make a difference. TEACH AG

THE HOOT

MARCH 2026

Vol. 2 No. 7

MARCH'S SUGGESTED TO-DO LIST

CLASSROOM

- What supplies do you need for the next 3 months?
- What does your budget for the next school year look like?
- What professional development opportunities can you attend to improve your knowledge, skills and teaching practices?

SAE

- Are your student's records updated in AET and ready for degree/award season?
- Have your students completed workplace safety activities?
- Have your students developed a resume and prepared a cover letter?

FFA

- What plans do you have for a chapter banquet/award ceremony?
- What plans do you have for state convention?
- Have degree applications been reviewed?
- Have you registered for Preliminary LDEs, Spring CDEs, etc.?
- Are your students working on their Agriscience Fair projects?

BEYOND THE BELL

UNPLUGGED

Unplugging allows teachers to reduce stress, avoid burnout, and restore mental energy by creating boundaries between professional demands and personal time. Committing to it requires intentional, small actions like establishing strict after-hours email rules, creating a closing-day ritual, and prioritizing at least one non-negotiable personal activity.

Steps to Commit to Unplugging

- *Create a Closing Ritual:* End the day by organizing the desk, writing a to-do list for tomorrow, and consciously deciding that work is finished.
- *Protect One Non-Negotiable Activity:* Choose one activity (e.g., a 30-minute walk, a workout, reading) that is sacred and non-work related.
- *Physical Separation:* Remove work materials from the home environment to mentally separate work from personal life.
- *Set Digital Boundaries:* Turn off email notifications on phones, set automatic "out-of-office" replies in the evening/weekends, and avoid checking school platforms.
- *Utilize "No-Tech" Time:* Engage in hobbies that do not involve screens, such as gardening, cooking, or journaling.
- *Communicate Availability:* Clearly inform parents and students of your communication hours to manage expectations.

FFA AMBASSADOR'S PICK OF THE MONTH

Patty Smith
National FFA Teacher Ambassador
smithp@warrenhills.org

"SERVE" LifeKnowledge Curriculum

This online curriculum includes engaging lessons and accompanying handouts designed to teach real-world skills for real life. The curriculum is divided into Middle School, High School, and Advanced High School lesson libraries. Each lesson library features a dedicated "SERVE" unit focused on community service and civic engagement.

HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/4JRK5XXV



AN OWL'S PERSPECTIVE

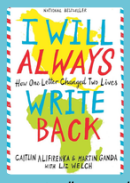
Be consistent. In an agricultural education program, consistency is more than good practice, it's essential. Whether students are in the classroom, the shop, the greenhouse, or preparing for an FFA event, they need clear expectations and steady leadership. When routines are predictable and expectations are consistently enforced, students feel safe, focused, and ready to learn. Consistency doesn't mean rigidity. It means fairness. It means following through on safety protocols in the shop every time. It means holding students accountable for SAE records and FFA commitments. It means modeling professionalism, preparation, and respect daily. Agricultural education thrives on relationships and hands-on experiences. Your steadiness, how you respond, how you lead, how you uphold standards, sets the tone for the entire program. In an environment where students are developing technical skills and leadership abilities, your consistency becomes the foundation on which their confidence grows.

REMINDER

PARTICIPATE IN THIS YEAR'S STATEWIDE COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECT SUPPORTING THE BURLINGTON COUNTY ANIMAL SHELTER AND PARTNERS.

LEARN MORE

GOOD READS



"I Will Always Write Back: How One Letter Changed Two Lives" by Caitlin Alifirenka, Martin Ganda, and Liz Welch

It all started with a school assignment. Caitlin, a student in Pennsylvania, had never heard of Zimbabwe when she was asked to write a letter to an unknown pen-pal. Martin, the top student in his class in Zimbabwe, was fortunate to receive her letter—one of only ten sent for fifty students. What began as a simple exchange about favorite colors, sports, and daily life grew into six years of letters that bridged continents and cultures. Through their correspondence, Caitlin and Martin discovered an unlikely but powerful friendship that shaped who they became. In this inspiring dual memoir, they share the story of how one classroom assignment turned into a bond that changed both of their lives.

BOOK CLUB

Join us for NJAAE Book Club

Wednesday, March 11

Visual Thinking
Chapter 6:
Visualizing Risk to Prevent Disasters

Second Wednesday of the month – 6:00 PM via Zoom

Reading Guide

PAUSE AND REFLECT

WHAT STEPS CAN YOU TAKE TO BUILD DEEPER, MORE MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS WITH YOUR STUDENTS?

AG TEACHER SPOTLIGHT



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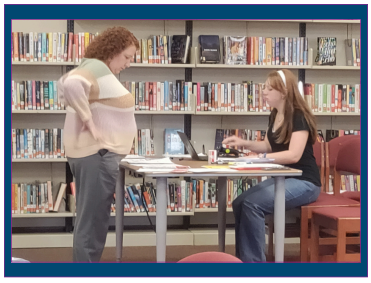
Dominique Otiepka is an environmental studies teacher and FFA advisor at High Tech High School. She is in her 7th year in agricultural education. She received a bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies from Ramapo College of New Jersey and a master's of science in Horticulture and Human Health from Colorado State University. At High Tech High, she teaches hydroponics, water resources and meteorology. Dominique has established and did extensive plant research on wildflowers and their pollinators, soil toxicity and hydroponics. She strives to bring awareness to the importance of environmental issues and share her love for the beauty of the natural world in her classroom. Her areas of expertise include: plant science, environmental science, food systems, and natural resources.

Prepared by Erin Noble

SHARING OUR BEST

BY SHARING IDEAS WE CAN MAKE AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION AND FFA ACROSS THE STATE STRONGER!
CHECKOUT THESE AWESOME COMMUNITY SERVICE IDEAS FROM OTHER CHAPTERS!

PENNS GROVE FFA BLOOD DRIVE





Since 2003, the Penns Grove FFA Chapter has partnered with the American Red Cross to host two student-led blood drives each school year. FFA members manage many details, from promotion and donor recruitment to scheduling appointments and sending reminders. On the day of the drive, they greet donors, offer support during donations, and staff the recovery area with refreshments and care. Through this long-standing tradition of service, members not only help save lives but also build leadership, organization, and compassion that extend far beyond the classroom.

NEW JERSE FFA'S STATEWIDE COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECT

For nearly two decades, New Jersey FFA members have demonstrated their commitment to service by partnering with organizations and addressing critical community needs across the state through the annual Statewide Community Service Project. From disaster relief and hunger prevention to environmental stewardship and health and well-being, these initiatives highlight New Jersey FFA's enduring dedication to strengthening communities and serving with purpose. Since 2019, a Day of Service at the State FFA Convention has further strengthened this commitment, providing members with hands-on opportunities to make a meaningful impact. It's not too late to participate in the 2026 Statewide Community Service Project - "Pawsitive Care Project."





CUMBERLAND REGIONAL FFA PEACE & TRANQUILITY GARDEN





The Cumberland Regional FFA Chapter partners with the Soroptimist Organization of Bridgeton to maintain, decorate, and plant new additions at the Bridgeton Peace and Tranquility Garden. The garden serves as a peaceful and safe space for women who have experienced domestic and sexual abuse. Through seasonal upkeep and holiday decorations, members help ensure the space remains welcoming and serene for all who visit. Through their volunteer efforts, members not only enhance the beauty of the garden but also develop empathy and social awareness while supporting a sanctuary dedicated to reflection, prayer, and healing.