ABSTRACT

WOOD, MEGHAN MCPHAIL. Plugging the Holes in the Bucket: A Qualitative Study to Determine Perceptions of Agriculture Teachers who have Left the Agricultural Education Profession. (Under the direction of Jim Flowers).

Agricultural education has experienced a shortage of qualified teachers for many decades. The exodus of teachers, teacher attrition, has been identified as a large factor to the shortage of teachers. Retaining highly qualified agriculture teachers is critical to the success of not only the students but also the profession of agricultural education. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to better understand the phenomenon of agriculture teacher attrition. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven former agriculture teachers in order to describe how they characterized their teaching experience and identify factors that influenced the decision to leave. Two rounds of interviews were completed and data were analyzed. Results indicated teacher attrition was a complex event that was experienced differently by each individual and a teacher’s decision to leave was influenced by a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors they experience during their teaching career. The study found that five participants came from strong agricultural education backgrounds and the influence of teachers is what made them become an agriculture teacher. This study also found lack of administrative support, bureaucracy of education, and salary were among the reasons given by former agriculture teachers as to their decision to leave the profession. Finally, the study found while many of the participants reflect positively about the impact their students had on them, there was no single factor that could influence them to return to the agriculture teaching profession. For many of the participants, they are satisfied with their decision to leave and are happy in their new career.
Plugging the Holes in the Bucket: A Qualitative Study to Determine Perceptions of Agriculture Teachers who have Left the Agricultural Education Profession

by
Meghan McPhail Wood

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of North Carolina State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

Agricultural and Extension Education

Raleigh, North Carolina
2014

APPROVED BY:

Jim Flowers
Committee Chair

Gary Moore

Travis Park

Wendy Warner
DEDICATION

To my husband, Austin, for your support throughout this journey.

To my parents, for instilling a love of education and agriculture.
BIOGRAPHY

Meghan McPhail Wood was born August 27, 1983 in Seneca, South Carolina. She was raised on a large Angus cattle and row crop production farm, Tokeena Angus in rural Oconee County. From a very young age, Meghan loved animals and showed horses and cows at many local, state and national shows. Meghan participated in 4-H at a young age and became involved in dressage and show jumping with many ponies by her side. While attending Walhalla High School, Meghan became involved in cheerleading and student government and developed an interest for the medical profession. Upon high school graduation in 2001, Meghan entered the medical profession to obtain an Associate’s Degree in Medical Laboratory Technology in 2003.

During this time, Meghan decided the medical profession was not her career choice. Getting back to her roots of agriculture and family history of teaching, agricultural education seemed a better fit for Meghan as a long-time career. In May 2006, Meghan earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Agricultural Education from Clemson University. As part of her degree, she completed her student teaching experience at Hillcrest High School under the direction of the late Mr. Clark Woods.

Upon graduation, she entered the Masters program at Clemson University to further pursue her teaching career in Agricultural Education. She developed the SC Equine Science Curriculum and implemented an Equine Science course at Hannah – Westside Extension Campus along with a three day summer camp.

Upon completing her Masters degree in July 2007, she accepted the agriculture teaching position at Aiken High School in Aiken, South Carolina to teach 9-12 grade
Horticulture and AgriScience courses. Meghan taught at Aiken High School for six years.

During her tenure at Aiken High School, Meghan received the 2009 National Association of Agricultural Educator’s Teacher Turn the Key Award and was named one of five outstanding young teachers in the nation, earning the 2011 NAAE Region V Outstanding Young Teacher Award. She led her FFA chapter to a top five spot by winning the National FFA Model of Innovation and Model of Excellence Awards in 2012.

In January of 2012, Meghan began coursework on her doctorate degree in Agricultural Education at NC State University. In 2013, Meghan accepted a full-time graduate teaching assistantship in the Agricultural and Extension Education department at NC State University. During her time in graduate school, Meghan taught a variety of courses and assisted with various teaching responsibilities as well as supervised student teachers. She also conducted research studies on teacher retention and attrition, teaching methods and professional development opportunities offered to agriculture teachers. While completing her degree, Meghan served on the SC Executive Board of Association of Career & Technical Education where she served as an ambassador to the career and technical education field.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This journey would not have been possible without the un-ending and un-wavering support of many people in my life. First, I must thank God for allowing me the opportunity to leave the high school classroom to pursue this journey fulltime. Without His blessings to my family, this would not be possible. Second, I must thank my husband, Austin. No matter the circumstances, you have been my rock that has given me a solid foundation for which to reach for the stars. Your unending support can be seen on our farm through your hard work and dedication in building our home place. Thank you for moving me to and from Raleigh and the endless trips in between, especially in the wee hours of the night. Thank you for putting up with my emotional spells of not only excitement but also tears. You have a magical way of handling me at my worst which makes me want to share with you my best. I cannot wait to embark on the next journey with you by my side.

To my parents, I would not be the person I am today without the strong agriculture foundation and tenacity to complete any task, no matter how big or how difficult. Our family has something special in that we always seem to find a way of pulling together to get any job done. Thank you for teaching me to work hard and creating an environment that enabled my success as a wife, teacher, student and person. I realize now the lessons I learned during seasons of planting & harvesting crops, raising a multitude of animals, and caring for the young and dying, that no matter what the task, a hard work ethic and tenacity to keep going will help you prevail in most circumstances. To my biggest cheerleader, Mom, thank you for reading and editing all of my research papers. This degree is as much yours as it is mine, Dr. Mom.
Dad, thank you for being a constant, unwavering foundation for me as a person. You always have a way of bringing me back to reality to ensure I am checking myself at the door. You make me realize what is important in life, and that is family.

Nainey, thank you for the long talks and great conversations during my four hour drives to and from Raleigh along with your love and prayers. If Jesus had a phone in Heaven, you would have his number on speed dial. You have a straight line of communication with the Lord and I appreciate your strength and words of wisdom. I promise you many years of shopping sprees when “the ink dries and the fat lady sings.” I hope Grand-daddy would be proud!!!

To my students at Aiken High School, I thank you for teaching me more in six years than I could have possibly taught you. It was from you all, I learned what teaching really is- that is being a learner and learning about my students every day. It was an extremely difficult decision to leave Aiken High School in 2013 however, seeing you succeed made me realize the Aiken FFA Chapter would be ok without me.

I also want to thank my amazing circle of friends for the all the shenanigans I needed in order to unplug. Thank you for the girl’s nights out, weekend trips to Raleigh for football games, crashing at your houses and random pedicures and shopping trips for a little therapy. I have learned how to become a better friend to all of you because each of you have been wonderful friends to me through this journey.

To my graduate committee, Dr. Jim Flowers, Dr. Gary Moore, Dr. Travis Park and Dr. Wendy Warner, thank you, thank you, thank you for this opportunity. Thank you for listening to my crazy ideas and being available to offer feedback, encouragement and on
occasion, a tissue. You each offered invaluable suggestions and advice for my study. Your patience, kindness, and friendship is appreciated. Thank you for your genuine interest in my success.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF TABLES</th>
<th>x</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I:</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of Agriculture Teacher Supply</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Today’s Teacher Supply</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Attrition</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of Study</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II:</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maslow’s Theory of Human Motivation</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herzberg’s Motivational Hygiene Theory</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purkey and Schmidt’s Perception Theory</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of Related Research</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attrition among Teachers</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Satisfaction Factors</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III:</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Subjectivity</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale for Phenomenology</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Research Design</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Selection</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness Criteria</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**LIST OF TABLES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, described by Lunenberg &amp; Ornstein</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>Herzberg’s Motivation-Hygiene Theory</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The exodus of quality teachers from the classroom has received significant attention as an issue facing the education profession (Ingersoll, 2003). Educational policy makers and practitioners have been guided by a common goal of increasing student learning, however, this can be challenging when quality teachers are leaving the classroom (Johnson, Berg & Donaldson, 2005). While there is a need to recruit talented, high quality candidates to the profession, it is also critical to retain those who enter the classroom (Johnson, Berg & Donaldson, 2005). One reasonable response to retaining classroom teachers is to identify personal and situational influences on teachers who leave the profession (Chapman, 1984). According to Grissmer and Kirby (1993),

Teachers have come under increasing scrutiny over the past several years as part of the continuing national debate on the quality and appropriateness of American schooling. Issues that have been raised focus on the quality of the teaching force, the adequacy of teacher compensation, the potential for teacher shortages, and the patterns and magnitude of teacher attrition (p. 5).

Attrition rates largely determine how many teachers need to be hired each year, playing a significant role in future teacher shortages (Grissmer & Kirby, 1993). Despite efforts to address the shortage of qualified teachers in agricultural education, attrition has continued to be a contributing factor in the shortage of agriculture teachers. However, the profession’s concern regarding supply and demand of agriculture teachers is not new
(Kantrovich, 2010). The shortage of secondary agricultural education teachers has been documented as early as 1921 (Camp, 2002).

**History of Agriculture Teacher Supply**

Agricultural education was expanding significantly in the years leading up to the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917. With this movement came an increase in demand for agriculture teachers in secondary and elementary schools (True, 1929). Therefore, the development of vocational agricultural teacher education was critical at the turn of the century (Hillison, 1986). During this time, nearly 75% of Americans lived in rural areas and people needed practical knowledge on subjects related to agriculture. Starting as early as 1903, some legislators required agriculture to be taught in public schools. By 1915, there were over 90,000 students enrolled in agriculture classes in 4,665 high schools (Arntzen, 1994). Agricultural education was growing and there was an increased demand for agriculture teachers as a result (Hillison, 1986).

Just four years after the passage of the landmark Smith-Hughes Act of 1917, C. D. Jarvis (1921) quoted C. H. Lane of the Federal Board of Vocational Education in a bulletin published by the Department of the Interior stating:

> In summarizing the enrollment in resident teacher-training classes it is found that there were 2,310 students enrolled during 1919-20, compared with 1,334 for 1918-19. Experience has shown that many students who work in these classes do not become teachers. Furthermore, these enrollments represent the number of students of all years, and many of them will not be immediately available for service. In 1920,
444 students who had carried the work in agricultural education were graduated (p. 9).

With an increased number of secondary agriculture students came an increase in the demand for vocational agriculture teachers (Jarvis, 1921; Hillison, 1986). However, the demand for teachers far exceeded the supply. Jarvis (1921) reported 465 additional vocational agriculture teachers were needed during 1920-21 and estimated there would be 1,135 agriculture teachers needed during 1925-26. These estimates were based on the probable growth of secondary education during this time period and indicated the possibility of an even greater demand unless colleges increased the supply of vocational agriculture teachers (Jarvis, 1921). With this insistent demand, colleges of agriculture began offering special training courses to supply technical agricultural content to those who were already certified to teach. However, because agriculture teachers required a great deal of technical knowledge, many states modified their laws to meet the atypical needs of such teachers instead of the same requirements for other academic subject teachers (Jarvis, 1921).

The passage of the Smith-Hughes Act caused many states to rush and establish teacher education programs in order to train agriculture teachers (Moore, 1988). Employing substandard agriculture teachers became a necessity for states during the early development of agricultural education. This further emphasized the need for close supervision and professional development of these teachers while in service (Jarvis, 1921).

The profession turned to Rufus Stimson as he had previously been involved in teacher training for nearly ten years prior to 1917. Stimson is regarded as the founder of the itinerant-teacher training approach of preparing teacher (Moore, 1988). Stimson believed the lecture
method was not engaging students sufficiently in their studies, and the manual labor method was insufficient for teaching the “why” of agriculture. During his tenure of state supervisor in Massachusetts, he traveled and trained teachers how to teach hands-on agriculture. The itinerant teacher training method was primarily established as an emergency measure to make up for deficiencies of teachers and also proved effective in developing agricultural education in secondary schools (Jarvis, 1921).

During the 1930’s, Swanson (1954) reported a surplus of agriculture teachers. The number of newly qualified teachers increased faster than the number of employed teachers leaving a slight surplus during this time period (Swanson, 1954). With an increase in federal aid by the Smith Hughes Act of 1917 and the George-Deen Act of 1936, student enrollments continued to climb during the 1940’s. However, the onset of World War II caused serious reductions in the supply of teachers. By the end of the war, only 6,000 schools were still offering agricultural education (Hamlin, 1949). After the war, many agriculture teachers who served in the war returned to teaching.

The 1950’s and 1960’s brought much slower growth to vocational agriculture programs (National Research Council, 1988); however, Woodin (1970) reported a continuous teacher shortage through the 1960’s. There were approximately 10,378 positions available and a shortage of 120 teachers needed in 1956 (Woodin, 1970). Studies of supply and demand for teachers of vocational agriculture began in 1965 as a way to guide recruitment efforts to the profession; however this did not address those teachers who leave the profession upon entering (Woodin, 1970). By 1967, there were 10,221 teaching positions and
1,104 replacements needed (Woodin, 1967). Perhaps the most serious effect of the shortage was that 117 programs were closed due to the teacher shortage (Woodin, 1967).

At one point, state supervisors wore a hat called teacher educator. These men were selected because they were former, skilled agriculture teachers who could play a role in addressing the agriculture teacher shortage during the 1960’s (McClay, 1967). The supervisor had eight roles: 1) recruited young men into the teaching profession 2) selected qualified teachers for open agriculture teaching positions 3) helped new teachers learn resources in the community 4) improved teaching by helping new teachers identify practices and methods best for agricultural education 5) encouraged new teachers to pursue professional development in order to improve teaching practices 6) advised teacher educators to keep open lines of communication between new teachers and college programs 7) researched best teaching methods and practices and 8) stayed up to date with newest, innovative practices in agricultural education (McClay, 1967). The roles and responsibilities of the state supervisor could be compared to today’s mentor for beginning teachers; however, supervisors had specific resources and time allotted to fulfill this responsibility in contrast to the mentor that may be assigned to a new teacher of today.

Craig (1976) reported recommendations made by the agricultural division Professional Personnel Recruitment Committee of the American Vocational Association. Recommendations included “Teacher turnover should be reduced and maintained at a low percentage level. Local administrators, state supervisors in agricultural education and professional organization should encourage all teachers of quality programs to remain in the profession” (Craig, 1976, p. 8). A comparison of the number of teachers of vocational
agriculture during the 1960’s and 1970’s showed a record increase from 10,221 in 1967 to 12,107 teachers in 1975 (Craig, 1976). However, there were 211 teachers needed but unavailable in 1975, and 78 programs closed because of the teacher shortage (Craig, 1976).

During the 1980’s, widespread budget cuts resulted in many agriculture teacher vacancies not being filled, causing a decrease in the total number of teaching positions available (Camp, 1995). Camp (1995) reported 11,687 teachers in 1985 with only eight needed to fill positions. However, the total number of teacher positions decreased to 10,840 with 25 needed but not available in 1989 (Camp, 1995). Camp (1995) reported, while the teacher shortage during this time continued to be small, the shortage may have been partially remedied by former agriculture teachers returning to the profession. Although there was a slight increase in the number of teachers in 1993 to 10,119, this represented the first increase in total teachers available since 1978 when the number reached a record of 12,844 teachers (Camp, 1995).

Today’s Teacher Supply

Education is facing an ongoing and worsening teacher shortage in all disciplines (Camp & Heath-Camp, 2007). According to Camp & Heath-Camp (2007), the National Education Association stated,

A historic turnover is taking place in the teaching profession. While student enrollments are rising rapidly, more than a million veteran teachers are nearing retirement. Experts predict that overall we will need more than 2 million new teachers in the next decade (p. 19).
Data collected between 2000-2009 for the *National Study of the Supply and Demand of Agricultural Education* found 68.25% of newly qualified teachers entered the teaching profession (Kantrovich, 2010). While agriculture teacher education programs continue to produce qualified teachers with about 70% entering a teaching position, there continues to be a national deficit of newly qualified agriculture teachers (Kantrovich, 2010). There are several states with surplus of new teachers, however those that make up the surplus are not willing to leave their state or short proximity of their residence to take a vacant teaching position (Kantrovich, 2010). It was concluded there was a very real problem that faced the agricultural education profession at this time because there was, in fact, a true teacher shortage.

In 1992, an Office of Educational Research and Improvement study estimated the number of agricultural educators in the United States during the years 1987-88 was 10,598 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1992). However, this number is down from 12,107 positions just 12 years prior with over 1,270 position replacements needed and over 600 positions filled with individuals who were not certified (Kantrovich, 2010). According to the latest report of the 36th *Volume of a National Study of the Supply and Demand for Teachers of Agricultural Education 2006-2009*, there were 10,600 positions available during the 2009 school year with 21 programs being closed due to lack of qualified teacher (Kantrovich, 2010). However, there were a total of 870 positions needing a replacement teacher and it should be noted there were still a number of positions filled with individuals who were not certified (Kantrovich, 2010).
Policymakers and educators have advocated increasing the supply of newly qualified teachers through a number of initiatives including financial incentives such as loan forgiveness, tuition reimbursement, stipends and development of alternative certification programs for people currently working in industry (Hirsch, Koppich, & Knapp, 2001; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). These recruitment efforts are often worthwhile but, unfortunately, do not answer the teacher shortage the education system is currently facing. A larger problem is teacher attrition, which is particularly high among beginning teachers (Ingersoll, 2003; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003)

**Teacher Attrition**

While student enrollment and teacher retirement continues to increase, schools nationwide struggle to fill classrooms with qualified teachers (Camp & Heath-Camp, 2007; Ingersoll, 2003; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). The decreased supply of teachers can also be attributed to teacher turnover, specifically, attrition and teacher mobility (Johnson, Berg & Donaldson, 2005). While Ingersoll (2001) reported 12% of teacher turnover is due to retirement, he also suggested most turnover is due to causes other than retirement. Ingersoll (2003) suggested teaching is an occupation that loses many of its newly trained teachers very early in their careers. Data from the Schools and Staffing Survey suggested between 40 and 50% of all beginning teachers leave the profession after five years (Ingersoll, 2003). The National Commission on Teaching & America’s Future (NCTAF, 2007) reported the average years of teacher experience was 15 in 1987-1988. However, the typical teacher had just one to two years of experience in 2007-2008 (NCTAF, 2014). Schools tend to lose inexperienced teachers, particularly those with fewer than five years of experience (Ingersoll & Smith,
Schools that lose new teachers end up replacing them with other novice teachers ensuring instruction and student learning will be consistently weak (Johnson, Berg & Donaldson, 2005). Teaching effectiveness increases as teacher experience (Johnson, Berg & Donaldson, 2005). If teachers repeatedly leave a school before becoming proficient in their teaching practice, students are continually taught by a string of teachers who are less effective than those teachers with more experience (Johnson, Berg & Donaldson, 2005).

A teacher’s decision to leave the profession is influenced by a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards they receive in their career. Intrinsic rewards include such things as the enjoyment of working with children, contributing to a student’s learning, and enjoyment of teaching their subject matter. Extrinsic rewards include salary, benefits, bonuses, and recognition. However, these intrinsic and extrinsic rewards sometimes interact. Salary may not be a reason a teacher enters the profession, but it can have an influence when working conditions are not favorable. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 1997), 10.7% reported salary as their main area of dissatisfaction with teaching as a career while 13.8% reported lack of recognition and support from administration was the cause of dissatisfaction in their teaching career. Student discipline problems accounted for 17.9% and inadequate support from administration accounted for 15.3% of teachers who left the profession as their main area of dissatisfaction (NCES, 1997).

NCES (1997) surveyed teachers using the Teacher Follow-up Survey to determine the main reason why teachers left the teaching profession. Of those who left the teaching profession, 27.4% retired, 14.3% left due to pregnancy or raising children, 10.1% for family or personal move, 12.1% chose to pursue another career, 6.5% for family or personal
reasons, 6.5% pursued a different career with better salary or benefits, 6.6% pursued coursework to improve career opportunities, 5.3% because they were dissatisfied with teaching as a career, 4.7% for health reasons, 3.4% took a sabbatical from teaching, and 3.2% left due to a school staffing action (NCES, 1997). However, when asked about factors that would influence teachers to remain in teaching, 39.9% of teachers who left felt providing higher salaries or better benefits would be effective and 20.6% felt dealing more effectively with student discipline and making schools safer were factors that would have influenced them to remain in the profession (NCES, 1997).

Few studies investigate the financial costs that are associated with teacher attrition. Assuming that a teacher will not return to the school or district in which they left, there is significant financial cost in recruiting, hiring, inducting and professionally training a replacement teacher (Johnson, Berg & Donaldson, 2005). Teacher turnover comes at a financial cost to school districts. A district experiences teacher turnover costs at two levels: 1) the central office spends resources when recruiting, hiring and training teachers; 2) the school district also spends resources at individual schools during the interview, orientation and induction process (NCTAF, 2014). According to the NCTAF (2014), a school district’s average cost per leaver is $7,500. NCTAF also estimated the national cost of the public school teacher turnover is over $7.3 billion a year (NCTAF, 2007). The Commission made the following conclusion regarding teacher turnover in United States:

Until we recognize that we have a retention problem we will continue to engage in a costly annual recruitment and hiring cycle, pouring more and more teachers into our nation’s classrooms only to lose them at a faster and faster rate. This will continue to
drain our public tax dollars, it will undermine teaching quality, and it will most certainly hinder our ability to close student achievement gaps (p. 1).

A thorough understanding of factors that contribute to teacher attrition and discontent through the perspectives of those who have left the profession could help the teaching profession develop strategies to increase teacher retention.

**Problem Statement**

Agriculture classrooms are no exceptions to the issue of growing teacher shortages across the country due to attrition (Ingersoll, 2003). In the past 30 years, new teacher attrition rates appear to have remained constant (Veenman, 1984; Ingersoll, 2003). Two solutions have been proposed for this: (1) preparing more newly qualified teachers to enter the profession to replace those who leave, and (2) reducing the number of teachers who choose to leave the profession. In order to keep qualified agricultural educators in the classroom, reducing attrition, we must first understand their reasons for leaving the profession. In order to address the issue of teacher attrition, we should consider the experiences and perspectives of those who made the decision to leave the classroom. It is not enough to ask teachers why they would stay in the profession. Therefore, it is critical to know why teachers have left the profession before retirement.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the journey of former secondary agricultural educators that led them to leave within ten years of entering the profession. The following objectives were developed to guide this study:
1. Identify reasons former secondary agriculture teachers initially chose to pursue a career in agricultural education.

2. Describe the experiences of former agriculture teachers who left the profession.

3. Identify factors which influenced former teachers to leave the profession within their first ten years.

4. Identify factors which might influence former agriculture teachers to return to the profession.

**Definition of Terms**

The following is a list of terms defined operationally for the specific purposes of this study.

*Teacher attrition*- leaving the teaching profession altogether (Ingersoll, 2003)

*Teacher turnover*- a teaching position vacancy created due to a teacher leaving. Turnover can be a result of combinations of teacher leaving altogether (attrition) or moving schools to obtain different position (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003).

*Teacher mobility*- moving from one school or one school district to another whether in the same district or to another, leaving a position vacant (Ingersoll, 2003).

*Migration*- teachers moving to jobs in other schools (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003).

*Secondary agriculture teacher*- A teacher who teaches agriculture to students in grades 9 through 12.

**Limitations of the Study**

The intent of qualitative inquiry is not to generalize findings (Creswell, 2009). This study targeted seven former North Carolina agriculture teachers. Data were collected from
August 20, 2014 through October 15, 2014. The qualitative findings here are limited to the responses of this group of former secondary agriculture teachers in North Carolina, and should be considered carefully, lending specific attention to the characteristics of the participants of this study.

**Assumptions**

It is assumed that the perceptions and ideas advocated by the former agriculture teachers interviewed were representative of each individual participant and that all personal examples, anecdotes, stories, etc. were truthfully and factually recounted to the researcher during the interview process.

