

# A Case Study Exploring the Perceived and Actual Person-Environment Fit of Teacher Aspirants in Agricultural Education

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*This study assessed the factors that led students who did not participate in secondary agricultural education programs to the agricultural education teaching major. Findings indicated that these participants were motivated to pursue an agricultural education degree because of their passion for agriculture and youth, and affinity for people and the job. Parents and friends were their biggest influences in pursuing a degree in agricultural education. Their greatest perceived strengths were content knowledge in agriculture, leadership skills, and ability to persevere; their greatest perceived limitation was lack of experience in a secondary agricultural education program. Unfortunately, none of the students secured employment as agriculture teachers. Because these findings are more subjective and personal (P) in nature, future research should investigate more objective measures of the demands from teachers in the workforce (i.e., environment-E).*

*Keywords:* person-environment fit, human capital, preservice teachers, employability

## Introduction

What inspires students to teach agriculture? Preservice teachers indicate often that a former teacher is the biggest influence regarding their career choice to become a professional educator. This is understandable considering the fact that, “students spend hours with the agriculture teacher developing supervised agricultural experience programs, preparing for career development events, and working on FFA activities after school” (Park & Rudd, 2005, p. 82). During these times of interaction, students recognize what it means to be a teacher. As these experiences accrue, some students begin to emulate their teacher (Park & Rudd, 2005; Stevenson, 1987) and are drawn to the career field of teaching.

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However, what about students who have a desire to become agricultural educators, but did not participate in agricultural education or FFA at the secondary level? What or whom influences and motivates them to become agricultural education teachers? Although this group may be in the minority of preservice agricultural teachers (Roberts, Greiman, Murphy, Ricketts, & Harlin, 2009), the number of people with general agricultural knowledge and experience has been an area of concern for decades (National Research Council, 1988). Thus, the number of future preservice teachers with a lack of secondary agricultural experience may continue to escalate, especially considering the job opportunities available as an agriculture teacher (Kantrovich, 2007).

Kantrovich (2007) reported a shortage of agriculture teachers that has the “potential to reach epidemic proportions if we are unable to recruit additional students into the field of agricultural education...” (p. 37). A portion of the shortage of agriculture teachers can be explained by the fact that each year up to 40% of newly certified teachers do not enter teaching. Institutions that certify agriculture teachers must recruit potential teachers with the understanding that not all graduates will enter the teaching profession (Kantrovich, 2007).

Roberts et al. (2009) reported that nearly 13% of all student teachers in agricultural education had not been enrolled in secondary agriculture courses previously. Their study found that a higher proportion of those students intended to teach than almost all other groups. The only group of preservice teachers with a higher intention to teach was those who participated in seven or eight semesters of secondary agriculture (Roberts et al., 2009).

Since those students did not participate in secondary agricultural education programs, other factors regarding career choice must be at play. Prior research has listed several factors that influence the career choice of students. Esters and Bowen (2005) reported that among urban agriculture students, parents/guardians and friends were the most influential in determining their choice of career. Conroy, Scanlon, and Kelsey (1998) assessed job choice among students in rural schools and discovered the majority who chose an agricultural career had their father present in the home and were from a lower socioeconomic status. The occupation of the student’s father held the most influence over the career choice of African-American and Hispanic graduates (Jones & Larke, 2001).

In addition to various personal characteristics, environmental factors regarding a person’s perceived level of *fit* also impact a person’s career choice. Person-environment (PE) fit takes into consideration a person’s skills and abilities as well as the demands of the environment (Osipow, 1990). Employers wish to hire employees who will meet their needs, are adaptable to on the job training, and will remain loyal to the organization (Caplan, 1987). “PE fit is changed by altering P (e.g., abilities and aspirations), E (e.g., job demands and rewards), or some combination” (Caplan, 1987, p. 248). Caplan (1987) stated that, “Prospective employees want to

find organizations which make use of their particular abilities and meet their specific needs” (p. 248). PE fit can be either subjective or objective. “Subjective fit is that which is perceived by the target person – that is, the employee. Objective fit, by definition, is free of the bias of human perception” (Caplan, 1987, p. 251). Kezar (2001) advanced the PE fit model to help individuals recognize and match their human capital to the needs of the organizations in which they are seeking employment.

