

Faculty efforts lead to program growth

Seventy students comprise the agricultural education department at Kansas State University, and each, in addition to future transfer students, is advised by one of three advisers - Dr. Steve Harbstreit, Dr. Shannon Washburn and Brandie Disberger. The three work to enable students to tailor the degree to meet students' individual needs while earning a teaching certificate.

In an effort to reach potential students, the advisers write personal notes following campus visits, congratulate FFA members who receive recognition and host booths at FFA, 4-H and community college events. While they hope to encourage students to major in agricultural education, they also challenge them to identify others demonstrating teaching qualities.

With these efforts, the department organizes Tagged to Teach Ag, a program encouraging current educators to identify students with the interest and skills to teach agriculture. Students share a photo holding a "Tagged to Teach Ag" poster on the department's social media platforms.

"[Agricultural education instructors] are passionate about youth, agriculture, teaching and sharing experiences with the FFA," Disberger said. "I believe they are sharing a positive message, but the more positive they can talk about it and the more they can talk about what a rewarding career this is, the better off we will be with our recruitment and retention efforts across the state."

Through their efforts, the department has achieved a job placement rate of nearly 100 percent, with all 2013 graduates choosing to teach. Additionally, retention rates are competitive within the college.

"Being a great teacher is an art. It has to be crafted, and it takes a strong education background in order to do that," said Disberger. "We know that not just everyone has the abilities to be a great teacher. Our mission is to find those that do and encourage them to teach agriculture."