

# A Profile of Women Faculty Members In Agricultural Teacher Education

Cathy A. Baxter and Tracy S. Hoover

Women have been a part of the university setting, teaching both traditional and nontraditional subject areas, since the nineteenth century. No specific date could be identified as to when women officially began teaching post-secondary agricultural education. However, state teacher colleges added agriculture and nature studies to their curricula around the turn of the century (True, 1929) and women soon became an important part of the instruction.

Currently, the percentage of women faculty in the colleges of agriculture is small, but increasing (Kuehl, Collins & Pesek, 1987). This finding seems to parallel the situation for women in many colleges and universities. In 1984-85, Kuehl, Collins & Pesek (1987) found that women made up 6% of full professors, 16% of associate professors and 27% of assistant professors at selected universities that have colleges of agriculture. Russell (1991) found that women made up 25% of full-time regular faculty in four-year institutions during the fall of 1987.

In general, the number of women in higher education has been growing. More women are graduating from colleges and universities in the USA than ever before. This trend is supported by an increasing number of women completing doctoral programs. The number of women receiving doctoral degrees in agriculture and natural resources increased sixteen percent between 1971 and 1988 (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1991). In 1971, women earned 14.3% of the 32,107

doctoral degrees granted in the United States. By 1988, 35.2% of 34,039 doctoral degrees were conferred to women (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1991).

Perhaps more women would consider entering a doctoral program with encouragement from faculty members and evidence of women faculty members to serve as role models (Kuehl, Collins & Pesek, 1987). University faculty appear to be an important factor in women deciding to continue their education and academic career. Christiansen, Macagno-Shang, Stanley, Stamler, and Johnson (1989) found that 35.2% of the women faculty at a large midwestern university decided to pursue an academic career in their field during their graduate study. When Cooper and Henderson (1989) surveyed women agricultural faculty at land-grant universities, they found that university faculty members were often cited as individuals who frequently encouraged the women to consider a doctoral program. They also found that most of the women surveyed would do nothing or very little differently if they began their careers again. Murphy (1990) found that the majority of the successful women surveyed in vocational education were satisfied with their educational preparation and would make the same career choice again.

However, the women Murphy (1990) interviewed still believe that it is more difficult for women to succeed in vocational education. Over half of the respondents reported that they had been treated differently than men in similar positions. The women also expressed a concern over the lack of women mentors and role models during their careers. Parson (1991) found that many of the tenured and tenure track faculty at a public research-oriented university in the midwest believed senior faculty have a responsibility to mentor assistant professors. Unfortunately, 15% of the women respondents reported that there were no senior faculty women to serve as mentors and that men found serving in such a role in relation to women problematic. Fifty-nine percent of the women felt that their work was undervalued because of their gender. When Johnsrud & Wunsch (1991) surveyed pairs of junior and senior women faculty, they found that the junior women faculty did not feel as isolated as the senior counterparts had thought. Both junior and senior women perceived the barriers surrounding work priorities, a sense of belonging and scholarship very similarly. However, Christiansen et al. (1989) found that overall, the women faculty interviewed reported positive perceptions about their work environment and felt supported within their departments by both men and women.

Although information was available on women faculty in general, little data exists on the academic backgrounds, employment, career choices and barriers of women faculty

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Baxter is a graduate assistant and Hoover is an assistant professor in the Department of Agricultural & Extension Education, 323 Ag Administration Building, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802, but in 1993 will join the Department of Ag. Ed. and Comm., 305 Rolfs Hall, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611

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specifically involved in agricultural education. This study was designed to profile women faculty whose primary responsibilities are in agricultural teacher education.

## Population & Design

The population consisted of women faculty whose primary duties and responsibilities were in agricultural teacher education. Agricultural Education department heads from several universities were contacted to provide a list of women agricultural education faculty members. Additionally, the 1991-92 Directory of Teacher Educators in Agriculture was used to complete the list. It was determined that only thirteen women faculty members were employed nationally with specific responsibilities in agricultural teacher education. Lacking empirical evidence on women agricultural teacher educators, a structured interview schedule was developed to compile a baseline profile of these individuals. Personal interviews were conducted with each woman faculty member during November 1991.

## Results

### Secondary Teaching and Academic Degrees

Only 15% (2) of the women had been enrolled in a high school agricultural education program. However, 78% (10) were high school agricultural instructors, teaching an average of 4.8 years with horticulture/floriculture and production agriculture as the predominant subject area responsibilities.

The most frequent bachelors(4) and masters(8) degree held by these individuals was in agricultural education. Other individuals held bachelors and masters degrees in other agricultural sciences (Table 1).