Lindholm (2003) identified four levels of environmental fit that exist within organizations. Person-vocation fit “refers to congruence between a person’s choice of occupations and his or her self-concept” (p. 128). Person-job fit refers to the demands of the job and whether the individual believes he or she has the skills necessary to perform the job well. Person-organization fit refers to how the person’s “values, interests, needs, and abilities” (p. 128) match up with the job and *climate* of the organization. Person-work group fit refers to how the individual perceives his or her colleagues. Generally, people seek good matches of fit between their human capital and the descriptions and rigor of the job (Osipow, 1990). This *match* is influenced mostly by parents and the “reinforcement and resources [they] provide” (Osipow, 1990, p. 124). In some cases where fit is not as strong, the individual can tailor or adjust his or her abilities to better match the industry’s needs (Lindholm, 2003).

As people acquire skills, they become more competent in general (Heckman, 2000). Heckman (2000) proposed that the return on human capital is higher for *younger* people than it is for the *older* generation. This proposition would seem to have implications for preservice teachers who were not able to participate in secondary agricultural education programs. From an employability standpoint, what are students’ perceived and actual *fit* in the agricultural education profession when they lack experiences at the secondary level?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative, collective instrumental case study was to assess the factors that led students who did not participate in secondary agricultural education programs to the agricultural education teaching major. The following research questions guided the study.

1. What factors motivated students to choose agricultural education as a major?
2. What personal (P) fit attributes do students believe they possess that will enable them to be effective as teachers?
3. What environmental (E) fit attributes do students perceive as being important to teach secondary agricultural education?

### **Ethical Considerations**

Procedural, situational, relational, and exiting ethics are important to note before describing the methodology (Tracy, 2010). Procedurally, it was made clear to each individual who participated that they had the option to remove themselves from the study at any time, and careful attention was given to the recording, transcribing, and reporting of their statements to ensure the essence of their experience was conveyed properly. Participants were provided the transcriptions and a copy of the manuscript to confirm that truthful interpretation occurred. The researchers understood that qualitative research is contextual and that the bias of each researcher plays a role in the research process. Reflexivity discussions exposed that the research team felt that these teacher aspirants were talented and held valuable promise for the agricultural education profession. Relational ethics were grounded on the preexisting relationship built with the four individuals. Finally, the exit strategy included an email thanking the participants and outlining the next steps of the research process. At the conclusion of data collection, each participant was able to discuss his or her position as an aspiring teacher and offer potential suggestions for increasing his or her employability into the teaching profession.

### **Methods**

This qualitative, collective instrumental case study consisted of open-ended questions in face-to-face interviews with four preservice agricultural education majors. Qualitative, collective instrumental case studies offer an opportunity to identify cases in which the maximum amount of knowledge can be learned relative to a given question (Stake, 1995). The researchers identified four teacher aspirants who entered the agricultural education major with no previous experiences as students in agricultural education or FFA at the secondary level. These individuals made up the four bounded cases studied. This method of data collection was deemed appropriate because of the small sample size of preservice teachers who participated in the study (Dooley, 2007).

The data for this study were collected through in-depth, face-to-face interviews. The researchers served as the instruments for the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Each interview consisted of a 21-item semi-structured interview protocol (Dooley, 2007) developed by the researchers based on the factors involving students' career choice. To ensure trustworthiness of the research, the strategies of confirmability, credibility, dependability, and transferability were addressed (Krefting, 1991). To enhance confirmability of researchers' interpretations, four triangulation protocols were embedded in the data collection process (Denzin, 1984; Stake, 1995). Data source triangulation was sought through the examination of multiple cases, each of which contained unique contextual settings. Investigator triangulation involved the three researchers viewing and interpreting the interviews independently, followed by researcher theme negotiation in line with theoretical triangulation. Finally, methodological triangulation was employed through the interpretation of both the actual interviews and researchers' notes and observations.

