “always teach in an urban school”, she felt she would not “always teach at her current school.” Ms. Carter stated that her decision to continue teaching in an urban school was going to be influenced by the curriculum that she would be able to teach. She planned on continuing at her current school as long as she could teach,

vet science or any kind of animal science. Obviously vet science because I like the curriculum because that’s what I did before I started teaching. I don’t think I could teach horticulture. I could teach it, but I probably wouldn’t like it because it’s not my background. I’m qualified in Ag 6 through 12, so that means I can teach anything, but if it’s not in my background then why...why would you? I mean sometimes it comes down to, do you want a job or do you not want to have a job. So, hopefully I won’t be in the situation where I have to teach something I don’t want to because I need the money.

Four participants mentioned the influence of family on their future career plans. Mr. Gall felt that it would be more difficult to move from his current urban location if his family was “settled in. If we have children and they start school here, it will be really difficult to move most likely.” Although Mr. Hill enjoyed living and teaching in the city, he acknowledged that “I still have some things about the country that I like.” Similarly, Mr. Linder planned to eventually relocate to a more rural area because “I don’t think a lot

of country folk want to raise their families in big cities.” Ms. Brown expected that she would move due to “job opportunities” for her husband. Mr. Flood felt his career decision was contingent on the level of support that he received from his administration,

I feel like in an urban school, it’s challenging enough to interest students and to really get them involved in agricultural activities and if we have an administration who are unsupportive, it makes it really difficult because it’s like how can we get these students involved when you’re saying we can’t do this, that, and the other. So I think the most important thing as far as me staying here will be support from my administration.

The rapid growth in urban areas has led to a dramatic increase in the number of schools in urban school districts. This expansion put the jobs of two participants at risk to be eliminated. Ms. Taylor enjoyed teaching at her school, but was uncertain about her future there, “I’m kind of in a hard spot because they are opening two new schools. I’m probably going to get cut based on numbers alone.” Ms. Carters’s job was threatened as a result of the school budget, “when the new principal came, he had to make some cuts and we were potentially on the chopping block.” With the elimination of current positions, the participants were going to be forced to seek employment in another school.

Although, Ms. Fritz had been offered jobs in rural programs, she made the decision to continue teaching in her current school because of the value of Agricultural Education to urban students,

I was offered positions at (high school name) and (high school name) since I’ve been teaching at least three years out of the five and I did not want to go. I wanted to stay here because I feel like this is where Ag Education is needed. It’s needed in the urban areas.

Mr. Hill explained the characteristics that he would seek in a new teaching position,

Everything I have here without the things that I don’t like. I would be looking for something that is more well-balanced in its student population, something that is more well-balanced in its faculty. We have a very undiverse faculty, myself being the minority. I would like a more stable principal or not principal, but administration. I would like a place that has less-turnover and more respectability.



The participants identified multiple influences on their anticipated teaching tenure including curriculum offerings, influence of family, concern for job security, level of administrative support, and desired characteristics in a new school.

### **Grounded Theory**

From the data analysis, a grounded theory was developed to describe the career experiences of the nine novice urban agriculture teachers who participated in the study.

Strauss and Corbin (1990), defined grounded theory as,

A theory that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. One does not begin with a theory and then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge (p. 23).

Charmaz (2003) stressed the importance of using the analyzed data to create theoretical categories instead of trying to “fit” the data into pre-existing categories. She also alluded to the adaptive nature of grounded theory, “grounded theory is durable because it accounts for variation; it is flexible because researchers can modify their emerging or established analyses as conditions change or further data are gathered” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 252). While a reference citing a specific number of participants needed to create a grounded theory was unattainable, Strauss and Corbin (1990) emphasized the importance of theoretical saturation. In order to reach saturation, the researcher used probing questions for continued expansion of the participants’ responses, until new and relevant information was no longer provided by the participants. The grounded theory presented conceptually in Appendix B illustrates the multiple influences that made varying impacts on the participants’ past, present, and future career experiences.

The personal influences and human influences that encouraged the participants' decisions to teach Agricultural Education are included in Circle A and Circle B of Figure B-1. The positive experiences that the participants had while they were Agricultural Education students and FFA members inspired them to pursue a teaching career. The chance to work with children and animals was also identified as an influence. Former agriculture teachers and college advisors were the primary human influences that led to the participants' career decisions.

The personal influences relevant to the participants' decisions to teach Agricultural Education in urban schools are depicted in Circle C of Figure B-1. Several participants expressed a desire to live and teach in an urban area. The participants were also drawn to an urban school by the opportunity to start their own program and teach a specific curriculum, such as plant biotechnology or veterinary science. Also, the established social and professional networks in urban areas supported the participants' decisions to accept teaching positions in urban schools. While prior experiences such as field experiences and student teaching experiences encouraged some of the participants to teach in an urban school, such experiences did not discourage participants from urban teaching careers.

In Circle D, the human influences related to the participants' decisions to seek employment in urban schools are noted. Participants responded to the publicized need for an agriculture teacher at a particular urban school and were actively recruited by the county supervisor for Agricultural Education. The participants' families also supported their move to an urban location.

The perceptions that the participants held about urban and rural schools are included in Circle E. The few expectations that the participants had about the school climate and student demographics did not discourage their career decisions. The participants' perceptions regarding rural schools reinforced their decisions to teach in urban schools.

The current experiences of novice agriculture teachers in urban schools were categorized into encouraging and discouraging experiences. The encouraging experiences could potentially support a teacher's decision to continue teaching at their current school, while a discouraging experience could potentially encourage a teacher to leave their current position. Some current experiences could either be considered encouraging or discouraging experiences.

The encouraging current experiences are illustrated in Circles F, G, H, I, and J. The participants found personal benefit in their ability to separate their personal life and their professional life and in contributing to the well-being of their students. As well, the presence of cultural diversity and its inclusion in the curriculum was beneficial to both the teachers and the students. The participants also stressed the value of Agricultural Education in educating urban students about the importance of agriculture. Participants were encouraged by the level of administrative support that they received for their programs, level of parental involvement, and the opportunity to make the curriculum and SAE meaningful for their students.

The discouraging current experiences are depicted in Circles K, L, M, and N. The administration's value of the Agricultural Education program was continually viewed as being in a state of flux due to the high rate of administrative turnover and differing, and

sometimes conflicting visions, for the Agricultural Education program. Lack of parental involvement and school characteristics such as school size and the level of pride in school were also identified as discouraging experiences. With the level of importance placed on FFA, attempts to overcome the multiple obstacles to student involvement in FFA was viewed as very discouraging. Also, participants described difficulties they faced with delivering an appropriate curriculum and identifying relevant SAE opportunities for urban students. However, these discouraging experiences may be considered encouraging experiences with the teachers' abilities to maintain a successful Agricultural Education program in spite of the challenges.

The influences on the participants' decisions to continue teaching in urban schools are included in Circles O, P, Q, and R. One participant identified student, faculty, and administrative characteristics that he would seek in a new school. Also important to the participants was level of administrative support, curriculum offerings, level of job security, and raising a family.

## CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

This qualitative study sought to explore and describe the career paths of novice urban agriculture teachers. To carry out this study, a criterion sample was used to select nine individuals who graduated from a teacher education program and had been teaching in an urban school for one to eight years. Each of the teachers participated in an in-depth interview to share about the influences on their initial decisions to teach Agricultural Education, the influences on their decisions to teach Agricultural Education in an urban school, their current experiences in urban schools, and their outlooks on their future teaching careers in their current schools.

Results from the data analysis were presented in Chapter 4. From the 178 pages of data, 71 axial codes were grouped into 20 selective codes. These selective codes composed the categories appropriate for each of the research questions. The axial codes included in each category provide additional support to the findings of the study. The categories relevant to the teachers' decisions to teach Agricultural Education included teacher background and decision to pursue teacher certification in Agricultural Education. The categories significant to the teachers' decisions to teach Agricultural Education in an urban school included prior experience in urban schools, desired location, decision to teach in a particular school, level of influence from family, participants' perceptions of urban schools, and participants' perceptions of Agricultural Education in rural schools. The categories that emerged from the data specific to the participants' experiences while teaching in an urban school included benefits to the

teacher, contribution of cultural diversity to the classroom environment, level of parental support, administrative support for Agricultural Education, administrative obstacles to teacher vision, Agricultural Education curriculum in urban schools, value of Agricultural Education to urban students, FFA in urban schools, obstacles to FFA involvement, Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) in urban schools, and school characteristics. The category pertinent to the agriculture teachers' outlooks on their teaching tenure in an urban school was influences on decision to continue teaching at current school. This chapter will present key findings from the research and discuss the implications for practitioners and for future research.

### **Key Findings**

#### **Teachers' Decisions to Teach Agricultural Education**

Before the participants began to consider the possibility of teaching in urban schools, they made a decision to teach Agricultural Education. One of the primary influences on the teachers' initial decisions to teach Agricultural Education was prior involvement in Agricultural Education and FFA. In a study of entry-phase teachers in Texas, Edwards and Briers (2001) found that 91% (n = 82) of the teachers were involved in FFA during high school. Ms. Brown expressed how much she "loved" her high school agriculture class and Ms. Taylor described the personal contribution of FFA, "the different leadership activities and things that I did in FFA kind of formed who I am today". The participants' interests in the agriculture curriculum and active participation in FFA supported their decisions to continue their association with Agricultural Education, only in the role of an agriculture teacher.

Similarly, in his study of preservice teachers completing their student teaching during Fall 2004, Rocca (2005) found that over 80% of the participants had been

previously enrolled in a high school Agricultural Education class, but did not detail how such experience contributed to the career decisions of the participants. Despite different factors that encouraged the participants to enroll in Agricultural Education during middle school or high school, the positive experiences resulting from enrollment in an agriculture class and involvement in FFA encouraged their career decision. Influential factors identified by several of the participants' included their interest and affinity for the subject matter, rapport with the agriculture teacher, and the personal benefit provided by numerous FFA opportunities.

This finding offers several implications for the recruitment of undergraduate Agricultural Education majors. Recruitment efforts should be directed at high school Agricultural Education students who express an interest in the course content and are involved in FFA. The participants who had been FFA members shared about their active FFA involvement, ranging from participation in Career Development Events to showing livestock at county and state fairs. The multitude of FFA activities at the local, district, and state level provide numerous recruitment opportunities. Students who have already developed an affinity for FFA through their involvement in the organization may be interested in continuing their work with FFA as a middle school or high school agriculture teacher.

Of the nine participants, only one, Mr. Flood, grew up in a metropolitan area. When reflecting on his own experiences as a student, he recalled the day he first entered his middle school agriculture class, he "knew nothing about agriculture at all." Through his involvement in Agricultural Education, Mr. Flood developed a "love for the field of agriculture", which helped encourage his decision to become an agriculture teacher. It is

important to examine the reaction that more urban students have to the Agricultural Education curriculum. Expansion of Agricultural Education programs in urban areas will not only increase the number of students interested in agriculture, but will also expand the pool of prospective urban agriculture teachers. Quality agriculture teachers are needed to attract students to urban programs and help students develop and sustain their interests in agriculture. Current urban agriculture teachers who have had numerous students pursue careers in Agricultural Education could assist new urban agriculture teachers in creating and delivering an Agricultural Education program that supports students' interests in agriculture and encourages their entry into the teaching profession.

The participants also expressed a desire to work with either children or animals. A few of the participants expressed their love of children and wanted the opportunity to work with students because they felt they would be able to make a difference in the lives of students. Likewise, Hovatter (2002) found preservice Agricultural Education teachers were attracted to the profession by the opportunity to interact with students. Agriculture teachers have many opportunities to work with students in the formal classroom environment and in informal settings. However, the desire to work with animals was an influential factor that had not been previously identified. Individuals who truly enjoy working with animals may consider the opportunity to teach veterinary science or animal science as an excellent career option.

The impact of a former agriculture teacher was very important to several of the participants. In high school, when Mr. Flood was certain he did not want to become an agriculture teacher, his agriculture teachers were able to promote the benefits of the profession and convince him to consider a teaching career. Similar to Ms. Brown, high



school students may experience some confusion about their future career path and seek out their agriculture teacher for advice. The career guidance provided by agriculture teachers can help students identify future career possibilities. The participants expressed a level of respect and appreciation for their former agriculture teachers, and felt they would be able to make a similar impact on the lives of their students. Due to the agriculture teacher's role in the career decisions of his/her students, it is imperative for agriculture teachers to promote a positive image of the teaching profession. When reflecting on what she enjoyed about teaching, Ms. Brown stated "it's so much fun coming here". Students may be unaware of the personal satisfaction derived from teaching, so agriculture teachers need to explicitly share with their students the many intrinsic benefits associated with the profession.

In addition to marketing programs to high school agriculture students, University Agricultural Education departments also need to market programs to agriculture teachers to equip them as an initial source of information for their students. As was previously mentioned, Ms. Brown was unsure about her future career and her agriculture teacher "told me you should be an ag teacher." If agriculture teachers are knowledgeable of the teacher education courses and requirements, as well as the career opportunities for graduates, they can encourage students to enroll in the Agricultural Education department. Also, if agriculture teachers have an established rapport with Agricultural Education faculty they have identifiable contacts to whom they can refer their students for advice on potential majors and careers within Agricultural Education.

College advisors were important in the career decision process, especially to individuals who had no prior involvement in Agricultural Education or who were

pursuing another major. Even though Ms. Campbell was hesitant about the idea of becoming a teacher, her advisor in the Food Science and Human Nutrition department encouraged her to visit several agriculture programs and changed her career outlook. It is important for faculty advisors in University Agricultural Education departments to establish and maintain relationships with faculty advisors in other departments so they remain current about career opportunities in Agricultural Education and can refer potential students to appropriate contacts within the Agricultural Education department.