All doctoral degrees completed dealt with teacher education in agriculture. Minors and/or areas of emphasis in the doctoral programs were numerous and varied. Many individuals reported more than one minor and/or area of emphasis, which included: Agricultural Education (3), Research, Statistics, Evaluation (3), Adult/Teacher Education (3), Special Education (2), Natural Resource Management (1), Animal Science(1), Nutrition (1) and Rural Sociology (1).

### Employment

Four of the thirteen faculty members were employed in occupations other than teaching prior to their current teacher education position. These occupations included Adult Education, the State Department, publishing, extension and various agricultural industries.

Women agricultural educators reported varied and diverse responsibilities as faculty members such as: inservice

**Table 1. Academic Degrees of Women Agricultural Teacher Educators.(N=13)**

	Bachelors	Masters
Ag Ed	4	8
An Sci	3	2
Horticulture	3	
Nat. Resources	1	
An Sci & Sec Ed	1	
Home Ec Ed	1	
Counselor Ed		1
Voc Ed		2

education (11), preservice education (10), graduate education (11), graduate advising (10), undergraduate advising (11), assisting /supervision of student teachers (8), curriculum development (7), beginning teacher supervision (5), and research project directors (3). In addition, all the educators noted they were involved in various committees, research and service activities from local to national levels.

### Perceptions/Choice of Career

Eight of the 13 women noted they were attracted to a career in teacher education due to the combination of teaching and agriculture. Additionally, several noted that they chose this career because they were ready for a challenge, felt they could have a positive influence on future teachers, and were interested in teacher education.

### Barriers/Advice

Seventy-five percent of the women indicated that they had experienced some subtle form of discrimination due to their gender in a male dominated field. However, all respondents noted that it was nothing they could not overcome with hard work and effort. Some indicated that they may have had to work harder to "prove" themselves because they were women. An interesting sideline is that seventy percent of the individuals reported they were influenced to enter the agricultural education profession by a male teacher or professor. The predominant theme of advice from this group to other women who wish to pursue an agricultural teacher educator career path is to be prepared to put in a lot of time and effort, choose an area(s) of specialization, and to be prepared to work in a extremely rewarding field that combines people, education and agriculture.

## Educational Implications

There have been many changes in the field of agricultural education and its accessibility to women. Two decades have passed since women were allowed to join the FFA, which was a decision that should have provided women with an increased accessibility to careers in agricultural education. Nationally, 23% of FFA members are women (National FFA, 1992). However, women only occupy 5.1% of the secondary agricultural education positions (Howe, 1992) and less than one percent of the agriculture teacher educator positions in this country. (It should be noted that many more women are employed in extension education, family living and youth development related positions in departments of Agricultural and/or Extension Education at the post-secondary level). While these figures show growth and interest of women student enrollment in secondary programs, the proportion of women employed at the secondary and post-secondary level is nominal. Several factors may contribute to this phenomena:

1. Lack of women role models in secondary and post-secondary positions to encourage women to choose a career in agricultural education (Knight, 1987; Kaplan, 1975; Matthews & McCune, 1975).
2. Perceptions of women students (at the secondary and post-secondary level) concerning discrimination against women entering the profession. Numerous studies have documented the misconceptions and biased attitudes of

fellow teachers, parents, administrators and students against women entering the agricultural education profession (Cano, 1990; Whittington, 1990; Doese, 1987; Knight, 1987; Moore and Thompson, 1987; Berrett & Barrett, 1982).

In most cases women who aspire to teach agricultural education at the post-secondary level need to have taught at the secondary level. If women do not perceive themselves as future agricultural educators or if agricultural education is not viewed as a viable career option, they will never progress through the system to be employed in a post-secondary agricultural education position.

Fundamentally, the problem in agricultural education is more profound than the small percentage of women employed in secondary and post-secondary agricultural education. Agricultural education, if it has changed to represent the new and emerging areas of agriculture, should be attracting women into programs. However, for the last few years, women consistently have represented only 1 of 5 members in the FFA (this is most likely representative of enrollment at the secondary level).

### A Commentary

Why is agricultural education only attracting such a small percentage of women? Perhaps agricultural education departments should change or ensure that college and departmental policies and procedures reflect a positive atmosphere and prevent discrimination. The development of a mentorship program among women agricultural educators might also help create a stronger support system for women. Additionally, we need to determine the rationale and factors that influence the enrollment decisions of women as they elect to enroll or not enroll in secondary programs of agriculture. Further research is needed to determine when, why and how women decide to pursue careers in agricultural education. By creating a positive atmosphere for women, agricultural education should see an increase in the number of women at all levels of the profession.

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