**Summary**

The lack of qualified agriculture teachers to fill vacant positions continues to be a problem in agricultural education. While some recommend recruiting more new teachers into the profession, others believe reducing the rate in which teachers leave the classroom provides greater benefit to solving the teacher shortage. Gaining a deeper understanding of those who have left the classroom may provide the education profession with knowledge to help reduce the rate in which teachers leave.
CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

Recruitment and retention of agriculture teachers has been an area of interest to researchers and theorists for many decades (Camp, 2002). Specifically, the agricultural education profession has been conducting supply and demand studies since 1965. In the early 1980’s, researchers (Darling-Hammond, 1984; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) identified student enrollment and teacher retirements as the reason for the nation’s teacher shortage (Ingersoll, 2001). However, Ingersoll (2001) described the problem as a combination of not enough qualified teachers entering the profession and too many of those who are qualified leaving the classroom for reasons other than retirement.

During the last three decades, significant research has focused on determining which kinds of teachers are more prone to leave teaching and why (Grissmer & Kirby, 1987, 1997; Haggstrom, Darling-Hammond, & Grissmer, 1988; Kirby & Grissmer, 1993). This research showed teacher turnover is strongly correlated with the individual characteristics of teachers. Ingersoll (2001) stated another important factor that affects a teacher’s decision to stay or leave the teaching profession is their age. The relationship between teachers’ age and their turnover follows a U-shaped curve (Ingersoll, 2001). Younger teachers have very high rates of departure and those who remain tend to “settle in” and turnover rates decline through the mid-career period until they reach retirement years (Grissmer & Kirby, 1987, 1997; Kirby & Grissmer, 1993). Research has also found as few as half of new teachers will remain in the profession beyond five years (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). The shortage of teachers is a great concern because as Vroom (1995) pointed out,
In order to function effectively, any social system, be it a nation or an industrial organization, must attract qualified persons to perform its various roles. A shortage of personnel who are both competent and willing to work in a given occupation places serious restriction on the degree to which the system can attain its goals (p. 58).

Educational leaders should understand that continued high rates of attrition indicate dissatisfaction with aspects of the teaching profession. According to the Metlife Survey of the American Teacher (2013), teacher satisfaction has dropped significantly to its lowest in 25 years. The Metlife Survey of the American Teacher (2005) painted a vivid picture of a teacher who is likely to leave:

(1) Not satisfied with teaching as a career (2) Feel as if their job is not valued by their supervisor. (3) Feel stress and anxiety related to reviews by their supervisor (4) Feel stress and anxiety related to personal issues, union, low pay, teacher conflict, discipline, complaints, and incompetence (5) Feel stress and anxiety related to unrealistic demands, workload, and number of responsibilities (6) Fewer years of teaching experience (7) Minority teacher (8) Feel stress and anxiety related to safety (9) Feels stress and anxiety related to budget/ lack of funding/financial constraints (10) Finds making a contribution to society a source of great teaching satisfaction (11) Feels stress and anxiety related to lack of resources (12) Finds pay/salary a source of great teaching satisfaction (p. 91).

**Theoretical Framework**

Three theories were used to guide this study: Maslow’s (1987) theory of human motivation, Herzberg’s Motivational Hygiene theory (1959) and Perception theory as described by Purkey and Schmidt (1996).
Maslow’s Theory of Human Motivation

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs seeks to categorize human needs in order according to intrinsic importance. These needs are (in order of importance): physiological, safety, belonging/love, esteem, self actualization, and self transcendence (Maslow, 1987). Physiological needs are those such as water and food. Safety needs are those perceived as a safe, orderly, predictable, and organized world (Maslow, 1954). If both physiological and safety needs are satisfied, an individual will pursue love, affection, and belonging. This creates a need and desire to develop relationships with other people (Maslow, 1954). Maslow (1954) describes a person’s esteem needs as the desire for achievement, confidence, and independence. These can develop from recognition, attention, status, and appreciation (Maslow, 1954). Self actualization refers to a “man’s desire for self fulfillment” (Maslow, 1954, p. 91). Maslow (1969) amended his model to include self-transcendence as a step beyond self actualization. An individual at this level seeks benefit for others beyond themselves.

Lunenberg & Ornstein (2000) translated Maslow’s (1954) theory of motivation to the education profession. A new teacher’s dissatisfaction and possible decision to leave the profession must be studied from the viewpoint of an individual’s needs. Lunenberg & Ornstein (2000) described how the level needs translate into factors affecting teachers’ jobs and are explained in Table 1:
Table 1

*Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as described by Lunenberg & Ornstein (2000)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Need Levels</th>
<th>General Factors</th>
<th>Organizational Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self actualization</td>
<td>Growth,</td>
<td>Challenging job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(most complex of needs)</td>
<td>Achievement,</td>
<td>Advancement in organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advancement</td>
<td>Achievement in work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esteem</td>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>Titles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Esteem from others</td>
<td>Status symbols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>Promotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Affection</td>
<td>Quality of supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>Compatible work group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td>Professional friendships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Safe working conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Security</td>
<td>Fringe benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>Job Security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physiological</td>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Heat and air conditioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(most basic of needs)</td>
<td>Food</td>
<td>Base Salary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shelter</td>
<td>Working conditions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Herzberg’s Motivational Hygiene Theory**

Building upon Maslow’s hierarchy, Herzberg sought to focus on aspects of the working environment rather than how the individual perceived the degree to which the teacher’s intrinsic needs were being met. Herzberg’s Motivation-Hygiene Theory helps to understand a person’s motivation to work and be satisfied with their job. There can be certain aspects of any job that override an individual’s intrinsic needs, which may cause unhappiness and the potential to leave one’s job. Herzberg’s Motivation-Hygiene model focuses specifically on the issues of satisfaction, which Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1959)
found to be associated with what is referred to as hygiene factors. A list of these two groups can be found in Table 2:

Table 2

*Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Factors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation Factors</th>
<th>Hygiene Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>Working Conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>Salary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Interpersonal relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advancement</td>
<td>Organizational policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>Supervision</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The five motivation factors, or motivators, are connected with an individual’s opportunity for finding satisfaction. The five hygiene factors are most strongly connected with the environment aspects of a particular job (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). Hygiene factors are associated with the conditions of work and are extrinsic in nature. Motivation factors are associated with work itself and are intrinsic in nature (Sergiovanni, Rubin, Manolakes, & House, 1975). Hygiene factors meet one’s need to avoid unpleasantness and hardship. Motivation factors serve one’s uniquely human need for psychological growth (Sergiovanni, Rubin, Manolakes, & House 1975). Hygiene factors are required to ensure an employee is not dissatisfied while motivators are necessary to promote satisfaction and motivate an employee to improve performance. After the initial publication
of Herzberg’s work hypothesizing that motivation factors and hygiene factors are mutually exclusive, Sergiovanni, Rubin, Manolakes, and House (1975) noted further research supported Herzberg’s hypothesis. It can be implied that while a higher salary can reduce dissatisfaction, it cannot increase satisfaction regarding the motivating factors.

The motivation-hygiene theory has been tested in educational settings on a number of occasions. In one such study (Sergiovanni, 1976), teachers were interviewed following Herzberg’s procedure to identify perceptions about their jobs and to gather stories which accounted for their perceptions. Herzberg found in his original study achievement and recognition were identified as the strongest motivators, however these positive feelings were short lived (Sergiovanni, Rubin, Manolakes, & House 1975). Sergiovanni, Rubin, Manolakes, and House (1975) noted poor interpersonal relations with students, inadequate or close supervision, rigid school policies, poor interpersonal relations with other teachers and parents, and incidents in one’s personal life to be the factors that contributed to dissatisfaction among teachers.

According to Sergiovanni, Rubin, Manolakes, and House (1975), teachers who seem more interested in hygiene factors rather than motivation factors are categorized as follows:

(a) those who have potential for seeking motivation but are frustrated by insensitive and closed administrative, supervisory, and organizational policies and practices. (b) those who have the potential for seeking motivation but who decide to channel this potential into other areas of their lives (c) those who do not have the potential for seeking motivation on or off the job. Those in the second and third groups use their jobs as a means to gain or achieve goals not related to school (p. 20).
Teachers in the second group are on the job for hygienic and external reasons and not necessarily motivation reasons while teachers in the third group seem fixated on lower level needs and were obsessed with avoiding unpleasantness and discomfort in the work place (Sergiovanni, Rubin, Manolakes & House, 1975).

**Purkey and Schmidt’s Perception Theory**

A deeper understanding of an individual’s perception of the agriculture teaching career will help to inform why they made the decision to leave. Each participant’s unique experience as an agriculture teacher who has left the classroom has shaped their perception of teaching. Perceptional tradition describes how an individual’s view and experience of the world informs human behavior. Particularly, the perception tradition maintains that an individual’s behavior is based on how they perceive the world (Combs & Avila, 1985; Combs, Avila, & Purkey, 1971; Purkey, 1970; Schmidt, 1997). Purkey and Schmidt (1996) noted perceptual tradition attempts to “…understand behavior through the eye of the beholder…from the perspective of the person’s personal and unique experience…” (p. 28). Perception theory states “Individuals tend to perceive only that which is relevant to their purposes and make their purposes and make their choices accordingly” (Purkey & Schmidt, 1996, p. 29). However, perception theory also posits that “what individuals choose to perceive is determined by past experiences as mediated by present purposes, perceptions and expectations” and individuals “reflect on past experiences and imagine future ones to guide their behavior” (Purkey & Schmidt, 1996, p. 29-30). Therefore, it is possible past, positive experiences can affect a person’s perception of a career before actually entering it.
Purkey and Schmidt (1996) have summarized the following primary features and assumptions of perceptional tradition:

1. There may be a preexistent reality, but an individual can only know that part which comprises his or her perceptual world, the world of awareness.

2. Perceptions at any given moment exist at countless levels of awareness, from the vaguest to the sharpest.

3. Because people are limited in what they can perceive, they are highly selective in what they choose to perceive.

4. All experiences are phenomenal in character. The fact that two individuals share the same physical environment does not mean that they will have the same experiences.

5. What individuals choose to perceive is determined by past experiences as mediated by present purposes, perceptions, and expectations.

6. Individuals tend to perceive only that which is relevant to their purposes and make their choices accordingly.

7. Choices are predetermined by perceptions, not facts. How a person behaves is a function of his or her perceptual field at the moment of acting.

8. No perception can ever be fully shared or totally communicated because it is embedded in the life of the individual.

9. Phenomenal absolutism means that people tend to assume that other observers perceive as they do. If others perceive differently, it is often thought to be because others are mistaken or they lie.
10. The perceptual field, including the perceived self, is internally organized and personally meaningful. When this organization and meaning are threatened, emotional problems are likely to result.

11. Communication depends on the process of acquiring greater mutual understanding of one another’s phenomenal fields.

12. People not only perceive the world of the present, but they also reflect on past experiences and imagine future ones to guide their behavior.

13. Perceptions create their own reality. People respond not to reality, but to their perceptions of reality.

14. Reality can exist for an individual only when he or she is conscious of it and has some relationship with it.

15. A person may perceive the “facts” involved in a situation, but may grossly distort the meaning of these facts.

16. Client distress may be more a process of perception of a situation than a situation itself.

(p. 29-30)

This study seeks to understand why a group of individuals (secondary agriculture teachers) exhibited a singular behavior (leaving the teaching profession). Understanding each perceptual field through their beliefs, values, feelings, hopes, and desires will inform why each exhibited the same behavior (Combs & Avila, 1985). Each participant’s unique experience as an agriculture teacher who chose to leave the profession has shaped their perception of teaching.
Review of Related Research

Attrition among Teachers

The teacher turnover problem, although high for the entire teaching occupation, affects beginning teachers more than others (Ingersoll & May, 2010). Attrition is a concern among teachers and stakeholders as over 90% of teachers who were hired in the United States were replacement teachers for those who left the profession for reasons other than retirement (Ingersoll, 2003). According to the 2008-2009 Teacher Follow-up Survey, there was a 13.5% turnover rate in 1988-89 and this rate increased to 15.6% in 2008-09 (NCES, 2010). Reichardt (2002) pointed out, “attrition is closely tied to a teacher’s age. Young teachers and those near retirement are most likely to quit” (p. 11). Thus teacher demand is estimated by examining the number of teachers eligible for retirement as well as determining the rate of new teacher attrition (Reichardt, 2002). Many teachers leave because they experience burnout, anxiety surrounding family and life balance, and poor time management skills (Boone & Boone, 2009; Clark, Brown, & Ramsey, 2012; Chenevey, Ewing & Whittington, 2008; Murray, Flowers, Croom, & Wilson, 2011; Torres, Lambert, & Tummons, 2009).

Teacher attrition appears to be especially high within the agricultural education discipline (Thompson, 1986). Moore (1978) reported results of 27 research studies conducted on the problem of why vocational agriculture teachers left the profession over the 1950’s, 1960’s and 1970’s. Results indicated salary, time, advancement, life goals, and administration were all factors given by teachers as reasons for leaving teaching during those time periods (Moore, 1978). In a study of attrition among Alabama vocational agriculture
teachers (Clark, 1965), results indicated at least 34% of teachers left the profession within the first two years which supported Ingersoll & May’s (2010) findings that teachers leave before five years. Clark (1965) also indicated factors which caused most teachers to leave the profession were opportunities for advancement and financial reward. A longitudinal study of California vocational education teachers found of the 713 teachers prepared to teach agricultural education between 1975 and 1985, only 242 (34%) were still teaching agriculture in 1985 (Thompson, 1986). Thirty-seven percent of those who received their teaching credentials never taught, and half of those who entered teaching quit by the fall of 1985.

Moore & Kennedy (1978) conducted a study in Indiana with 57 agriculture teachers, 58 principals, and 53 current teachers to determine why vocational agriculture teachers left the profession. The median age of those who left the classroom was 27 years old with an average of four years of teaching experience. Results indicated long hours as the highest ranking factor given by former teachers as to why they left teaching. This study also sought the perception of principals who had an agriculture teacher vacancy between 1973 and 1977. The major reason reported by principals as to why teachers left the profession was “long range goal was something different than teaching vocational agriculture” (Moore & Kennedy, 1978, p. 6). Salary and long hours came in distant second and third, respectively. In addition to former teachers and administrator perspectives, the study sought the perspectives of current teachers as well. The rankings of the three groups indicated long hours, inadequate salary and different long range occupational goals in their top four ratings. Both present and past teachers indicated students in class who should not be in vocational agriculture was a major factor; however the principals rated this eighth (Moore & Camp,
1979; Moore & Kennedy, 1978). While all three groups also ranked long hours and inadequate salary as important reasons for leaving the profession, principals did not rate these two items as having a great impact on a person leaving. This could indicate administrators during this time period were not aware of the responsibilities of the agriculture teacher (Moore & Camp, 1979; Moore & Kennedy, 1978).

In a study conducted by Tippens, Ricketts, Morgan, Navarro, & Flanders (2013) of 390 Georgia agriculture teachers, females were more likely to leave the profession before males but return after raising children and fulfilling family responsibilities. The challenge of balancing family life and career is not unique to women in agricultural education. According to Foster (2001) women agriculture teachers reported a general attitude of having to put family matters aside to put the job first. One participant stated:

> As I have enjoyed my time in the high school, I have decided it would be extremely difficult to start a family and teach agriculture. I’d not feel that I would be able to devote the appropriate time to maintain a program and develop a family. Currently, I am looking for possibly a teaching position that would allow more time for family (p. 5).

> These feelings were echoed by another participant’s comment: “It is really too demanding of a female to be expected to work so many hours and still be “domestic” at home” (Foster, 2001, p. 5). Another stated:

> I wish I had more time for my family. FFA and teaching have many weekend and night activities. I feel that these activities are important to my students, but it takes away from my family time. I don’t want my children to hate my job, FFA, or
agriculture for taking their mother from them. I also will not give up my marriage for this job. I find farming to be less stressful than teaching. I may teach again, but not in this district ever (Foster, 2001, p. 7).

While gender is not the best factor in determining a teacher’s likelihood of leaving the profession, findings make gender an important demographic to consider when predicting retention (Stair, Warner, & Moore, 2012; Stripling, Ricketts, Roberts, & Harlin, 2008; Stripling & Roberts, 2012).

The expectation of beginning teachers from the educational community is that of an ideal teacher; no other profession puts its’ beginning teachers in a position where they are expected to perform like veterans (Mundt, 1991). New teachers are often overwhelmed with their new job duties and a primary concern with beginning teachers is lack of time to fulfill these responsibilities (Myers, Dyer, & Washburn, 2005). Johnston and Ryan (1983) stated, Suddenly, over the short space of a summer or less, beginning teachers’ lives are changed dramatically. They are no longer students. Now they are teachers. No longer can they rely on their own knowledge, understanding and experience of the students’ role. They are now thrust into the role of teachers, a role they have observed countless times but only briefly tried out (p. 138).

Torres, Ulmer, and Aschenbrener (2007) noted agriculture teachers typically have a greater workload and work longer hours than other academic teachers. Therefore, it is no surprise beginning agriculture teachers experience high levels of stress during their first year of teaching (Joerger & Boettcher, 2000). In an ethnographic study of eight beginning agriculture teachers in Idaho, Mundt (1991) found beginning teachers experience problems
with discipline, classroom management, curriculum, and administrative support. These teachers were also described as being “quiet and reserved-often afraid to ask for help, hesitant to act, and low self-esteem” (Mundt, 1991, p. 20). Mundt (1991) concluded that as a result of the inexperience in dealing with these problems, the teachers exhibited a lack of self confidence in their behavior.

Roberts and Dyer (2004) indicated teaching is a stressful and time-demanding job therefore teachers can experience burnout quickly. In a study conducted by Lambert, Torres, and Tummons (2012) of beginning teachers in Missouri, results indicated 95% of beginning teachers work in excess of 45 hours per week. This may be due in part to the extra expectations and responsibilities they must commit to the job, which contributes to emotional exhaustion (Croom, 2003). In a study of 22 first year agriculture teachers in North Carolina, Stair, Warner, and Moore (2012) analyzed concerns of new teachers related to the agricultural education classroom. Teachers identified eight items of high-level impact concerns: 1) balancing personal and professional responsibilities managing, 2) managing student discipline, 3) making special education/ESL accommodations, 5) motivating students 6) building support of faculty, counselors, and administrators, 6) organizing FFA activities 7) time management, 8) recruiting and retaining students.

In another study of 54 National Vocational Agriculture Teachers Association (NVATA) Outstanding Young Member award winning agriculture teachers, Mundt and Connors (1999) identified challenges first year teachers may experience. After three rounds of questions, results indicated teachers felt managing the overall activities of the FFA chapter, building support of faculty, counselors, and administrators, balancing professional
and personal responsibilities and maintaining personal motivation and a positive outlook as very important challenges associated with the first years of teaching agriculture (Mundt & Connors, 1999). Problems related to the first years of teaching can be translated to inservice needs of first year teachers.

While the job responsibilities of an agriculture teacher are different than general education teachers, agriculture teachers still have a need for inservice training to gain more knowledge and skills necessary for their teaching roles (Garton & Chung, 1996). In order to determine the inservice needs of beginning teachers, Garton and Chung (1996) surveyed 37 agriculture teachers and 16 teacher educators and state supervisors in Missouri. Results indicated beginning teachers felt they needed the most inservice training on completing reports for local/state administrators while joint state staff administrators ranked managing student behavior problems as beginning teachers’ greatest need for inservice training (Garton & Chung, 1996). Beginning teachers ranked managing student behavior problems thirteenth as a need for inservice training.

Several studies note teachers leave teaching primarily out of dissatisfaction with the profession and a desire for a better job (Corbell, 2009; Ingersoll, 2003). The following studies provide further explanations for why teachers leave by exploring what teachers say are the reasons they left, and for why teachers stay by determining what teachers say are important factors in their decision to leave or stay in the profession.

Buchanan (2009, 2010) interviewed 22 former teachers about their decision to leave the classroom and their work lives afterwards. Buchanan asked participants about what kept them in teaching for the length of their experience, what led them to leave, their view of the
teaching profession prior to and after teaching, the thought process of deciding to leave, and if there was anything that would have kept them in the classroom. A final question asked them to compare their teaching jobs to their current jobs in the areas of salary, workload, responsibility, working conditions/support, and prestige of their profession. Many of Buchanan’s (2009, 2010) respondents stated the workload and responsibility of teachers was greater than that required in their new career field. Respondents also reported the physical working environment was better in their current position than that of the school environment in which they taught (Buchanan, 2009, 2010). Buchanan (2010) stated, “lack of support emerged as the single strongest predictor of a decision to leave the profession” (p. 205). This included lack of support from both administration and teaching peers. One participant stated, “I couldn’t believe the people who delighted in watching you get eaten” (p. 206). Many of the respondents reported taking a reduction in pay upon leaving the classroom to take another job (Buchanan, 2009, 2010). Buchanan (2009) offered three reasons this may be the case: a) selflessness attracts people to the teaching career therefore salary plays a lesser role in satisfaction for the job, b) desperation to find a different job, and c) teaching salaries are competitive to other jobs requiring similar levels of ability. Buchanan’s respondents provided various responses regarding the prestige of teaching. Some reported “teachers were treated with respect, mixed at time with sympathy for the demands of their work” (2010, p. 208) while others reported teachers were not respected at all for their work.

Overall, many of the teachers in Buchanan’s (2009, 2010) study described the process of leaving the profession as an experience with complex emotions, circumstances, and contexts. Some teachers left after losing confidence in themselves, their students, or school
administration. Others left after an incident raised concerns over their safety. Buchanan (2010) stated,

> It would be incomplete and misleading to portray an image of people disdainfully shaking the dust of teaching from their clothes, and walking into a job where they are better appreciated in a career with higher wages and greater prestige. While this was the case for some, alongside this emerged a parallel pathway of teachers seeking asylum (p. 202).

A study conducted with 937 Missouri teachers in 1953 found only 38% of new teachers remained in the profession past five years (Charters, 1970). Ten years later, a similar study conducted with 2,064 teachers in Oregon found only 32.8% of new teachers persist through their first four years (Charters, 1970). The rates jumped significantly for new teachers, particularly at high-poverty schools, to a rate of nearly 50% (Metlife Survey of the American Teacher, 2005). Nearly all studies in this area point to specific failure of the public school system to retain enough new teachers (Grissmer & Kirby, 1987, 1997). Research has also found that as few as half of new teachers will remain in the profession beyond five years (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). NCES selected a national sample of teachers who left teaching after their first year to list the main reasons for their departure for the Teacher Follow-up Survey (NCES, 1997). Thirty-nine percent left to pursue a better job or another career, and 29% stated dissatisfaction with teaching as a career or with their specific job was a main reason. Together, these two factors play a major role in two-thirds of all beginning teacher attrition (Ingersoll, 2013).
Job Satisfaction Factors

Job satisfaction factors can be positive or negative. Both satisfiers and dissatisfiers are discussed in regards to factors that lead to a teacher’s satisfaction level with their teaching career. While teachers show a consensus on a focused list of resources of satisfaction, they expressed a more detailed and lengthy list of causes of stress and anxiety on the job. Dissatisfaction is nearly unavoidable in almost every vocation. Many factors that cause new teachers to experience dissatisfaction are well researched and documented. Despite extensive research, it must be noted that each individual new teacher who experiences dissatisfaction has unique circumstances leading to their frustrations (Hudson, 2009). Ingersoll (2013) reported 29% of teachers reported being dissatisfied with the teaching career and listed dissatisfaction as their major reason for leaving. In the same study, more than 75% indicated that one of four different working conditions was an influence in their decision to leave the profession: student discipline problems, lack of administrative support, poor student motivation, and lack of teacher influence over school wide and classroom decision making (Ingersoll, 2013).

