

Minnesota Agriculture in the Classroom – Featured Teacher

Ms. Beth Sletta

STEM Teacher
Jefferson Elementary School
New Ulm, MN

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

I currently teach over 650 elementary students in grades 1-4 in the STEM lab and schoolyard garden at Jefferson Elementary School in New Ulm. I also work with over 100 summer care kids in the schoolyard garden. To be honest, I did not choose teaching as a profession, teaching chose me! I was determined to stay away from the education department in college, but my advisor wisely suggested I give it a try. Here I am, 32 years later, still teaching and loving it!

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

Agriculture education and the Minnesota Agriculture in the Classroom programs and materials have greatly impacted my lessons in the STEM lab and garden as well. I am determined to tie the garden and agriculture into lessons throughout the school year. I use the [curriculum matrix](#), [AgMag/AgMagJr](#), and [video links](#) on the MAITC site to help add agriculture to my lessons.

Students and their families are excited about learning more about agriculture and the MAITC program has been helpful in spreading the excitement. Many of our families have started home gardens after working in the school garden. Students come to school early in the morning to help me work in the garden, and even spend their recess working in the garden, so I need to keep on my toes. I am really looking forward to attending the [Many Faces of Agriculture tour](#) this summer so I can learn even more to pass on to my students and their families.

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

I have worked with a passionate group of students to design, fund, and build a beautiful schoolyard garden at our school. The students wanted to help pollinators and plant a small garden, but their excitement was contagious and our garden grew and grew! We currently have 10 fabric beds with vegetables and herbs, nine 4' x 8' raised beds with flowers, herbs, and berries. We are so thrilled that we just planted four apple trees right next to the garden. This wintery spring was quite a challenge,



but we experimented with winter sowing and a very small greenhouse in our garden. The cloches(covering for protecting plants from cold temperatures) and greenhouse were covered with snow more times than we care to remember, but the cool weather crops are doing so well! Probably one of our most exciting projects is our outdoor classroom that is being built adjacent to the garden. This structure will allow all teachers in our building to use the garden as they teach.

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

Don't be afraid to use community resources. We have enlisted the help of local beekeepers, CSA farmers, the high school ag classes, FFA, local turkey farmers, senior citizens who grew up on farms, master gardeners, and so many more people. These people are a wealth of information and have such a strong connection to agriculture. Their passion about agriculture related topics is contagious and their knowledge is wonderful.

Don't be afraid to try new things! I had students suggest we start composting and I didn't know a great deal about how to begin. The students and I found resources and we now have a wonderful composting station in our teachers' lounge and a large composting bin next to the garden. We learned so much about soil as we progressed through this project.

Why do you believe it is important for our students to be agriculturally literate and aware in today's society?

I asked one of my second grade students why they thought it was important to learn about agriculture even though most of the students at our school don't live on a farm. Her response was awesome!

"We have to care about earth, where our food comes from, and we need to learn how to take care of the earth and the animals so we can keep having good food to eat!"