Additionally, encouraging prospective Agricultural Education majors with no prior experience in school-based agriculture programs to visit school sites can be an effective recruiting tool. Initially, Ms. Brown was reluctant to pursue a teaching career because she “didn’t want to be stuck in a classroom.” For individuals who may cite similar reasons for their aversion to teaching, the opportunity to visit an agriculture classroom may modify their existing beliefs about teaching agriculture. Through such visits, prospective teachers can gain an understanding of the scope of the Agricultural Education curriculum, the numerous opportunities for the inclusion of hands-on activities and application of subject matter, and student engagement through FFA and SAE. Some prospective teachers may question their ability to teach Agricultural Education because they did not grow up on a farm or have had little exposure to production agriculture. Visits to agriculture programs could help dispel the beliefs that these individuals have about their inability to teach Agricultural Education.

### **Teachers’ Decisions to Teach Agricultural Education in an Urban School**

The participants had varying degrees of prior experience in urban schools. Two participants had attended school and completed internships in rural schools and had no prior experience in urban schools. Three of the participants were raised in urban locations

and attended urban schools. A few of the participants had the opportunity to gain exposure to urban schools through field trips, school visits, and volunteer experience. Of the nine participants, four completed teaching internships in urban schools. Two of the participants discussed the contribution of their internship experience to their decision to teach in an urban school. Ms. Brown felt her internship helped prepare her to teach the culturally diverse student population of the school where she would be teaching. Ms. Brown enjoyed working with the ethnically diverse students at her student teaching site and wanted the opportunity to teach in a diverse school. Although he grew up in a rural area, Mr. Linder wanted to teach in an urban area, but was uncertain of a future career in Agricultural Education. He found his teaching internship to be “very, very productive” and enjoyed his experience because he was “able to see from a different perspective how much children can be helped by Agricultural Education.”

Prior research has documented the influence of field experiences and teaching internship experiences on preservice teachers’ attitudes towards the urban school environment (Fry & McKinney, 1997; Haberman & Post, 1992; Heinemann et al., 1992; Marxen & Rudney, 1999; Pagano et al., 1995; Rushton, 2000; Rushton, 2003; Wolffe, 1996). From these participants we can conclude that experience in an urban school is not a prerequisite for every preservice teacher who accepts a teaching position in an urban school. The participants who attended field trips to urban schools did not elaborate on any reinforcement or change that occurred in their prior beliefs about urban schools as a result of the trips they took. As was previously mentioned, two of the participants’ student teaching experiences reinforced their decisions to seek employment in an urban

school. Additional research is needed to explore if these types of experiences had any influence on teachers who would not consider teaching in an urban school.

The participants' desired teaching and living locations encouraged them to seek teaching positions in urban areas. Previous studies have concluded that preservice teachers are likely to seek teaching positions in or very near their hometown and in a similar environment (Easter et al., 1999; Gilbert, 1995; Werner, 1993; Zimpher, 1988). Two of the participants from urban areas began teaching in their hometowns or in similar environments. Additional research is needed to determine if more preservice teachers who were raised in urban areas desire to teach in their hometown or in a similar city. The current research focuses on the desired living location and teaching location of preservice teachers who are primarily from rural or suburban backgrounds. If preservice teachers who were raised in metropolitan areas express a desire to return to urban locations, recruitment efforts should focus on urban students who could return to teach Agricultural Education in their hometowns or in similar environments.

The teachers who grew up in non-urban locations were also encouraged to seek jobs in urban areas. It is important to note that while one participant was willing to relocate to Orlando for a teaching position, she would have been unwilling to move to Miami because, "it would scare me...it's just a big city." Consequently, when encouraging students to consider teaching positions, it could be beneficial to refer to a specific city rather than just using the generic and potentially negative term "urban area". By helping preservice students make personal connections with an area, they may feel more comfortable and be willing to consider a teaching position within the county. Although Mr. Gall had no desire to live in an urban area, he was attracted to an urban

school by some of the characteristics of the agriculture program that will be discussed in detail later in the chapter. Preservice teachers may be so concerned with the location of an urban school, they overlook some of the benefits associated with accepting a teaching position in an urban program. Taking preservice teachers on field trips to urban programs could increase their familiarity and help them recognize some of the advantages of teaching in an urban school.

Six of the teachers were very responsive to the need for an agriculture teacher. They revealed various motivations for accepting the position including the need for a job, the potential closure of the program, and the desire to help the current teachers. Without the publicized need for an agriculture teacher in these various schools, the participants would have been unaware of the job opportunities. It is important that the job openings in urban schools are well publicized through communication with potential teachers and teacher educators, job posting boards at the university, and job listings on the websites of professional organizations and the National FFA Organization. The use of these various methods can also help attract potential teachers from out of the state.

The county agriculture supervisors of these participants were also helpful in the effort to place agriculture teachers in urban programs. The supervisors actively recruited preservice teachers and promoted the job opportunities within their respective counties. Additionally, the supervisor served as a primary contact for the participants and assisted them in arranging school visits. Because urban centers are more likely to have multiple openings, urban supervisors are more likely to be able to match teacher interests with available positions. Due to the administrative hierarchy of urban school districts, the role of the agriculture supervisor is of critical importance. Applying for a job in an urban

school can be an intimidating process for a preservice teacher. The agriculture supervisor can provide personal assistance to a preservice teacher as he/she navigates through the human resources department of a large urban district. Also, county supervisors are often more knowledgeable about the characteristics of the urban agriculture programs and better able than principals to respond to questions of preservice teachers. While this study identified successful recruiting strategies used by agriculture supervisors in urban districts, it would be beneficial to examine the characteristics of agriculture supervisors who are effective recruiters in rural and suburban school districts. The recruiting strategies used to draw agriculture teachers to rural and suburban schools may also be successful in attracting agriculture teachers to urban school districts.

Two of the participants were drawn to a specific teaching position by the other teacher(s) in the program. The second teacher in Ms. Fritz's school offered her the chance to select the classes she wanted to teach and the FFA activities that she would oversee. Ms. Taylor was attracted to her position by the personal attributes of the other teacher at her school. Inservice teachers need to recognize their contribution in recruiting preservice teachers to fill available positions. If a preservice teacher is considering a job in a multi-teacher program, the other teacher(s) need to meet with that individual to discuss class assignments and teaching responsibilities. In addition, allowing the preservice teacher to observe at the school for several days can provide them with an opportunity to learn more about their potential colleagues and the program.

A few of the participants were drawn to a particular urban school because of the opportunity to teach a specific curriculum, such as vet science or plant biotechnology. The participants developed interests in these curriculum areas through some of their

undergraduate courses and prior work experience. Two of the participants felt if they accepted a position in a rural school, they would be responsible for teaching a more general agriculture curriculum while they preferred to specialize in biotechnology. These participants considered rural teachers to be curriculum generalists, while they felt teaching in an urban school would allow them to be a curriculum specialist. During her time as a middle school agriculture teacher, Ms. Carter had taught a more general agriculture curriculum but was attracted to her current job by the opportunity to teach the veterinary science classes. By identifying the various curricula that are taught in urban areas, future teachers may be interested in teaching at a particular urban school for the opportunity to teach a specialized course of study.

Three of the participants felt more comfortable accepting a teaching position in an urban district where they had an established professional network consisting of agriculture teachers who would be willing to mentor the new teacher. Beginning a teaching career can be a frightening experience and some teachers feel very isolated from other teachers within their schools (Mundt, 1991). Having access to other teachers who can answer questions and offer support can be very reassuring to most teachers, especially novice teachers. Although Mr. Flood considered teaching positions in another urban district, he made the decision to return to the urban city where he had grown up. In his hometown, he already had an established social network made up of family and friends he would not have had in another urban location.

The participants' families had minimal influence on their career decisions. While Ms. Brown's mother shared negative experiences from her teaching career in an urban school, Ms. Brown did not envision teaching in any environment, other than an urban

one. Although Ms. Fritz's family tried to convince her to teach in a rural school, she decided that she would prefer teaching in an urban area. A few of the participants shared about the surprise of their families towards their decision to become an Agricultural Education teacher, yet their families offered no opinions regarding the decision to teach in an urban school. The spouses of two of the participants were very supportive of the move to an urban area. This level of support was evidenced by the spouses' willingness to relocate to a completely new area and pursue education at a different institution. While the participants' families were not overly supportive or critical of the participants' decisions to teach in an urban school, they did not try to discourage the participants from accepting teaching positions in urban areas. This implied support may have influenced the participants' career choices. If preservice teachers' spouses question the possibility of teaching in an urban school, they should be invited to tour the school facilities and provided with more information about the program. Mr. Gall's spouse was allowed to participate in the interview process. As a result, she recognized the benefits of the teaching position and supported her husband's decision to accept the job.

Previous research has documented the multitude of beliefs that preservice teachers have regarding the context of urban schools (Aaronsohn, 1995; Gilbert, 1997; Shultz et al., 1996; Socoski & Hynes, 1991, Tiezzi & Cross, 1997). When asked to recall any beliefs about urban schools they had prior to beginning their teaching careers, the participants mentioned perceptions that they had of the potential challenges present in an urban school environment, decreased student interest in FFA, and the cultural diversity of students. Two of the participants thought the urban school environment would be a more challenging environment in which to teach when compared to schools in rural areas. Two



participants believed there would be little student interest in FFA. In regards to student demographics, one participant was concerned about being a minority in a school with a predominantly African American student population while another participant anticipated a larger percentage of Caucasian students than was actually in the school. However, as a group, the participants discovered that their prior beliefs were inaccurate. Mr. Linder described his school environment as a “warm bath everyday.” Mr. Hill and Ms. Fritz found their urban students were eager to get involved in FFA activities. While Ms. Brown and Mr. Hill did interact with a large number of minority students on a daily basis, they did not encounter any problems specific to race. University Agricultural Education faculty could help future teachers formulate more accurate ideas regarding the urban school context by inviting novice urban teachers to speak to preservice teachers about the beliefs they had prior to beginning their urban teaching career and the realities of their current teaching career.

Many of the participants had perceptions regarding Agricultural Education in rural schools. Several of the participants felt more comfortable teaching urban students because they thought rural students might know more than the teacher as a result of their rural upbringing and exposure to production agriculture. Ms. Fritz was concerned that rural students would be “telling me what I needed to know” and Ms. Brown shared her recent embarrassment when rural students “taught me how to tag a cow because I didn’t even know.” This belief was common among the participants who had not grown up on a farm. The perceptions the participants had regarding the knowledge of rural students was concerning, because it indicated the teachers were not confident in their ability to teach students from any background. Teacher education programs need to make efforts to assist

preservice teachers in enhancing their level of efficacy so they will feel confident in the delivery of an engaging and relevant agriculture curriculum to any student audience. According to Darling-Hammond (2000), well-prepared teachers have a significant influence on student achievement. During teacher preparation courses, preservice teachers should discuss relevant curriculum topics and activities for various student audiences. Additionally, the preservice teachers could develop and deliver lessons appropriate for different audiences in a clinical setting. The completion of early field experiences in middle and high school classrooms in rural and urban settings could assist preservice teachers in developing the necessary confidence to teach agriculture to a diverse student audience.

One participant expressed her beliefs about the role of FFA in a rural Agricultural Education program. She believed some rural teachers were focusing too much of their efforts on FFA and ignoring the importance of the agriculture curriculum. Also, this participant assumed the parents would expect the primary focus of the agriculture program to be FFA, resulting in an emphasis on team preparation for Career Development Events. The differences between urban agriculture programs and rural agriculture programs as related to student knowledge, parental expectations, and FFA participation remain largely unexplored. Research should be conducted to identify the similarities and differences in urban and rural Agricultural Education programs.

University teacher educators can play an important role in the preparation of preservice teachers for urban schools. However, most agricultural teacher educators are Caucasian males who were raised in small towns (Swortzel, 1996), with limited experience in an urban environment. In order to become more knowledgeable about

urban programs, immersion programs should be offered for teacher educators. Participating teacher educators could spend one to two weeks in different urban agriculture programs observing classrooms, interacting with students, and interviewing teachers. Such experiences could help teacher educators develop a better understanding of Agricultural Education in urban schools, which could influence their teacher preparation courses and selection of field experience and internship sites.

### **Teachers' Experiences while Teaching in an Urban School**

The current experiences of an agriculture teacher can have an influence on their teaching tenure in an urban school. The participants identified both benefits and challenges associated with teaching Agricultural Education in an urban school. On a personal level, two of the participants felt they were able to separate their personal lives from their professional lives, something they didn't think they would be able to achieve as easily if they were teaching in rural schools. Ms. Carter thought that in a rural area there would be constant pressure for Agricultural Education to be the foremost priority in an agriculture teacher's life, whereas she believed teaching in an urban area allowed the teacher much more personal freedom. Ms. Brown valued the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of her students. Since she felt that many of her students did not have appropriate role models within their families, she was willing to serve as a mother figure and role model to her students. As a result of the large proportion of non-traditional family structures among urban students, they may be more likely to look to their teacher as a parental figure. Some agriculture students may even spend more time with their agriculture teachers than they do with their parents or guardians. Therefore, it is important for urban agriculture teachers to serve as role models for their students.

Participants from one urban district discussed how collaboration among the agriculture teachers in the district personally benefited them. They used the time during regularly scheduled meetings to share lesson plan ideas and resources. As relatively new teachers in the county, these meetings helped the participants feel supported by the experienced teachers in the county. This collaboration encouraged the teachers to develop personal relationships with each other that also enhanced their professional relationships. While the teachers in Ms. Taylor's county did not hold regular meetings, she was reassured by the level of assistance provided to her by the other teachers in her department. Ms. Taylor felt very comfortable going to any of her co-teachers with questions or for help. This finding reinforces the importance of mentoring among urban agriculture teachers. In addition to collaborating with other urban agriculture teachers within the same county, networking opportunities should be provided for urban teachers at professional meetings on the state and national level.