For the most part, research has found most agriculture teachers are satisfied with their job (Kitchel et al., 2012) for several reasons including self-fulfillment from educating youth, experiences outside the classroom, and community visibility (Bruening & Hoover, 1991). In a study of 95 agriculture teachers in West Virginia, Boone and Boone (2007) found student-centered teachers were more motivated to remain in the profession. Teacher motivation was also reinforced by financial rewards, professional networking, job location, job security, and administrative support. In a study of 149 Missouri agriculture teachers, Walker, Garton, and
Kitchel, (2004) reported job satisfaction increased among agriculture teachers who stayed in the profession, positing that maturity and becoming accustomed to job responsibilities were related to increased satisfaction. It was also reported agriculture teachers who stayed in the profession could have reached a plateau in their career, leading to energy saving behavior and contentment for their career (Walker, Garton, & Kitchel, 2004).

In an extensive review of 91 studies conducted after 1964 which dealt with problems of beginning teachers across the profession, Veenman (1984) found the most reoccurring problems were: classroom discipline, motivating students, dealing with individual differences, assessing students’ work, relationship with parents, organization of class work, inadequate teaching materials and supplies, and dealing with problems of individual students. Researchers (Barrick & Doerfert, 1989; Heath-Camp & Camp, 1992; Mundt, 1991) confirmed the same problems identified by Veenman for agriculture teachers. In a study of 95 agriculture teachers in West Virginia, Boone and Boone (2007) reported problems experienced by agriculture teachers included lack of administrative support, discipline, paperwork, mentorship, poor financial rewards, community support, facilities and equipment, time management and others. During a second phase of the study, Boone and Boone (2009) sought to evaluate the degree in which they thought each item was a problem. Differences were found in the severity and rank of problems identified by new teachers and those with teaching experience. However, some factors, such as poor salary, time management, paperwork, and balancing home and school activities, existed regardless of years of experience (Boone & Boone, 2009). Murray, Flowers, Croom, and Wilson (2011) surveyed 172 agriculture teachers in Georgia to investigate the struggle agriculture teachers’ face in
trying to balance school and home life. Both males and females reported dedicating upwards of 50 hours per week to their job, in addition to carrying out traditional gender roles at home (Murray, Flowers, Croom, & Wilson, 2011). Cano and Miller (1992) surveyed 558 agriculture teachers in Ohio to investigate specific factors associated with job satisfaction and dissatisfaction of male and female agriculture teachers. Male and female agriculture teachers do not differ significantly on satisfaction with their jobs, nor do they differ on satisfaction and dissatisfaction factors (Cano & Miller, 1992). However, women expressed frustration at trying to balance their professional life while maintaining quality family and personal time, and even expressed fear or apprehensiveness at having a family, become discouraged, and consider leaving their profession (Foster, 2001).

In a study of 388 Ohio agriculture teachers, Chenevey, Ewing, and Whittington (2008) indicated while teachers reported high levels of job satisfaction, low levels of occupational stress and high coping resources, they also reported burnout at moderate to high levels of intensity. However, Croom (2003) reported teachers experienced moderate levels of emotional exhaustion, low levels of depersonalization in relationships, and high levels of personal accomplishment in their work, indicating burnout was not necessarily a problem for agriculture teachers. Theiman, Henry, and Kitchel (2012) claimed teachers are more susceptible to burnout when they lack support and struggle to cope with job related stress. Maslach and Jackson (1981) defined burnout as a condition characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and loss of a sense of personal accomplishment. Burnout can manifest easily in the following ways: work overload, lack of community among teachers in the school, lack of fairness in work assignments, and the uneven distribution or absence of
rewards (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). In a study of teachers at one urban high school, Byrne (1998) found 98% of teachers surveyed reported educational bureaucracy was the primary cause of burnout. The teachers in Byrne’s study (1998) also reported one major cause of low morale was the ineffectiveness of the administration to alleviate workload. Teachers want to have an impact in the classroom, but the risk of burnout increases when too many non-instructional duties are placed on them creating a routine of being overloaded (Metropolitan Life Corporation, 2005). Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter (1996) reported, for many teachers, the sustaining force behind their decision to remain in teaching is the personal accomplishment they feel in teaching students. Because of this, teachers are highly susceptible to burnout when their perception of personal accomplishment is diminished by organizational and social factors.

Some problems faced by agriculture teachers are unique to the agriculture teacher profession. Despite facing problems as new and experienced teachers, agriculture teachers indicate overall satisfaction with their chosen profession. Even former teachers who have left the profession indicated satisfaction with their job while an agriculture teacher (Lemons, 2013). In a study of nine former Texas agriculture teachers, participants expressed satisfaction with their former careers (Lemons, 2013). One participant stated “I loved what I did” (Lemons, 2013, p. 72) while another stated “I think ag teaching is the best job on campus. I still do to this day” (p. 72). Despite their choice to leave the agriculture teaching profession, several participants were satisfied with their career as an agriculture teacher.

While agriculture teachers have their fair share of discontent, they have reported certain factors that keep them motivated to teach (Rice, LaVergne, & Gartin, 2011).
Motivational factors included having highly motivated students, good classroom and laboratory conditions, aiding in student success and achievement, and having administrative support for their program (Rice, LaVergne, & Gartin, 2011). However, lack of student motivation, student discipline problems, and guidance counselors’ use of agricultural education classes as a dumping ground for low performing students were found to be demotivational factors that influence a teacher’s decision to leave the profession (Rice, LaVergne, & Gartin 2011).

**Summary**

Teacher attrition is not a new problem needing attention from the education profession. Research has led to many practices to be implemented in schools around the nation in order to address the rate of which teachers are leaving the classroom. A review of literature on beginning teacher attrition described rates at which turnover occurs, causes of dissatisfaction among new teachers, and factors influencing attrition of those who leave. Research related to factors such as age, gender, lack of administrative support, and intrinsic and extrinsic needs such as salary, advancement and a feeling of professionalism on a teachers decision to leave the education profession was included in this chapter.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In order to gain a better understanding of why an agriculture teacher chooses to leave the teaching profession, a qualitative approach was utilized for this study. Qualitative research seeks to understand how people make sense of their experiences and assign meaning to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) captured the nature of qualitative research succinctly by stating “rather than determining cause and effect, predicting, or describing the distribution of some attribute among a population, we might be interested in uncovering the meaning of a phenomenon for those involved” (p. 5).

A qualitative approach was selected for this study in an effort to explore former agriculture teachers’ perspectives and experiences of leaving the profession. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) defined qualitative research as “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 meaning people bring to them” (p. 2).

Merriam (2009) also characterized qualitative research as “naturalistic, interpretive, or qualitative” (p.13). Qualitative research is focused on meaning and how people make sense of their world and experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Hatch, 2002; McMillan, 2004; Merriam, 2009). The goal is to provide an insider’s perspective (emic) rather than that of the observer’s outside perspective (etic) (Merriam, 2009). Another important characteristic of qualitative research is that the process is inductive (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Hatch, 2002; McMillan, 2004; Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) further explained researchers gather data
to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than deductively testing hypotheses and combines data into larger, more general categories. Qualitative research is also characterized by rich, descriptive data (Bogdan & Bilken, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; McMillan, 2004; Merriam, 2009). Data are often presented in the form of quotes from interviews, field notes, and observations to support the findings of the study and all contribute to the descriptive nature of qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). Finally, qualitative research has an emergent design which changes and develops as the study progresses (Hatch, 2002; McMillan, 2004; Merriam, 2009). Emergent design allows a qualitative study to be flexible and responsive to changing conditions of the study in progress (Merriam, 2009).

The purpose of this study was to understand the journey of former secondary agricultural educators that lead them to leave the profession. The individualized research focus lent itself to qualitative methodology and more specifically, the phenomenological research approach. Participant perspective was imperative because it provided insight into the meaning they created to make sense of their experience leaving the agriculture classroom.

**Researcher Subjectivity**

The context of the researcher must be addressed in order to clarify bias brought into the study and reinforce validity of the findings (Creswell, 2009). By documenting specific knowledge and beliefs, the researcher is better able to monitor perspectives that could manipulate the interview process and distort data analysis and research findings (Glesne, 1999). The subjectivity of the researcher is described below:

I was raised on a row crop and cattle production farm where my dad was a fulltime farmer and my mom was a science teacher. Not only was my family heritage strong in
agriculture, it was also heavily weighted with teaching as my grandmother was an elementary teacher and grandfather was a college English professor. I grew up in the midst of all the farm activities including working cattle, baling hay, repairing fences and tending to my dad’s broiler chicken houses. You could say I was a young kid who was burned out on the farm life. In my teenage years, I sought extracurricular activities that did not require anything of agriculture and became involved in cheerleading and student government. It was during my high school career that my mom switched from the middle school science classroom into a middle school agriculture classroom. This was not important to me at this time but would be pivotal a few years later.

Upon graduation from high school, I pursued a medical degree from a local community college. Four o’clock AM hospital shifts and captivity in what seemed like a cold, dark dungeon called the “Hospital Laboratory,” proved to be a detrimental career choice for this farm girl. It wasn’t until this point that I decided to rekindle my heritage of agriculture and teaching backgrounds and follow in my mother’s footsteps to become an agriculture teacher. I was ready to get back to my roots and teaching agriculture seemed like the perfect choice, even though I had no previous high school agricultural education or FFA experience.

During my undergraduate career, I fulfilled the requirements necessary to complete my degree, however, was not completely sold on the high school agriculture classroom. I observed several science/biology classes to see if that was a path I wanted to pursue. Upon entering my student teaching experience, I was sold. I finally decided teaching agriculture was the career for me. I had a wonderful experience with an accomplished, veteran
agriculture teacher at Hillcrest High School, Mr. Clark Woods. He was the true epitome of someone who loved his work. His favorite saying to me every morning was “I would hate to know what I would do if I had to go to work today.” As a student teacher, I tried to embody this mindset.

After completing my Masters degree and gaining more classroom experience teaching equine science at a high school for a semester, I got my first big-girl job teaching in a large 4A school set in the small rural town of Aiken, South Carolina. I was excited to take over from the legendary teacher who had retired. Aiken is known for its equine industry, so I assumed that I would be able to implement an equine class into this nationally recognized horticulture program. Was I wrong, or what! During my first summer of employment, my parents, brother, husband, students and their parents all came to help me literally clean the agriculture program from top to bottom including four huge greenhouses which I knew nothing about. After filling five 30 cubic foot dumpsters and six weeks later, my very own students walked in the first day of school. They thought I was one of them and asked “Who are you?” Needless to say, nothing I learned in my college preparation coursework and student teaching experience taught me how to handle the obstacles I were to face my first couple of years as an agriculture teacher.

My first two years of teaching at Aiken High School were challenging. Overall, my students were enthusiastic, especially the freshmen. They were thirsty for knowledge and soaked up every ounce in class and greenhouse activities. However, I faced large classes and older students who were disrespectful and lacked respect for authority. The school’s student population was made of 55% Caucasian students, 40% African American students and
approximately 5% Hispanic students. Well over half of the student population qualified for free or reduced lunches despite the affluent community in which we lived. The student population in the agriculture program was nearly 95% Caucasian.

Initially, I was nervous about how my lack of greenhouse knowledge and experience might hinder my ability to deliver a top-notch, rigorous horticulture curriculum. The FFA Chapter was a nationally recognized three-star chapter and students were very active in career development events, fundraisers and community service activities. I was also nervous about my ability to continue the long-standing tradition of being a nationally recognized chapter.

Needless to say, I was burning the candle at both ends to keep up with all the responsibilities of such a large program. I did not realize but burn out was occurring. I began to look for other career opportunities. I entertained several ideas such as selling jewelry, working at a veterinarian’s office, etc. Nothing was off the table. It wasn’t until I was nominated and won the NAAE Teacher Turn the Key Award that I had a change of heart, and maybe a change of attitude. During my first NAAE convention, I developed a network of resources along with a bit of confidence in myself that it took for me to become confident in my classroom teaching. My third year was much better; year four, five and six, we (my students mainly) were breaking records. It was awesome and I felt as Clark Woods always said, “I don’t know what I would do if I had to go to work today.”

During my tenure as an agriculture teacher, I received the NAAE Teacher Turn the Key Award in 2008 and the NAAE Region V Outstanding Young Member in 2011. In 2012, our FFA program received the National FFA Model of Innovation and Model of Excellence
Awards, a first in the state of South Carolina. The Aiken chapter was also recognized as the SC Outstanding Program award in 2012.

As a beginning teacher who often thought of leaving the profession just as so many teachers do, I find myself looking at the success of my students, some who are pursuing a career as an agriculture teacher, and think of the opportunities and impact that would have been missed had I left the classroom.

Qualitative methodology allowed for the human to serve as the instrument (Merriam, 2009), in capturing and retelling the stories of the participants. While the researcher attempted to maintain objectivity throughout data collection and data analysis, the researcher’s prior experiences and perspectives as an agriculture teacher who almost left the profession could have potentially influenced probing questions in the interview process. Several measures were employed by the researcher in an attempt to provide an accurate, unbiased description of the participants’ experiences.

**Rationale for Phenomenology**

While the term *qualitative research* remains an umbrella term for the broad category of research, there are a variety of forms of qualitative research. Each type of qualitative research has some attributes in common that result in their falling under the umbrella concept of *qualitative* (Merriam, 2009). They may each have a different focus, resulting in variations in how the research questions are asked, sample is selected, and data is collected and analyzed (Merriam, 2009). Creswell (2007) and Merriam (2009) identify phenomenology as a specific type of qualitative research. The specific phenomenon under study was teachers leaving the profession.
Epistomology is the theory of knowledge (Crotty, 2003). Hamlyn (1995) described epistemology as the “nature of knowledge, its possibility, scope and general basis” (p. 242). This theory is the foundation by which qualitative researchers pursue their inquiry and determine the type and value of new knowledge. This phenomenological study is grounded in the epistemology of constructionism.

According to Crotty (2003), constructionism is “the view that all knowledge, therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42). In a constructionist world, meaning is not discovered, but rather constructed. Meaning does not reside in the object, but rather waiting for someone to construct it (Crotty, 2003). These meanings are constructed by individuals as they engage with the world they are interpreting.

The constructionist vein invites the researcher to explore “new or richer meaning” (Crotty, 2003, p. 51) and is an invitation to reinterpretation of previously constructed meanings. Lived experiences are the focus of phenomenological research (Hatch, 2002). Researchers are better able to describe the aspects of the experiences and identify elements that move the experience from isolation to universal access (Moustakas, 1994).

A theoretical perspective anchors a study into a particular conception, helping one make sense of the world around us and better understand “how we know what we know” (Crotty, 2003, p. 8). It guides the researcher’s methodology, serving as the philosophical foundation. Interpretivism was used to guide the foundation of this phenomenological study. Interpretivism attempts to explain human and social reality (Crotty, 2003). The interpretivist
approach looks for “culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social
life world (Crotty, 2003, p. 67). Specifically, phenomenology was used to focus on the
meaning established through experiences in order to “understand the hidden meanings and
essence of an experience” (Grbich, 2007, p. 84).

Creswell (2007) explains that “a phenomenological study describes the common
meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p.
76). A phenomenologist focuses on describing what all participants have in common as they
experience a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) further explains the basic
purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a
expressed the purpose of phenomenology as trying to understand the experiences of a few in
order to create broader understanding of them. Termed “the great phenomenological
principle” (Crotty, 2003, p. 83), this process can be described as putting yourself in their
shoes to portray one’s unique experiences. This type of research is based on the “assumption
that there is an essence or essences to shared experiences” (Patton, 2002, p. 106). Patton
(2002) states:

These essences are the core meaning mutually understood through a phenomenon
commonly experienced. The experiences of different people are bracketed, analyzed,
and compared to identify the essences of the phenomenon, for example, the essence
of loneliness, the essence of being a mother, or the essence of being a participant in a
particular program. The assumption of essence, like the ethnographer’s assumption
that culture exists and is important, becomes the defining characteristic of a purely phenomenological study. (p. 106)

Evidence from phenomenological research is derived from first-person accounts of life experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher must put all prior beliefs about the phenomenon of interest aside, or bracketed, so not to interfere with seeing the elements of the phenomenon emerge (Merriam, 2009). When these beliefs are temporarily suspended, awareness becomes sharper and can be examined in the same manner that an object of consciousness can be examined (Merriam, 2009). Creswell (2007) states phenomenology rests on the following philosophical assumptions: the study of the lived experiences of people, the view that these experiences are conscious ones (van Manen, 1990), and the development of descriptions of the essences of these experiences, not explanations or analyses (Moustakas, 1994).

The phenomenological interview is the primary method of data collection in order to capture the essence of an experience (Merriam, 2009). The researcher must examine personal dimensions of the experience in order to become aware of personal prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) describes this process as the *epoche* and means “to refrain from judgment” (p. 25). “In the Epoche, no position whatsoever is taken; every quality has equal value” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 87). In practicing the Epoche, the researcher finds a quiet place to review their own thoughts and feelings and focuses on the specific situation, person or issue at hand (Moustakas, 1994).
Qualitative Research Design

Methods used for this study were grounded in foundations of transcendental phenomenology. Moustakas’s (1994) transcendental phenomenology is focused less on the interpretations of the researcher but more on a description of the participants’ experiences. Besides bracketing the Epoche, transcendental phenomenology relies on specific data analysis procedures. Moustakas (1994) describes the “Phenomenological Reduction” (p. 90) as the task of developing a “textural” (p. 90) description just as the phenomenon is perceived by each individual. The process is described as a “reduction” in that it leads us back to our own experience of the way things are (Schmitt, 1968, p. 30). Textural description can be described as what the participants’ experienced. A structural description of the participants’ experiences is also constructed and can be described as how they experienced different conditions and situations (Creswell, 2006).

A composite of the textural and structural descriptions is used to convey the overall “essence” (Creswell, 2006, p. 60). Creswell (2007) and Merriam (2009) posit that the essence of the phenomenon is the product of a phenomenological study. “The reader should come away from the phenomenology with the feeling, ‘I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that” (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 46) (Creswell, 2007, p. 62). While the essence of any experience can never be fully exhausted, the fundamental textural-structural synthesis represents the essence at a particular time and place from the point-of-view of the specific individual (Moustakas, 1994).

Finally, imaginative variation seeks to find possible meanings through imagination, divergent perspectives, and help close with a structural description of the experience
(Moustakas, 1994). The purpose of imaginative variation is to create the structural description of how the phenomenon was experienced by each participant (Moustakas, 1994). This key piece demonstrates the essence of the phenomenon; returning to the foundation of knowledge and exposing the universal structure originally sought by the phenomenological approach (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994).

**Participant Selection**

The participants for this study were purposefully selected based on the criteria that they were secondary agriculture teachers who left the classroom to pursue another career choice outside of education. Purposive sampling is central to naturalistic inquiry. Erlandson, Harris, Skipper and Allen (1993) maintain a random or representative sample is not preferred when doing naturalistic inquiry because a major concern is not to generalize the findings of the study to broad populations and instead, maximize discovery of patterns and problems that occur in the particular context under study. Another aspect of purposive sampling is sample size. There is no concrete rule for sample size. The key is to look for more quality than quantity, more information for richness than volume (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). Patton (1990) stated,

> In the end, sampling size adequacy, like all aspects of research, is subject to peer review, consensual validation, and judgment. What is crucial is that the sampling procedures and decisions be fully described, explained, and justified so that information users and peer reviewers have the appropriate context for judging the sample. (p. 186).
This sample is also unique as it reflects the atypical or unusual perspective (Dooley, 2007). Phenomenological studies typically address the experiences of “up to ten” (Creswell, 1998, p. 65). Maximum variation of participants helps to capture a variety of viewpoints (Dooley, 2007). In order to achieve maximum variation, participants were chosen with a variety of years of experience prior to leaving the profession. More specifically, a criterion sample (Patton, 2002) was used to select seven individuals who had graduated from a teacher education program since 2000, and had been teaching more than one year but less than ten years upon their exit from the teaching profession.

In order to select participants with the specific criteria, the agricultural education faculty department chair at North Carolina State University provided the researcher with a frame of teachers who had graduated and earned a teaching certificate from the Agricultural and Extension Education department since 2000. Faculty members were used to help identify those teachers meeting the selection criteria.

Seven former agriculture teachers were selected and contacted by email outlining the purpose and value of the study, significance of their role as a volunteer participant, and methods to be used in data collection. Three participants were male; four were female. All seven participants agreed to participate and received an informed consent letter to sign prior to the interview. Interview dates and times were established upon agreeing to participate. Email correspondence can be found in Appendix A.

**Data Collection**

The researcher used various qualitative methods within the capacity of this study to gather data. Those methods included phone interviews and document analysis. Phone
interviews were conducted during various hours of the day, and ranged anywhere between 9:00 A.M. to 8:00 P.M. depending on the participant’s availability. Phone interviews were also conducted over personal interviews because of the researcher’s time limitations to conduct the study, participant accessibility, and were the preferred interview method for each of the participants. Interview protocol was chosen to gain a better understanding of the perceptions and experiences these former teachers had while in the classroom. Specifically, phenomenological studies utilize in-depth interviewing (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Moustakas, 1994). Merriam (2009) states, “Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them” (p. 88). The researcher utilized a semi-structured interview protocol in order to provide flexibility in responses. Interview protocol development was based on the review of literature. Questions were designed to encourage the respondent to provide longer answers, producing richer data (Dooley, 2007). Following IRB approval, the interview guide was pilot tested with three former North Carolina agriculture teachers during the spring 2014. This procedure confirmed the interview guide asked the most relevant and important questions related to the purpose of the study.

Seidman’s (2006) phenomenological interviewing technique was deemed appropriate as a method of data collection. This strategy employs three interviews to describe “the meaning of a concept or phenomenon that several individuals share” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 104). It also allowed the researcher to develop a rapport with the participants because each interview builds off each of the others, providing a basis for and insight into, the next one (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Seidman, 2006). While three interviews are
recommended by Seidman, only two interviews were conducted for this research study. Due to accessibility of the participants, components of Seidman’s (2006) three interview strategy were combined.

The purpose of the first interview in Seidman’s (2006) technique is to reveal a focused life history, contextualizing the phenomenon and eliciting details related to the individual’s experiences. During this interview, the researcher sought experiences as a high school agriculture teacher and what brought them to the decision to leave the profession. They were also asked to share why they chose the agriculture teaching profession. Participants were prompted to share details of the experiences as they related to their decision to leave. The purpose of the second interview was to extract details of the participants’ experiences (Seidman, 2006). The researcher asked participants to share specific stories of their experiences during their time in the classroom and how they reached the decision to leave.

Seidman’s (2006) phenomenological interview technique recommended scheduling interviews for 90 minutes, with each interview spaced between three days and one week apart. However, Seidman (2006) conceded that the interview structure can be manipulated to meet the specific needs of the study. Each interview in the current study lasted an average of 51 minutes and was scheduled one to two days apart with a week time span. Round one interviews ranged from 36 minutes to 67 minutes. Round two interviews ranged from 19 minutes to 39 minutes, and lasted an average of 29 minutes. Round one interview transcripts ranged in word count from 8,308 words to 2,916 with an average of 5,078 words per
transcript. Round two interview transcript word count ranged from 2,372 words to 1,098 with an average of 1,753 words per transcript.

Interviews

Dexter (1970) describes interviews as conversations with a purpose. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe interviews as a way to reconstruct the past, interpret the present and predict the future and allow people to move back and forth in time.

