



## REACHING OUT TO SCHOOLS

### FINDING THE CONTACT INFORMATION

Developing a database of schools and teachers is an on-going challenge. Teachers retire, move to other schools and move up or down grades. Maintaining a database isn't easy and takes time and effort.

There are some databases available through the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. If you work with MS Excel, you can download the databases, conduct sorts and develop your own listing. You can find these lists at <http://dpi.wi.gov/directories>.

The Agriculture Education Instructors list is available at <http://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/ag/pdf/wis-ag-directory.pdf>.

You also can purchase a Wisconsin School Directory (hard copy) or download the information by visiting <https://pubsales.dpi.wi.gov/>. The hard copy lists all public schools and any private schools that fill out a PI-1281 form.

You can also develop your database by visiting the websites of schools in your county, calling them directly or having your members check their school district and compile a list.

Once you have the information, you can develop a contact list. If you do this in MS Excel, it is easier to maintain and you can also import it into MS Word to make mailing labels.

### HOW TO PROMOTE AND ENCOURAGE USE OF AITC MATERIALS

- Use the Wisconsin AITC 'Snap Shot' blank side for your county information in teacher mailings and outreach. You can find this PDF on the Ag in the Classroom website under "About – Wisconsin AITC" Listing your county's contact information, resources you have, programs and activities offered and other information is helpful for teachers.
- Call, email, visit or send a mailing to your local school to let them know you are interested in working with the teachers. Build a working relationship with the teachers, school administrator or curriculum director.
- Map out your county and identify the school districts and several key Farm Bureau members/AITC volunteers who live in each district. We find that some districts are more receptive if approached by someone living in that district, someone with kids in their schools or someone who is active in the community.

- Who do you know who works in the school? Spouse of Farm Bureau members? Kids of Farm Bureau members? Agriculture education instructor? They can be your 'foot in the door!'
- Offer an in-service program on Ag in the Classroom. Some schools have required hours that teachers need to attend in-services- this could be your opportunity! Find out who schedules and approves in-service topics. You may want to include other county resource people in the in-service such as county extension staff, promotion and commodity groups that offer educational programs or services.
- Ask what you can do to help them with their agricultural units- their needs will vary based on experience, time in the district or at that grade level, resources in the school and their background.
- Offer assistance in finding agribusinesses and farms that could be helpful to the teacher if they want to go on tours or guest speakers.
- Notify the Wisconsin AITC Coordinator or your county AITC committee if there are needs, questions or concerns from teachers about our materials.
- If you have financial means, offer scholarships for teachers who attend agriculture-related in-services, tours or take graduate credits.
- If schools participate in any of your programs (i.e. essay contest, safety, county activities), offer a classroom presentation or some type of resource.
- Invite a teacher who has used AITC materials or attended an in-service or graduate class to speak at the county Farm Bureau annual meeting, a board of directors meeting or other event.
- If you have a committee interested in working with schools and teachers, invite several teachers to be a part of the committee. They will be a valuable asset in developing programs that teachers want.
- Be positive! Unfortunately, most teachers like to visit farms in the fall or spring when the weather is nice. That also is the busiest time for farmers. Please try to be accommodating. Your interaction with the teacher may be the only contact he/she has with a farmer, so let it be a good experience for everyone.
- Use National Ag Day, National FFA Week and other special events as a time to promote or conduct an activity.
- Use the media to promote your resources, activities and special events. Also use your county Farm Bureau newsletters, commodity newsletters and agricultural media to increase awareness.

### Keep in mind...

- Don't get discouraged if you have a lot of participation one year and less the next year. Sometimes the timing of events, contests and activities just doesn't work with a school schedule or testing dates.
- If you see a decrease in a school's response (or no response), take time to contact the school or teacher to see if there's a problem.
- Reminders are good- whether by a bright colored postcard, an email or phone call.
- Developing a good relationship with a teacher will help increase use of your resources, programs and activities.