To establish credibility of the protocol, the researchers asked two professors in the Department of Agricultural Education, Communications, and Leadership at Oklahoma State University to assess the questions for completeness and consistency in conjunction with the study's purpose. Based on those suggestions, minor adjustments were made to the instrument.

For the purpose of this study, the researchers selected preservice agricultural education teachers who were attending Oklahoma State University during the fall 2010 academic year. These four individuals had no former agricultural education experiences in high school (i.e., did not enroll in agriculture courses and were not FFA members). As such, this study employed a purposive sampling technique. According to Ary, Jacobs, and Razavieh (1972), "purposive sampling is a nonprobability sampling technique in which subjects judged to have the sought after characteristic are included in the sample" (p. 180-181). The participants received an e-mail from the researchers asking for their participation in the study. Once confirmed, a date was set, and the interview was conducted. All interviews occurred in a neutral office on campus at Oklahoma State University. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was tape-recorded for transcribing purposes.

Once data were transcribed verbatim, member checks were conducted to establish credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Specifically, each transcription was submitted to its respective participant, via e-mail, to verify that the researchers had captured the essence of the interview accurately. Additionally, to help the researchers maintain credibility, notes were taken during each interview session, which assisted the researchers in validating emic perspectives (i.e., insider's intuition) (Gardner, 2008; Merriam, 1998).

For dependability, the researchers each developed an audit trail (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) based on their analysis of the data. Each researcher documented the transcriptions for dependability and credibility (Trochim, 2006). Then, the researchers met and discussed their findings to confirm their emic and etic perspectives (Patton, 2002). Based on the documented transcriptions, the researchers analyzed the data line-by-line (Patton, 2002) to develop themes (Dooley, 2007). Once themes were constructed, memos were established, which allowed the researchers to summarize findings into thoughts and sentences based on the transcriptions and the researcher's intuition, or emic perspective (Gardner, 2008; Merriam, 1998). Due to the nature of the study, no generalizations have been made. Rather, it has been left up to the reader to determine transferability of the research findings to other situations (Krefting, 1991).

### **Description of the Cases**

The four students who participated in this study consisted of two males and two females. To protect the identity of the participants, pseudonyms were used. "Ed" was homeschooled as a child. His draw to agriculture developed from his work on his family's farm. His chief

agricultural interests were related to plant and soil science. Being from a small, rural town, Ed realized the importance of agriculture and a solid education. His desire to be a public school teacher in agriculture stemmed from his lack of a secondary school experience as a youth. During the time of data collection, Ed had just finished his student teaching experience and was seeking employment as a secondary agriculture teacher.

“Sandra” was an out-of-state student from an urban area. Her main involvement with agriculture was through equine activities. Though she understood the disadvantages associated with not participating in agricultural education as a student, she was confident she could make up for those deficiencies during her student teaching internship through hard work. While on campus, Sandra admitted that her peers saw her as a leader and often discussed that her lesson plans and presentations were innovative. During the time of data collection, Sandra was a senior agricultural education major and entering her last semester.

“Keri” was also an out-of-state student from an urban area. Her passion involved helping people learn about agriculture in all settings and environments. In her words, she was “from the city.” However, she found value in that perspective. As a student, Keri was involved heavily in leadership roles within the college and saw agricultural education as an opportunity to continue her role as a leader in a local school. During the data collection period, Keri was a junior agricultural education major.

“Tom” was an in-state student from a small, rural school. His background in agriculture included working on his grandfather’s farm. Both Keri and Tom were attracted to agricultural education because it offered an opportunity to help develop and prepare students for college, the workforce, and society. Tom was involved in another career and technical education program in high school, but felt that agricultural education suited his interests and talents best. Tom infused himself quickly into the agricultural education culture; few students knew of his limited agricultural education background. At the time of data collection, Tom was a junior agricultural education major.

## **Findings**

### **Theme One: Passion for Agriculture and Youth**

All four students expressed that even though they had never been involved in a secondary agricultural education program, they had a “love of agriculture.” Each student had a different agricultural background, most of which were not production agriculture. Each student expressed his or her deep desire to impact youth and recognized the need for agriculture. As such, the desire to educate and work with youth was apparent throughout the study.