Culturally diverse student populations were evident in the participants' classrooms. The student enrollments in Agricultural Education were composed predominately of African American, Caucasian, and Hispanic students. While Easter et al. (1999) and Werner (1993) report that teachers may question their ability to relate to students of different cultural backgrounds, two of the participants specifically sought out teaching positions that would allow them to work with a diverse group of students. These two participants and one additional participant acknowledged how much they enjoyed learning about the cultural heritage of their students and felt that the inclusion of culture in the classroom enhanced the learning environment.

Due to the ethnically diverse student populations found in urban schools, it is important for agriculture teachers to appreciate cultural diversity. Preservice agriculture teachers nationwide are predominately raised in rural hometowns that provide limited opportunities for exposure to cultural diversity. According to Rocca (2005), 86% of the preservice teachers who completed teaching internships in Fall 2005 were raised in a rural location. As a result, they may not recognize the contributions that student diversity can make to the school environment. During early field experiences, preservice teachers should be provided the opportunity to work with diverse groups of students. These experiences could help preservice teachers develop a more thorough understanding and appreciation for culturally diverse classrooms. Additionally, preservice teachers should be encouraged to discuss, design, and present activities and lesson plans that allow students to showcase their unique heritages in the classroom.

In addition to working with culturally diverse students, participants had various experiences with parental involvement. While several participants noted the importance of parental involvement, they discussed widely varying levels of parental support among the schools. Ms. Brown, who taught agriculture as an elective in an inner-city middle school, reported minimal levels of parental involvement in the school. She found her efforts to encourage parents to get involved in the FFA chapter to be unsuccessful. Mr. Flood had a similar experience with the parents of the students he taught in an elective class for the general school population. He believed the work schedules of the parents prevented them from becoming involved at the school. In contrast, Mr. Flood received an overwhelming amount of parental support from the parents of his magnet students who were “pro-education for their students and no matter what, it’s for their child.” Mr. Flood

stated a common misperception of the magnet program was “students are high socioeconomic”, but he pointed to his observation that his magnet students reflected the demographics of the general school population.

However, there was a difference in the culture of Mr. Flood’s magnet middle school students compared to the middle school students in Ms. Brown’s elective agriculture class. The most notable differences existed in student enrollment in the program and grade requirements to remain in the program. At Mr. Flood’s school, students were selected for the program based on prior academic achievement and the completion of an essay. In contrast, “they just throw kids in” to Ms. Browns’ classes. Additionally, the students in Mr. Flood’s school were required to maintain a certain grade point average to remain in the magnet program. If students did not meet the grade requirement, they would have to return to their zone schools. Due to the organization of magnet agriculture programs and agriculture electives, certain characteristics and issues are unique to each type of class setting. Both types of classes are found in urban programs, so continued research is needed specific to magnet agriculture programs and elective agriculture classes in urban schools.

With the rapid turnover of administration, several of the participants experienced fluctuating levels of support from administration. When Ms. Brown was initially hired, her principal was supportive of the agriculture program. However, that principal was replaced before the start of the school year by a principal who was not supportive of the program. After two years and another principal change, Ms. Brown felt that she received adequate assistance from her administrators. Likewise, most of the participants felt well supported by their school administration at the time data were collected. Two of the

participants described the efforts they had made to garner support from their principals. The participants perceived their principals were primarily concerned with the FCAT performance of students, so in response the participants documented the FCAT scores of Agricultural Education students and the integration of other curriculum subjects into the agriculture curriculum. Teacher educators should model strategies that preservice teachers can use to assist students in preparation for standardized testing and for integrating other curriculum areas. Preservice teachers can also develop lesson plans that integrate other curriculum subjects to use during early field experiences and student teaching.

Principals, in cooperation with an administrative team, determine the course offerings for each specific urban middle and high school; therefore, it is important for administrators to have positive perceptions of agriculture classes. Kalme and Dyer (2000) found that secondary school principals in Iowa held favorable perceptions of agriculture programs, courses, and teachers. A similar study should be conducted to determine urban school administrators' beliefs about Agricultural Education in urban schools. Additionally, administrators who are reluctant to include Agricultural Education in the course offerings should be interviewed in an effort to further understand their perceptions of agriculture classes.

Three of the participants acknowledged how supportive their assistant principals were of the Agricultural Education program. Continual effort needs to be made to promote Agricultural Education to urban principals and encourage them to include Agricultural Education as part of the complete school curriculum. However, similar efforts should be made to involve assistant principals in Agricultural Education.

The participants identified several administrative obstacles that hindered the teacher's vision for the program. As was discussed previously, the transition of administrators led to varying levels of support for the Agricultural Education program. It was difficult for participants to establish rapport with administrators in the limited time they remained at the school. The level of administrative transition is increased in urban school districts where new schools are being opened every year. The opportunity for an administrative promotion or to work in a brand new school often draws administrators from their current schools.

The perceptions of county and school administrators challenged three of the participants' beliefs on the appropriate curriculum and necessary facilities for their programs. Although Mr. Hill's principal was a former agriculture teacher, Mr. Hill felt he expected the curriculum to be more traditional and emphasize production agriculture more than Mr. Hill preferred. Ms. Brown's principal had a different view of the agriculture class, which prevented her from housing any animals on campus. Her principal's aversion to raising small and large animals modified Ms. Brown's vision for the program and curriculum.

The prior agricultural experiences of the lead teacher for Mr. Gall's department caused her to question the need for an agriculture class. Due to her narrow perception regarding the scope of the agriculture industry in Florida, she did not recognize the contribution Agricultural Education could make to students' futures. While Mr. Hill envisioned a classroom with the appropriate laboratory facilities to complement his biotechnology curriculum, the county agriculture supervisor had a different idea regarding the equipment needs of the program. The county supervisor felt that some



equipment, such as a welder and a drill press, were absolutely essential for any agriculture program regardless of the curriculum focus. Mr. Hill had to convince his supervisor to abandon his beliefs about what was needed for the program and purchase equipment that was better-suited for the curriculum of the program. Mr. Gall faced similar obstacles with facilities and equipment. The design of the classroom and laboratory and the equipment that had been ordered were not suitable for the program he had envisioned.

Additionally, in Mr. Gall's school district, a publication produced to inform the public about potential careers in agriculture reinforced the common perception that agriculture is simply farming, which was the specific perception he had been working to overcome. Urban teachers need to clearly articulate the vision they hold for their programs to their school and county administrators. They need to collaborate with county supervisors and school administrators to ensure that ordered equipment is appropriate for the curriculum of the program. Also, it is important for an urban agriculture teacher to publicize the activities and achievements of their students so administrators will be aware of the benefits of Agricultural Education.

While three participants were attracted to their current school by the opportunity to teach a specific curriculum, one participant exhibited a great deal of flexibility in modifying the curriculum she envisioned teaching. Ms. Brown was eager to teach about animal science and supplement her curriculum with live animals on campus. Due to the restrictions of the school specific to housing animals on campus, she was forced to deliver a curriculum that emphasized horticulture and plant science. Although she was initially disappointed at the inability to maintain animals on the school campus, she

focused her efforts on delivering the horticulture curriculum and was planning to teach about aquaculture in the future. Urban agriculture teachers must be flexible, creative, and resourceful when working within the parameters established by administrators. During teacher education, preservice teachers should be encouraged to develop lessons on a variety of agriculture curriculum topics. Also, it may be beneficial to place a teaching intern in an agriculture program that requires them to move beyond their “curriculum comfort zone.” Such experience can help the preservice teachers identify beneficial resources to help in the design of an agriculture curriculum appropriate for their particular school.

Participants stressed the importance of delivering a student-centered curriculum and discussed their efforts to deliver an agriculture curriculum appropriate for urban students. In an attempt to involve his students in curriculum development, Mr. Linder solicited input from his students on what they would like to learn. Ms. Fritz felt that the students in her veterinary assisting classes would be better served by learning about small animal science because many of her students had domestic pets. In her classroom, a focus on large animal science would not meet the needs of the students because very few students would ever interact with large animals. Ms. Fritz even planned to begin a dog grooming business as a part of the veterinary assisting curriculum. Mr. Flood also found it difficult to interest his students in learning about large animal science because they did not have a practical application for the material.

Several of the participants provided their opinions on the content that should be included in an urban agriculture curriculum. Mr. Gall identified specific topics that he thought would be the most appropriate for urban students including food science,

biotechnology, interiorscaping, and companion animals. Trede and Russell (1999) surveyed stakeholders regarding their perceptions on the subject matter topics of importance in an urban agriculture curriculum. They concluded that leadership, environmental science, biotechnology, agriculture business management, and food sciences were appropriate topics to be included in an urban curriculum. However, they did not recognize the importance of small animal science to the urban curriculum, which was mentioned by four of the participants in the current study.

Participants expressed a need to deliver a consumer-based program that emphasized the scientific aspects of agriculture. Trede and Russell (1999) made a similar recommendation to emphasize science-based topics in the urban agriculture curriculum. However, among the participants there was disagreement about the role of production agriculture in the urban agriculture curriculum. One participant felt that students were more interested in production agriculture as compared to consumption agriculture. In contrast, another participant contended that a traditional, production oriented agriculture curriculum would not appeal to the students in his high school. It is difficult to conclude that one specific curriculum is appropriate for every urban school. Current and former urban agriculture students could assist in designing agriculture curriculums they feel would be the most relevant and beneficial in preparing urban students for future educational and/or career paths. As well, an advisory board composed of individuals representing local agricultural businesses/industries could assist in the identification of curriculum topics pertinent to the community. Advisory board members could also assist urban teachers in locating field trip sites and securing student SAE opportunities in the vicinity of the school.

When reviewing multiple research studies relevant to beginning teachers, Veenman (1984) concluded that one of the most common perceived problems of beginning teachers was classroom management. However, none of the participants in this study voiced a concern regarding student behavior. Most of the participants were very complimentary of the students enrolled in their agriculture classes. Mr. Linder stated, “these are the best kids that I have ever worked with and I’ve worked with over 250,000 kids.” Another participant stated that she “liked that most of her urban students entered her classroom with little prior knowledge of agriculture.” This limited amount of agricultural knowledge commonly contributed to the misperceptions that students had about agriculture. The students often associated agriculture strictly with farming and lacked an understanding of the broad scope of agriculture and its’ impact on their everyday lives. After overcoming their initial perceptions, many of the students were found to embrace the subject matter. One of the participants discussed the desire of her students to learn the material that was being taught in her agriculture classroom. Other participants related their student’s positive reaction to the subject matter with the opportunity to work in the greenhouse and interact with the classroom animals. Ms. Brown was able to observe one of her former students applying the subject matter from her agriculture class in her after-school job. Ms. Brown’s student worked at daycare and engaged the kids in landscaping. Preservice agriculture teachers may be reluctant to teach in an urban school because they do not think students will embrace the subject matter. The findings described above counter this sort of misperception and demonstrate that many urban students thoroughly enjoy their agriculture classes and are able to apply the agricultural concepts that they have learned in a variety of settings, such as their after-school jobs.

There existed a wide range in the number of FFA members in each of the nine respective FFA chapters. The smallest chapter had approximately 10 to 12 active FFA members, while the largest FFA chapter had approximately 438 paid members, with about 100 of those members involved in some type of FFA activity. Urban FFA members were involved a variety of activities on the local and state levels and the participants shared multiple examples of student successes achieved through FFA events. While most of the participants took a traditional approach to FFA meetings, Ms. Brown felt FFA meetings were an opportunity to give the kids something fun to do at school so they wouldn't get into trouble in their neighborhoods. Ms. Campbell stressed the value of FFA in developing the leadership skills of her students. She provided a specific example of the lasting benefits of participation in Career Development Events such as parliamentary procedure,

I mean parliamentary procedure...if they can learn that at this age, it's going to carry on through the rest of their lives. Even if they decide to stay in agriculture or not as a career, even if they go into corporate, I mean the meetings should be properly run and any political settings, or company settings, that's how they should run. I mean PTSA, SAC, that's how it should be.

In urban schools, there were multiple obstacles to the FFA involvement of students. The schools offered numerous extracurricular clubs and after-school activities that competed with FFA for the students' time and interest. Lass (1989) surveyed agriculture students in Louisiana to determine what factors influenced their decisions to join or not join FFA. For agriculture students who decided not to join FFA one of the items credited for this decision was "I am involved in too many other activities to join the FFA" (Lass, 1989, p. 347). Also, many of the high school students held part-time jobs that limited their amount of free time. The high number of transient students served as a challenge to one participant. This rapid turnover of students made it difficult to maintain continuity in

the FFA chapter. Transportation obstacles made it difficult for many of the urban students to participate in FFA activities beyond the normal school hours, especially in the magnet programs. The work schedules of parents limited their availability to pick students up after school. Additionally, the large volume of traffic in urban areas hindered the parent's ability to commute to the school in a reasonable amount of time.

As a result of these challenges to student involvement in FFA, teachers need to look beyond the "traditional" after-school FFA meeting. With the large FFA membership at Mr. Flood's school, his FFA officers were assigned to his homeroom class. During this homeroom time, the officers would plan chapter events and activities and then travel to the other homerooms to notify other FFA members. Teachers may also hold FFA meetings during their lunch time or designate one day every two weeks or once a month as FFA day and hold smaller FFA meetings within each class period. Often preparation for Career Development Events takes place after school, which can limit student participation. Agriculture teachers could create a website with contest preparation materials so that students could practice at home. For students who do not have access to the internet, the teacher could create kits containing the preparation materials that the students could take home and study. While these suggestions are not perfect substitutions for practicing at school under the supervision of a teacher, they do allow for the participation of students who may not have access to after-school transportation.