Semi-structured interviews were scheduled and conducted during the months of August through October 2014. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The researcher used a set of guiding questions during the interview but allowed for flexibility by using probing questions to expand and clarify statements made by the participants. The researcher assigned a code to each participant in order to maintain confidentiality. Each interview was transcribed verbatim within 24 hours of the interview being conducted. Credibility (Merriam, 2009) was addressed through member checks and peer debriefing. Member checking was addressed by emailing each of the participants a copy of their interview transcript for verification and accuracy (Dooley, 2007). Upon participant review, transcripts were also sent to an expert panel to review findings. Guiding questions used in this study can be found in Appendix A.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed and reported using commonly accepted qualitative procedures (Creswell, 1998). Keen (1975) described phenomenological analysis of data as such that it “cannot be reduced to a ‘cookbook’ set of instructions. It is more an approach, an attitude, an investigative posture with a certain set of goals” (p. 41). Interviews should be recorded and
transcribed verbatim by the researcher. It is also important that the researcher bracket their interpretations and meanings to the side during the transcription process (Hycner, 1985). The researcher should also listen to the recording in addition to reading the transcript multiple times in order to provide a context for the emergence of specific meaning (Hycner, 1985). Hycner (1985) then described that the “very rigorous process of going over every word, phrase, sentence, paragraph and noted significant non-verbal communication in the transcript in order to elicit the participant’s meanings” begins (p. 282). He further described this process as “a crystallization and condensation of what the participant has said” (p. 282). He termed this as the “unit of general meaning” (p. 282). Each of these units of general meaning is evaluated against the entire context of the interview, keeping in mind the research objectives, to develop “units of relevant meaning” (Hycner, 1985, p. 284).

For this specific study, two interview devices were used to ensure optimal audio quality and protect from equipment malfunction or operator error. Transcripts were cleaned by reading the transcript while listening to the recording to correct any errors.

*Categorization of Units of Relevant Meaning*

Once the researcher has compiled units of general meaning, the researcher then determines if any of the relevant units can be grouped together, based on a common theme or essence. The essence emerges through rigorous examination of each unit (Hycner, 1985). In this process, there is a constant process of going back to the transcript and comparing each of the units of relevant meaning. Specifically, data units were compiled by putting complete thoughts or sentences on 3 x 5 note cards. Data were sorted into categories through shuffling and unitizing data into meaningful groups by hand using Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) “3 x 5
card shuffle” method. Exact statements were then categorized into similar groups and examined for specific meanings in relation to the purpose of the study.

**Merging Categories**

Once data units were compared with other data units and assigned to a category, the researcher examines all categories to determine if there is a central theme that emerges. This is described as the “central theme which expressed the essence of the clusters” (Hycner, 1985, p. 290). The data and their interpretations were examined for themes and patterns that characterized the experiences of the participants. This allowed the researcher to draw conclusions.

**Trustworthiness Criteria**

Merriam (2009) recommends eight strategies for promoting validity and reliability. *Credibility* (Merriam, 2009) was addressed through member checks and was accomplished by emailing participants a copy of the interview transcript for verification and accuracy. Credibility was also established by sending tentative findings and emerging themes to an expert panel for peer review. Please see Appendix E and Appendix F. Upon data analysis, emerging themes were also sent via email to each of the participants in a memorandum to further establish credibility. Please see Appendix G. Interview observation documents and various research artifacts, such as literature and quantitative surveys, were analyzed to establish *triangulation* (Merriam, 2009). *Dependability* was addressed in the study by keeping an audit trail and detailed records of the data collection and analysis procedures (Merriam, 2009). A transcript of the interview was created from researcher notes and audio recordings. A copy of the interview transcript was provided to each participant for
adjustment. All documents and notes were kept for examination. Confirmability was addressed in the study by including exact statements from the interviews that supported interpretations and conclusions drawn by the researcher (Merriam, 2009). Transferability can be achieved by providing a rich, thick description to allow readers to determine if the findings match the results to other populations; however, some analytical generalizations can be concluded to similar groups such as other teacher populations (Merriam, 2009).

Researcher bias cannot be removed; however, an awareness of personal bias was documented through journaling and was acknowledged during the study and analysis of results (Merriam, 2009). Maximum variation was established through purposefully selecting unique individuals with a diverse number of years of teaching experience upon leaving the profession. Draft copies of the report were sent to colleagues for peer review and feedback regarding the process of study, emerging themes with raw data and tentative interpretations.

Chapter Summary

This chapter described the methodology and techniques that were used to conduct this research study in understanding the perceptions of agriculture teachers who have left the teaching profession. A qualitative, phenomenological design was used. Semi-structured and unstructured interviews were the primary source of data while document analysis served as a secondary source of data. Data were analyzed looking for common themes in the participants’ decision to leave profession.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS & FINDINGS

Attrition of quality teachers from the classroom has received significant attention as an issue facing education in recent years (Ingersoll, 2003). Agriculture classrooms are no exceptions to the issue of growing teacher shortages across the country due to attrition (Ingersoll, 2003). Despite the concern and efforts to address the shortage of qualified teachers in agricultural education classrooms, attrition has continued to be a contributing factor in the shortage of agriculture teachers. A number of studies have already determined factors influencing teachers who are still in the classroom such as job satisfaction or problems that agriculture teachers face (Murray, Flowers, Croom, & Wilson, 2011). However, the perspective of those who made the decision to leave the profession is not a position often sought.

Seven participants were purposefully selected for this study. Each participant was given a pseudonym to protect individual confidentiality. Participants are described in reference to the demographic information collected in the course of the interviews. The numbers and letter in parentheses following the quotations are a reference to the location of the quotation in the original interview transcript.

Willy (W)

Willy is a male in his mid-30. He was a North Carolina Teaching Fellows Scholar which had a huge influence on him choosing to pursue a career in agricultural education. The program offered him $26,000 to which was an opportunity he could not refuse. He currently works as a County Extension Agent. He taught high school for three and one-half years
before entering the Extension profession. Throughout his three and one-half years of teaching, he taught at two separate schools in North Carolina. He taught a variety of curricula including Agricultural Mechanics, Horticulture, and Animal Science. At times, he has missed being in the classroom, but his ultimate career goal is to pursue a doctoral degree and teach on the college level.

Dolly (D)

Dolly is a female in her early 30’s. Her high school did not offer agricultural education classes, as they discontinued the program many years prior. She was never exposed to agricultural education and the FFA but always had a love for animals and outdoors. She originally intended to become a veterinarian, however, she experienced burnout from her coursework. Her back up plan was to teach. Through her time in vet school, she met others pursuing a degree in Agricultural Education and decided it was a natural fit for her interests. She felt as though she had the natural ability to teach. Dolly currently works in a profession that continues to allow her to teach people of all ages. She taught high school agricultural education a total of seven and one-half years. However, she left after her first year to pursue the mission field in Australia. Upon returning from Australia, she returned to the agriculture classroom for another six and a half years. Dolly stays connected with agriculture teachers in the state by offering educational opportunities to their students and would consider returning to the profession if the right opportunity unfolded.

Reba (R)

Reba is female in her early 30’s. Reba was involved in a very active agricultural education program and FFA chapter during high school. She saw the impact her agriculture
teacher had on students and he had a huge impact on her. Her decision to choose the agriculture teaching profession was based on doing the same thing for other students that her agriculture teacher did for her. She felt as though she wanted to be in an agriculture program that was strong and active as well. However, in her college career, she realized it was more about truly mentoring and impacting kids. When she took her first teaching job at 21 years of age, she taught students who were older than her. Reba taught high school agricultural education for two and one-half years. Specifically, she taught AgriScience Applications, Horticulture I, and Horticulture II Honors. She taught in a program with one other agriculture teacher. She is currently a Field Representative for another agriculture agency. Reba loved teaching and still misses her students. However, she is passionate about her current job and believes she made the right decision. She admitted if she ever left her current job, she would not hesitate to renew her teaching license and return to the agriculture classroom.

Terri (T)

Terri is a female in her mid to late 20’s. She taught high school agricultural education for two years in a rural high school in North Carolina. She did not take agricultural education classes in high school. Her career aspirations at that time were to become a veterinarian and the agriculture department did not offer courses in animal science. She instead chose to take medical science classes with the intention of attending vet school at North Carolina State University. Upon entering the veterinary science program, she was quickly burned out from her coursework and made the decision her sophomore year to switch majors to agricultural education. She felt the desire to use her animal science background to teach others. Terri taught in a single teacher agriculture department and started the program her first year. She
attended high school in the same county as her first teaching position, a neighboring school. The principal who hired her was also her principal in high school. Terri loved teaching, however, she and her husband had the desire to start a family and raise their children at home. She feels torn as to whether or not she would go back to the classroom as she is able to enjoy evenings with her husband and raising her child at home, not doing lesson plans or attending to the multitude of responsibilities of being an agriculture teacher. She would like to have more children and would consider another form of teaching small children about agriculture.

Garth (G)

Garth is a male in his late 30’s. Garth was involved in agricultural education in his high school career but admitted to viewing FFA as nothing more than a club, rather than for deeper opportunities that come with competitions and leadership activities. Garth had career aspirations of entering the military. During his senior year of high school, his agriculture teacher charged him with the duty of training an Agriculture Issues Career Development Event team. With a competitive drive and willingness to learn, Garth led his team to a second place finish at state FFA convention. This was a pivotal moment as Garth developed a love for teaching others and seeing the light bulb come on when connections were made. After much consideration, Garth decided at the last minute to make a career change and attended a community college his first semester of his freshmen year. He then applied to North Carolina State University and entered into agricultural education. Garth taught for two and one-half years at a rural high school in North Carolina in a single teacher department. He was charged with the goal of doubling the FFA membership from 60 members to over 120 members his
first year of teaching. However, coming from a military family and with the stinging memories of 9/11, Garth felt his personal needs were not being met and wanted to serve his country. He is currently serving active duty for the military and has had been deployed several times to the Middle East. Garth loved teaching. He would most definitely consider returning to the agriculture classroom and shared that after multiple deployments, he has a different perspective. Serving his country in the marines has fulfilled his need. In fact, during his tenure in the military, he obtained a master’s degree in education and is considering his options when his active duty is soon complete.

Carrie (C)

Carrie is a female in her late 30’s. Carrie was involved in the FFA organization during high school and felt as though she wanted to pursue a career that allowed her to give back to the organization. Carrie taught six and one-half years at a very large rural high school. She taught in a two teacher program and had over 200 FFA members. Carrie enjoyed her time in the classroom. She enjoyed bonding with her students, seeing students succeed and the opportunities FFA and agricultural education provided to them. Carrie and her husband decided to start a family and her mother began to have health problems; therefore she could not keep both of her children. She made a personal decision to leave her teaching career to stay at home with her children. She substitute teaches for the agriculture teacher currently there and always get the teaching fever when she does. Her intention is to return to the agriculture classroom when her youngest child begins school in a few years.
Tim (TM)

Tim is a male in his early 30’s. He was heavily involved in FFA and agricultural education in high school. Tim taught at a rural high school in a four teacher department for six years after working in the industry for one year after college. Tim enjoyed his time in the classroom and reflected upon his memories and relationships with his students. Tim felt the need to pursue another career after becoming frustrated with the emphasis on high-stakes testing requirements for his students. He also felt he worked too hard and too many extra hours for not enough pay. Therefore, he made the personal decision to leave the classroom for a career in the agricultural mechanics industry making substantially more, which has improved his family’s standard of living.

Themes

The following objectives were developed to guide this study:

1. Identify reasons former secondary agriculture teachers initially chose to pursue a career in agricultural education.
2. Describe the experiences of former agriculture teachers who left the profession.
3. Identify factors which influenced former teachers to leave the profession within their first ten years.
4. Identify factors which might influence former agriculture teachers to return to the profession.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven former North Carolina secondary agriculture teachers. Phenomenological data analysis procedures were used in addition to the
researcher keeping a reflexive journal. Transcribed interviews were open-coded, axial coded and themes were identified. The following themes emerged through analysis of data:

1) Roadmap to Becoming a Teacher
   a. Influence of agricultural education and FFA
   b. Influence of teachers
   c. Impact of student teaching

2) Growing Pains of the First Year

3) Reality of the Classroom
   a. Love of Teaching
   b. Frustrations
   c. Age & Gender Influences
   d. Unique Occurrences

4) Influences to leave

5) Rear view mirror: Looking Back
   a. Advice
   b. Things they enjoy now

The Roadmap to Becoming a Teacher

Each of the seven participants described various paths that led them to choosing a career as an agriculture teacher. They all described the positive impact either their former agricultural education teacher or another teacher had on them making their decision to pursue teaching as a career. They also described how their student teaching experience shaped their beginning year as an agriculture teacher.
Influence of agricultural education and FFA

Each participant spoke passionately about their experiences as an agriculture teacher. Even when discussing struggles and negativity, they shared how they enjoyed teaching agriculture and were passionate when they were teaching students. Five of the seven participants had previous experience in agricultural education and the FFA organization. One had a family member who was a teacher that also influenced her decision to enter the teaching profession.

Willy was involved in agricultural education and FFA in high school and wanted to pursue a career as an agriculture teacher afterward. Willy said: “I wanted to teach high school agriculture, not so much to teach, but to still be involved in the FFA once I finished college.” (I1:W: 32-33).

Carrie knew that being a teacher was going to be hard work; however she chose the profession regardless. While she admired her teachers growing up at a young age and thought the teaching profession was an admirable job, she continues to feel that same way to this day. She stated, “I knew it was going to be a lot of hard work and long hours” (I1:C:60). She continued and stated, “I wanted to be an ag teacher in high school, I wanted to be one in college, I wanted to be one while I was teaching, and I still want to be one now” (I1:C:54-56). Carrie stated:

I really enjoyed taking agriculture classes and FFA in high school and I didn’t know what to do with my life, so I thought I would give it a try to be an agriculture teacher. It sounded like it would be fun and be right up my alley. (I1:C: 29-31).

She continued by stating,
I enjoyed [FFA] so much that I wanted to give back to it and be a part of it on going… I don’t know that my advisor or the FFA was the turning point for me but just being around all of it and the people and the organization itself made me want to be a part of it. (I1:C:41-45)

Reba was also involved in agricultural education in high school and was influenced by her agriculture teacher; therefore, she felt she wanted to choose a career that she could make that same impact. Reba commented:

I went to a high school that had a very active and strong FFA and Ag Ed program. My agriculture teacher had a record of success and I saw the impact that he made on his kids and the impact he had on me. I wanted to make that kind of impact. I wanted to do the same thing he did for me. (I1:R:32-37).

She reflected about her perspective before entering her own classroom and admitted that her perspective changed. She said,

After I graduated and came to Raleigh for school to become an ag teacher, my philosophy about what it meant to be successful in an ag program changed quite a bit. I realized not every ag program looked like mine (I1:R:37-40).

She continued and said, “It was less about winning and more about truly touching and impacting kids (I1:R:41-42). She discussed how the relationship between agriculture teachers and students is different by saying,

You would see ag teachers interacting with their kids and it is more than just a student/teacher relationship. It is not a friendship because that undermines authority, but it is a special bond that ag teachers have with their kids (I1:R:61-64).
Tim echoed this positive experience of agricultural education he had in high school. Tim also had an agriculture background that influenced his decision. In addition to his farming background, he was also influenced by his agriculture teachers in high school. His agriculture teacher waited for him to take his place when he retired. Tim knew that teaching could be challenging. However, he also knew it could be rewarding because of the impact they have on students. He stated, “I knew there would be difficulties and struggles. I knew there would be good times and good learning moments” (I1:TM:73-74). He continued and said, “I wanted to make a positive difference in the lives of kids” (I1:TM:80).

Garth was in agricultural education classes in high school but was never involved in the opportunities provided by the class or the FFA. He said, “I joined FFA in high school but never really thought of it more than a club before my senior year” (I1:G:19-20). Coming from a military background, he was on a path to a career in the military until his agriculture teacher charged him with the duty of training a career development event team for state convention. This was a huge influence for Garth, as well as the turning point in choosing the teaching profession. He admitted it was at this point during his senior year he took on a leadership role in his FFA chapter. He stated,

My agriculture teacher told me that if I would train a team, [he] would submit the team for state convention. I agreed to train the team and we ended up getting second place in the state which was, for me, the first time I was able to make it on stage, was a big deal to me. So, that gave me a lot to think about (I1:G:26-29).

Once Garth experienced leading his teammates to a second place finish, he admitted that it was a good feeling to teach someone. He said,
After that convention, I thought it felt really great to teach somebody something and see the light bulb go on and be the team captain. I thought I could either be a lawyer...or I can be a teacher and have these great feelings of helping someone or teaching someone (I1:G:36-36).

Upon changing his career focus from being in the military to entering agricultural education at North Carolina State University, he said,

I was in love with FFA and agricultural education and even at one point, I remember saying I would teach agriculture until my arms fell off, I loved it that much. It was a complete 180 in that I had never thought about teaching in the profession and then once I got into it, at the time, I couldn’t imagine doing anything different (I1:G:72-77).

Garth shared his perspective that he always respected teaching as a profession and was influenced by the opportunities provided by his teachers. He stated, “I always respected and revered teachers in that I respected them as the authority. I’ve always been inspired by teachers and I always loved opportunities to be inspired (I1:G: 60-62) and continued “I thought it was an honorable profession” (I1:G:66).

Influence of Teachers

Two participants did not have any prior agricultural education or FFA experience but chose agricultural education once they entered college in the pre-veterinarian track. Terri admitted, “I came to NC State with the intention of going the pre-vet route and going to vet school” (I1:T: 34-35). However she felt as though that career path was not for her as she wanted to be married and not be on call as a veterinarian. She continued by saying,
Over the summer break of my freshman year, I talked to my parents and told them I couldn’t see myself going the vet route being on call 24/7… I started thinking about my options of what I could do that I could take a lot of my animal science classes to teach others. The reason why that came about was I always enjoyed teaching people. I did things like that in high school. (II:T: 40-47).

Terri’s mom was also an English teacher, who had a big influence in her decision to choose teaching. She “knew growing up that it was a lot of work in terms of there was always something going on, meetings, grading papers, planning lessons” (II:T:68-70) because, while growing up, she helped her mom in her classroom.

Dolly was also never exposed to agricultural education in high school. Her plan was to be a veterinarian as well. She said, “I actually got into vet school but when I got ready to graduate from my undergrad, I was burnout. I had this fall back plan that I wanted to teach.” (II:D: 36-38). She met many people in her undergraduate degree program that were in the agricultural education program and felt it would be a natural fit for her interests. She also felt she had the natural ability to teach. She said, “It was something that was a natural gift. I believe God gives us talents and teaching has been a natural thing for me.” (II: D: 49-50).

While she may not have had the influence of an agriculture teacher, her decision was influenced by other teachers in her life. She said, “I had some great teachers in middle school and high school that influenced my decision” (II:D:59) and she also said, “I have always felt like a teacher builds the foundation of who you want to be” (II:D:62).

The participants reflected upon their perspectives they had of teachers and the teaching profession before entering their own classroom. Each participant respected the
teaching profession and teachers in general, and knew it could be rewarding, as well as
demanding. Willy stated “I thought [teachers] had a tough job to be totally honest”
(I1:W:49). He continued and stated,

I thought that was something everybody deals with and since everybody deals with it,
then it is something I could overcome. I thought teachers as a whole had a rewarding
job and I guess I was looking for something that was going to be rewarding in that
respect. It wasn’t about money for me, it never has been (I1:W:52-57).

Because Willy was chosen as a NC Teaching Fellows, he felt he “had the world in the
palm of his hand” (I1:W:58). He continued by stating, “I thought I could make miraculous
changes as a teacher and make it different and all those cliché things we hear about. I was
starry eyed about it all.” (I1:W:60-62).

With the influence of her mom being a teacher while growing up, Terri also knew
teaching could be a challenging, yet rewarding career to choose. She stated,

I knew there was a lot involved but I also knew it was very rewarding hearing my
mom tell stories of how kids got something or she saw kids who struggled…I was
aware of having different types of [students] in a classroom and the struggle it may
entail having to adapt (I1:T: 73-78).

Once she entered agricultural education in college, she started learning about the parts
such as the three circle model and admitted “I knew it was going to be time consuming but
you were going to develop good relationships with your kids” (I1: T: 84-85).

*Impact of student teaching*
Prior to entering their very own classroom as an agriculture teacher, each of the participants shared experiences of how their student teaching experience influenced their first year as a beginning teacher. Some felt their student teaching experience prepared them thoroughly, while others felt it was an unrealistic view of the real-world they would soon experience as a first year teacher.

Dolly described her student teaching experience as one that influenced the way she ultimately handled her first year of teaching. She stated, “I would not trade that experience for the world. I had an awesome cooperating teacher who was such a huge influence on things I later did in my own classroom and how I handled classroom management” (I1:D: 78-80).

Reba echoed this positive experience and stated,

I had a wonderful [cooperating] teacher when I was student teaching. I would say that your student teaching experience is critical to your impressions and abilities to make it through your first survival year. Having a good mentor and receiving good, constructive criticism as well as encouragement from someone who has been in the trenches for a while is very critical to the success of a first year teacher (I1:R:54-58).

While Terri agreed that her student teaching experience was beneficial and that she learned a lot from her cooperating teacher, she also felt it would have been helpful to have completed her student teaching experience in a program that was not quite so established, because she had to start a new program as a first year teacher. She felt it was beneficial to see how the FFA chapter and greenhouses were operated and how the teacher completed various activities as an agriculture teacher. However, she admitted, “It would have been helpful to
see a new program starting up because I didn’t know I would be starting a new program” (I1:T: 343-345). She also felt as though the activities and lesson she created in her student teaching experience were also beneficial in her first year teaching. In regards to her first year teaching, she stated,

I wasn’t having to create anything new on top of having to get used to the schedule. I pulled a lot of things from [cooperating teacher] in terms of how she organized her classroom, how she was able to get things done. I got to see how it was like to have a [teaching assistant] (TA) and how you use a TA. I think it really helped me establish my own classroom, how to make it run well. I pulled a lot of things like how she wrote her objectives on the board or the question of the day. I used a lot of her stuff because it worked and it was convenient. It was great to be able to walk into a classroom and have stuff already prepared (I1:T: 361-368).

To further echo the importance of how the student teaching experience influences a first year teacher’s success, Garth stated, “I think had it not been for such a great student teaching experience, I would have been more leery when I got to teach on my own” (I1:G:146-147). He student taught with a teacher who he described as “what an ag teacher should be like, this is how you’re going to do it hands-on” (I1: G:153). He learned a great deal about classroom discipline from his cooperating teacher and stated, “I think a lot of success that I pulled off in my short experience was because of what I learned during that experience” (I1:G:154-156). He continued by stating, “I think the experience I had there was crucial to my success as a teacher, especially being by myself” (I1:G:165-166).
Willy shared that he felt his student teaching experience was not an accurate portrayal of the reality of teaching. He described it as an experience “that was laid out for me” (I1:W:460). He continued and stated,

   The principal wanted to paint the rosiest picture she could of her school and the kids were handpicked…it spoiled me. I did have discipline problems, but I was spoiled in my situation because they set it up so I wouldn’t fail (I1:W:460-463).

He admits that if he could go back and do it all over again, he would have chosen another school to student teach at to gain a more realistic perspective of the real-world of teaching.

**Growing Pains of the First Year**

   Each of the seven participants shared various experiences of their first year as an agriculture teacher. Unfortunately, most of the experiences they described were negative and left a lasting impact on their perception as a beginning agriculture teacher.

   When asked to describe their first year of teaching, all seven participants had similar feelings to share of it being a horrible experience. When asked to share their first year experiences with me, the four female participants responded emphatically with statements such as, “O man! It was terrible” (I1:C:66), “It was very stressful” (I1:T:107), “Girl, the struggle was real…they nailed me to the wall” (I1:R:110-115), and “Have you ever heard the term baptism by fire. It was absolutely the worst experience of my life” (I1:D:186-187).

   While the three male participants were not as emotional in their responses, they did, however, share similar experiences. Garth stated, “My first year of teaching was up and
down” (I1:G:88) and Willy stated, “My first year as an educator, I really couldn’t get out of that college funk” (I1:W:95-96).