Ed stated, "I've always had a passion for helping people." This motivation escalated once he attended the university. He shared, "I love agriculture, but didn't want to farm." Keri said, "I want to be an advocate for agriculture, and although I'm not a traditional student, and I didn't grow up around it, I'm on fire about it." She noted that her passion for agriculture set her apart: "Traditional students may get in their comfort zone and they'll just start teaching in their comfort zone. They may have the experience, but I have the knowledge, teaching skills, and passion."

Tom expressed his passion for helping educate and develop youth. He stated passionately, "I am going to teach you how to survive in life." To accomplish this, Tom felt that students needed information in some context, and his preferred context was agriculture: "you can teach math, you can teach science, and you can teach English, but you have to tie it to something and something that everyone knows like trees, plants, and animals."

Sandra's passion was evident when she stated, "People in the city are completely ignorant of agriculture. They have no idea, no idea of the value it holds for this country. I can say that because I was one of those people once." Keri added, "I want to educate the general public about agriculture, be an advocate for agriculture, and I feel that agricultural education gives me a way to dabble into everything." She elaborated, "I would love to be an advocate for nontraditional agricultural students or people in urban communities, educating them about agriculture and how important it is."

## **Theme Two: Affinity for People and the Job**

Each of these students noted the friendliness of other students in the College of Agriculture and other people involved in agriculture, generally. As such, these individuals had an appreciation for the genuineness of people who are involved in agriculture.

Tom said pointedly, "The people are really one thing that drew me to Ag. How receptive, open, and friendly they are. It's a different kind of people, and that's something I like being around." Sandra agreed: "The people in agriculture are just so friendly. They're so nice. They're so, 'here's my life story.' Listening to their stories and talking about their agriculture teachers, I was like 'well, maybe one day I could be that agriculture teacher.'"

Tom noted that he enjoys the challenges associated with being an effective teacher. He stated, "Teaching is one of the most challenging things you can possibly do if you do it the right way." Sandra echoed his sentiments: "Teaching agriculture is fascinating to me. I could never learn enough about agriculture. It's all fascinating!" Tom iterated that observing other agriculture teachers motivates him to join the ranks. He stated, "Seeing the passion for the people who teach Agricultural Education because they love what they do is something that makes you want to stay [in the teaching field]."

These teachers all noted pertinent individuals who pushed them to pursue a teaching degree. All noted that their parents were big supporters. Additionally, Tom recognized that his dad and a former college faculty member at the junior college he attended were his two biggest advocates in motivating him to be an agriculture teacher. “He [dad] was actually the whisper in my ear the whole time saying, ‘Don’t listen to what everyone else is saying you should be, do what makes you happy.’” He elaborated that his parents instilled in him to, “Do what you can have an impact doing because you’ve been put here for a purpose and so find your purpose.”

### **Theme Three: A Lack of Predisposed Biases**

The participants believed that they have an advantage over their “traditional” counterparts because they have not been predisposed to any part of the program. They believe they have no preconceived notions about agricultural education. As such, they are more apt to learn the material at the university better and with more intensity because it is new and novel to them.

Participants noted that through hard work and dedication, they have acquired more knowledge than their peers. Sandra stated, “I think my greatest strength will be the knowledge that I have gained [in college] and my patience and ability to work with youth, and understanding that they’re all different.” Tom explained that because he was not raised in agriculture, he has developed a greater felt need to learn information. This eagerness to learn, referred to by Tom as “life-long learning,” is an advantage of any aspiring teacher. He noted that at times, it is fun to enter a setting with an attitude that “we can learn this together.” Sandra confirmed, “What I don’t know, I will find out one way or another.” Keri added that she believes her lack of experience can actually be a positive attribute for her because she has to work that much harder at learning the content. She said, “I’m new at this, and I have to enrich myself in all of this because I’m learning every single day. All of it is new to me.”