The level of student participation in SAE varied among the nine schools. In three of the middle schools, all students were required to complete an SAE in the form of a class assignment. These students were given several options to complete the SAE requirement. At one school they could complete an agriscience fair project or community service. At

another school, they could select a project on agricultural careers, animal care, or home improvement. Participants who did not require SAE as a class assignment did not have SAE participation from all of their students. Similarly, Leising and Zilbert (1985) found that more students complete SAE projects when it is a class requirement and contributes to the class grades of students. In a few of the schools, SAEs were only required for FFA members. Since a majority of the urban students lived in apartment complexes or housing developments, most of the large animal SAEs were maintained on the school property. Due to the increase of agriculture students living in urban and suburban areas, Dyer and Osborne (1996) recommended that school systems should provide appropriate lab facilities for students to conduct SAE programs on the school campus.

The participants cited a lack of parental involvement as an obstacle to student SAEs. They felt that parents were necessary to assist the students in developing and completing SAE projects. Even in the absence of parental support, agriculture teachers need to assist students in identifying SAEs that they can complete. Agriculture teachers and students may believe that an appropriate SAE has to have “a halter attached.” However, many SAEs can be relevant to the everyday life of students, as evidenced by the SAE projects completed by Ms. Campbell and Mr. Flood’s students. Some preservice teachers may have limited ideas for potential SAE projects based on their prior experience in Agricultural Education. SAE tours could be planned to expose preservice teachers to more of the “non-traditional” SAEs of current agriculture students. Dyer and Osborne (1996) also recognized the importance of teacher education programs in “providing beginning teachers with the background and knowledge to effectively

administer SAE programs and adapting experiential learning activities from SAEs to the classroom” (p.28).

All of the participant’s schools had large student enrollments. Ms. Carter considered the size of her school to be a logistical disadvantage to the agriculture program. With 3500 students, because the school was so large, the campuses were divided into a campus specifically for 9<sup>th</sup>- graders and a campus specifically for 10<sup>th</sup>- – 12<sup>th</sup>- graders. Since both of the agriculture teachers at Ms. Carter’s school were housed on the 10<sup>th</sup>- –12<sup>th</sup>- grade campus, 9<sup>th</sup>- grade students were unable to enroll in Agricultural Education classes. For 8<sup>th</sup>- grade students who were eager to enroll in agriculture classes, the inability to take such a class in the 9<sup>th</sup>- grade jeopardized their continued interest in agriculture as a 10<sup>th</sup>- grader and their involvement in FFA. An additional drawback to the division of the campuses was that it was impossible for Ms. Carter’s veterinary assisting students to complete the five courses necessary to be considered program completers and earn an anatomy and physiology credit.

The size of Ms. Brown’s middle school resulted in an average of 30 students in each of her classes. Her portable classroom offered a limited amount of space, so she was unable to use many pieces of the equipment that was purchased for her classroom. In an attempt to utilize more of the classroom equipment and provide hands-on learning activities for students, Ms. Brown described her plans to include learning stations for her 6<sup>th</sup>- grade students. Each learning station would be specific to an agricultural topic and would contain relevant background information, activities, and assignments that a group of students could complete in 1–2 days. Ms. Brown’s goal for using stations would place her in more of a facilitative role rather than providing instruction to the whole class, but



would encourage the increased use of classroom equipment. For example, if teaching about landscape design, it would be impossible for Ms. Brown to have her entire class use computer software to design a landscape. However, through the use of learning stations, a group of 4-5 students had the opportunity to create a landscape plan using the computer. The use of learning stations was an idea that Ms. Brown received from her cooperating teacher and may be very helpful to new teachers. To supplement the learning stations that have already been developed, preservice teachers could design additional stations with information, activities, and assignments that would be appropriate for various curriculum topics.

### **Agriculture Teachers' Outlook on Their Teaching Tenure in Urban Schools**

When asked to speculate on their future teaching career in their current school, the participants identified several influences that could potentially influence their career decisions. Two of the participants really enjoyed the particular curriculum they were teaching and wanted to continue teaching a similar curriculum in the future. Four participants identified their family as an important influence on their teaching location. For Ms. Brown, she was willing to relocate to a city, which had the best job opportunities for her husband. Mr. Gall felt that if he and his wife started a family while living in their current location, it would be difficult to move. While Mr. Linder enjoyed living in a metropolitan area, he wanted to eventually return to a rural area to raise a family.

As new schools are opened to provide relief for overcrowded schools, the draw of students from their current schools decreases the student enrollment, which results in the elimination of teaching positions. Two of the participants felt their jobs might be threatened based on a change in student enrollment in their current school. Mr. Flood stated that administrative support was a key factor in his decision to continue teaching at

his current school. Ms. Fritz planned on staying in an urban school because she felt that Agricultural Education was desperately needed in urban areas. Of the nine participants, only one expressed his intention to leave his current school for a teaching position in another state.

### **Recommendations for Research and Practice**

#### **Recommendations for Future Research**

While this study provided worthwhile information about the career influences and expectations of nine agriculture teachers who were teaching in urban schools, all of the participants made the choice to accept employment in an urban district. It is also important to explore the career influences of teachers who would not seek employment in an urban school or who declined an offer for a teaching position in an urban area.

The perceptions held by participants regarding urban schools did not discourage them from teaching in urban areas, however, research is needed on the perceptions of individuals who would not consider teaching in an urban school. Such research could help determine if these perceptions are truly a factor in the individual's avoidance of urban schools. Additionally, activities/experiences could be identified for inclusion in teacher education programs to help address these perceptions of urban environments. Also, the participants were asked to recall the perceptions that they held in the past. For the participants this involved reflecting on how they felt anywhere from one year to five years ago and could have been altered by their actual experience in urban schools. A more accurate representation of the perceptions that individuals have about urban schools may be ascertained from teachers prior to the start of their teaching careers through the use of interviews and focus groups.

Only four of the participants completed their student teaching experience in an urban school. While two of the participants mentioned the role of this experience in their career choice, it was not the sole influence on their decision to teach in an urban school. Future research should concentrate more specifically on the contribution of the student teaching experience on a teacher's decision to teach in an urban school. Although prior research discussed the influence of urban field experiences, such as field trips, the individuals who had participated in field trips as preservice teachers did not elaborate on how such experiences shaped their beliefs about urban schools. It may have been difficult for the participants to recall their memories from field trips in which they participated as many as five years previously. The beliefs of preservice teachers should be examined prior to field trips to urban schools and again upon their return from such field trips.

The factors the participants credited as influential in their anticipated career continuation in an urban school were merely speculative. Using the same participants, a longitudinal study would provide additional data about the factors that influenced their decisions to either stay or depart from their current teaching site.

Some findings of the study appeared to be specific to agriculture programs in inner city schools compared to agriculture programs in urban schools represented by this study. Also, differences were noted in agriculture classes that were offered as electives to the general student population and magnet agriculture programs that had established criteria for student selection. Further research should be conducted to gain a thorough understanding of the career experiences of teachers in these different urban contexts.

There was a striking difference in the levels of FFA involvement among the nine schools. Several of the chapters experienced high levels of student involvement while

other chapters struggled with student membership. While a few of the participants hypothesized about possible obstacles to student involvement, urban agriculture students should be interviewed to examine what encourages and hinders their participation in the FFA.

All of the participants in the study were graduates of teacher education programs at land grant institutions. Yet, with an ongoing shortage of qualified teachers to fill available teaching positions in Agricultural Education (Camp, Broyles, & Skelton, 2002), administrators often hire uncertified teachers to fill teaching vacancies (Roberts & Dyer, 2004). Similarly, the Urban Teacher Collaborative (2000) found that teaching vacancies in urban schools are often filled with teachers who are not fully certified. Consequently, it is important to examine alternatively certified teachers' decisions to teach Agricultural Education in urban schools, the career experiences of alternatively certified teachers while teaching in urban agriculture programs, and alternatively certified agriculture teachers' outlook their career longevity in urban schools.

### **Recommendations for Future Practice**

Several of the participants who were not raised in urban areas were willing to consider teaching positions in urban schools because of a desire to live in urban areas or relocate to areas they felt would offer a better quality of life. If preservice teachers express an interest in moving to an urban location or a willingness to move to a new area, teacher educators should assist them in identifying potential teaching jobs in urban schools.

With the influence that former agriculture teachers and college advisors had on several of the participants' decisions to teach agriculture, it is important for teacher educators to establish relationships and maintain contact with these individuals.

Agriculture teachers and college advisors can identify students who have expressed interest in becoming an agriculture teacher, so that teacher educators can focus recruitment efforts on interested students.

Prospective Agricultural Education teachers who have not had prior experience as a student in Agricultural Education may be reluctant to consider a teaching career. Encouraging these students to shadow an agriculture teacher and assisting them in arranging school visits could help them determine whether teaching is a suitable career.

In order for preservice teachers to be knowledgeable of job openings in urban districts, the openings must be well publicized using a variety of methods. In addition to word-of-mouth publicity by teacher educators, job posting boards and websites for professional organizations and the National FFA Organization could be used to advertise urban openings. The use of websites may be especially helpful in notifying out-of-state preservice teachers who are interested in an urban teaching position of available jobs.

Prospective teachers may be drawn to a particular school by the opportunity to teach a specific curriculum. Identifying and advertising the curriculums of urban agriculture programs could assist individuals in selecting a position that provides them with the opportunity to teach a course relevant to their area of interest or expertise.

One of the influences on Mr. Flood's decision to return to his urban hometown was the existence of a social network composed of family and friends. While Ms. Brown accepted a teaching position in a new location, she predicted that she would always teach in an urban location as a result of her upbringing in urban areas. If other individuals who are raised in metropolitan areas exhibit the same desire to return to their hometown or a similar urban location, urban students who are interested in the possibility of teaching

Agriculture Education need to be actively recruited to enroll in teacher education programs.

Several of the participants discussed the rapid rate of administrative turnover in their respective schools. In order to gain the support of new administrators, the participants used different strategies to educate their principals about Agricultural Education. Preservice teachers should collaborate with their peers and current teachers to design a public relations program that they can implement at their student teaching site and at the school where they accept a teaching position.

APPENDIX A  
CODING

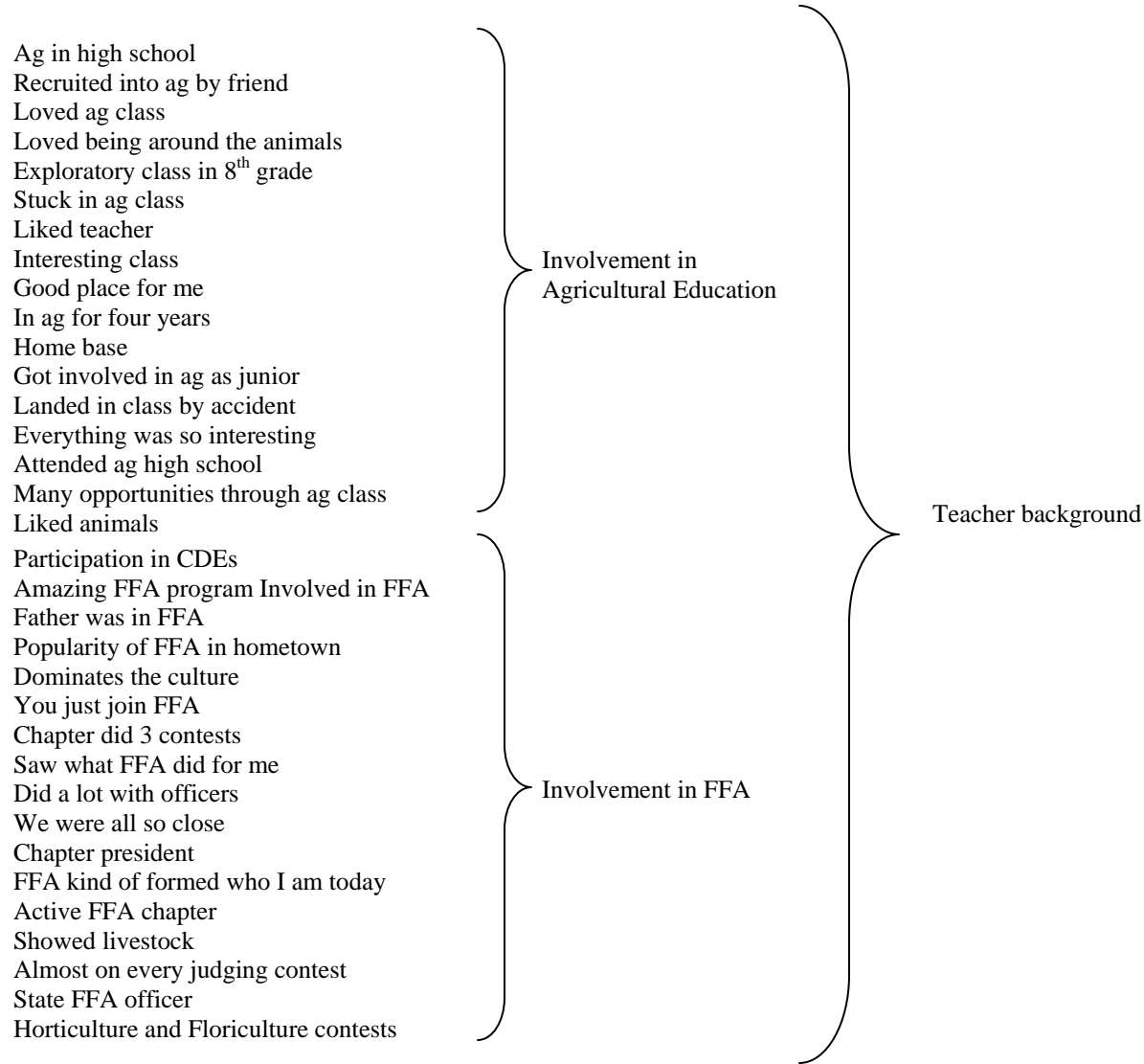


Figure A-1. Influences on teachers' initial decisions to teach Agricultural Education.



