



Wisconsin Ag in the Classroom Reaching Out to Schools Handbook

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www.wisagclassroom.org

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 can 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 can also 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 they live in 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

- You can use the Wisconsin AITC "Snapshot" 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 the teachers.
- Call your local school, email, stop in or send them a mailing to let them know you are interested in working with the teachers. Build a working relationship with the teachers as well as 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.
- Help 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 that 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 that has used AITC materials or attended an in-service or graduate class, to speak to the county Farm Bureau annual meeting, a board of director's meeting or another 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 an asset in developing programs that teachers want!
- Be positive! Unfortunately, most teachers like to come out to farms in the fall or spring when the weather is nice. That is also 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 please let it be a good experience for everyone!
- Use National Ag Day, Food Check Out 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.

Tips for making classroom presentations

SCHOOL POLICIES

- Ask if there is visitor's parking and which entrance to enter. Usually they will have you park near the door closest to the school office.
- Find out what the visitor's policy is at the school. Most schools require that visitors register in the office and wear some type of identification.
- Discuss school policy with the teacher if you want to bring animals or larger equipment in for the students to see.
- If you are going to take pictures and use them in newsletters or other places, check to see if a Release Form or Permission Form needs to be signed.

CLASSROOM PRESENTATIONS

- If you need audio-visual equipment or have other set-up needs, be sure to arrange the details with the teacher ahead of time.
- If you have a lot of items to bring in and have a cart, ask which floor the classroom is on and if there is an elevator!
- Find out the number of students so that you have adequate handouts or supplies.
- Ask the teacher to have nametags for students or provide them yourself.
- If you are bringing in food, check with the teacher about any food allergies that students may have. Bring an alternative snack for them.
- Check with the teacher about any allergies to animals (dander, hair, fur) or grains.
- Present a good image of your fair association. Dress casually but be clean, neat and well-groomed.
- Write down your agenda of what you want to cover. It helps keep you on track. Make yourself notes as to the amount of time for each part of your presentation. Be aware of the time frame the teacher gave you- they have many things scheduled in a day so it's important not to abuse the time limit.
- Kids love to ask questions or tell about their experiences. That is great – but it is easy to get distracted. If the student poses a tricky question or sticky situation, provide a factual response and avoid direct confrontation. People today have less interaction to production agriculture and some parents may “feed” questions to their child to ask you (i.e. Animal welfare, BST, dehorning, tail docking, and GMO crops) - explain your farm practices but use judgment in the amount of detail you give.
- Bring along pictures or slides of your fair, samples of “giveaways” from the previous year, examples of projects that members exhibited, or other “hands-on” items.

Classroom Presentations- How to use

Books

- You don't have to read the whole book
- Blow up pictures or pages that you want to highlight
- Have the kids sit in a group when reading – they can see better and it's a new seating arrangement for them
- Make a copy of the pages that you can read from- have someone else hold the book so the kids can see
- Have a follow-up activity related to the book
- Ask some review questions after you've read to them

Videos-DVDs-Social Media Posts

- You don't have to use the whole video, just show segments
- Have the equipment arranged with the teacher ahead of time
- Give it to the teacher to operate if you're unfamiliar with the equipment
- Have it set to the right section so you don't have to search for the spot you want

Food

- Ask if there are any food allergies or issues you need to be aware of
- Wear plastic gloves when handling food
- Sanitary supplies and equipment
- Storage- keeping the cold items cold in going to the school and prior to the presentation
- Ask for wastebaskets!
- Bring along clean up supplies- not all classrooms have sinks or water supplies
- Don't rely on the classroom having anything- plates, napkins, cups, spoons
- Remind the students that eating the food is optional. Suggest a taste test
- Make sure you have enough!

Hands-on Activities

- Know the number of students ahead of time and make sure adequate supplies are obtained
- Ask for a table or area to set up on ahead of time!
- Is it best to: distribute items to their desks, have an assembly line, pre-pack the supplies, have helpers distribute supplies?
- If it can spill, someone probably will spill! Be prepared for clean ups!
- Be aware of the student's space- are they at desks, group tables, angled top desks (not good with beads!), or will they be sitting on the floor?
- Food- you may need to have people handing out the items to make sure all the last person gets some (i.e. gummy worms, M & M's).
- What can the kids do themselves? i.e. tie knots, thread beads, pour liquids
- Water bottles are great for a water supply

Keep in mind...

- Kids have a limited attention span (sometimes only 5-10 minutes!) so vary your activities.
- Have an outline of what you want to cover
- Have all resources organized, sorted, and ready to go!
- Involve the students- give them jobs to do, ask questions...

Sample Letter/Email to Teachers

Dear _____ County Teachers, (or import the teacher's name from your database)

The _____ County Ag in the Classroom program is available to help you with your units on agriculture! Our program is coordinated with the _____ County Farm Bureau and _____ group in our county to help provide you with resources, lesson plans, speakers, tour sites and whatever else will assist you.

Our county Ag in the Classroom program currently offers the following resources for your use:

- Tubs with curriculum, lesson plans, videos and books
- List of producers who are willing to host farm tours
- List of members who are willing to make classroom presentations
- Scholarships for teachers to AITC Teacher Training opportunities

These items can be requested by contacting _____ at _____ (phone) or _____ (email).

