

## **The Summer of Learning**

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Teachers typically bring lessons to life for their students, but this summer, the teachers became the students to learn more about the role of agriculture in Arizona.

More than 60 teachers from 13 of Arizona's 15 counties participated in the Hybrid Summer Agricultural Institute (SAI), which was sponsored by the Arizona Foundation for Agricultural Literacy (AFAL). Of these teachers, Buffalo Amber Struthers, was lucky enough to participate in this summer of learning.

These teachers heard virtual lectures, including ones from our University of Arizona colleagues; Audra Waddle from AZ Queen Bee; and John Boelts from Desert Premium Farms; as well as a panel discussion that was moderated by Stefanie Smallhouse, who is the president of the Arizona Farm Bureau. There were also some teachers who traveled to different parts of Maricopa County, which included stops at Danzeisen Dairy, Grand View Dairy, Heiden Land & Cattle, Rosseau Farming Company, and Sunbelt Transplants, and Yavapai County, which included stops at Mortimer Farms and Yavapai College.

Some participants said that they, in spite of the heat, enjoyed learning about agriculture in person.

"I never thought I would love hanging out at feedlots and dairy farms in 120° [temperatures], but this was truly an AWESOME day," wrote one.

Some participants said that their time at the SAI would help them to have deeper discussions with their students.

"In order to really teach the importance of farming, you have to get there and see it firsthand," one wrote.

"It is so inspiring to see the people and their careers that are putting STEM into practice to grow food here in [Arizona] and for the world. It definitely puts some wind under my wings to want to teach and to encourage my students to pursue a solid STEM education," said another.

Some participants also liked how these four days encouraged them to challenge their perceptions about agriculture.

"...I really loved being in 'the thick of things' with the farmers. It really shows how difficult the agricultural life is and how much these 'farmers' do care about how and what is being produced. They showed me that it is not always about the quantity being churned out," one wrote.

This summer also allowed teachers from four of Arizona's 15 counties participated in the National Agriculture in the Classroom (NAITC)'s annual conference, which was held in Des Moines, Iowa, but also included a virtual option. Some of the in-person attendees included MacKenzi and Wyman Navenma from Second Mesa Day School and Barbara Lee from Chinle High School, who were recipients of the Native American Agriculture Fund Scholarship, as well as Mary Ann Cawley from Sonoran Foothills School and Rebecca Bhasme from Willcox Middle School, who were winners of the CHS Foundation Teacher Scholarship and the AFAL Teacher Scholarship. Cawley is a two-time alumna of the SAI, and both Cawley and Bhasme teach robotics at their respective schools.

Bhasme and Cawley said that one of their personal highlights was the collaboration component of the NAITC conference.

Bhasme considered the conference to be a concentrated time of learning—she liked that it gave her different perspectives because the teaching community, as a whole, was willing to work together—whereas Cawley said that the conference gave her an opportunity to improve her craft.

“We’re learning together, so we bring ideas to our classroom,” Cawley said.

Bhasme and Cawley are also excited to apply some of their takeaways from the conference in their classrooms.

Bhasme believes that the ideas that she gained from the conference can sometimes translate into what students take away from their lessons. She had been inspired by videos and lessons that were available to the community—these videos and lessons were designed to introduce the audience to local Iowa phenomena—and she wanted to introduce a similar concept to her students.

“Kids will learn so much more because they can see this phenomena around them,” she said.

Cawley also said that she wanted to make the way for her students to explore the future. This, for her, involves bringing students into discussions about current issues and being resourceful about introducing agricultural STEM concepts into her curriculum. Cawley, however, believes that it comes down to the little things that teachers can do to encourage their students to think about agricultural STEM concepts in a different light.

“Being passionate about the things you do, the rest of the things carry out,” she said.



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