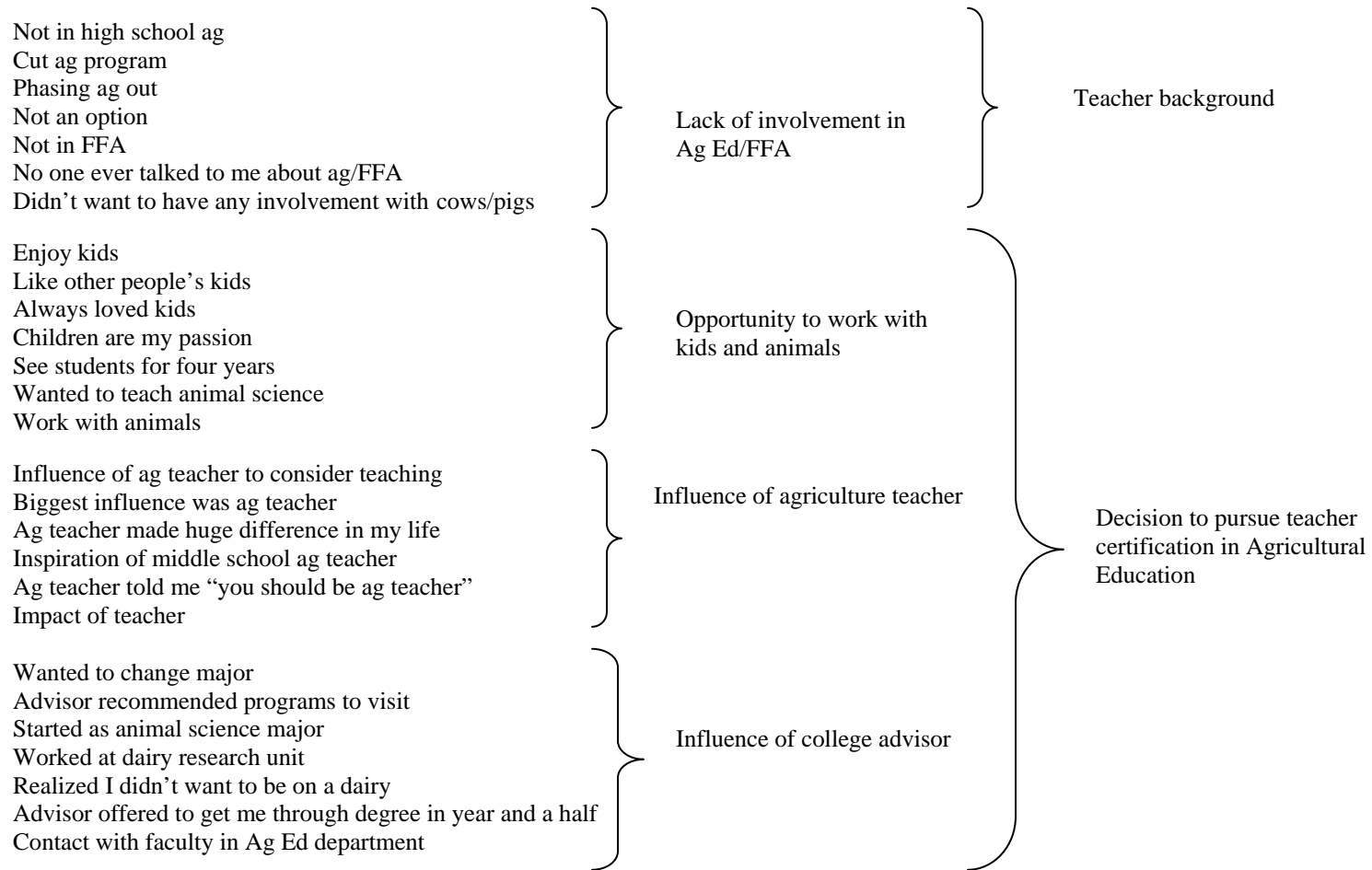


Figure A-1. Continued.

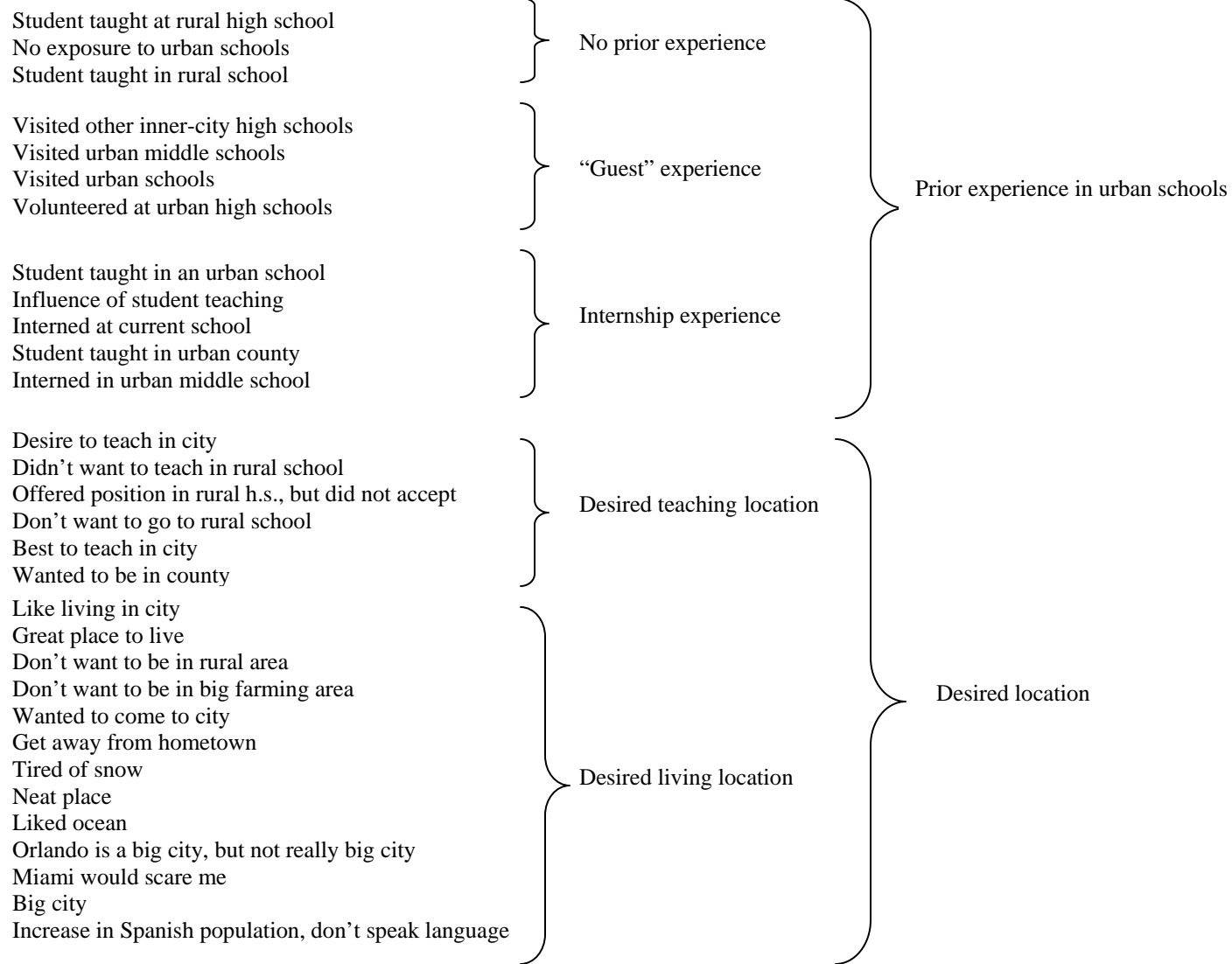


Figure A-2. Influences on teachers' initial decisions to teach Agricultural Education in an urban area.

Open position  
Threat of program closing  
Job was open forever  
Posted for 2 or 3 years  
Available position  
Where opening was  
Had to have job  
What's open, you want to take it

Need for agriculture teacher

Recruitment from ag supervisor  
Supervisor was one of main reasons I came  
She contacted me  
Helpful  
Sold the program  
No clue what to expect  
Someone selling program – respond to sales pitch  
Contact with supervisor  
Liked supervisor

Influence of supervisor

Met with other teacher  
Made it very attractive to me  
Offered me class choices  
Coach whichever FFA teams  
Lots of choices and options

Influence of other teacher

Wanted to teach plant biotechnology  
Have to go to urban setting  
Traditional curriculum in rural schools  
Science-based  
Not traditional program  
Work with animals  
Vet science curriculum

Curriculum offerings

Decision to teach in a particular school

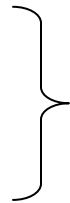
Figure A-2. Continued.

Support from ag teachers  
Knew teachers in county from undergrad  
Teacher base  
Mentors were at school  
Knew people at school  
A lot of support  
Familiar with program  
Wouldn't start from scratch  
Best place to be



Professional network

Family here  
Compelled to come back  
Miami was best for me  
Coming back home was best  
Difficult to make living in other city  
Not having support in other city  
From neighborhood



Social network

Start own program  
Personally responsible for success/failure  
Not compared to previous teacher  
New program opening  
More opportunities at big schools  
Strong bonds with one teacher



Personal control



Decision to teach in a particular school

Figure A-2. Continued.

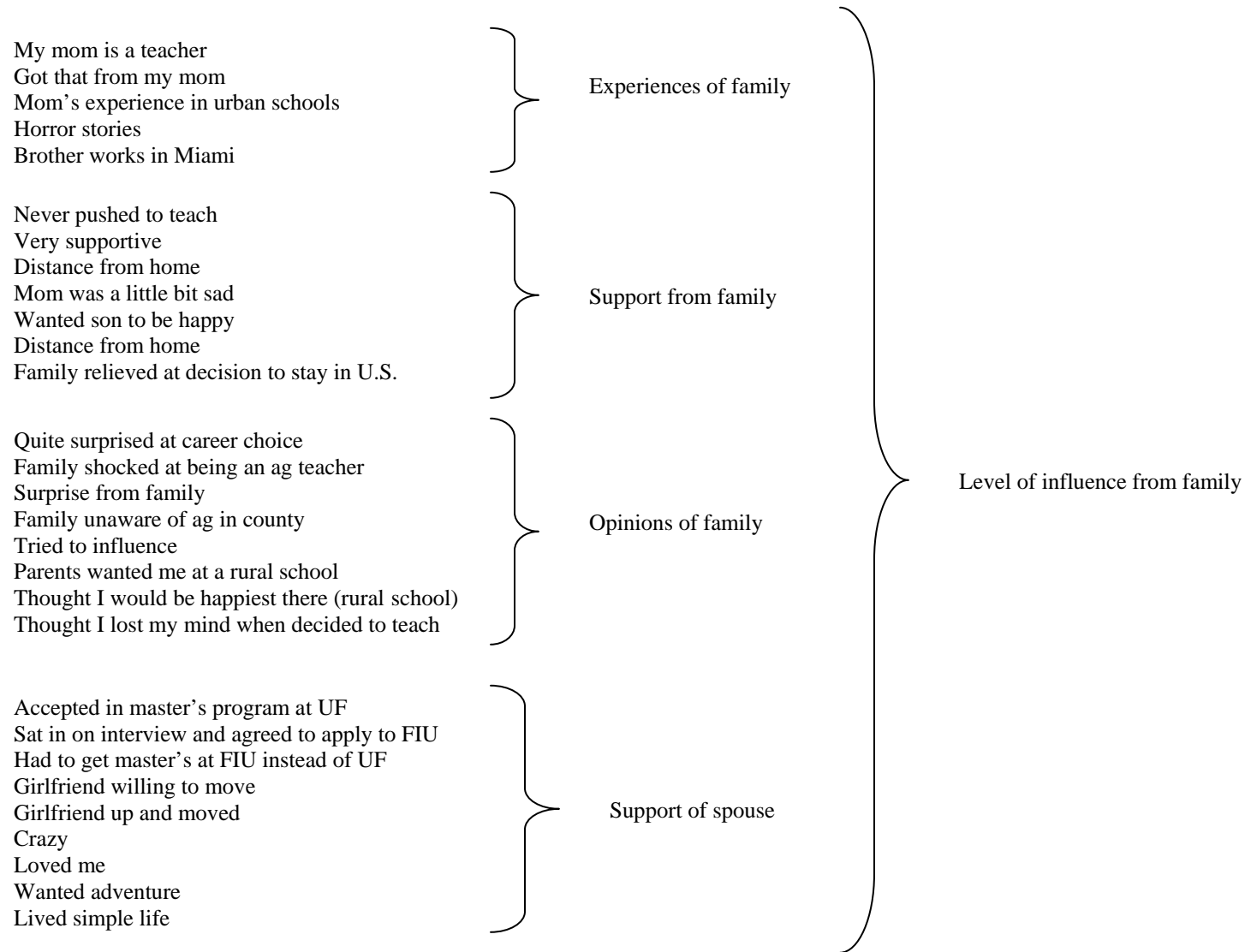


Figure A-2. Continued.