Carrie entered her first teaching job in January which was the middle of the school year. She replaced a male teacher who had been teaching there for many years prior. The program was an agricultural mechanics program, which she was not prepared to teach. The teacher left the semester prior and did not tell the students he was leaving. When the students returned from winter break, they were not very accepting of her stepping in his place. She stated,

I caught a lot of resistance from his level two students that had him before. I had one class with 12 boys and no girls. That was really difficult for me because I didn’t know the curriculum and was fighting his teaching styles. He was a completely different type of teacher. The classroom management was completely different, especially his approach to lab safety. It was hard (I1:C:70-75).

Not only was Carrie juggling the classroom responsibilities being a teacher calls for, she also had some personal issues that were weighing on her as well. Carrie shared another reason why her first semester as a beginning teacher was particularly difficult was that her mother was fighting breast cancer and she was planning her wedding. She described going through the experience as “It was a very overwhelming semester” (I1:C:79). In order to meet the challenge of teaching agricultural mechanics for the first time, she described how she would stay up all night watching videos and reading books or enlisting the help of the local Lowe’s guy and her dad to learn how to teach the material required in the class.
Terri described her first year of teaching as being stressful because of the amount of time she had to put into developing her lessons and building a new program. In addition to being a recent newlywed, she spent a lot of extra time outside of the classroom preparing for lessons and learning new content. She felt as though there was a large time commitment that was required to stay ahead in the job. She stated,

I spent about 90% of my time with schoolwork. I got to school early, I worked all day, I taught my three classes, I went to meetings, I graded papers, then I came home. Some days it was hard to start the day teaching prepared. Some days I would get a day ahead, but some classes I was planning day by day (I1:T:113-116).

She felt as though this time commitment was taking away from her ability to be wife to her new husband. She stated, “I wasn’t giving him time and I was dragging him to certain things I had to do outside of school time and on the weekends” (I1:T:215-216).

Reba realized her first year of teaching was going to be more difficult than what she first thought it would be. She gained a new respect for what her teachers had gone through as she also “realized how much time, effort, and patience is involved in managing the classroom in addition to managing a unique program like what we have in agricultural education” (I1:R:75-77). She tried to stay positive during her first year, even though the negativity from other teachers could have influenced her mentality. However, she had many positive influences that helped her through her first year. She described her first year teaching as a “juggling act” (I1:R:84). Reba expected to enter her first year and “hit the ground running and see results immediately” (I1:R:89-90). She also compared teaching to running a marathon. She stated,
Teaching is like a marathon and not a sprint. I thought I would go in and immediately make an impact with the kids and I would have kids if they were failing, they would want to step up in my class and do their work. That doesn’t happen right off the bat. That takes time and years (I1:R:90-93).

She continued and stated,

I thought I would have a classroom full of kids who were like me, who want to be successful, who were driven to better themselves. That is not necessarily the case. A lot of students bring additional challenges to a classroom (I1:R:96-100).

She felt her first year was so bad that she reflected her own feelings and said, “That first month, I would get up be like ‘what am I doing with my life?’ Every day I feel like I am failing” (I1:R:117-118). It was hard for Reba to feel this way because she was such a driven person. She described crying many tears on her husband’s shoulder trying to figure out how to survive her first year.

While Dolly also had a bad experience during her first year of teaching, it was for different reasons than Reba, Terri, and Carrie. Like most first year teachers, Dolly was assigned a teaching mentor as a first year teacher. This person was supposed to be supportive and a resource for new teachers to depend on during their first year. However, Dolly’s mentor teacher was just the opposite of supportive and had a huge influence in her negative experience. This mentor teacher was the other agriculture teacher who had been the single teacher in the department for 22 years. Dolly described how her mentor had unrealistic expectations of her as a first year teacher and their personalities did not match up. Dolly began to develop great relationships with the students in the program and felt as though the
mentor teacher became jealous. She stated, in regards to the experience with her mentor, “In fact, she put me in the hospital. I had to wear a heart monitor for months because I was so stressed with my job. I absolutely hated it” (I1:D:198-199). Thankfully, Dolly had another support system throughout her first year in other teachers. She relied greatly on these other teachers for support and found a way to help her survive. She stated, “They really were trying their best to help me survive that first year” (I1:D:207-208). She resigned after her first year but she admitted, “It didn’t jade me bad enough that I didn’t ever return to the classroom. But it was a horrible, horrible experience for a year” (I1:D:213-214). While the experience didn’t change her perspective of teaching, it did change her perspective of teachers. She stated, “The longer you’re in teaching, the more you realize that not everyone is in there for the good of the students” (I1:222-223).

Garth described his first year as having its ups and downs (I1:G:88). He was 21 years old when he agreed to take his first teaching job that was an ultimatum of either him accepting the position or the program would be closed. Other than this challenge, he felt as though he was prepared for the most part to be a teacher. He stated, I think I was prepared for the FFA aspects of teaching, I was decently prepared for the teaching portion, I was not prepared for the discipline side of things, rather disciplining students, handling classroom management, special needs students, and writing IEP’s (I1:G:90-93).

He felt the hardest part of his first year was handling the issue of keeping the program alive. He stated, “I wasn’t only battling my first year of teaching, but I was fighting for the program from the get-go” (I1:G:105-106). He knew the challenge going into the position, and he was
willing to do what he needed to do to make the program successful. After being in the classroom his first year, he gained a deeper appreciation for his former teachers. He laughed and said,

I made it a point every time I went home…if I saw a former teacher of mine, I would give them a hug and apologize for anything I did in their classroom. I definitely had a deeper appreciation for teachers and the everyday stuff they have to deal with (I1:G:114-118).

Garth admitted that the job was tough and required a lot of extra time and effort put into a successful agriculture program. He stated, “I think after that first year, my perception had changed and I knew if I wanted to keep doing it, I was going to have to change how I was doing it” (I1:G:126-128).

Tim went back to his home high school to take his first teaching position and entered in the middle of the school year after leaving a job in the industry. He had originally not planned on teaching after his student teaching experience. However, he made the decision when the opportunity came to replace his previous agriculture teacher upon retirement. However, with a retiring teacher, also came the challenge of change. He also felt a struggle during his first year with administration. He said, “It seems like the administration didn’t have faith in you or that your students were out to get you” (I1:TM:93-94).

Willy accepted his first teaching position with the fear of North Carolina Teaching Fellows coming to knock on his door requiring him to repay the $26,000 loan that led him to the career path of becoming an educator in the first place. He accepted the first job that was offered to him without researching the position or the community it was a part. Willy moved
three hours away from home and felt all alone after accepting his first teaching position. Willy also shared an experience that influenced his first year of teaching greatly and that was the passing of his father during his senior year of college. Along with the passing of his dad, the transition and moving away from home, coupled with the stress as a first year teacher, Willy said, “I really couldn’t get out of that college funk” (I1:W:95-96). His first year of teaching was “wearing on my health” (I1: W:104). He continues to deal with these health problems to this day.

Willy also described how he didn’t have an understanding of the administrative/teacher relationship coming out of college. He said, “We were taught basic teaching theory and how to teach. We weren’t taught how to work with other people in a lot of ways” (I1:W:110-111). He described his principal as someone that made his first year a horrible experience. He said, “My principal rode me really hard that first year and put me in a funk. It put me in a depression. I was in a very dark place for the last half of that year” (I1:W:124-126). Willy shared an emotional story as he described overhearing a conversation in the teacher’s lounge between his principal and vocational director. He said, “I was walking to the teacher’s lounge and when I got to the door, I could hear [principal] telling my vocational director that he was ready to go ahead and let me go and I was one semester in” (I2:W:44-45). He said that he “turned around, went back to his office and cried” (I2:W:57-58). His first year experience was the reason why he chose to move schools when the opportunity arose. During his first year, his perception of teaching started to change. He said, “I started to question is this what I wanted to do for the rest of my life, is this really what I want to put up with” (I1:W:161-163)? It was then that he started to question whether he made
the right decision to choose teaching as a career path. Willy reflected and said, “I would have
rather sat out a year and worked at TGIF than have had to have gone through what I did that
first year because who knows how things would have turned out?” (I1:W:485-487).

**Reality of the Classroom**

Each of the seven participants described many positive and negative experiences of
their time in the agriculture classroom. While all participants described an overall love of
teaching, love of the agricultural education and FFA components, and love for their students,
they also shared there is a greater reality to the classroom that presented itself after entering
their very own teaching position. Each of the participants described their reality through
unique stories and experiences while they were teaching.

The theme, “Reality of the Classroom” emerged as a larger category as the
participants described a variety of experiences they shared. This category has four sub-
themes: Love of Teaching, Frustrations, Age & Gender Influences, and Unique Occurrences.

**Love of Teaching**

All seven participants spoke about how much they loved teaching when they were
able to teach. It was abundantly clear that all former teachers truly enjoyed and were
passionate about teaching their students and found reward throughout their teaching career.
Participants spoke fondly of their students and sharing their love for teaching the subject of
agriculture. The participants identified helping students succeed, building positive
relationships with students, and providing opportunities for students as a reward in teaching.
Reba said,
I am an agriculture teacher because I am passionate about the agriculture industry, but I am first and foremost a teacher of students. That was the best part of my job was seeing them grow and achieve and being involved in the organization that I loved and was so passionate about growing up (I1:R:156-160).

Reba also admitted, “Even to this day, with my current job, I tell people I really miss my kids. I miss the relationships I built with my students” (I1:R:155-156). Carrie echoed the reward she found in building relationships with her students. She stated, “[I enjoyed] bonding with students and seeing students that didn’t really feel like they could do anything or achieve something just because their family had never done it” (I1:C:164-166). She continued and stated, “I loved the FFA aspect, the camps and conferences that provided opportunities for students to grow in their personalities and leadership skills” (I1:C:170-171).

Garth shared that his love of teaching and rewards also came from his students. In describing a reward, he said, “I had outstanding kids, that really worked hard...to see the kids in this setting that otherwise normally would not achieve but started believing in something and creating success for themselves” (I1:G:243-245). Garth also felt agricultural education is unique in that it gives a teacher the opportunity to see a student grow and develop over four years. He described another rewarding experience came from getting a freshman student in ninth grade and four years later, watching him become a state FFA officer. Another reason Garth felt agricultural education offered unique rewards is because of the opportunity for students to be engaged in afterschool activities such as competitions. He described a past experience with a student that was from a bad family and had become involved in the FFA to “take her mind off of going home” (I2:G:19). Her mother never showed interest in her
schoolwork and she had to always find a ride home because her mom would not pick her up. She participated in the creed speaking contest and won state. Upon arriving back to school, her mom was there waiting on her. He said, “It was something for her mom to take pride in something for her” (I2:G:20). He described the moment as “One of those warm and fuzzy moments. She wasn’t expecting her mom to be there but her mom actually took the time to pick her up and tell her she was happy for her” (I2:G:25-26).

Dolly also reflected back upon her love of teaching agriculture and the love she had for building relationships with her students. She continued to maintain some of those relationships to this day and felt they were rewarding even now. She stated,

To think six years after I have left, I still have contact; even after all of those frustrations that happened then, there is still a reward now. They still considered me an important part of who they had become that they thought to invite me to their high school graduation (I1:D:249-252).

Dolly also felt that while she may have had an impact on her students, she felt as though they impacted her as well. She stated, “The connection you make with your students, not just the way you impact their lives but how they impact yours” (I2:D:8-9).

Terri had the experience of seeing her mom as a teacher to know that the teaching profession could be a very rewarding experience. Like Garth, Dolly, Carrie and Reba, she, too, found her own rewards and love for the profession in the two years she was in the classroom through her students. She reflected upon the positive relationships she had with them and how she continues to stay in touch with a few of them. She felt as though she also left the teaching profession on a good note because one of her students asked her to write a
college recommendation letter for her. She felt this was special because she had not taught the student but for two years. She said, “That spoke volumes to me, especially being a young teacher, not having taught her for long” (I2:T:17-18). While she also loved teaching and spoke passionately about teaching agriculture, it was ultimately the pressures from administration and the decision to have a family that influenced her away from the profession.

Tim also shared a passion for teaching and having an impact on his students. He truly enjoyed the agricultural mechanics curriculum that he taught because of the opportunity for students to learn hands-on. He said,

Because I was an ag mechanics teacher, I got to do a lot of hands-on things such as building projects and help the students. So, I miss that aspect of it. I miss the learning by doing aspect, that was pretty fun (I1:TM:178-180).

He reflected back on times when he would see former students who would share stories of the impact he did have on them. He said,

Some of the good parts of it were students I would run into. They would say, ‘I laughed at you when you told me something, I thought you were joking, but what I learned in your class, I am doing it right now and I am earning good money.’ Hearing those stories and seeing kids succeed in FFA competitions was good (I1:TM:115-119).

Frustrations

All seven participants discussed various frustrations they encountered during their teaching experience. Several participants talked about administrators being the biggest source
of frustration while others mentioned the bureaucracy of education and poor salary. Some participants had very supportive administrators while others felt their administration was not supportive, and even critical of their teaching practices.

Dolly experienced frustration during her first year as her agriculture class was considered a “dumping ground” (I1:D:134) for students because she felt as though the administration “did not understand what agricultural education was” (I1:D:135-136). She spent time educating her administrators about her expectations for her classes and her students, and stated, “Once we got on the same page, my classes were cream of crop students” (I1:D:138-139). She also felt as though the education profession can be political and is easily manipulated to “the best interest of whatever power is in control at the time” (I1:D:84-85). She began to see money was influenced by politics and this was a source of frustration to her because “teachers don’t have the freedom to do what they need to do in their classroom to be successful” (I1:D:91-92).

Carrie and Reba also echoed that the bureaucracy of education was a source of frustration. Carrie described how her school administration would implement different rules and policies that affected all students and groups differently. In describing a story about an activity at NC FFA Camp, her administration required that her students not be allowed to go swimming at FFA camp because of the actions of another school and student group. She said, “The school district was all the time making blanket policies when it doesn’t need to apply to more than one group” (I1:C:179-180). She also described the requirements and influence of high-stakes testing had on her teaching as another source of frustration. However, Reba’s frustration came in the form of “paperwork tasks outside was I was set to do to prepare for
my class” (I1:R:154-155). She also laughed and stated, “I felt like I had to fill out a form to go to the bathroom. Every time I turned around they wanted this paperwork or that paperwork, for us to go or do anything” (I1:R:165-167). With agriculture teachers having such a unique set of needs with equipment and trips, this proved to be difficult and was a huge source of frustration for her. Reba also spent a lot of time educating her principal about the unique needs and opportunities in agricultural education. However, because her school was in the middle of an urban city, her principal “did not understand why we had an agriculture program” (I1:R:173-174). She also felt frustrated with the political influences involved in education. She said,

I wanted to be in my classroom working on stuff that was pertinent to my job and not sitting there while they roll out some new initiative we would never see the end result of. That was always a frustration for me. I needed that time in my classroom, and didn’t understand why they were taking it away from me (I1:R:181-184).

Willy also described administration and the bureaucracy of education as being a large source of frustration to him as well. He felt there was too much emphasis placed on high-stakes testing by his administrators. During his first year of teaching, Willy described how he overheard his principal in the teacher’s lounge telling someone he “was ready to go ahead and let me go” (I2:W:45). He felt this had a lot to do with the fact that his VoCATS (Vocational Competency Achievement Tracking System) scores were not high enough his first semester. Willy also felt that his principal criticized much of the work he did during his first year. His principal criticized his plant sales revenue along with classroom management techniques. Willy described a situation where the principal did not support him for
disciplining a student and was instead, reprimanded in front of the student and parent. He stated, “He reprimanded her for [discipline] but he also reprimanded me in front of the parent and the student about not giving her paper and I had to apologize while in the office for that” (I2:W:142-143). He said,

When you get hit with a lot of discipline issues, combined with lack of support from administration, combined with everything else, it made for this perfect little cocktail of anger and frustration and depression, all rolled up together that put me in a funk that first year (I1:W:174-177).

Tim echoed frustrations in regards to the bureaucracy of education. He became very frustrated with the emphasis that was put on standardized testing in his school and felt as though he was “teaching to the test” (I1:TM: 108). He also became frustrated with the amount of time and effort he was working and felt that his salary was not reflective of the time he put into his job. He said, “I was fed up with the amount of work we had to do… It made it frustrating when you are doing all this extra work and weren’t getting anything out of it” (I1:TM:185-189).

Terri’s frustrations as a beginning teacher came because she was starting a new program from the ground up. She also felt like she did not receive much support from her administration during this process. She also described the time commitment to teaching in fulfilling responsibilities as something that developed into a frustration because she felt as though she needed to be spending time with her husband. She stated, “Feeling like you always had something to do other than just teaching and preparing for classes. The extra part
of being a teacher, being involved in the school and the other duties that came along” (I1:T:203-205).

Garth felt his frustrations came from his administration constantly giving him new benchmarks to achieve, or they threatened to close the program out from under him. He was first charged with doubling the enrollment of the program by the end of his first year. He not only met this charge, but he exceeded it. He described “having more kids signing up for ag classes than I was able to teach” (I1:G:252-253). With this growth, his administration continued to make him feel it “wasn’t good enough” (I1:G:255). The second source of frustration came from the administration moving his classroom from the converted auto-mechanics shop and put him in an old English classroom in the main part of the school building. He described having no space for tools and equipment, along with converting a trophy case into a tilapia tank and no space for the ducks and chickens. He also felt “constant micromanagement” (I1:G:268) from the administration. He said, “They were trying to take my legs out from underneath me at every turn, which led to the feeling of bobbing for air and fighting uphill the entire time” (I1:G:271-273).

Age & Gender Influences

All seven participants shared that they felt the age they were upon entering their first classroom had a great impact on the experiences of their teaching career. Dolly was the oldest of the participants at 23 years of age when she entered her teaching career. Carrie was 22 years old and the rest were all age 21 when they started teaching. Reba had the realization that she was actually younger than one of her students because he was still in school at the age of 21. Garth shared that one of his students refused to call him by his last name and
would only refer to him as “Garth.” While he claimed it was not in a disrespectful way, he admitted looking back on the situation, “it did seem a bit odd” (I2:G:57). Garth also felt as though his young age had more of an impact in the way his administrators and other teachers treated him, rather than his students.

Carrie’s first teaching job was in the same home town in which she grew up, therefore, she reflected on stories of teaching students that she babysat. She stated, “I was only four years older than they were. That was weird too trying to instruct people that I had actually grown up with” (I2:C:73-74). She recalled students asked her about drinking alcohol and they tried to tell her stuff that she really did not need to know about as a teacher, trying to be a professional. She also said, “I think it is because they see you as close to their age, so she knows what I am going through or get better advice because she knows what I am going through” (I2:C: 87-88).

Willy echoed the fact that he was only four years older than most of his students during his first year and this proved to be challenging for him. He said, “I couldn’t be confident in what I was saying and justified in the classroom because of [age]. It was very intimidating to someone fresh out of college” (I2:W:154-156).

While the female participants shared similar experiences of being put into situations with male students that made them feel uncomfortable, one male participant also shared a story about a female student as well. This uncomfortable feeling resonated with all four of the female participants because they felt as though they were young, attractive females in a classroom environment with male students. Terri, Dolly and Carrie had one class of all male students their first year of teaching. Carrie described her experience of having all male
students in an agricultural mechanics classroom and feeling less confident about the curriculum because the male students “knew so much more about mechanics” (I2:C:67) than she did.

Terri’s experience was different than Carrie’s because Terri’s classroom was outside the main school building, in a portable trailer. She said, “I felt uncomfortable being in a classroom, in a trailer, outside of the school building with a bunch of guys. I felt like it could be a set up for a bad situation” (I2:T:115-117). She specifically described a situation with one student who made her feel very uncomfortable because he was “very flirtatious” (I2:T:102). While she approached her administration and guidance counselors about it, there was nothing done to alleviate the situation.

Dolly shared Terri and Carrie’s perspective on the challenges of being a female agriculture teacher. She too, like Terri, reflected on stories of older male students who made sexual gestures to her. She said, “As a teacher, no one prepares you for this. If something like this happens, this is what you do…the insinuation is if you don’t do anything, it can mark you for the rest of your career” (I2:D:93-97).

Tim shared a similar story of how a female student accused him of making an obscene gesture about her that required him to defend to his administration. He felt this was something unnecessary he had to deal with and was an uncalled for action by the female student.

*Unique Occurrences*

For three of the participants, they reflected and shared stories of incidents that involved their own personal safety or health that stood out to them during their teaching
career. These types of occurrences had either impacted their immediate safety or were a health concern at some point during their experience as a teacher.

Garth described an incident during his first year when a student pulled a knife on him. He stated,

I had been teaching for three weeks when a student pulled a knife on me in the classroom and said ‘I’m going to cut you.’ At that moment, I didn’t know what to do.

No one ever said if a kid pulled a knife, this is what you do (I1:G:174-177).

He also went on to describe how he learned to diffuse those situations but he also admitted “I wasn’t prepared for those types of challenges” (I1:G:186-187).

Terri described a situation where she had a special needs student in her classroom who became visibly upset during a storm. She felt unsafe as he had a history of becoming violent, and throwing desks during an episode of anger. She described how the student became visibly upset during the storm so she called for the principal. She said,

I just knew he was going to throw a desk. There were really good days and a lot of really bad days. I dreaded that one class because of that student. I never knew what he was going to be like. I never knew what he was going to bring into class each day.

That was a hard thing to go through” (I2:T:87-91).

Dolly became physically ill during her first year of teaching and had to wear a heart monitor because of the experience she encountered with her mentor teacher. Due to the pressure and stress from his administration, Willy also experienced depression during his first year that influenced his career as a beginning teacher.
Not only did Dolly encounter health issues, Dolly was also assaulted by a student during a subsequent year in the classroom. She described how she was in the parking lot on bus duty one morning and needed to confront a student from the alternative school who was misbehaving. She stated,

I told him to get back to where he was supposed to be. Little did I know, this certain student had no respect for women, especially women in authority. In a split second, he was in my face telling me I had no right to tell him what to do and he hit me (I2:D: 61-64).

She went on to say that the student was arrested and charges were later filed by the school resource officer for the incident.

**Influences to Leave**

When asked to describe factors that influenced them to leave the agriculture classroom, the majority of participants shared multiple reasons for making their decision. Each of the participants described how making the decision to leave was hard, but also shared various internal and external influences that helped them make the ultimate decision.

For all of the participants, making the decision to leave the classroom was difficult. There were many factors that played a role in them deciding to leave. However, they also unanimously agreed there was not much that could have influenced their decision to stay at that specific time in their lives. For Terri and Carrie, having children and starting their own family was a huge factor. Terri felt “convicted that I wasn’t giving my family life as much time as I was giving my career” (I1:T:219-220). Terri got pregnant during April of her
second year, and she and her husband agreed they wanted her to stay at home to raise their child for a few years. For Terri, leaving the agriculture classroom had nothing to do with not liking teaching itself and it didn’t really have anything to do with the frustrations and stress and negativities, it didn’t pull me entirely other than the fact that my time was a huge concern for me…I felt like having a child should be my number one priority, husband first, then child. I wanted to be there for them, and I couldn’t see how that would work if I kept teaching (I1:T:234-240).

Carrie’s decision was influenced by personal and family reasons to leave the classroom as well. However, she hopes to return to the agriculture classroom soon as she still considers herself an agriculture teacher. During her last year of teaching, she got pregnant with her second child very soon after she had her first. She and her husband analyzed their family budget, adding paying a babysitter for two children, and realized that they could live without her salary as a teacher in order for her to stay at home with their children. Her mother was also battling breast cancer, which was another contributing factor to her decision to leave when she did.