We also encourage you to contact the Wisconsin Agriculture in the Classroom program at www.wisagclassroom.org, 608-828-5644 or darneson@wbf.com. The website also has information about teacher in-services, grants, lesson plans, state facts, essay contests and links to other programs and activities.

Two other resources are the National Ag in the Classroom Program (www.agclassroom.org) and the American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture (www.agfoundation.org) websites. NAITC has a Curriculum Matrix search engine which can help you find any type of resource and search by grade level, educational standards, subject, and many other factors. It also has all the state facts, lesson plans, and other resources for K-12 teachers of all subject areas. The AFBFA has many downloadable resources along with numerous funding, scholarship and grant opportunities.

Please share this information with other teachers in your school. We look forward to working with you and your school!

Thank you,

_____ County Ag in the Classroom Coordinator

School Contact Talking Points

One of the most difficult jobs for county and state AITC programs is maintaining accurate contact lists for schools and teachers. Each year there are staff, address, email and grade level changes that need to be kept up with!

There are some sources that you can use to download databases for schools:

- Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. If you can 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/lbstat/labels.html>
- The Agriculture Education Instructors list is available at <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/ag/pdf/ageddirectory.pdf>
- You can also purchase a Wisconsin School Directory (hard copy) or download the information by visiting <http://dpi.wi.gov/schldist.html>. The hard copy lists all public schools and any private schools that fill out a PI-1281 form.

The challenge can also be finding the policy that each school district has for distributing information. We are finding that some districts require approval of a mailing, essay contest, donating resources, etc. by a district staff member or principal. Other districts may not have any restrictions. In order to save county programs time and money as they prepare to contact schools about essay contests, programs and other activities, it is suggested that you contact school districts in your county periodically to update contact information and to find out if there are any policies related to distribution of materials.

Talking points when contacting a school. The contact can be made over the phone or in person.

- I am calling from the _____ County Ag in the Classroom/Farm Bureau about our educational resources about agriculture. We are organized through the USDA and Wisconsin Ag in the Classroom program. We have resources for K-12 grade teachers and students. We also have a 4-5th grade essay contest that we would like to provide information about to your staff.
- Does your school district have any policies or approval process on contacting staff or distributing information about our resources? If so, who should we contact and what is their contact information (i.e. name, position, mailing address, phone and email).
- If we would like to send the 4-5th grade essay flyers to your appropriate staff members, which schools have 4-5th grade? Should we send to a specific teacher, the principal and how many copies of the flyers are needed?
- Currently we have _____ (refer to the excel database) staff members listed for your district. Is this listing still current?
- Does your school district offer in-service opportunities that we might be able to provide a workshop on our resources? Or could we offer an after-school meeting for interested staff?
- You can also refer the contact person to Wisconsin Farm Bureau AITC and Wendy Kannel if they have questions or need further information.

Teacher In-services

An effective way to communicate to a larger group of teachers and to present your information is through Teacher In-services. In-services give you the opportunity to display your resources, introduce yourself and develop a face-to-face contact with the school.

Scheduling: In-services may be at the beginning of the year, during scheduled student days off, after school, or during the summer. Check with the administration to find out what staff person does the scheduling or coordination. Having the in-service in a convenient room in the building you are targeting will be most effective.

Promotion: Develop a flyer with the agenda, date, time (starting and ending time), place and any “free” items you’ll be giving out! If there is a staff newsletter, consider having an article in it as well as comments from your school contact (i.e. administrator, principal) to encourage attendance. If possible, put a fun reminder piece in their mailboxes the day before the in-service to remind them and to entice them into coming. If you have accessed their emails via the school website, an email reminder could be used as well.

Planning the content: The material covered in the presentation will depend on the amount of time the teachers are required to be there. After-school in-services tend to be shorter, so you need to pack a lot of information into a short amount of time. Develop some handouts that you can highlight and have all the details that they can take home and read. Be aware of the time element and estimate the amount of time needed per agenda item. Some people will leave when their required time is up- plan your presentation to be finished by that point. Send them home with lots of free resources!

Agenda: Here are two sample agendas that you could use to plan your in-service:

Example One

Welcome, Introductions and overview of county AITC program

Wisconsin AITC Program Highlights- flyer or latest newsletter

Commodity Promotion group representative(s)

Time to do hands-on activities and look at resource displays

Collect survey sheets- closing

Example Two

Welcome and Introductions

Overview of county resources and program

Viewing of clips from videos, lesson plans and website resources. Highlight any correlations to state standards.

Hands-on activity related to Essay Contest or other activity you want to highlight

Collect survey sheets- closing

_____ County Ag in the Classroom (AITC) Program Contacts and Information

County AITC Chairman Contact Information

Contact information and include an explanation of what information or resources the chairman can offer.

County Soybean Science Kit Coordinators

Contact information for all the coordinators that have sponsored kits.

Include an explanation of what the Soybean Science Kits are and how they can be used.

County Essay Coordinator

List who your coordinator is and contact information. How do you judge the entries and let the teachers/students know who the winner is. Do you have prizes or incentives? Do you offer support (i.e. buy books, give presentations)

Programs, resources and outreach offered by your county:

(List contact information for any of the resources)

Learn more about Ag in the Classroom State and National Programs by visiting www.wisagclassroom.org, www.agfoundation.org or www.agclassroom.org

You may want to add some general information about the importance of Walworth County agriculture, upcoming dates of events, or other information about the county.