Thought it would be more challenging environment  
Could be more challenging  
More difficult than working with students from similar background

Perceptions of school environment

Little student interest  
Willing to participate in land judging  
As much FFA interest as there was

Perceived student interest in FFA

Difficulty with race (85% of school is black)  
Didn't expect ethnic diversity  
Thought there would be more white students  
Only white person in room

Expectations of student demographics

Students with ag background  
Never raised on farm  
Maybe rural kids know more  
Never knew how to tag a cow  
Kids telling me what I need to know  
Students would have known more than me  
Doing that since they were young  
Going to know more than I do  
Happens here, but on different level  
No ag background  
Not enough education/knowledge  
Lack of technical ag knowledge  
High schoolers would teach me  
Unable to teach high school students  
City kids don't know more than teacher  
Didn't grow up on farm  
Rural kids would know more  
Ignorance of urban students about agriculture  
Rural students already know information  
Not in FFA in high school  
Maybe I don't have that background  
Thought rural schools would be more interested in ag

Perceptions of rural students

Teachers' perceptions of urban schools

Perceptions of Ag Ed in rural areas

Figure A-2. Continued.

Some rural programs rely too much on FFA  
“I’m an FFA teacher” – no such thing  
I’m an ag teacher, not an FFA teacher  
Some rural programs are so FFA  
Teaching through FFA  
Don’t want to be an FFA teacher  
Rural parents expect FFA teacher  
Focus on teams  
Need to teach first



Perceptions of rural schools



Perceptions of Ag Ed in rural areas

Figure A-2. Continued.

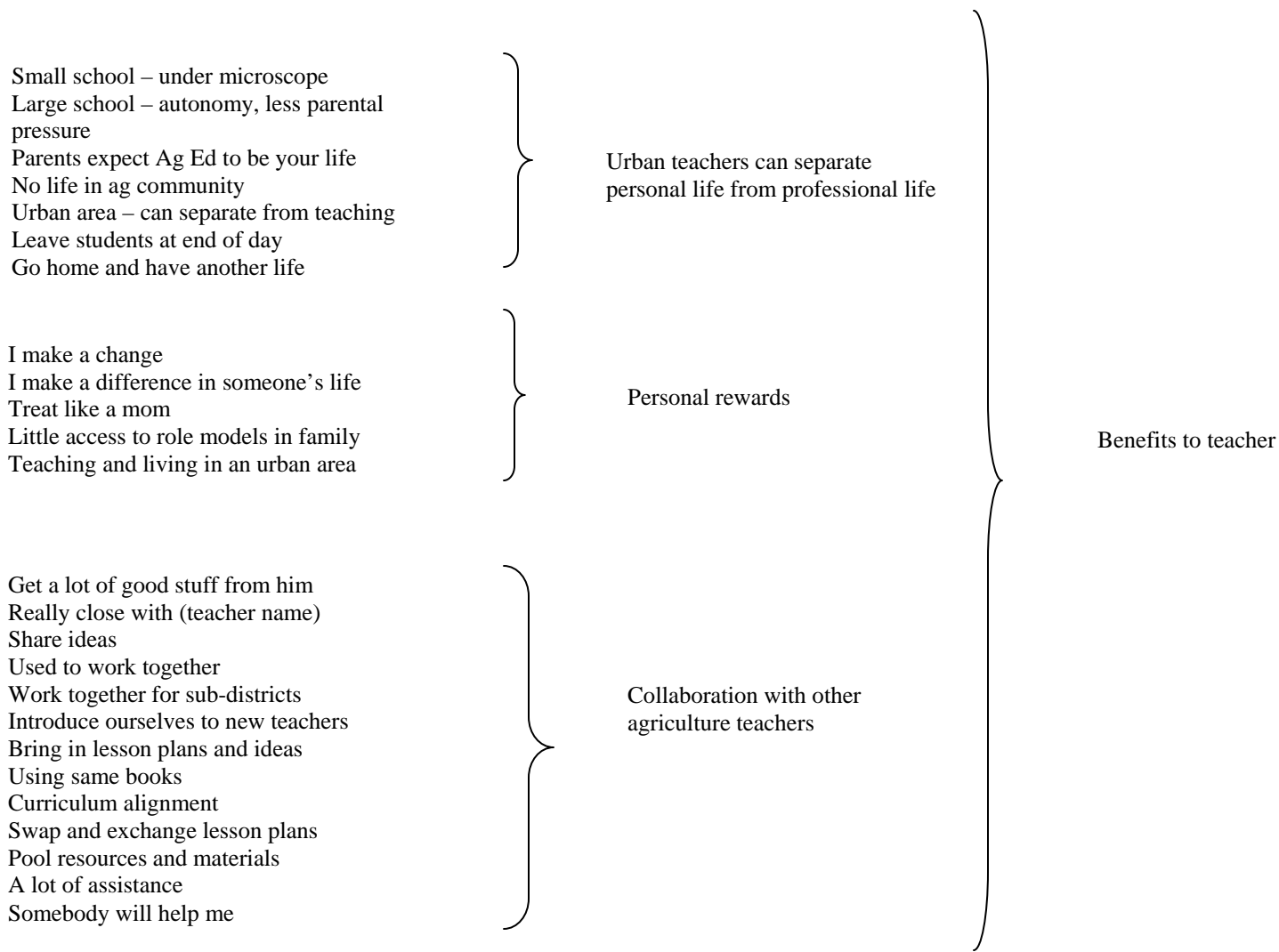


Figure A-3. Agriculture teachers’ current experiences in urban schools.



84% Hispanic  
11% White  
2% Black  
1% Asian  
2% other

98% minority  
High Hispanic population  
~50% Hispanic  
85% of school is Black

75% Black  
10% White  
10% Hispanic

Some of everybody's here  
Understanding student culture

Cultural diversity of students

Contribution of cultural diversity to  
classroom environment

Like learning about different cultures  
Love hearing about different places  
Enjoy diversity of urban students  
Like the diversity & Hispanic culture  
Different from my hometown

Teacher appreciation of cultural diversity

Kids share about background  
Hear about ag in Puerto Rico  
Contribution of students – culture and experiences

Contribution of individual student culture  
to classroom

Figure A-3. Continued.

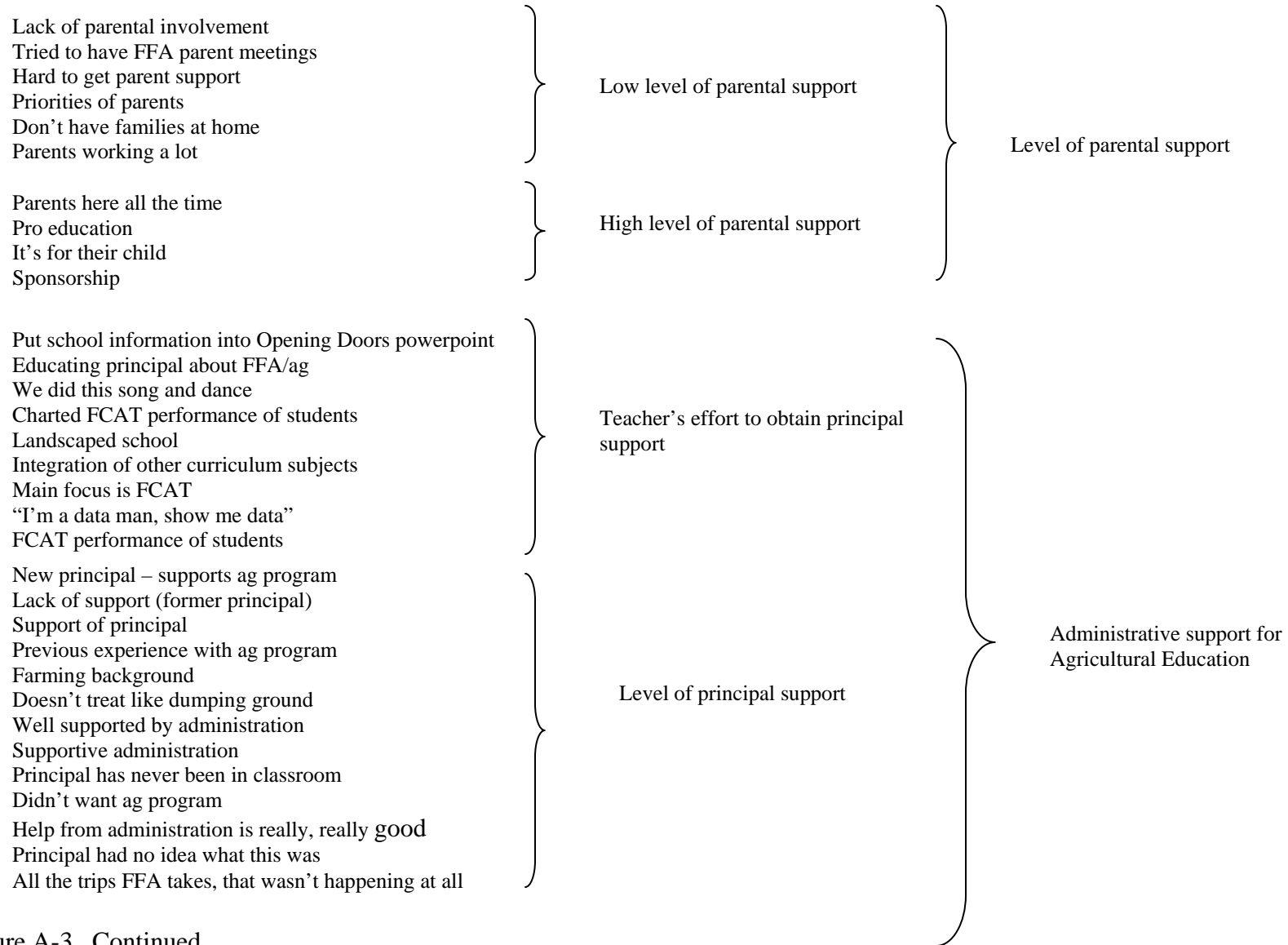


Figure A-3. Continued.

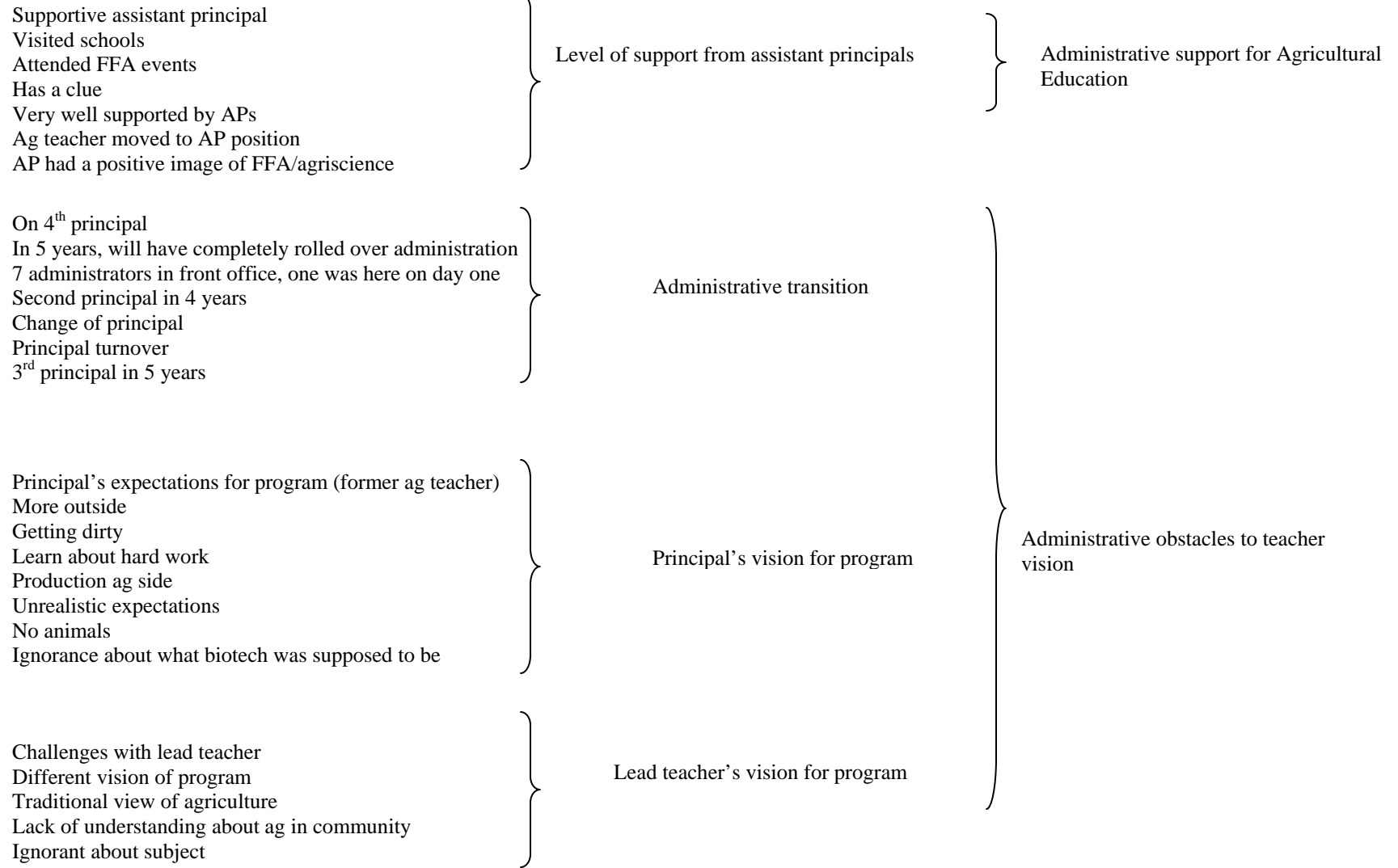


Figure A-3. Continued.