Reba also loved teaching and really struggled making the right decision to leave. However, she admitted she was “burned out” (I1:R:194). She described coming into her first teaching job “full throttle, trying to change the program” (I1:R:194-195). She felt unappreciated by her teaching partner and had begun looking into returning to graduate school to pursue a higher degree in agricultural education. She believed “God has a plan for us and He leads us in different directions and we have to trust Him” (I1:R: 217-218). She left her classroom and accepted an “attractive assistantship and a unique opportunity” (I1:R:210-
to work on her Master’s degree as well as intern at the company she now works for. She agonized over the decision and cried the day she left as she was so upset; however, she said, I knew I was making the right decision but it was hard. I didn’t quite feel ready to hand it over to someone else. But in the end, it was God’s providence and I still look back. It was a hard decision, but it was the right decision (I1:R:211-214)

Dolly and Garth both left initially to pursue the missionary field. However, upon returning from the mission, Dolly returned to the classroom for several more years while Garth joined the military and did not return. Garth admitted that he never expected to leave the classroom. He said, “I completely expected to be teaching into my 60’s and be that ag teacher that would be there for 30 years and teaching the rest of my life” (I1:G:80-81). However, he felt “worn out” (I1:G:276). Upon returning home from the mission field, Garth tried to find another teaching job, but he decided to join the military instead. He described his decision as, “It was a selfish decision and that was the only time finances came into play with me in teaching” (I1:G:294-295). At the time, marriage and starting a family influenced Garth into a career that would pay more. Garth also grew up in a military family and felt the need to serve his country. The United States had been attacked on September 11, 2001 and he felt the need to do something. He stated, “The country was at war and I needed to do something. My dad grew up in the military; he did his part and I needed to do mine” (I1:G:303-305). He intended to return to the classroom, but instead entered in the active duty position and is currently still serving. At times Garth does regret leaving the agriculture classroom. He stated “every day I was in Afghanistan and Qatar or somewhere else in the Middle East, all those
times I definitely regretted it especially because of my kids” (I1:G:310-312). Being deployed gave Garth a different perspective on teaching. He stated,

    When I was teaching, I was bobbing for air and it was super hard. But after multiple deployments and doing the job I do now, I would love to have that 8:30-3:30 work day and get to coach FFA teams and sports teams, I would love to do that (I1:G:318-321).

    Garth has enjoyed his time in the military and feels as though it has fulfilled his need for serving his country. Garth also admitted to thinking about teaching quite often and obtained a Master’s degree in education while in the military that could help him if he decided to return the education profession at some point. Garth also said there was nothing that could have influenced him to stay at the time he left to pursue the mission field, however he may not have left had he talked to his mentor teacher about the decision. His active duty is coming to an end and he is “sitting at a crossroads” (I1:G:353) deciding what to do. He most definitely is considering coming back to the agriculture classroom. He admitted the relationship with FFA is the reason he has considered coming back. He stated, “FFA has a way of pulling you back and so I think the fondness you have for it always pulls you back. For me, I definitely see it as an option” (I1:G:355-356).

    After returning from her mission trip in Australia, Dolly returned to the agriculture classroom for six and one-half more years. Dolly experienced an administrator that was not supportive, which ultimately led to her decision to leave the profession the second time. She talked about her current job, the possibility of returning again, and stated, “I currently have a home office, a state vehicle, a state gas card and I am doing something I actually love and
have a huge passion for. It just wasn’t worth it for me personally” (II:D:181-183). She continued and said,

There were some personal things going at the time that had a major influence on me leaving teaching, but not because I was unhappy with teaching but because it was a way to escape some things. Between that and not having the support of an administrator, opportunity to make more money, opportunity to try something new; it was hard (II:D: 259-263).

She said that she does miss teaching agriculture but does love her new career. She laughed and admitted that she does work less and makes more money in her current profession. While she is still educating people in her current profession, Dolly has the opportunity to reach a broader audience through hunter education all while teaching young people about hunting and the outdoors. She does admit “It was something I truly loved and if the right opportunity unfolded and the right circumstances existed, I would consider coming back” (II:D:287-289).

During his third year of teaching, Willy began to question whether he made the right career decision to enter agricultural education. He stated, “I could tell I was losing passion about teaching, so I understood where other teachers would come from when you have one of those teachers who looked burned out” (II:W:171-173). Willy also wanted to purse a Master’s degree which he was able to obtain without paying for, through his current job as an extension agent. He described how living three hours away from his hometown was a factor that influenced him to leave the classroom. When the extension agent position in his home county came open, he described it as a “blessing” (II:W:290). He continued and stated,
“Ultimately, the lure of being close to home, combined with the fact that I was going to be able to go back to graduate school without having to pay for it, that sealed the deal” (I1:W:297-298). He also said that he took a pay cut to take his current position but because he taught for exactly three and a half years, he did not have to repay the $26,000 NC Teaching Fellows scholarship.

Willy’s career goal is to teach again, however he described wanting to teach on the college level instead of the high school level. He did admit that with the uncertainty of job security in extension, he was unsure that he would still have a job in a few years. He continued and said,

My only option with my degree where I live right now, would be to go back to teach if the option is there. I can never say never. But, barring nothing unforeseen, I don’t want to have to step back in the classroom again if I can help it (I1:W:379-381).

Tim’s ultimate decision to leave the classroom was one based on bureaucratic influences in his school district and the need for better salary. He described how his school district hired a new superintendent who then proceeded to cut local funding from classroom teachers. He also described feeling very frustrated with the emphasis on testing and curriculum changes with the adoption of Common Core. However, he ultimately left to pursue a career in industry making significantly more money to support his family. He said,

From the time I started teaching six years ago, I averaged a $200 per year raise. I worked my butt off trying to succeed, never was late a day to work and very rarely did I ever take a sick day. It wasn’t worth the gratification (I1:TM:164-167).
Rear View Mirror: Looking Back

While making the decision to leave the agriculture classroom was a difficult decision for most participants, they all reflected upon their decision and described how they do not regret leaving. They each look back on things they could have done differently, however, they are able to enjoy many other things such as time with family, feeling of appreciation and flexibility since they have departed from the classroom. The participants reflected in two ways: giving advice to either beginning teachers or someone choosing to pursue a career in agricultural education and secondly, describing things they are able to enjoy since they left the classroom.

Advice to others

Reflecting back on their experiences, all seven participants shared their reflection in the form of advice to someone entering the profession. Reba felt that a new teacher has to understand that when they walk into their very own classroom, it will be different than all the training they have had up until the point of having their own classroom. However, she said, “You don’t have to be perfect, but don’t despair in that first year. Everybody has to learn” (I1:R: 282-283). She continued and said,

It is going to be completely different from your student teaching…but make it your own and hang in there. In the end, even on the most frustrating days, you have to look for successes. Acknowledge there are challenges and talk about solutions, but don’t allow yourself to wallow in being a failure. Pick yourself up and keep going (I1:R: 285-289).
She continued and said “You may not see the immediate change or immediate results, but at some point, you will look back and see what you have done has made a difference with your kids” (I1:R:290-292).

Garth and Carrie emphasized the importance of building a foundation in the classroom during the first year and allowing the other responsibilities to fall into place after that. Garth made this emphasis and stated, “You can model your program after a successful one but it is not going to happen in a day or in a year. It will take time…lay a solid foundation on the education piece” (I1:G:383-386). He continued and described how if a teacher builds a foundation for learning, the other pieces will follow. He stated, “In hindsight, if you build the solid foundation of good classroom instruction, blended with the hands-on learning, the true ag ed piece of teaching them knowledge and skills, if you do those things, the rest will fall into place (I1:G:389-392).

He described this as having balance because the knowledge piece completes the “puzzle” (I1:G:396). He also recommended beginning teachers should spend time making Supervised Agricultural Education (SAE) visits. He said this was critical for a new teacher to build this relationship to see how their students live, “to see where the students are coming from” (I1:G:406-407). He said that if a new teacher does not understand the importance of this piece, “they will miss out on an opportunity to reach their students on a different level” (I1:G:407-408).

Carrie emphasized the importance of building a foundation in the classroom and stated, “You have to pace yourself. Pick something you want to be good at and start there”
She also felt that if the classroom component is missing, the other pieces will be missing as well. She further emphasized this and stated,

If the class is organized and the kids enjoy that, then they will follow you to other activities. If your classroom stuff is incompetent and unorganized, and they aren’t learning anything in the classroom, why are they going to give you more time? You have to get your classroom in order first and then your curriculum, then you can add things.

Carrie continued and said, “You can’t do everything even when you are really good at it” (II:C:257). Terri echoed this. She felt as though teachers must find time for themselves or they will get burned out. She said, “As a first year teacher, you don’t want to say ‘no’ to anyone because you want to look like you want to help and be involved, but sometimes you just have to say ‘no’ to things” (II:T:326-328). Willy echoed this perspective as well and stated, “One thing I would say for beginning teachers is to not get in over your head” (II:W:510). Tim also shared, “Some days you are going to feel like you want to quit. But if you give it your all, and when the dust finally settles, you are still called to be here, then so be it” (II:TM:219-221).

Willy had a different perspective, looking back, on what he may do differently. His advice to a beginning teacher was to do a thorough job researching the position by seeking those in the school system and in the community to find out if it is a good fit. He felt as though he may have made a different decision entering his first position had he known what the administration would be like. He said,
There were a lot of people in the know about that job I took who knew the situation I was getting ready to walk into, but they bit their tongue because they didn’t want to discourage me from taking a job (I1:W:483-485).

Willy also emphasized the importance for new teachers to build a positive relationship and open communication lines with administration. He said, “You are going to make mistakes and if there is a good line of communication there, those mistakes won’t be taken as harshly as they would if there wasn’t” (I1:W:497-499).

**Things they enjoy now**

All seven participants chuckled a bit when reflecting upon things they are able to enjoy now more so than they did when they were teaching. Some of these items include more time with family, more money or even more flexibility with their current job.

Terri and Carrie both are stay-at-home mothers, so they are able to enjoy more time together with their children and spouses. Carrie reflected about the freedom she has during the summers as well. She said, “I stay at home with my children every day, we spend a lot of time together and I couldn’t have that if I was teaching…I have my summers free and I can go on vacations when we want” (I1:C:242-244). Terri echoed this feeling of freedom to spend time at home with her child during the day and ability to enjoy her nights with family. She reflected on her days in the classroom and said, “I would spend most of my nights as a teacher doing lesson plans, or grading papers” (I1:T:302-303).

For Garth and Tim, salary is something they both enjoy now. However, Tim admitted that he works about the same, if not more, hours than he did when he was teaching. He said, “I work the same hours as I did as a teacher especially those first few years. At the same
time, at least now if I work, I get paid” (I1:TM:211-212). Tim also feels as though his family enjoys a “higher standard of living” (I1:TM:203). He also feels that because he is making drastically more money, he is meeting more of his family’s needs.

Garth also agreed he enjoys the pay raise now in his current job with the military. Dolly also shared additional things such as a home office, state vehicle, gas card, and an increased salary, each being an advantage to her current job she enjoys now. She also is able to leave her work and feel as though she does not have to carry it with her home. She said, “I enjoy that when I’m off, I’m off.” (I1:D:315). She also laughed and stated, “I enjoy going to the grocery store and not everybody knowing my business” (I1:D:316-317).

Willy and Reba’s enjoyment comes from the freedom and flexibility their current jobs allow them throughout their daily schedule. As an extension agent, Willy described having flexibility to work as needed in the field, making visits, or in his office. Willy described how he did not like the constraints of being a teacher. He said, “I didn’t want to be constrained inside the school building itself. I didn’t like having to wait and know that a bell told me I had five minutes to go to the bathroom. I hated it, I despised it (I1:W:313-316). Willy also said that if his child is sick, he is able to stay at home more easily now, than when he was a teacher because of the responsibilities to secure a substitute and write lesson plans for the sub. While he does admit a county extension position has its share of political influences, he is able to delegate paperwork responsibilities to his secretary. Willy took a significant pay cut when he accepted his new position, however, he believes the freedom and flexibility he currently has is worth the difference in pay.
Willy also described how he feels more recognized and appreciated now as an extension agent. He also attributed this recognition as helping him become more confident in his job as an agent compared to being a teacher. He said, “My confidence as an extension agent compared to being an ag teacher is a million times stronger because I have been able to find success in this job that I didn’t find in teaching” (I1:W:410-412). He felt teachers do not get thanked enough for what they do. He gets constant feedback from the administration in extension which has helped him pinpoint areas for improvement. He also said, “I am a face in my community because of my job now. Because of that I get appreciation from outside of my job” (I1:W:420-422). He continued and stated,

I feel important. I didn’t as an ag teacher. I felt like I was just a face in the crowd when I was an ag teacher. I don’t feel that way as an extension agent. I feel very valued, and important and appreciated” (I1:W:423-426).

Reba shared this feeling of value as something she is able to enjoy as well in her current job. Her daily schedule is also flexible and she enjoys being able to “call up a client or friend, and go eat lunch” (I1:R:264). She also described how she feels like more of a professional in her position. She said, “I feel like I am treated more like a professional in my current job than I was teaching…I don’t feel like the administration is looking over my shoulder to make sure I am doing my job” (I1:R:265-268). She continued and stated, “I felt like at school, I was being constantly micro-managed for the tests…I felt like I was under a microscope a lot” (I1:R:270-272). Reba also mentioned the ability to spend more time with her husband, family and friends as something she is able to enjoy now as well.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study sought the perspectives of former secondary agriculture teachers about their experiences in the classroom and their decision to leave the teaching profession. The participants in this study had more than two years of teaching experience, but less than ten years, upon exiting. Using the research objectives as a lens through which to view the data, it is evident that these former teachers loved their job as a teacher, viewed the relationships with their students as having an impact on them and credited various frustrations and family responsibilities as being the ultimate reason for leaving the classroom.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the journey of former secondary agricultural educators that lead them to leave within ten years of entering the profession. The following objectives were developed to guide this study:

1. Identify reasons former secondary agriculture teachers initially chose to pursue a career in agricultural education.
2. Describe the experiences of former agriculture teachers who left the profession.
3. Identify factors which influenced former teachers to leave the profession within their first ten years.
4. Identify factors which might influence former agriculture teachers to return to the profession.

Summary of Procedures

Phenomenological methods and techniques were used to conduct this research study. While this study cannot be generalized to other populations, it can serve to provide insight
into the phenomenon of teachers leaving the profession. Insight may also help the education profession develop innovative strategies to help meet the needs of beginning teachers.

Interview questions were developed and pilot tested with three former agriculture teachers in North Carolina during the spring of 2014. Data collection and analysis during the pilot study suggested changes in questions used in the final draft of the interview guide. Seven former North Carolina agriculture teachers were purposefully selected for this study. A foundation of Seidman’s (2006) three-interview approach was used to construct two interview sessions with each of the participants. Semi-structured and unstructured interviews were the primary source of data, while document analysis of quantitative surveys and literature served as a secondary source of data. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and transcripts were sent to participants as a part of member checking and trustworthiness criteria required of qualitative research. Data were coded and analyzed looking for common themes in the participants’ decision to leave profession.

**Summary of Findings**

**Research Objective 1: Identify reasons former secondary agriculture teachers initially chose to pursue a career in agricultural education.**

Overwhelmingly, it is concluded that the participants chose to become an agriculture teacher because of the influence another teacher had on them at some point in their life. Five of the seven participants had an influence of choosing to become an agriculture teacher because of their involvement in agricultural education and the FFA organization during high school. All five of these participants said they were or became heavily involved in activities because their teacher took the time to invest in them as students. For Reba and Carrie,
specifically, the impact their high school agriculture teachers had on them as students had a large influence on their decision to become agriculture teachers. Garth wasn’t as involved in his high school FFA chapter until his senior year, when his advisor charged him with the duty of training a CDE team. It was then he realized he wanted to continue to have that impact.

Two of the seven participants were not involved in agricultural education prior to entering it in college. Terri and Dolly both wanted to pursue a career in veterinary science after high school and were accepted to the North Carolina State veterinary science programs. However, they both changed their mind and decided veterinary life was not for them. Terri had the influence of her mother who was also a teacher and Dolly had the influence of a former teacher in high school. Terri knew she wanted to have a family and could not handle being on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week as a veterinarian. Dolly echoed this and described being burned out before she graduated. They both felt they could use their animal science backgrounds and coursework to then pursue a career as an agriculture teacher.

**Research Objective 2: Describe the experiences of former agriculture teachers who left the profession.**

It can be concluded while the experiences of these first year teachers are difficult, they each came back for a second year. Each of the seven participants shared some similar, as well as different, experiences throughout their time in the classroom. Each participant described their student teaching experience and the positive as well as negative impact it had on their first year as a beginning teacher. Willy felt his student teaching experience was nearly perfect, lending to an unrealistic view and unrealistic expectations as a first year
teacher. However, the others agreed that they learned a great deal that had a positive impact on their success as a beginning teacher during their student teaching experience.

Each participant shared a negative experience during their first year of teaching. They described the experience with a variety of terms such as “baptism by fire” (I1:D) and “terrible” (I1:C). The participants shared a variety of reasons as to why their first year was so difficult. However, lack of administrative support, bureaucracy of education, and personal issues were among the reasons for the majority. The female participants reflected upon having classes with all males and teaching curriculum in which they were unfamiliar which made for such a difficult year. Four of the seven participants also shared experiences in which they felt unsafe or they became ill because of issues during their first year of teaching. In Garth’s case, a student pulled a knife on him during class and threatened to harm him. During her first year, Dolly also became so stressed from her mentor teacher who was assigned to her, that she was admitted to the hospital and wore a heart monitor. During a subsequent year, Dolly was also assaulted by a male student. Because of the stress and criticism of his principal, Willy became depressed and described how he was in a “dark place” (I1:W).

While all seven participants experienced their share of frustrations, they also found rewards in their experiences. Each of them reflected upon their students as a rewarding aspect of the teaching profession. Several built lasting relationships with their students that they continue even to this day. They also found reward in the FFA and hands-on activities they were able to do with their students in and out of the classroom. They felt this is the part that helped students build connections to the classroom material they were teaching.
Age and gender also had an influence on the seven participants in some way. All participants described themselves as young when they entered their first teaching career. While they were out of college and had obtained a college degree and teaching certificate, this played no part in building their confidence as a beginning teacher. Classroom management and administration were among the biggest issues these young teachers faced and they felt they could not be confident in what they were doing as a teacher, making the everyday decisions for the multitude of responsibilities that come with being an agriculture teacher. Age also had an impact on the way their students viewed them as a beginning teacher. For several participants, students would ask and talk about inappropriate subjects. For a new teacher building rapport amongst faculty and the community, they struggled with handling this as a professional, never having encountered the situation before. For the females, being a younger female especially, proved challenging amongst their classes with all male students. They each described uncomfortable situations that happened during their teaching experiences that involved actions by their male students towards them. In addition to the females, one male participant also shared that a female student brought allegations against him, which were dissolved after he proved them false. He described this as a situation that should have never occurred and added stress to the existing responsibilities that he had.

**Research Objective 3: Identify factors which influenced former teachers to leave the profession within their first ten years.**

It can be concluded that there are various factors that influenced each of the former teacher’s decision to leave the agriculture teaching profession. While all participants left to either pursue another career field or stay at home with their children, they all shared either
how lack of administrative support, salary, or the bureaucracy of education played a major role in their decision to leave the classroom. For several, they felt unappreciated by their administration as an agriculture teacher. Two of the female participants left for family reasons. Both Carrie and Terri wanted to raise their children in the home and made the personal decision to leave the classroom for that priority. However, both reflect on the difficulty of the decision, but knew it was the right one at that time. Carrie still considers herself an agriculture teacher and hopes to return to the agriculture classroom one day when both of her children are in school. The other five participants left to pursue another career. They now are able to enjoy the flexibility and freedoms to spend with their families or are not constrained by the daily schedule of the high school classroom. Reba and Willy both enjoy flexibility of their daily schedule in their new careers. However, Willy took a pay cut to become an extension agent. He also feels as though the freedom and flexibility he has now is worth the difference in pay. For many of the participants who chose a new career path, they do feel as though salary was a big influence on their decision. While salary was a factor for Garth entering the military, it wasn’t the ultimate reason for his departure. Garth also had a personal need that was not being met as a teacher and felt the need to serve his country after the attacks on 9/11. However, salary was a huge decision making factor for Tim. He attributes a higher standard of living for his family due to a substantial increase in salary in his new career. This was the largest reason for his departure after six years in the classroom. Dolly is also able to enjoy a higher salary as well as a home office, state vehicle and a gas card which she feels would be difficult to give up for a teacher’s pay.
While all seven participants reflected fondly about their teaching experiences, the impact their students had on them as well as the positive relationships they built with their students, they all unanimously agreed there was not one single factor that could have influenced their decision to leave the classroom at that specific time. They also admitted that making the decision to leave was difficult because they did truly enjoy teaching students and had a passion for agriculture. However, the influences of administrators, requirements of high-stakes testing, and personal issues all led to their decision to leave at the time.

**Research Objective 4: Identify factors which might influence former agriculture teachers to return to the profession.**

The participants varied in their feelings about ever returning to the agriculture teaching profession. While they all reflect back upon the rewards, positive experiences, love of teaching, and their love for students, all but one participant were hesitant about a possible return to the classroom. Carrie is the only one who absolutely wants to return when her children are older and in school as well. Garth is at the crossroads of making a career move from the military as his active duty is coming to an end. As much as he would love to come back to his roots of agricultural education and the FFA, he also admitted that it is a close second or third in line to other options. One reason for this uncertainty is because of the salary teachers make. Dolly and Tim both are adamant in that the salary for teachers has to be improved before they would consider it. Terri is also unsure and sees herself becoming involved in other aspects of educating children about agriculture such as the Farm Bureau’s *Ag in the Classroom* program with younger children. While Willy admitted that his career as an extension agent isn’t secure due to state budget cuts and re-structuring of extension, he
was also hesitant to enter the high school agriculture classroom again. His ultimate career goal is to obtain his doctoral degree and teach on the college level or be in extension administration.

**Conclusions**

It can be concluded that teachers, in general, have a huge influence on future teachers choosing the profession. Many students are influenced by a teacher at some point in their life, and this influence carries over to their choosing a life-long career path. There is also a secondary influence of experience with agricultural education and the FFA organization that also influenced teachers to choose a career as an agriculture teacher.

It can also be concluded that experiences of former agriculture teachers vary. Teachers experience both positive and negative experiences during their career as an agriculture teacher. While former teachers shared experiences of a difficult first year, these teachers chose to return to the classroom for a second year.

In determining factors that influenced former agriculture teachers to leave the profession, it is concluded there is not one single factor that played a role in their decision. Their decision to leave the profession was based on multiple factors, all intertwined together.

Lastly, it can be concluded that there are not significant factors that could influence a former agriculture teacher to return to the profession.

**Contextual Implications**

In painting a vivid picture of a teacher who is likely to leave the profession, the Metlife Survey of the American Teacher (2005) indicated a teacher may feel less valued by their supervisor and also feel stress related to personal issues, low pay, discipline problems
and job responsibilities. Results of this study help further paint a portrait of a teacher who may leave the agriculture teacher profession in a number of ways.

Participants’ comments support previous research findings that all beginning teachers face unique challenges (Boone & Boone, 2009). Results indicated lack of administrative support was frustrating to the participants during their time in the classroom. While this ultimately was not the sole reason for each of the participants to leave the profession, it supports previous research (Boone & Boone, 2007; Ingersoll, 2013; Sergiovanni, 1975) as being a factor that contributed to their dissatisfaction. These results also support research (Moore, 1978; Moore & Kennedy, 1979,) that administration is a factor for leaving and the claim that administration may not be aware of the responsibilities of agriculture teachers (Moore & Camp, 1979). Results from this study also support and may implicate Buchanan’s (2010) claim that administrative support can be a strong predictor of a teacher’s decision to leave the profession. For several of the participants, they felt as though their administration or guidance counselors used their agriculture class as a dumping ground for students who did not belong in that specific type of class environment. This further supports claims (Moore & Kennedy, 1978; Moore & Camp, 1979) that students were enrolled in agriculture classes who should not be, further emphasizing the need for teachers to educate their administration and guidance counselors about their responsibilities and advocate for their support as a new teacher.