Another noted advantage was participants’ goal orientation, involvement, motivation, and academic success. Keri and Tom stated that their involvement in leadership was their greatest attribute. Tom served as a national officer in another career and technical organization as a high school student. Keri was working to receive a leadership minor as part of her undergraduate degree and served as an ambassador for the College. She stated plainly, “I’ve been involved in a leadership role all throughout my life. Leadership is kind of my thing.” Sandra was motivated to complete a double major and did so while remaining in the top 10% of her class.

### **Theme Four: Overcoming a Lack of Former Experiences**

Participants revealed that not having experienced a secondary agricultural education program was their greatest limitation. As such, they recognized that their skills were perhaps lacking when compared to their “traditional route” colleagues in regard to livestock exhibition and FFA

speech preparation in particular. Students were concerned that not being in the FFA would restrict their abilities as future agriculture teachers, and they might be less credible to their students than they would prefer.

Tom admitted not coming from a production agriculture setting takes away from his confidence and credibility. He stated:

I think you have to establish a certain degree of credibility in the classroom or the kids are just going to tear you up. You know, some kid knows a lot about show steers, and you start talking about show steers, and you say one thing that is not correct, and they are going to eat you alive.

Keri asserted that building credibility begins in the teacher education program. She shared that, “I have to prove myself and make a name for myself before anyone is accepting of me.” She noted relevant hands-on experience in agriculture is her limitation, and she looks to her teacher education program to fill that gap by the time she graduates.

Another common limitation was related to individuals’ predeveloped opinions of nontraditional agriculture teachers. Ed shared that, “[Agricultural Education] is a very unfriendly profession in my opinion. It is ‘dog eat dog,’ unless you know the neighboring teacher and can get your foot in the door.” During a course assignment, Ed was asked to teach a three-day lesson to a high school agriculture class. At the end of the three days, the teacher made a remark that shocked Ed to the core: “He told me that since I was homeschooled, I would never know enough to be an agriculture teacher. That made me so mad! So, I went with a passion through Agricultural Education the entire way.”

Though this experience fueled Ed’s desire to teach agriculture, he still struggles with this commonly held belief from the teaching community. Keri had a similar circumstance whereby a faculty member informed her that she would have difficulty securing employment as a teacher due to her background. She said:

I wouldn’t say I was discouraged not to participate in Agricultural Education, but I was informed it would be a struggle for me. I was at a high disadvantage because I’m nontraditional, I am a female, and I’m from out of state.

Each participant noted that the lack of FFA and Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAE) served as a limitation. Sandra commented, “training the kids for CDEs is what I really worry about,” and that “when I tell people my background and where I grew up, all they hear is ‘No FFA!’” Ed shared, “There were several stumbling blocks along the way, [especially] just finding out more on the FFA part of it and the SAE side of it. I had never heard of SAE.” In regard to her lack of FFA knowledge, Sandra’s greatest fear is that “students will not get to participate because of something I did.”

FFA and SAE knowledge were noted repeatedly as potential limitations. Tom shared his biggest limitation: “that I don’t come from a production agriculture setting.” Sandra noted that skills such as fitting show animals are sources of anxiety. She admitted to thinking, “I can’t do this. I can’t handle it. These kids are going to look at me and think, ‘You are some kind of idiot.’” Tom described a class situation where an instructor was asking students to identify the area in which students are limited. He shared his realization that, “I’m raising my hands for everything. This is probably funny to most people.” Sandra added, “Every day I have questioned whether or not I have chosen the right major because I don’t have that FFA experience. Every day, I question whether I will be able to do this or not and that is so scary, it’s so scary!”

### **Theme Five: Understanding the Purpose of Agricultural Education**

Participants identified that the purpose of agricultural education was to educate the public about agriculture and to grow and develop future leaders in agriculture and society as a whole.

Ed explained that the purpose of agricultural education was to teach students about “the world of agriculture, the changes of agriculture, the diversity of agriculture, but also to show students where their niche is if they want to pursue agriculture as a career.” Ed had a distinct belief that agricultural education has deviated too far from the original purpose of promoting agriculture. He stated that, “FFA is slightly overdone” in Oklahoma.