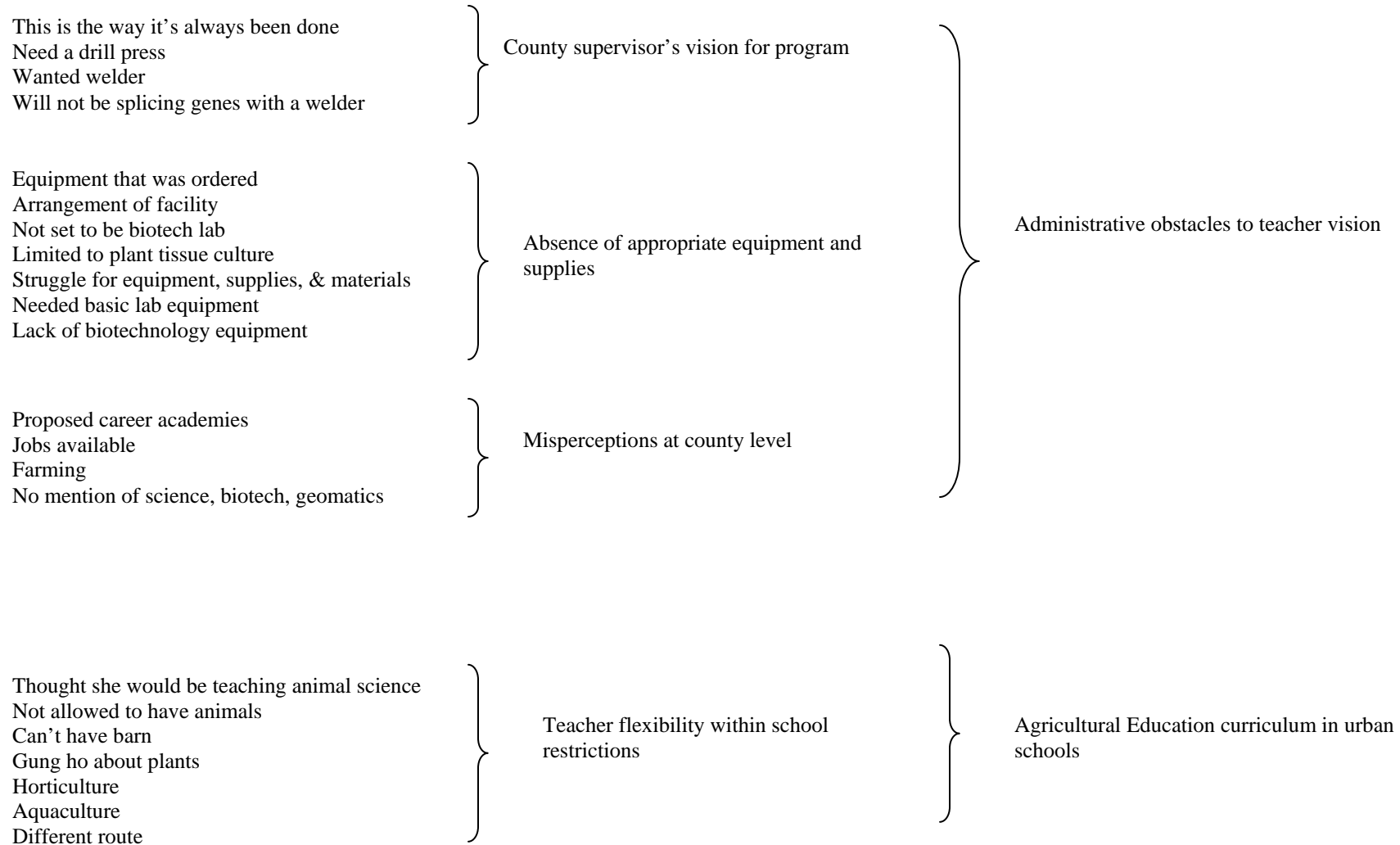


Figure A-3. Continued.

Start a dog grooming business  
 Future of ag at high school and area  
 Getting kids working with small animals  
 No future in cows  
 Appealing to students with small animals  
 90% of my kids have never been within 5 feet of cow  
 Never will interact with cows  
 80-85% have cat or dog at home  
 Make ag relatable to these kids  
 Ag production is not relatable to urban kids  
 I ask them what do you want to learn about  
 You can tailor it to whatever they want  
 Combine what they want & what I think  
 Hard to convey message without application  
 Production of large animals  
 Nothing to apply to  
 Community based  
 Important to work in traditional agriculture  
 Traditional agriculture can't be main focus  
 Relevant, consumer based programs  
 Food science, biotechnology  
 Focus on interiorscaping, small-scale production  
 Ornamental horticulture  
 Companion animals  
 Fad is consumption ag  
 Not enough interest in consumption ag  
 Kids in ghetto, playing in dirt  
 Don't change everything to consumption ag  
 Good old boy mentality  
 Ag is original science  
 Stop promoting stereotype  
 Train to be scientists  
 No training needed for farming  
 Not interested in agriculture  
 Traditional ag offered as an elective  
 Take art  
 Don't want to get sweaty and dirty



Student-centered curriculum

Curriculum content



Agricultural Education curriculum  
in urban schools

Figure A-3. Continued.

Students are fine  
No student problems  
Best kids I ever worked with (worked with over 250,000 kids)  
Love students  
Great kids  
Awesome students  
Well-behaved  
Look forward to students  
Likes the students  
Likes that urban students do not have agriculture background  
Likes students' lack of agriculture knowledge

Students enrolled in Ag Ed classes

Farming  
Low level of education  
Low end job  
Negative perception of ag  
Don't want to learn about farming  
Has nothing to do with me  
No idea about agriculture  
Minimal knowledge of ag  
No understanding of everyday impact  
Get milk from store  
No concept of agriculture  
Think about Old MacDonald's farm  
Just another science class  
Never even heard of it  
Is it true that are we are going to be milking goats  
Thought we were going to be farming  
Had no idea what it was  
190 kids dumped in class  
Don't have a clue what ag is  
Just cows and tractors

Students' perceptions of agriculture

Value of Agricultural  
Education to urban  
students

Figure A-3. Continued.

Kids are hungry for what we are trying to teach them  
 Student raised on a dairy farm is not going to appreciate strawberries  
 Urban kids are excited as information that rural kids would consider minimal  
 After a couple of weeks, 75% of kids were on board  
 Enrollment for next year = 130 students  
 91 signed up for high school ag  
 They go crazy because of animals, greenhouse  
 They love it  
 Exploratory class embraced subject matter  
 It gives the students the chance to experience something very different  
 Kids want to learn  
 Hungry to learn material  
 Want to learn about small animals  
 Want to learn dog breeds

Student reaction to subject matter

Student works at daycare  
 Always landscaping daycare  
 Kids are playing in dirt and growing plants  
 She's doing something I taught her

Student application of subject matter

Do everything possible  
 Opening/closing  
 Extemp  
 Prepared  
 Creed  
 Fair booth  
 Veggie ID  
 Food science  
 1<sup>st</sup> in OCC  
 Spanish extemp speaker  
 Public speaking  
 Quiz bowl  
 Land judging  
 OH demos  
 Focused efforts  
 Horse judging

FFA activities

Value of Agricultural Education to urban students

FFA in urban schools

Figure A-3. Continued.

Not normal FFA activities  
Keep students off street  
Soccer  
Board games  
Chill and hang out  
Order pizza  
Something to do



Alternative view of importance of FFA

10 –12 members  
45 members  
10 – 12 members  
55/42 members  
between 50 –60 members  
top kids are in FFA  
High achievers gravitate towards me  
438 members  
100 students involved  
Willing to participate in FFA



Student involvement in FFA

State winner in extemp  
No ag background  
Reaction to award  
Hard work paid off  
Excited about recognition  
Extemp speaker – Spanish speaking  
1<sup>st</sup> place in OCC  
Success in land judging



Student achievement



FFA in urban schools

Figure A-3. Continued



Students are more distracted  
Many different things to do on weekends/after school  
Other opportunities at school competing for time  
Involved in established clubs  
Thought students would gravitate to FFA  
Other responsibilities – lives and jobs  
Everything is after school  
Million other activities around the school

Student opportunities and involvement

Transient students  
Half of chapter moved  
High student turnover  
Always getting new students  
Hard to keep them  
Influence of neighborhood  
Movement of renters

Turnover of student population

Didn't have a ride to get anywhere  
Can't stay after school  
Nobody to pick them up  
Fewer students can participate after school  
Kids live far away  
Mom and dad have to pick them up  
After school activities are very limited

Transportation obstacles

Student perception of FFA  
Stereotypical redneck farmers  
Educate about FFA  
Difference in membership numbers between two schools  
Difficult to educate students about FFA  
This is the farming club  
Defeating perception  
Do I have to show animals to be in FFA?  
Other avenues and options FFA has to offer  
Stereotype crap  
Freshman are pressured about club involvement

Promoting involvement in FFA

Obstacles to FFA involvement

Figure A-3. Continued.

Practical relevant SAEs for urban students  
Zero percent have land  
Subdivision or apartment kids  
More large animal SAEs than small animals (housed at school)  
Agriscience projects or community service  
Animal care or home improvement  
No projects outside of class except agriscience projects  
Small projects for fair (chicken, rabbits, plants)  
Live in apartments, condos, or houses on small lots  
Not much space for home project  
Apartment/residential areas  
Pig projects are not relevant  
Practical SAEs  
SAEs stay at school  
More work for teacher  
Caring for turtles  
More research than care

SAE opportunities for students

Encounter resistance on parent's part  
Parents do not realize value  
Huge barrier is lack of parental support  
Difference in parents at urban/rural schools  
At home, parents would help  
Don't have parental back-up to do things  
Can't get too creative with SAEs  
No one is going to help  
You can only help so much as advisor

Lack of parental involvement in SAE

SAE in urban schools

Figure A-3. Continued.

Division of campuses  
Hurt enrollment  
Large campus  
2 campuses  
3500 students  
No freshman on main campus  
Can't start ag until sophomore year  
Hurts program  
2600 students  
3<sup>rd</sup> year for school  
Can see 3 other high schools with 5000 students  
My school is also expected to be 5000 students  
Not enough seats in classroom  
Limited space  
Can't use equipment  
2600 or 2700 students  
1200 in entire school  
440 in magnet program

Size of school

High teacher turnover  
Difficult school environment  
Difficult classroom environment  
Number of referrals and suspensions  
Low performance on FCAT  
Looks like a jail  
Horrible  
Scary at night  
School looks trashier and trashier  
Looks terrible

Pride in school

School characteristics

Figure A-3. Continued.

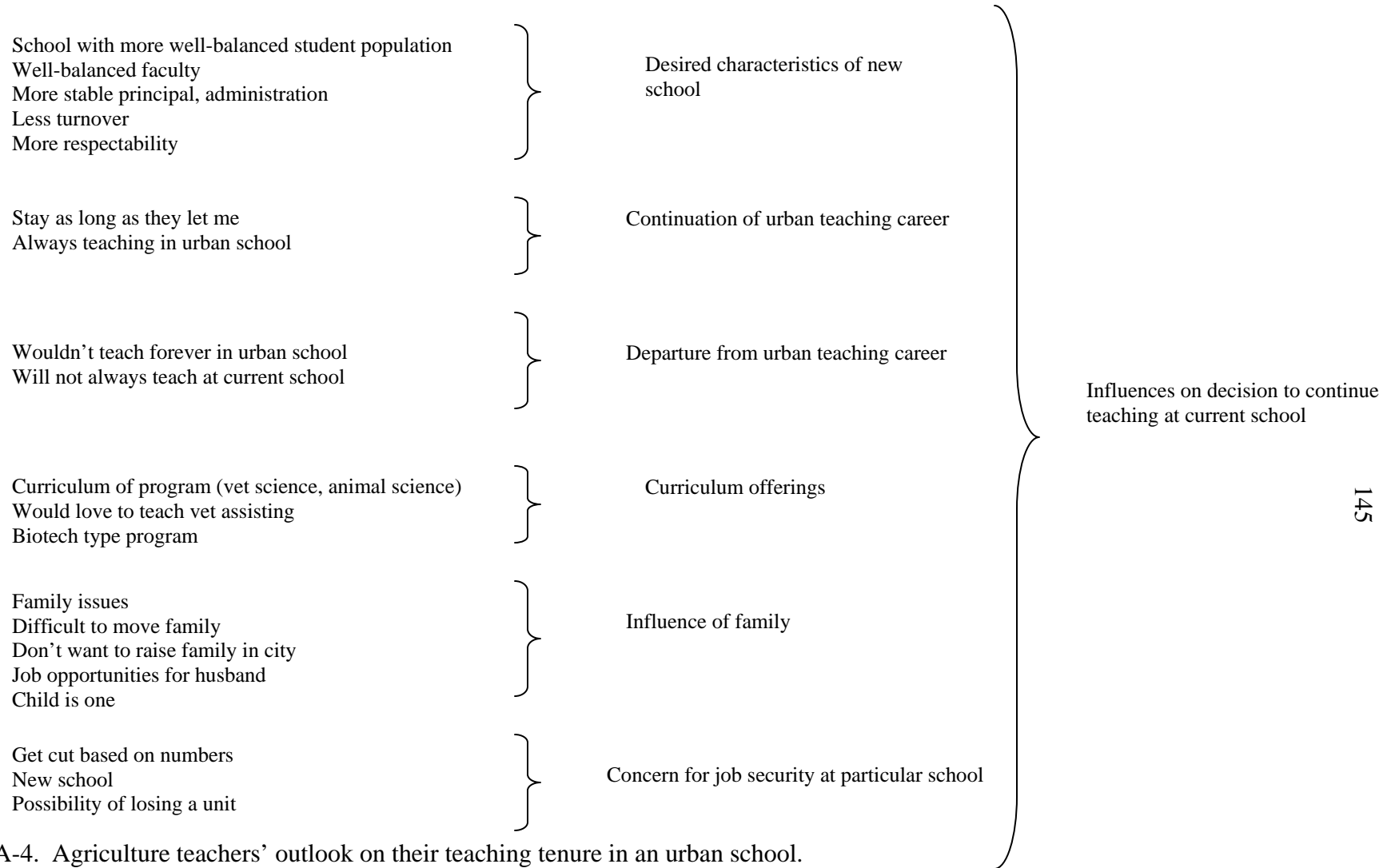


Figure A-4. Agriculture teachers' outlook on their teaching tenure in an urban school.