As a theoretical foundation for this study, results also support Maslow’s third hierarchal social need of these teachers were not being met because of the quality of the supervision they received as a teacher (Lunenberg & Ornstein, 2000). This further supports
Herzberg’s Motivation-Hygiene theory because the hygiene factor, interpersonal relations, was not satisfied, lending to the teachers becoming dissatisfied with their career as a teacher. While Purkey and Schmidt (1996) posit communication depends on the process of acquiring greater mutual understanding of one another’s phenomenal field. Results of this study indicated participants felt the need to communicate with administration to not only advocate for their classroom, but also gain the administrator’s perspective of their roles, responsibilities and duties as an agriculture teacher.

These results also support research (Ingersoll, 2001; Reichardt, 2002) that age is an important factor to consider in teacher attrition. The average age of participants in this study, when they left the profession was 25 years old. Participants also taught an average of four years prior to leaving, and ranged between two and seven and one-half years, similar to findings by Moore and Kennedy (1978). Along with age, gender is also a characteristic of teachers that may consider leaving the teaching profession. The findings of this study support Tippens et. al (2013) claims that females were more likely to leave the profession but may return after raising their children and fulfilling the responsibilities to their families. In addition, results also support previous research findings that gender is an important demographic to consider when predicting whether or not a teacher will stay or leave the classroom (Stair, Warner, & Moore, 2012; Stripling, et al., 2008; Stripling & Roberts, 2012). Participants in this study indicated inability to balance family and work relationships, therefore making the ultimate decision to leave their career, supporting previous research by Cano and Miller (1992). While gender did not manifest as a hygiene factor in Herzberg’s
Motivation-Hygiene theory, it did manifest as an intrinsic, motivating factor to leave the classroom because of the responsibilities required of the agriculture teaching career.

Maslow’s most basic human needs are described as physiological needs. Lunenberg and Ornstein (2000) translate organizational factors such as salary as being one of the most basic needs, therefore affecting a teacher’s satisfaction with their career. Salary is also described as a hygiene factor by Herzberg (1959) which is required to avoid being dissatisfied with a career. Participants in this study indicated severe dissatisfaction with their salary as a teacher which further supports Moore’s (1978) and Clark’s (1965) assertion that salary is a contributing factor in a teacher’s decision to leave the profession. Results further support Boone and Boone’s (2007) finding that salary was a problem experienced by agriculture teachers. One participant indicated taking a pay cut to leave the agriculture classroom, supporting Buchanan’s (2009, 2010) argument that some people are so desperate to find a different job they do in fact take a reduction in pay to leave the teaching profession. While salary may not be the ultimate reason one chooses to leave the profession, it is a secondary influence that also plays a greater role in their decision to return to the agriculture teaching career.

Participants in this study shared they experienced a very difficult first year in the classroom. Several encountered challenges with administration, classroom management, as well as balancing personal and professional responsibilities. A few others commented on the lack of preparation to accommodate special needs students. This supports research (Joerger & Boettcher, 2000; Mundt & Connors, 1999; Stair, Warner & Moore, 2012) that teachers encounter high levels of stress and multiple challenges during their first year of teaching.
This also supports that first year teachers have a need for appropriate and relevant mentorship and in-service opportunities during that time to help meet their needs (Garton & Chung, 1996).

As participants spoke about their time as an agriculture teacher, they shared both positive and negative experiences. For the most part, they felt as though they loved teaching agriculture beside all the other frustrations such as administration. They found reward and fulfillment through their students and reflected positively about the impact their students had on them. This finding is similar to findings from Lemons (2013) and Kitchel, et al. (2012) that for the most part, teachers are satisfied with their job and find reward in educating youth about agriculture and experiences in and out of the classroom.

Another finding in this study was the frustration of the bureaucracy and politics surrounding the education profession. Many participants felt they were overwhelmed by the amount of paperwork and policies that were required of them just to do their job. Organizational policies such as those described by the participants in this study are considered hygiene factors and are strongly connected to the environmental aspects of a job. Results of this study also support Boone and Boone (2007) that paperwork is a problem reported by agriculture teachers and Byrne’s (1998) claim that educational bureaucracy is another factor of frustration among teachers, possibly lending to burnout from their career.

One participant felt teaching is a career with no room for advancement. He also felt as though his needs for personal growth were not being met because of the lack for advancement or promotion in the teaching profession. This supports both Maslow’s self-actualization need level and Herzberg’s motivation factors of advancement and growth that
helps determine whether or not an individual’s intrinsic needs are being met. This also supports Moore’s (1978) finding of advancement and life goals as factors that influence a teacher’s decision to leave the classroom.

Participants also identified the satisfaction with freedom and flexibility with their career or personal lives upon leaving the teaching profession. This supports research by Sergiovanni, Rubin, Manolakes, and House (1975) and Buchanan (2009, 2010) as factors contributing to dissatisfaction among teachers in that they are no longer confined to the rigid classroom and school environment. Sergiovanni, Rubin, Manolakes, and House (1975) research also supports that this type of work environment is a hygiene factor needed to avoid unpleasantness.

For the participants who left to pursue another career, they shared that they felt like they are treated more like a professional in their current job than they were as a teacher. They described feeling unappreciated and micromanaged by their administration. In their current jobs, they feel their supervisors trust their work ethic and competence, thus giving them confidence in their ability to do their job. This supports Lunenberg and Ornstein’s (2000) translation of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs that recognition is an important need affecting a teacher’s career. It further supports Herzberg’s (1959) theory that recognition is also a motivation factor connected with opportunity to find satisfaction.

Agriculture teachers encounter several problems including poor financial rewards, factors related to juggling a multitude of responsibilities such as time management and facilities and equipment upkeep, factors related directly to students such as discipline and student motivation, administrative support, and others (Boone & Boone, 2007, 2009). Results
also supports research by Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter (1996) that for many teachers, the sustaining force behind their decision to remain in teaching is the personal accomplishment they feel in teaching students. Because of this, teachers are highly susceptible to leaving the profession when their perception of personal accomplishment is diminished by organizational and social factors.

**Recommendations for Practice**

The data from this study suggests while these former teachers were satisfied with their experience as an agriculture teacher, there was in fact a sense of relief in leaving the classroom. Overall, the teachers shared very negative experiences as a first year teacher but also described rewards that came with being a teacher. They all shared advice for future agriculture teachers in order to overcome the pressures and frustrations that come with the job.

A recommendation for the profession is to seek opportunities to educate administrators about the responsibilities of agriculture teacher and further develop realistic expectations of beginning teachers. It is also recommended that beginning agriculture teachers know how to be an advocate for their classroom and students. Teachers should feel as though they have a voice in not allowing their classroom be used as a dumping ground for students.

It can also be recommended that experienced and successful agriculture teachers be formally utilized as mentors to help guide novice teachers in times of need. These could include state and regional supervisors, retired agriculture teachers and retired career and technology education directors. Further, there may be value in allowing beginning teachers to
find their own source of mentor, rather than being assigned to one. This may prove beneficial as they develop their own networks and relationships with those in their school system.

From a teacher educator perspective, there may be value in developing a model that includes an extended agriculture teacher induction program giving beginning teachers additional support throughout their first year. This induction model should implement ways to meet the specific needs of beginning teachers, and could include classroom management techniques, time management tools, and strategies to advocate for administrative support.

It is recommended the profession maintain a database of former agriculture teachers to rely on for various needs. This database could be used to support a variety of needs in the agriculture education profession. In order to keep former agriculture teachers connected to the profession, they can be utilized for judging or training CDE team, serving as a local advocate in their community for agriculture education, serving on advisory committees for local agriculture programs and substitute teaching for schools with agriculture programs. Lastly, they could also be contacted about job openings to see if they would consider returning to the classroom.

To help alleviate the shortage that continues to face the agricultural education profession, a recommendation for the profession is to emphasize the importance of recruiting students to the teaching profession. While many current students come into agricultural education because of the positive role their agriculture teacher had on them, it is also important for current teachers to be an advocate for the agriculture teaching profession by recruiting students into the career. All participants in this study were influenced by another teacher in making their decision to enter the profession. Teachers should know they may be
the most important influence on someone choosing to be an agriculture teacher. While there are positive aspects to having students who are familiar with Ag Ed and FFA recruited in the agriculture teacher profession, recruiting non-agriculture students who are seeking a career as a teacher should also be maximized. While there will be good and bad days in all professions, it is specifically important for agriculture teachers to promote their job in a positive manner helping recruit students into the profession.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Implications from this study also indicate the need for future research. Additional qualitative research with former agriculture teachers may help deepen and expand the knowledge base regarding reasons for leaving the profession. Given the limitation of time and geographical nature of this study which resulted in only two interviews being conducted per participant, follow up interviews may prove beneficial to further clarify their thoughts, feelings and experiences impacting their decision to leave the agricultural education profession. Further research may also investigate if there is existence of a connection between experiences of former agriculture teachers, former general education teachers and former teachers in other disciplines of career and technical education.

The primary recommendation for further research is replication of this study to include multiple viewpoints of others who may have had an influence on the teachers who left. Case study research could provide unique perspectives from those other than the teachers who left. These could include but are not limited to: veteran agriculture teachers, administrators, spouses, and mentor teachers. The perspective of beginning teachers who continue their career as an agriculture teacher should also be considered as an important
viewpoint to identify ways they are overcoming challenges identified by those who have left. This will help to deepen the knowledge base about teacher attrition. Further research may also investigate if there is a connection between experiences of former agriculture teachers, former general education teachers and former teachers in other disciplines of Career and Technical Education in order to deepen the knowledge base. Quantitative or mixed methods research could deepen and strengthen the knowledge base concerning the causes of attrition among agriculture teachers. Further, a quantitative instrument could be developed and used to investigate reasons teachers who leave the profession.

Research should also be conducted using teachers who leave the classroom and return to determine factors influencing their decision. This may provide insight into decreasing the teacher shortage facing the agricultural education profession. Further, replication of this study with teachers who have remained in the profession with less than ten years of experience should also be considered. Findings should be compared between the two groups, those who have left and those who have stayed, to determine differences.

Lastly, research should also be conducted to provide the profession the number and percentage of agriculture teachers who leave before their fifth year of teaching experience. While it is well documented that between 40 and 50% of teachers leave the education profession before their fifth year of teaching, the percentage of agriculture teachers who leave before this same time needs to be researched.
REFERENCES


DOI:10.5032/jaatea.1987.02008


Ingersoll, R. M. (2013). Why schools have difficulty staffing their classroom with qualified teachers? Published hearing testimony. Retrieved from:


International Development Seminar on “Policies Affecting Learning Outcome Through Impacts on Teachers”, Cambridge, MA: RAND.


APPENDIX
Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol:

1. Tell me about your career as an agriculture teacher.
   - Where did you teach?
   - How long did you teach?
   - What subjects did you teach?
   - What age were you when you entered/left the profession?

2. Tell me how you chose the agriculture teaching profession.
   - When did you decide to become a teacher?
   - What was your perception of teachers prior?
   - What was your perception of teaching while in college?
   - What did you expect your teaching career to be like?

3. What was your first year(s) of teaching like?

4. Did your perception of teaching change after your first few years?

5. Did you receive any type of support (induction, mentoring, professional development) when you began teaching?
   - Tell me about that experience?

6. What type of support could have changed your decision to leave?

7. Did you enjoy teaching agriculture?
   - What about teaching did/didn’t you enjoy?

8. Did you have frustrations while teaching agriculture?
   - Can you tell me about those?

9. Tell me what brought you to the decision to leave teaching?
   - When did you first think about leaving?
   - Do you regret leaving teaching?

10. Was there anything that could have influenced you to stay in the agriculture classroom?

11. Would you ever consider coming back to the agriculture classroom? Why or Why not?

12. Did you have goals for yourself when you began your teaching career?
   - Which of those goals did you accomplish?
• Were there any you didn’t accomplish? Why?

13. What is something you are able to enjoy now that you have left the classroom that you didn’t while you were teaching agriculture?

14. What advice would you give to pre-service and beginning agriculture teachers, based on your experiences and decisions?

15. What is your current occupation?
Appendix B: Email to Perspective Interviewees

Email to Perspective Interviewees

Good afternoon,

My name is Meghan Wood and I am a doctoral graduate student in the Agricultural & Extension Education Department at NC State University. I am in the beginning stages of my dissertation research that is seeking to find perspectives of agriculture teachers who have left the teaching profession. I received your name from the Agricultural & Extension Education faculty here at NCSU that identified you as a former agriculture teacher in North Carolina.

Currently, there is a national shortage of agriculture teachers. I am interested in your perspective as a former teacher to help the education profession develop ways to keep teachers in the classroom. Your experiences and perspective are very important to my dissertation research and ones that are not often sought.

If you would be willing to meet either in person or talk over the phone for an interview, I would be very appreciative. I would need about an hour of your time so you can tell me your story of being an agriculture teacher.

We could meet in Raleigh, if you are close, or in a mutually agreed location, or via the phone, Skype, FaceTime, or whatever method would be convenient for you.

All conversations (phone, email, in person) are confidential as per the rules and regulations of NC State University Institutional Review Board and federal law.

Please email me back if you are interested in participating or if there are any other questions that I can answer for you. You can also reach me on my cell phone at 864-903-1730.

Thank you in advance and I look forward to talking with you,

Meghan

Meghan M. Wood
Graduate Teaching Assistant
NC State University
Agricultural & Extension Education
202 Ricks Hall
Raleigh, NC
919-513-3838
mlwood3@ncsu.edu
Appendix C: IRB Informed Consent Letter

North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Teacher Retention: Perceptions of teachers who have left the classroom

Megan Wood
Principal Investigator

Dr. Jim Flowers
Faculty Sponsor

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?
Former agricultural education teachers in North Carolina will be interviewed in order for the researchers to learn about the reasons why teachers choose to leave the agricultural education profession. The study will attempt to discover any contributing factors that may exist and/or the role of “others” (administration, university supervisors, peers, mentors, family, etc.) and how this affects the rate of teacher retention/teachers leaving the classroom.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to sign this consent form, take part in an audio recorded phone interview to discuss your experiences as a teacher; and members of the study will be asked to review (member check) a brief written analysis of the information shared for accuracy purposes. All identifying information will be removed from transcripts prior to emailing them to a single private email address for member checking purposes. This interview will only take about an hour of your time, and the member check (review of interview transcript) will only take about thirty minutes.

Risks
The risks associated with participating in this study are minimal.

Benefits
No promise or guarantee of benefit has been made to encourage you to participate. The data collected from you during this study will be used to develop a description of why teachers leave the agricultural education profession.

Confidentiality
The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Data will be coded and stored securely in password protected computer. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. You will NOT be asked to write your name on any study materials so that no one can match your identity to the answers that you provide.

Compensation
No compensation will be given to participate in this study.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?
If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514).

Consent To Participate
“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

Subject’s signature __________________________ Date __________________________

Investigator’s signature __________________________ Date __________________________
Appendix D: IRB Approval

From: Jennifer Ofstein, IRB Coordinator
North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board

Date: May 1, 2014

Title: Plugging the holes in the bucket: A qualitative study to determine the perceptions of agriculture teachers who are leavers of secondary agricultural programs

IRB#: 3972

Dear Meghan Wood,

The research proposal named above has received administrative review and has been approved as exempt from the policy as outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations (Exemption: 46.101. b.2). Provided that the only participation of the subjects is as described in the proposal narrative, this project is exempt from further review. This approval does not expire, but any changes must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

NOTE:
1. This committee complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU projects, the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.

2. Any changes to the research must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

3. If any unanticipated problems occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days.

Please forward a copy of this letter to your faculty sponsor, if applicable.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Ofstein
NC State IRB
Appendix E: Peer Debrief Memo #1

Dissertation Peer Debrief Memorandum

TO: Dr. Wendy Warner
    Dr. Jim Flowers
    Dr. Gary Moore
    Dr. Travis Park

FROM: Meghan Wood

SUBJECT: Dissertation Research- Themes and Findings thus far

DATE: 9/10/14

Research Update

To date, seven interviews have been conducted with two more scheduled to take place in the next week. The subjects are broken down demographically as follows:

- 3 males, 4 females
- All between the age range of late 20’s to late 30’s
- 6 taught in rural/semi-rural areas in NC, 1 taught in urban Raleigh
- Participants taught a range of 2 years to 7.5 years.
- Career choices after leaving the classroom include the following:
  - Stay at home mother
  - Extension Agent
  - Other agriculture agency’s
  - Military
  - Industry
- Interviews have been conducted over the phone due to participants’ choice. Interview times have varied between 36 minutes to over an hour.

Synthesis of Interview Content

Within the 7 interviews that I have completed thus far, experiences are varied. Some participants share similar experiences to others while some were completely different in certain aspects. In terms of themes, similar trends have emerged and are discussed in the
“Emerging Themes” category below. Differences in experiences are explained in a separate category.

**Emerging Themes**

- **The Roadmap (to becoming a teacher):**
  - Many interviewees share the common trait of coming from a successful agriculture program in high school that had an influence on their choosing the career. Several had aspirations and goals of serving as State FFA officers and others were active in their home chapters and agreed their agriculture teacher had a big impact on them in high school. Therefore, they wanted to give back to the profession and FFA organization.

- **Love of Teaching:**
  - The interviewees overall loved teaching the content of agriculture. They built positive relationships with their students and felt as if lack of administrative support and the bureaucracy of teaching are what ultimately made them choose to leave the profession.
  - Several participants are still connected to their former students and reflect back upon the reward they feel now because of their time in the classroom.

- **Reality of the Profession**
  - Several participants felt as though the reality of being a classroom teacher meant being constrained to the walls of a single building with no time for you to even go to the bathroom. Many participants felt constrained by the daily bell schedule and lack of freedom on a daily basis.
  - The reality of living on a bell schedule is coupled with the reality that they felt they weren’t treated as professionals in their job.
  - For the participants who work in another career, they reflected upon the freedom they have day-to-day and they feel like a professional, are appreciated and respected by not only their supervisors but also the communities in which they live.

- **Growing Pains- The Dreaded First Year**
o When asked the question, tell me about your first year, ALL participants grumbled. One even stated, “The struggle was real.” Participants felt that it was a horrible experience and reflected on the struggles of their first year.

- **Experiences of the Classroom**
  - **Rewards:**
    - Building relationships with their students.
    - Teaching about agriculture.
    - Watching students grow personally.
  - **Frustrations**
    - Lack of administrative support
    - Bureaucracy of education
  - **Balance**
    - Family life
    - Time commitment & responsibilities
  - **Classroom Management**
    - Discipline
    - Building a foundation for your classroom

- **Influences to Stay**
  - While all participants loved teaching, they felt as though they made the right career decision at the time. Some were seeking to fill other needs in their life and others were seeking better working conditions and personal growth.

- **Looking in the Rear View Mirror**
  - All participants had a positive perception of entering the teaching profession prior to entering their first year of teaching. That perception hasn’t much changed for the participants other than developing a deeper respect and appreciation for those who are still in the classroom.
  - All participants loved teaching and many have said if the right opportunity presents itself, they would not hesitate to go back to the classroom. Some
would like to enter into teaching on the college level, but would also consider going back to the high school classroom if needed.

- Many participants felt as though new/beginning teachers need to understand the importance of building a foundation for your classroom during your first year and the rest will fall into place in the coming years.

**Differences**

- **Student teaching experience**
  - Some interviewees felt as though their student teaching experience was critical to the survival of their first year of teaching. However, others felt as though they should have had a more realistic teaching experience that would better prepare them for the first years in their own classroom.

- **Support & Mentorship**
  - Some participants felt as though the support and mentorship they received their first year was critical to their success the first years of teaching. Many participated in county/district programs that were mandated for all new teachers.
  - However, some participants were assigned to teachers who were not as supportive and caused hardship.
Appendix F: Dissertation Peer Debrief Memo #2

Dissertation Peer Debrief Memorandum II

TO: Dr. Wendy Warner
    Dr. Jim Flowers
    Dr. Gary Moore
    Dr. Travis Park

FROM: Meghan Wood

SUBJECT: Dissertation Research - Themes, Findings & Tentative Recommendations

DATE: 10/8/14

Research Update

To date, 2 rounds of interviews have been conducted with 6 participants of the 7 participants. Thirteen interviews have been completed thus far with one more scheduled to take place Wednesday, October 15.

- 1st Round Interviews:
  - Interview times have varied between 36 minutes to over an hour.
  - Researcher used interview guide to ask questions.

- 2nd Round Interviews:
  - Interview times varied between 17 minutes 38 minutes.
  - Researcher asked participants to share a story or two about their experiences, lending to deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Emerging Themes

Six overarching themes emerged from the interviews. There were also subthemes that emerged within the larger themes and are described below.

- The Roadmap: Choosing the Profession
  - Therefore, they wanted to give back to the profession and FFA organization.

- Growing Pains of the First Year
  - Influence of student teaching experience

- Experiences of the Classroom
  - Love of Teaching
  - Rewards
  - Balance
    - Family life
    - Time commitment & responsibilities
  - Age and Gender Influences
  - Health & Safety Concerns

- Reality of the Profession
  - Professionalism (not being treated as such)
  - Frustrations
    - Lack of administrative support
Bureaucracy of education
  o Flexibility & Constraint of Classroom
  o Classroom Management
• Influences to Stay
• The Rear View Mirror: Looking Back
Appendix G: Member Checking Memo

Dissertation Member Checking Memorandum

TO: Interview Participants

FROM: Meghan Wood

SUBJECT: Themes and Findings thus far

DATE: 9/24/14

Dear Interviewee,

The purpose of this memo is to inform you of the themes that have emerged from the interviews you participated. Please take a look over the emerging themes to see if you can agree with the findings thus far.

Synthesis of Interview Content

Within the 6 interviews that I have completed thus far, experiences are varied. Some participants share similar experiences to others while some were completely different in certain aspects. In terms of themes, similar trends have emerged and are discussed in the “Emerging Themes” category below. Differences in experiences are explained in a separate category.

Emerging Themes

- The Roadmap (to becoming a teacher):
  - Many interviewees share the common trait of coming from a successful agriculture program in high school that had an influence on their choosing the career. Several had aspirations and goals of serving as State FFA officers and others were active in their home chapters and agreed their agriculture teacher had a big impact on them in high school. Therefore, they wanted to give back to the profession and FFA organization.

- Love of Teaching:
  - The interviewees overall loved teaching the content of agriculture. They built positive relationships with their students and felt as if lack of administrative support and the bureaucracy of teaching are what ultimately made them choose to leave the profession.
  - Several participants are still connected to their former students and reflect back upon the reward they feel now because of their time in the classroom.

- Reality of the Profession
  - Several participants felt as though the reality of being a classroom teacher meant being constrained to the walls of a single building with no time for you to even go to the bathroom. Many participants felt constrained by the daily bell schedule and lack of freedom on a daily basis.
  - The reality of living on a bell schedule is coupled with the reality that they felt they weren’t treated as professionals in their job.
o For the participants who work in another career, they reflected upon the freedom they have day-to-day and they feel like a professional, are appreciated and respected by not only their supervisors but also the communities in which they live.

- Growing Pains - The Dreaded First Year
  o When asked the question, tell me about your first year, ALL participants grumbled. One even stated, “The struggle was real.” Participants felt that it was a horrible experience and reflected on the struggles of their first year.

