



Teacher Feature

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Where and what level do you currently teach and why did you choose to become an educator?

I am a Biology teacher at Wayzata High School. My first jobs were in informal education with a Learning Center in Sarapiquí Costa Rica, the Minnesota Zoo and then as the Outreach Coordinator for the International Wolf Center. I loved each of these teaching opportunities, but what they didn't allow me to do was see and help students grow as learners. I was giving hour-long/week-long programs, but I didn't get to see the growth in my students as learners. I was simply dispensing information and that is when I knew that I had to go back and get my masters in teaching. I love working with students and teaching them how to learn, and meeting them wherever they are at in that journey and challenging them to meet their potential. I also feel as an educator I get to share with them the excitement that comes with having a job that you love, and helping students find their passions. Finally, I had some pretty spectacular teachers that influenced me and now I feel it is my responsibility to help other students overcome their fear of science, and hopefully help them learn to love it, and help them realize that they too are "good at science."

How has agriculture and the Minnesota Agriculture in the Classroom Program impacted your students and instruction?

I would say I wish I found the MN Agriculture in the Classroom program sooner. Last summer I went on the specialty crop tour, and it helped provide me with context, contacts and stories to share with my students as I went back into the classroom to teach my Ecology of Food class this semester. Just as my students enjoy hearing from different producers in the classroom, it was so fun to be able to meet so many different people involved in the food system, directly on their farms. I have found that everyone in this community is so incredibly passionate about what they do, and so willing to work with teachers and generous with their time so they can share their experiences with students.



Describe any agriculture based projects you have been involved in lately.

Through the Ecology of Food class, we developed a vegetable garden at the high school. Students and families help to maintain it over the summer, and produce was donated to our local food shelf. As a result, students were able to help be a part of the solutions to food insecurity within our own community. We also started an almost one acre pollinator garden, with help from our local Pheasants Forever chapter. Through a community project we are able to learn more about the connection of local pollinator populations and the security of our food supply.

What advice do you have for other teachers on implementing agriculture into their classroom/program?

Don't reinvent the wheel. There are a lot of amazing resources out there that you can use immediately in your curriculum. The Minnesota Ag in the Classroom Curriculum Matrix provided me with lots of different lesson plan ideas even before I found their teacher tours.

Just try it, sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't, but you will never know if you don't try.

Why do you believe it is important for our students to be agriculturally literate?

I feel it is so incredibly important for all students to have an understanding about where their food comes from if we are going to make progress towards being able to feed a growing population while focusing on the sustainability of our planet as well. As a teacher and a parent I am also concerned with the diets of our young children and how that has impacted our overall health as a nation. As a parent I have found when my children are part of the growing process, they are more accepting of different types of foods, and eat healthier as a result. I feel that food, health and agriculture provide an amazing interdisciplinary study at any level and it forces students to examine issues at a systems level. Many of our efforts to link food production and health are centered at the elementary level, in our district, but I think it is equally important for high school students to see this connection as well. They are about to go out into the world to make decisions about their own health and that of our planet.

From my science background, I also feel very strongly about creating scientifically literate citizens that can make informed choices in their everyday lives. Hence the reason I created an elective class at Wayzata High School titled, "Ecology of Food." I feel like more than ever consumers are influencing companies and producers, I just want to make sure that they are making decisions that are thoughtful choices that are beneficial for their own personal health, the health of their communities and for the sustainability of the planet... Through my Ecology of Food class I have seen students learn to respect food again, appreciate those who grow it and learn to think critically about complex issues that face our world.