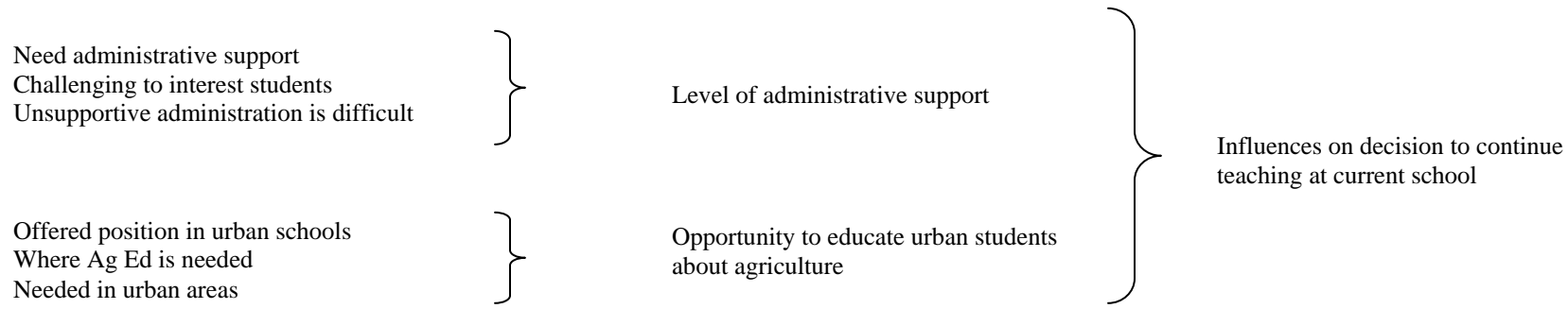


Figure A-4. Continued.

APPENDIX B  
GROUNDED THEORY

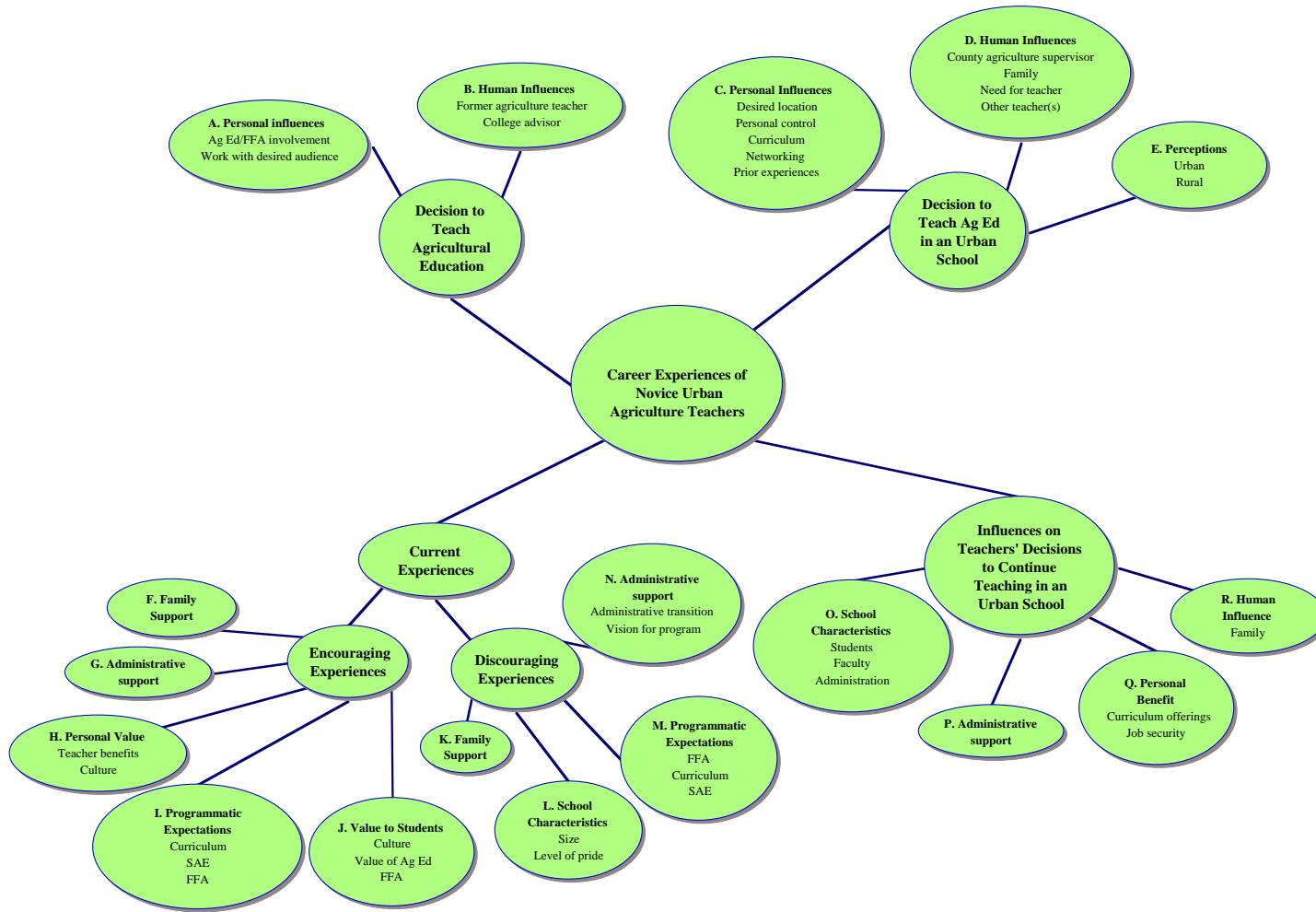


Figure B-1. Grounded theory of the career experiences of novice urban agriculture teachers

## APPENDIX C EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE

### Email that will be sent to participants

Dear <insert name of participant>,

As an urban agriculture teacher, your contribution to agricultural education is critical to the future success of ag ed and the agricultural industry. As you know, we need more talented individuals to make the decision to teach agriculture – especially in urban settings. To better understand why ag teachers choose to teach in urban schools, I am conducting a research study. I am writing to ask for your assistance with this important research. If possible, I would like to conduct an interview (will last about an hour) about your experiences and beliefs about teaching in an urban school and your expectations about your future expectations of teaching in an urban school.

If you would be willing to participate, please let me know and we can arrange a date/time. You can reach me via email or on my cell phone (352-283-1711).

Take care,

Wendy  
Wendy J. Warner  
Graduate Teaching Assistant  
University of Florida  
Agricultural Education and Communication  
310 Rolfs Hall  
P.O. Box 110540  
Gainesville, FL 32611  
Phone: (352) 392-0502 ext. 238  
Fax: (352) 392-9585  
[warnerw@ufl.edu](mailto:warnerw@ufl.edu)

Approved by  
University of Florida  
Institutional Review Board 02  
Protocol # 2006-U-0127  
For Use Through 02/15/2007



## APPENDIX D INFORMED CONSENT

### Informed Consent

**Protocol Title:** Novice Agriculture Teachers' Decisions to Teach in Urban Schools

**Purpose of the research study:** To understand why agriculture teachers choose to teach in urban schools.

**What will you be asked to do in the study:** Participate in an interview conducted by the researcher and the member checking process. Allow the interview to be audiotaped and transcribed at a later time.

**Time required:** Approximately 1 hour.

**Risks:** There are no known risks associated with this study.

**Benefits/Compensation:** There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. There is no compensation, monetary or otherwise, for participation in this study.

**Confidentiality:** Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by the law. Your responses to the interviews will be anonymous. The audio tapes will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study. The final results will be submitted to research conferences and journals for possible presentations and publications.

**Voluntary participation:** Your participation is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating. You have the right to withdraw from the study at anytime without consequence. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer.

**Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:**

Dr. Shannon Washburn  
Department of Agricultural Education and Communication  
PO Box 110540  
Gainesville, FL 32611-0540  
Phone: 352-392-0502  
Fax: 352-392-9585

Wendy Warner  
Department of Agricultural Education and Communication  
PO Box 110540  
Gainesville, FL 32611-0540  
Phone: 352-392-0502  
Fax: 352-392-9585

**Whom to contact about your rights in the study:**

UF IRB Office  
PO Box 112250  
University of Florida  
Gainesville, FL 32611-2250  
Phone: 352-392-0433

Approved by  
University of Florida  
Institutional Review Board 02  
Protocol # 2006-U-0127  
For Use Through 02/15/2007

**Agreement:**

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and have received a copy of this description.

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Principal Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX E  
IRB APPROVAL



**Institutional Review Board**

FWA00005790

98A Psychology Bldg.  
PO Box 112250  
Gainesville, FL 32611-2250  
Phone: (352) 392-0433  
Fax: (352) 392-9234  
E-mail: [irb2@ufl.edu](mailto:irb2@ufl.edu)  
<http://irb.ufl.edu>

DATE: February 15, 2006

TO: Wendy Warner  
PO Box 110540  
Campus

FROM: Ira S. Fischler, Chair *ISF*  
University of Florida  
Institutional Review Board

SUBJECT: Approval of Protocol #2006-U-0127

TITLE: Novice Agriculture Teachers' Decisions to Teach in Urban Schools

SPONSOR: None

I am pleased to advise you that the University of Florida Institutional Review Board has recommended approval of this protocol. Based on its review, the UFIRB determined that this research presents no more than minimal risk to participants. Given your protocol, it is essential that you obtain signed documentation of informed consent from each participant. Enclosed is the dated, IRB-approved informed consent to be used when recruiting participants for the research.

It is essential that each of your participants sign a copy of your approved informed consent that bears the IRB approval stamp and expiration date.

If you wish to make any changes to this protocol, *including the need to increase the number of participants authorized*, you must disclose your plans before you implement them so that the Board can assess their impact on your protocol. In addition, you must report to the Board any unexpected complications that affect your participants.

If you have not completed this protocol by **February 15 2007**, please telephone our office (392-0433), and we will discuss the renewal process with you. It is important that you keep your Department Chair informed about the status of this research protocol.

ISF:dl

APPENDIX F  
INTERVIEW QUESTION GUIDE

Today, I would like to provide you with the opportunity to describe your perceptions about teaching in an urban school.

1. Why did you decide to teach? Middle school/high school?
2. Why did you decide to teach ag?
3. What are your beliefs about teaching in an urban school?
  - Did you have any beliefs prior to obtaining a job in an urban school?
  - Students
    - expectations, diversity, interest in subject matter, behavior management
  - Curriculum
    - teaching style, subject matter
  - Context of school
  - Role of SAE/FFA
  - What assisted in the formation of these beliefs?
    - People (parents, cooperating teacher, university personnel), media, etc.
  - Since you have started teaching in an urban school, how have your beliefs changed?
  - Efficacy
4. Prior to teaching, what kind of experiences did you have in an urban school/area?
  - Primary/Secondary school experience
  - University experience
  - Preservice teacher preparation
    - Early field experience
    - Student teaching experience
    - Discussions during preservice preparation
  - Initial decision to teach in urban school
    - Influential factors
    - Reaction of family/friends

5. What kind of experiences have you had while teaching in an urban school?
  - Students
  - Other faculty
  - Administration
  - Families/Parents
  - Acceptance of agriculture
  - Curriculum (class activities)
  - FFA/SAE
  - Extracurricular activities of students
  
6. What are your expectations of your future teaching career in an urban school?
  - Decision to continue teaching in an urban school (influential factors)
  - Students
  - Curriculum
  - Administration
  - Resources
  - Collaboration with other teachers

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Wendy Jacklyn Warner was born August 19, 1976 in Washington Court House, Ohio. She was raised on a small hog and grain crops farm in rural Fayette County, Ohio. When she was eight years old, Wendy joined the Wayne Progressive Farmers 4-H Club and began exhibiting Chester Whites at the county and state fair. While attending Miami Trace High School, Wendy continued her involvement in 4-H and also became an active member of the Miami Trace FFA Chapter.

In June 1998, Wendy earned her Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Education from the Ohio State University. As part of her degree program, she completed her student teaching at Johnstown High School in Johnstown, Ohio under the supervision of Mr. Tim Reichert.

Upon graduation, Wendy relocated to Orlando, Florida to teach exploratory agriscience courses to 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students at Corner Lake Middle School. After two years of teaching at the middle school level, Wendy accepted a position at Robert Hungerford Preparatory High School in Eatonville, Florida. While teaching at Hungerford Prep, she served as the academy leader for the Agricultural Biotechnology Academy, president of the Orange County Agriculture Teachers Association, and a mentor for beginning teachers. In 2002, Wendy was recognized as the Florida FFA Agriscience Teacher of the Year.

In 2003, Wendy accepted a graduate teaching and research assistantship in the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication at the University of Florida

and began work on a Ph.D. in Agricultural Education. During her time in graduate school, Wendy taught a technical writing course, assisted with various teacher preparation courses, and supervised student teachers. She also conducted research studies on urban agriculture programs, laboratory instruction, and experiential learning. While completing her degree, Wendy served as the vice-president and secretary of Alpha Tau Alpha and was a member of Gamma Sigma Delta and the Agricultural Education and Communication Graduate Student Association.

In September 2006, Wendy will assume an assistant professor position in the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, California.