Keri admitted that she struggles to define her career major to friends and family. Being from the “city” makes it difficult to find a working definition of agricultural education. Ed was more profound in his ability to communicate its purpose. He stated that the purpose of agricultural education is “to educate students about the world of agriculture, the changes of agriculture, the diversity of agriculture, but also show them where their food, fiber, and natural resources come from.” He added that another purpose was to teach people to be self-sustained.

Sandra explained that agricultural education exists “because agriculture, no matter how small or large you think it is, is absolutely vital – vital to the success of this country.” Tom took a more holistic approach to answering the question. He confirmed, “The whole point of education is to develop from the next step and to teach them [secondary agricultural education students] how to survive in society.”

### **Theme Six: The Ideal Type of Program**

Participants shared their preference to work within a well-developed, multiteacher department in order to grow and develop under a more experienced educator. The participants preferred both urban and rural settings.

Ed shared that his best-case scenario would be, “an urban, two-teacher department that has community and administrative support.” When asked why Ed preferred a more urban setting, he responded that “75% of those students don’t know where milk comes from. With the urban community, if you can get those kids roped into your program, you have a little bit more attentive audience.”

Sandra stated, “My ideal school is somewhere where I am welcomed into the community, where I have that community support, the school support, [and] administrative support. I would like to see more agriculture in urban settings.” She noted, “I would be uncomfortable going to a rural setting where there is such a successful chapter, just because those are big shoes to fill, and there are going to be a lot of expectations.”

Keri explained that she desired to begin her teaching career in a multiteacher department because “it is important for me, important for the students, and although I am going to work really hard, I’m going to have questions when I teach, and I would like to have someone older than me to mentor me.” She preferred a more rural setting to gain additional experience in the area of production agriculture, and felt that she needed “to go to the place where I will learn the most.” Keri also shared that after gaining experience, she would “love to go back home [to her home state] and start an agricultural education program. Or, even to start an agricultural education program in New York or something.” She reasoned that it would be interesting to help students, like herself, who did not grow up in agriculture.

Tom stated simply that he wanted to work in a “stronger” program with multiple teachers. He shared, “I’m not picky as long as I’m in a place where I feel like I can make a difference. He did note he prefers a rural lifestyle but concluded by sharing that he “sees the pros and cons to both.”

### **Where Are They Now?**

Ed completed his student teaching experience and graduated from Oklahoma State University with an agricultural education degree. He applied for numerous teaching jobs and became frustrated when the only interview he was granted revealed his lack of FFA experience in high school. The administrator did not believe he could lead an FFA program successfully. He has since enrolled at Oklahoma State University to pursue a second bachelor’s degree in plant and soil sciences and has taken a sales position in a plant science-based company.

Sandra completed her course of study in agricultural education by student teaching in Fall 2010. She had a strong academic experience at Oklahoma State University, finishing with a 3.68 grade point average. She applied for a few agriculture teaching positions, but was never granted an interview. Eventually, she applied for and received a teaching position in special education—a position she holds currently. She believes her lack of experience as a high school student is what prevented her from entering the profession as an agriculture teacher.

Keri completed the requirements for her degree and successfully completed the student teaching experience. She decided against applying for teaching positions; instead, she accepted an internship in Washington, DC, as an agricultural lobbyist directly after student teaching. She has since accepted a full-time role as recruiting coordinator at Oklahoma State University. The chances of her entering the agricultural teaching profession are slim to none.

Tom became disenfranchised with the teaching major during his senior year. He became more concerned that his lack of FFA knowledge would prevent him from obtaining a position as an agriculture teacher. As such, he stayed out of school his last semester and took a job as a youth minister at a local church. He is now on track to graduate with a general agriculture degree in Spring 2013. After graduating, he plans to continue his job as a youth minister.