- Experiences of the Classroom
  o Rewards:
    • Building relationships with their students.
    • Teaching about agriculture.
    • Watching students grow personally.
  o Frustrations
    • Lack of administrative support
    • Bureaucracy of education
  o Balance
    • Family life
    • Time commitment & responsibilities
  o Classroom Management
    • Discipline
    • Building a foundation for your classroom

- Influences to Stay
  o While all participants loved teaching, they felt as though they made the right career decision at the time. Some were seeking to fill other needs in their life and others were seeking better working conditions and personal growth.

- Looking in the Rear View Mirror
  o All participants had a positive perception of entering the teaching profession prior to entering their first year of teaching. That perception hasn’t much changed for the participants other than developing a deeper respect and appreciation for those who are still in the classroom.
  o All participants loved teaching and many have said if the right opportunity presents itself, they would not hesitate to go back to the classroom. Some would like to enter into teaching on the college level, but would also consider going back to the high school classroom if needed.
  o Many participants felt as though new/beginning teachers need to understand the importance of building a foundation for your classroom during your first year and the rest will fall into place in the coming years.

- Differences
  o Student teaching experience
    • Some interviewees felt as though their student teaching experience was critical to the survival of their first year of teaching. However, others felt as
though they should have had a more realistic teaching experience that would better prepare them for the first years in their own classroom.

- Support & Mentorship
  - Some participants felt as though the support and mentorship they received their first year was critical to their success the first years of teaching. Many participated in county/district programs that were mandated for all new teachers.
  - However, some participants were assigned to teachers who were not as supportive and caused hardship.
Appendix H: Qualitative Data Analysis

Clusters of Relevant Meaning (Hycner, 1985)

I. The Roadmap to Becoming a Teacher

Influence of agricultural education and FFA

- I wanted to teach high school agriculture not so much to teach but to still be involved in the FFA once I finished college. (I1:W: 32-33)

- I really enjoyed taking agriculture classes and FFA in high school and I didn’t know what to do with my life, so I thought I would give it a try to be an agriculture teacher. It sounded like it would be fun and be right up my alley. (I1:C: 29-31)

- I enjoyed [FFA] so much that I wanted to give back to it and be a part of it on going…I don’t know that my advisor or the FFA was the turning point for me but just being around all of it and the people and the organization itself made me want to be a part of it. (I1:C:41-45)

- I went to a high school that had a very active and strong FFA and Ag Ed program. My agriculture teacher had a record of success and I saw the impact that he made on his kids and the impact he had on me. I wanted to make that kind of impact. I wanted to do the same thing he did for me. (I1:R:32-37)

- I joined FFA in high school but never really thought of it more than a club before my senior year (I1:G:19-20)

- My agriculture teacher told me that if I would train a team, [he] would submit the team for state convention. I agreed to train the team and we ended up getting second place in the state which was, for me, the first time I was able to make it on stage, was a big deal to me. So, that gave me a lot to think about (I1:G:26-29)

- After that convention, I thought it felt really great to teach somebody something and see the light bulb go on and be the team captain. I thought I could either be a lawyer…or I can be a teacher and have these great feelings of helping someone or teaching someone (I1:G:36-36)

- I was in love with FFA and agricultural education and even at one point, I remember saying I would teach agriculture until my arms fell off, I loved it that much. It was a complete 180 in that I had never thought about teaching in the profession and then once I got into it, at the time, I couldn’t imagine doing anything different (I1:G:72-77)
• I thought [teachers] had a tough job to be totally honest (I1:W:49)

• I thought that was something everybody deals with and since everybody deals with it, then it is something I could overcome. I thought teachers as a whole had a rewarding job and I guess I was looking for something that was going to be rewarding in that respect. It wasn’t about money for me, it never has been (I1:W:52-57)

• had the world in the palm of his hand (I1:W:58)

• I thought I could make miraculous changes as a teacher and make it different and all those cliché things we hear about. I was starry eyed about it all. (I1: W: 60-62)

• I knew it was going to be time consuming but you were going to develop good relationships with your kids (I1: T: 84-85)

• After I graduated and came to Raleigh for school to become an ag teacher, my philosophy about what it meant to be successful in an ag program changed quite a bit. I realized not every ag program looked like mine (I1:R:37-40)

• It was less about winning and more about truly touching and impacting kids (I1:R:41-42)

• You would see ag teachers interacting with their kids and it is more than just a student/teacher relationship. It is not a friendship because that undermines authority, but it is a special bond that ag teachers have with their kids (I1:R:61-64)

• I knew it was going to be a lot of hard work and long hours (I1:C:60)

• I wanted to be an ag teacher in high school, I wanted to be one in college, I wanted to be one while I was teaching, and I still want to be one now (I1:C:54-56)

Influence of Teachers

• I came to NC State with the intention of going the pre-vet route and going to vet school (I1: T: 34-35)

• Over the summer break of my freshman year, I talked to my parents and told them I couldn’t see myself going the vet route being on call 24/7…I started thinking about my options of what I could do that I could take a lot of my animal science classes to teach others. The reason why that came about was I always enjoyed teaching people. I did things like that in high school. (I1:T: 40-47)
• knew growing up that it was a lot of work in terms of there was always something going on, meetings, grading papers, planning lessons (I1:T:68-70)

• I actually got into vet school but when I got ready to graduate from my undergrad, I was burnout. I had this fall back plan that I wanted to teach. (I1:D: 36-38)

• It was something that was a natural gift. I believe God gives us talents and teaching has been a natural thing for me (I1: D: 49-50)

• I had some great teachers in middle school and high school that influenced my decision (I1:D:59)

• I have always felt like a teacher builds the foundation of who you want to be (I1:D:62)

• I knew there would be difficulties and struggles. I knew there would be good times and good learning moments (I1:TM:73-74)

• I wanted to make a positive difference in the lives of kids (I1:TM:80)

• I always respected and revered teachers in that I respected them as the authority. I’ve always been inspired by teachers and I always loved opportunities to be inspired (I1: G: 60-62)

• I thought it was an honorable profession (I1: G:66)

• I knew there was a lot involved but I also knew it was very rewarding hearing my mom tell stories of how kids got something or she saw kids who struggled…I was aware of having different types of [students] in a classroom and the struggle it may entail having to adapt (I1:T: 73-78)

**Impact of Student Teaching**

• I would not trade that experience for the world. I had an awesome cooperating teacher who was such a huge influence on things I later did in my own classroom and how I handled classroom management (I1:D: 78-80)

• I had a wonderful [cooperating] teacher when I was student teaching. I would say that your student teaching experience is critical to your impressions and abilities to make it through your first survival year. Having a good mentor and receiving good, constructive criticism as well as encouragement from someone who has been in the
trenches for a while is very critical to the success of a first year teacher (II: R:54-58)

- It would have been helpful to see a new program starting up because I didn’t know I would be starting a new program (II:T: 343-345)

- I wasn’t having to create anything new on top of having to get used to the schedule. I pulled a lot of things from [cooperating teacher] in terms of how she organized her classroom, how she was able to get things done. I got to see how it was like to have a [teaching assistant] (TA) and how you use a TA. I think it really helped me establish my own classroom, how to make it run well. I pulled a lot of things like how she wrote her objectives on the board or the question of the day. I used a lot of her stuff because it worked and it was convenient. It was great to be able to walk into a classroom and have stuff already prepared (II:T: 361-368).

- I think had it not been for such a great student teaching experience, I would have been more leery when I got to teach on my own (II:G:146-147)

- what an ag teacher should be like, this is how you’re going to do it hands-on (II: G:153)

- I think a lot of success that I pulled off in my short experience was because of what I learned during that experience (II:G:154-156)

- I think the experience I had there was crucial to my success as a teacher, especially being by myself (II:G:165-166)

- that was laid out for me (II:W:460)

- The principal wanted to paint the rosiest picture she could of her school and the kids were handpicked…it spoiled me. I did have discipline problems but I was spoiled in my situation because they set it up so I wouldn’t fail (II:W:460-463)

II. Growing Pains of the First Year

- man! It was terrible (II:C:66)

- It was very stressful (II:T:107)

- Girl, the struggle was real…they nailed me to the wall (II:R:110-115)
• Have you ever heard the term baptism by fire. It was absolutely the worst experience of my life (I1:D:186-187)

• My first year of teaching was up and down (I1:G:88)

• My first year as an educator, I really couldn’t get out of that college funk (I1:W:95-96)

• I caught a lot of resistance from his level two students that had him before. I had one class with 12 boys and no girls. That was really difficult for me because I didn’t know the curriculum and was fighting his teaching styles. He was a completely different type of teacher. The classroom management was completely different, especially his approach to lab safety. It was hard (I1:C:70-75)

• It was a very overwhelming semester” (I1:C:79)

• I spent about 90% of my time with schoolwork. I got to school early, I worked all day, I taught my three classes, I went to meetings, I graded papers, then I came home. Some days it was hard to start the day teaching prepared. Some days I would get a day ahead, but some classes I was planning day by day (I1:T:113-116)

• I wasn’t giving him time and I was dragging him to certain things I had to do outside of school time and on the weekends” (I1:T:215-216)

• realized how much time, effort, and patience is involved in managing the classroom in addition to managing a unique program like what we have in agricultural education” (I1:R:75-77)

• juggling act (I1:R:84)

• hit the ground running and see results immediately (I1:R:89-90)

• Teaching is like a marathon and not a sprint. I thought I would go in and immediately make an impact with the kids and I would have kids if they were failing, they would want to step up in my class and do their work. That doesn’t happen right off the bat. That takes time and years (I1:R:90-93)

• I thought I would have a classroom full of kids who were like me, who want to be successful, who were driven to better themselves. That is not necessarily the case. A lot of students bring additional challenges to a classroom (I1:R:96-100)

• That first month, I would get up be like ‘what am I doing with my life?’ Every day I feel like I am failing (I1:R:117-118)
• In fact, she put me in the hospital. I had to wear a heart monitor for months because I was so stressed with my job. I absolutely hated it (I1:D:198-199)

• They really were trying their best to help me survive that first year (I1:D:207-208)

• It didn’t jade me bad enough that I didn’t ever return to the classroom. But it was a horrible, horrible experience for a year (I1:D:213-214)

• The longer you’re in teaching, the more you realize that not everyone is in there for the good of the students (I1:222-223)

• I think I was prepared for the FFA aspects of teaching. I was decently prepared for the teaching portion, I was not prepared for the discipline side of things, rather disciplining students, handling classroom management, special needs students, and writing IEP’s (I1:G:90-93)

• I wasn’t only battling my first year of teaching, but I was fighting for the program from the get go” (I1:G:105-106)

• I made it a point every time I went home…if I saw a former teacher of mine, I would give them a hug and apologize for anything I did in their classroom. I definitely had a deeper appreciation for teachers and the everyday stuff they have to deal with (I1:G:114-118)

• I think after that first year, my perception had changed and I knew if I wanted to keep doing it, I was going to have to change how I was doing it (I1:G:126-128)

• It seems like the administration didn’t have faith in you or that your students were out to get you (I1:TM:93-94)

• I really couldn’t get out of that college funk (I1:W:95-96)

• wearing on my health (I1: W:104)

• We were taught basic teaching theory and how to teach. We weren’t taught how to work with other people in a lot of ways (I1:W:110-111)

• My principal rode me really hard that first year and put me in a funk. It put me in a depression. I was in a very dark place for the last half of that year (I1:W:124-126)

• I was walking to the teacher’s lounge and when I got to the door, I could hear [principal] telling my vocational director that he was ready to go ahead and let me go and I was one semester in (I2:W:44-45)
• turned around, went back to his office and cried (I2:W:57-58)

• I started to question is this what I wanted to do for the rest of my life, is this really what I want to put up with (I1:W:161-163)

• I would have rather sat out a year and worked at TGIF than have had to have gone through what I did that first year because who knows how things would have turned out (I1:W:485-487)

III. Reality of the Profession

a. Love of teaching

• I am an agriculture teacher because I am passionate about the agriculture industry, but I am first and foremost a teacher of students. That was the best part of my job was seeing them grow and achieve and being involved in the organization that I loved and was so passionate about growing up (I1:R:156-160)

• Even to this day, with my current job, I tell people I really miss my kids. I miss the relationships I built with my students (I1:R:155-156)

• [I enjoyed] bonding with students and seeing student that didn’t really feel like they could do anything or achieve something just because their family had never done it (I1:C:164-166)

• I loved the FFA aspect, the camps and conferences that provided opportunities for students to grow in their personalities and leadership skills (I1:C:170-171)

• I had outstanding kids, that really worked hard...to see the kids in this setting that otherwise normally would not achieve but started believing in something and creating success for themselves (I1:G:243-245)

• take her mind off of going home (I2:G:19)

• It was something for her mom to take pride in something for her (I2:G:20)

• One of those warm and fuzzy moments. She wasn’t expecting her mom to be there but her mom actually took the time to pick her up and tell her she was happy for her (I2:G:25-26)

• To think six years after I have left, I still have contact; even after all of those frustrations that happened then, there is still a reward now. They still considered me an important part of who they had become that they thought to invite me to their high
school graduation (I1:D:249-252)

- The connection you make with your students, not just the way you impact their lives but how they impact yours (I2:D8-9)

- That spoke volumes to me, especially being a young teacher, not having taught her for long (I2:T:17-18)

- Because I was an ag mechanics teacher, I got to do a lot of hands-on things such as building projects and help the students. So, I miss that aspect of it. I miss the learning by doing aspect, that was pretty fun (I1:TM:178-180)

- Some of the good parts of it were students I would run into. They would say, ‘I laughed at you when you told me something, I thought you were joking, but what I learned in your class, I am doing it right now and I am earning good money.’ Hearing those stories and seeing kids succeed in FFA competitions was good (I1:TM:115-119)

b. Frustrations

- dumping ground (I1:D:134)

- did not understand what agricultural education was (I1:D:135-136)

- Once we got on the same page, my classes were cream of crop students (I1:D:138-139)

- the best interest of whatever power is in control at the time (I1:D:84-85)

- teachers don’t have the freedom to do what they need to do in their classroom to be successful (I1:D:91-92)

- The school district was all the time making blanket policies when it doesn’t need to apply to more than one group (I1:C:179-180)

- paperwork tasks outside was I was set to do to prepare for my class (I1:R:154-155)

- I felt like I had to fill out a form to go to the bathroom. Every time I turned around they wanted this paperwork or that paperwork, for us to go or do anything (I1:R:165-167)

- did not understand why we had an agriculture program (I1:R:173-174)
I wanted to be in my classroom working on stuff that was pertinent to my job and not sitting there while they roll out some new initiative we would never see then end result of. That was always a frustration for me. I needed that time in my classroom, and didn’t understand why they were taking it away from me.

was ready to go ahead and let me go (I2:W:45)

He reprimanded her for [discipline] but he also reprimanded me in front of the parent and the student about not giving her paper and I had to apologize while in the office for that (I2:W:142-143)

When you get hit with a lot of discipline issues, combined with lack of support from administration, combined with everything else, it made for this perfect little cocktail of anger and frustration and depression, all rolled up together that put me in a funk that first year (I1:W:174-177)

teaching to the test (I1:TM: 108)

I was fed up with the amount of work we had to do… It made it frustrating when you are doing all this extra work and weren’t getting anything out of it (I1:TM:185-189)

Feeling like you always had something to do other than just teaching and preparing for classes. The extra part of being a teacher, being involved in the school and the other duties that came along (I1:T:203-205)

having more kids signing up for ag classes than I was able to teach (I1:G:252-253).
constant micromanagement (I1:G:268)

They were trying to take my legs out from underneath me at every turn, which led to the feeling of bobbing for air and fighting uphill the entire time (I1:G:271-273)

c. Age & Gender Influences

I was only four years older than they were. That was weird too trying to instruct people that I had actually grown up with (I2:C:73-74)

I think it is because they see you as close to their age, so she knows what I am going through or get better advice because she knows what I am going through (I2:C: 87-88)

I couldn’t be confident in what I was saying and justified in the classroom because of [age]. It was very intimidating to someone fresh out of college (I2:W:154-156)
• knew so much more about mechanics (I2:C:67)

• I felt uncomfortable being in a classroom, in a trailer, outside of the school building with a bunch of guys. I felt like it could be a set up for a bad situation (I2:T:115-117)

• very flirtatious (I2:T:102)

• As a teacher, no one prepares you for this. If something like this happens, this is what you do...the insinuation is if you don’t do anything, it can mark you for the rest of your career (I2:D:93-97)

d. Unique Occurrences

• I had been teaching for three weeks when a student pulled a knife on me in the classroom and said ‘I’m going to cut you.’ At that moment, I didn’t know what to do. No one ever said if a kid pulled a knife, this is what you do (I1:G:174-177)

• wasn’t prepared for those types of challenges (I1:G:186-187)

• I just knew he was going to throw a desk. There were really good days and a lot of really bad days. I dreaded that one class because of that student. I never knew what he was going to be like. I never knew what he was going to bring into class each day. That was a hard thing to go through (I2:T:87-91)

• I told him to get back to where he was supposed to be. Little did I know, this certain student had no respect for women, especially women in authority. In a split second, he was in my face telling me I had no right to tell him what to do and he hit me (I2:D: 61-64)

IV. Influences to leave

• convicted that I wasn’t giving my family life as much time as I was giving my career (I1:T:219-220)

• had nothing to do with not liking teaching itself and it didn’t really have anything to do with the frustrations and stress and negativities, it didn’t pull me entirely other than the fact that my time was a huge concern for me...I felt like having a child should be my number one priority, husband first, then child. I wanted to be there for them and I couldn’t see how that would work if I kept teaching (I1:234-240)

• burn out (I1:R:194)
• full throttle, trying to change the program (I1:R:194-195)

• God has a plan for us and He leads us in different directions and we have to trust Him (I1:R: 217-218)

• attractive assistantship and a unique opportunity (I1:R:210-211)

• I knew I was making the right decision but it was hard. I didn’t quite feel ready to hand it over to someone else. But in the end, it was God’s providence and I still look back. It was a hard decision but it was the right decision (I1:R:211-214)

• I completely expected to be teaching into my 60’s and be that ag teacher that would be there for 30 years and teaching the rest of my life (I1: G: 80-81)

• worn out (I1:G:276)

• It was a selfish decision and that was the only time finances came into play with me in teaching (I1:G:294-295)

• The country was at war and I needed to do something. My dad grew up in the military; he did his part and I needed to do mine (I1:G:303-305)

• every day I was in Afghanistan and Qatar or somewhere else in the Middle East, all those times I definitely regretted it especially because of my kids (I1:G:310-312)

• When I was teaching, I was bobbing for air and it was super hard. But after multiple deployments and doing the job I do now, I would love to have that 8:30-3:30 work day and get to coach FFA teams and sports teams, I would love to do that (I1:G:318-321)

• sitting at a crossroads (I1:G:353)

• FFA has a way of pulling you back and so I think the fondness you have for it always pulls you back. For me, I definitely see it as an option (I1:G:355-356)

• I currently have a home office, a state vehicle, a state gas card and I am doing something I actually love and have a huge passion for. It just wasn’t worth it for me personally (I1:D:181-183)

• There were some personal things going at the time that had a major influence on me leaving teaching, but not because I was unhappy with teaching but because it was a way to escape some things. Between that and not having the support of an administrator, opportunity to make more money, opportunity to try something new; it
was hard (I1:D: 259-263)

- It was something I truly loved and if the right opportunity unfolded and the right circumstances existed, I would consider coming back (I1:D:287-289)

- I could tell I was losing passion about teaching, so I understood where other teachers would come from when you have one of those teachers who looked burnout” (I1:W:171-173)

- Ultimately, the lure of being close to home, combined with the fact that I was going to be able to go back to graduate school without having to pay for it, that sealed the deal” (I1:W:297-298)

- My only option with my degree where I live right now, would be to go back to teach if the option is there. I can never say never. But, baring nothing unforeseen, I don’t want to have to step back in the classroom again if I can help it (I1:W:379-381)

- From the time I started teaching six years ago, I averaged a $200 per year raise. I worked my butt off trying to succeed, never was late a day to work and very rarely did I ever take a sick day. It wasn’t worth the gratification (I1:TM:164-167)

V. The Rear View Mirror: Looking Back

a. Advice to others

- You don’t have to be perfect, but don’t despair in that first year. Everybody has to learn (I1:R: 282-283)

- It is going to be completely different from your student teaching…but make it your own and hang in there. In the end, even on the most frustrating days, you have to look for successes. Acknowledge there are challenges and talk about solutions, but don’t allow yourself to wallow in being a failure. Pick yourself up and keep going (I1:R: 285-289)

- You may not see the immediate change or immediate results, but at some point, you will look back and see what you have done has made a difference with your kids (I1:R:290-292)

- You can model your program after a successful one but it is not going to happen in a day or in a year. It will take time…lay a solid foundation on the education piece (I1:G:383-386)
• In hind sight, if you build the solid foundation of good classroom instruction, blended with the hands-on learning, the true aged piece of teaching them knowledge and skills, if you do those things, the rest will fall into place (I1:G:389-392)
• to see where the students are coming from (I1:G:406-407)

• they will miss out on an opportunity to reach their students on a different level (I1:G:407-408)

• You have to pace yourself. Pick something you want to be good at and start there (I1:C:250-251)

• If the class is organized and the kids enjoy that, then they will follow you to other activities. If your classroom stuff is incompetent and unorganized, and they aren’t learning anything in the classroom, why are they going to give you more time? You have to get your classroom in order first and then your curriculum, then you can add things (I1:C:252-256)

• You can’t do everything even when you are really good at it (I1:C:257)

• As a first year teacher, you don’t want to say ‘no’ to anyone because you want to look like you want to help and be involved, but sometimes you just have to say ‘no’ to things (I1:T:326-328)

• One thing I would say for beginning teachers is to not get in over your head (I1:W:510)

• Some days you are going to feel like you want to quit. But if you give it your all, and when the dust finally settles, you are still called to be here, then so be it (I1:TM:219-221)

• There were a lot of people in the know about that job I took who knew the situation I was getting ready to walk into, but they bit their tongue because they didn’t want to discourage me from taking a job (I1:W:483-485)

• You are going to make mistakes and if there is a good line of communication there, those mistakes won’t be taken as harshly as they would if there wasn’t (I1:W:497-499)

b. Things they now enjoy

• I stay at home with my children every day, we spend a lot of time together and I couldn’t have that if I was teaching…I have my summers free and I can go on
vacations when we want (II:C:242-244)

- I would spend most of my nights as a teacher doing lesson plans, or grading papers (II:T:302-303)

- I work the same hours as I did as a teacher especially those first few years. At the same time, at least now if I work, I get paid (II:TM:211-212)

- higher standard of living (II:TM:203)

- I enjoy that when I’m off, I’m off. (II:D:315)

- I enjoy going to the grocery store and not everybody knowing my business (II:D:316-317)

- I didn’t want to be constrained inside the school building itself. I didn’t like having to wait and know that a bell told me I had five minutes to go to the bathroom. I hated it, I despised it (II:W:313-316)

- My confidence as an extension agent compared to being an ag teacher is a million times stronger because I have been able to find success in this job that I didn’t find in teaching” (II:W:410-412)

- I am a face in my community because of my job now. Because of that I get appreciation from outside of my job (II:W:420-422)

- I feel important. I didn’t as an ag teacher. I felt like I was just a face in the crowd when I was an ag teacher. I don’t feel that way as an extension agent. I feel very valued, and important and appreciated (II:W:423-426)

- call up a client or friend, and go eat lunch (II:R:264)

- I feel like I am treated more like a professional in my current job than I was teaching…I don’t feel like the administration is looking over my shoulder to make sure I am doing my job (II:R:265-268)

- I felt like at school, I was being constantly micro-managed for the tests…I felt like I was under a microscope a lot (II:R:270-272)