

Ag teacher shortage pushes K-State recruitment

With the academic year drawing near, Kansas State University's Department of Communications and Agricultural Education is busy with recruitment. Kansas is experiencing a challenge filling all of its open positions in agricultural education programs.

The department expects high enrollment numbers in the agricultural education major. In the midst of a national agricultural educator shortage, this is good news, according to agricultural education instructor Brandie Disberger.

"If we take into [consideration] the factors of teachers who are retiring, teachers who are leaving the profession and add new programs opening every year, it simply means that our demand is going up far faster than our graduation rate is," Disberger said.

For graduates, this means a nearly 100 percent job placement rate. In 2012, ten of 12 of the department's graduates pursued teaching careers. In 2013, 100 percent of graduates entered the profession. Still, the demand presents a challenge.

"If a community is looking for a new agricultural educator, it can be a very difficult task, because the statistics say that although we graduate an average of about 12 students, we see about 30 openings each year in the state of Kansas," said Disberger.

According to Disberger, the challenge is not likely to end soon. While 52 percent of agricultural educators have taught fewer than ten years, the second largest percentage represents teachers nearing retirement.

In the profession, 76 percent of teachers are male, while 24 percent are female. However, the major consists of 30 percent male and 70 percent female students.

"If we can get the most outstanding agricultural educators in the female and male populations, we probably wouldn't have the shortage we have today," Disberger said. "It's important that we identify anyone, male or female, who has the qualities to be an outstanding teacher, and head them in the right direction."