### **Conclusions**

This study revealed that these students were motivated to pursue an agricultural education teaching degree because they have passion for agriculture and youth, affinity for people involved in agriculture and the job, and a desire to bring about agricultural literacy and awareness. Specifically, these students had a unique and enlightened sense of agriculture because they were learning the content for the first time. Further, these students expressed an affinity for agriculture. They perceived agriculture as “cutting edge” and innovative. They noted that people in agriculture were overly nice and helpful—a source of inspiration who encouraged them to think about pursuing a degree in agricultural education. Yet, once these students entered the agricultural education major, they realized that the profession was competitive, somewhat cutthroat, and fraternal in nature. As such, they were forced to adjust and adapt their personal attributes to fit in (Caplan, 1987; Lindholm, 2003).

Because these students had not been predisposed to agricultural education, they had a greater felt need to learn and grow within the preservice program. Therefore, these students were not as concerned about their technical agriculture knowledge. Rather, they were more concerned about their lack of FFA knowledge and SAE experiences, which are major criteria for teaching agriculture (Roberts & Dyer, 2004). Explaining the purpose of agricultural education to others was difficult for these students. Understanding policy-driven information related to FFA, such as completing FFA record books and training students to compete on CDE teams, was also an area of concern. In all, these students were passionate about agriculture and youth. They had a deep desire to work with youth and teach them about agriculture and its importance in the world. However, unfortunately, none have been employed as agriculture teachers.

Parents, faculty members, and other students in the College of Agriculture were the greatest influences on these individuals becoming agricultural education majors. The fact that parents were highly influential resonates with previous research (Conroy et al., 1998; Esters & Bowen,

2005; Jones & Larke, 2001). Also, these students were drawn to the major by their perception of the openness, warmth, and acceptance of the individuals involved in agriculture.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Although preservice teachers' perceived PE fit is important from a recruitment and retention standpoint, research should also be conducted with officials who hire agriculture teachers, such as principals, to determine *actual* fit. Specifically, what characteristics and experiences are most important when employing a secondary agricultural education instructor? Research should assess this phenomenon to better prepare current and future students. Currently, alternatively certified (AC) teachers in agricultural education are being employed to fill vacancies of teacher shortages; yet, AC teachers have no pedagogical training (Robinson, 2010). So, from an employability perspective, are life experiences or pedagogical skills more imperative to hiring officials? Robinson and Baker (2012) found that certification type had no effect on whether principals would consider interviewing a candidate for a teaching position. Future work should assess the effect that previous FFA and agricultural education experience has on the employability of aspiring teachers.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Attempts should be made to assist preservice teachers to understand their PE fit in the teaching profession earlier in their educational career. Once identified, these students should be encouraged to adjust their human capital—skills, education, and experiences—to fit the needs of the workplace (Lindholm, 2003). Also, attempts should be made to connect future students with similar backgrounds with more intentional field-based experiences. Because these students have no former secondary agricultural experiences, efforts should be made to identify programs that *fit* these students' needs best, especially as it relates to student teacher placement for internships. Specifically, if students desire to teach in multiteacher programs in urban areas, then attempts should be made to fulfill those desires more intentionally.

### **Implications and Discussion**

It was clear that these students did not express the PE fit necessary to enter the teaching ranks in Oklahoma. Although disappointing, perhaps each was able to use the academic major and its experiences to secure the job for which they are suited best. Perhaps agricultural education is a good major for building employability skills that will transfer well to other careers. Teacher educators at this institution can take solace in knowing they helped these individuals build human capital that, in turn, led to opportunities for a successful career path.

Establishing PE fit is an ongoing phenomenon. It is important for teacher educators to consider each preservice teacher's needs. Do preservice teachers know their PE fit? Does their fit, or lack thereof, have implications for their satisfaction with their job? Further, how does PE fit relate to securing employment and job retention in agricultural education? It would appear that bright, motivated, passionate individuals could secure jobs regardless of their former experiences. It would also seem obvious that individuals who are satisfied with their job have *good* PE fit and likely would be more apt to remain in the teaching profession longer. Likewise, it would be assumed that those individuals who are less satisfied with their jobs have *poor* PE fit and would thus be more apt to leave the profession. Helping preservice teachers understand their PE fit early in their academic careers could have big implications for recruitment and retention efforts of teachers.

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