

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND FORESTRY

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Ag in the Classroom Hosts State Summer Conference

Oklahoma Ag in the Classroom's state conference "Fruits, Nuts, Veggies and MORE" allowed teachers across the state to engage in meaningful sessions devoted to agricultural education.

AITC's goal, as a whole, is to equip teachers with agricultural lessons that are aligned to state standards so they can teach students where their food and fiber come from.

More than 300 educators attended this year's conference Thursday (July 6) at the Moore Norman Technology Center.

"The purpose of the state conference is to allow teachers to spend a full day immersed in agriculture," said Melody Aufill, AITC coordinator, "with presenters and speakers who use Ag in the Classroom around the state."

Teachers chose from 19 workshops led by experienced teachers from across the state and heard from keynote speaker, Holly Blakey, executive director of the Oklahoma FFA Foundation.

"We chose Holly Blakey because she has a lifelong passion for agriculture and has life experiences that will resonate with the teachers from across the state," Aufill said. "The workshop presenters are exemplary teachers who use Ag in the

Classroom on a regular basis and participate in a variety of AITC activities like our road trips, contests and workshops.”

Aufill said the conference brings in incredible educators who deserve recognition. Debra Deskin from Edmond was awarded AITC Teacher of the Year, and Amber Bales of Morrison was recognized with the National Excellence in Teaching Agriculture Award. Barbara Jacques was recognized as the 2017 AITC Ag Advocate, and the Oklahoma Farm Bureau Women’s Leadership Team was recognized for serving as room moderators during the conference.

Teachers are given the opportunity to connect with vendors, commodity groups and publishers who specialize in books about agriculture. The conference allows teachers time to collaborate and connect with teachers statewide and focus on how they might want to use AITC in the upcoming school year.

Dora Fuqua, a sixth-grade teacher at Canton Elementary School, has attended state conference nine times and has been incorporating AITC lessons in her classes for 10 years.

“I mean they’re excited,” she said. “It engages them. There’s not that complacency. I think that’s probably the number one thing is that they get excited about their learning, and they don’t even realize that they’re learning. They think they’re having fun and playing.”

Fuqua said her students request time spent in the garden and are excited to journal about their projects and grow new plants. She’s an advocate for Ag in the Classroom because she has seen improvements with her own students. She encourages teachers to give it a try and set a goal of one lesson a month for starters.

“I think you find as you start [teaching AITC] that you’ll do more and more and more,” she said. “The more I did it, the more I wanted to do it.”

Fuqua looks for ways to use agriculture in her classroom by choosing books with a connection to it. Even though she teaches in a farming community, her students don’t always know about agriculture.

“Even though they’re right in the middle of it, they still don’t see it,” she said. “It kind of gives them a new respect, too, for some of their friends that live on the farm and that feed cattle.”

Fuqua also said that using agriculture in her classes allows her to reach students in a different way. The students suddenly think the kids who grew up around farming are heroes because they are good at working in the garden, she said. They learn together and become friends because of it.

Aufill said AITC’s desire is to show teachers there are resources and materials to support their teaching.

“We want to love on teachers and connect them with people in the agricultural sector,” she said.

Oklahoma AITC has hosted this event for the past 11 years.

“We want teachers to leave with an excitement about agriculture and know that teaching about agriculture is accessible to them, whether they are in a rural or urban setting,” Aufill said.

Five Things Teachers Learned at State Conference

1. “I learned about the decreasing number of people providing food for the world and lots of good activities involving bees,” said Mary Taylor, Sasakwa Elementary School pre-K and kindergarten teacher.
2. “I learned how to get a grant written using detail, and it let me know what’s out there, where I can get money to help fund my classroom,” said Cindy Carlton, Middlebery Public Schools pre-K through eighth-grade special education teacher.
3. “I learned about extracting DNA and how to involve that in a junior high classroom as well as some of my upper level classes,” said Bethany Turner, Hardesty Public Schools agricultural instructor.
4. “I learned how to get a free mobile dairy to come to my school and show my kids how they milk cows,” said Kelly Wardlaw, Stillwater Junior High School engineering teacher.

5. “I especially enjoyed the Pickle Patch workshop, which incorporated math and team building and number sense, and I have some great ideas to take back to my classroom,” said Carrie Hefton, Tulsa Public Schools fourth-grade math and science teacher.

What Ag in the Classroom Has to Offer

Aside from state conference, educators and child nutritionists can become involved in numerous ways throughout the year.

“Ag in the Classroom has engaging resources, lessons and contests for pre-K to 12th-grade students to learn about agriculture in a variety of methods and hands-on activities,” Afill said.

AITC has an outstanding website that showcases 300 lessons and activities. It is updated on a monthly basis to highlight agricultural activities that pertain to each specific month. Additionally, teachers can sign up for the newsletter to be updated on contests, conferences, free professional development and trips that occur throughout the year. For more information, visit www.agclassroom.org/ok or the Oklahoma Ag in the Classroom Facebook page.

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Photo caption: Weatherford FFA and 4-H members taught attendees about feed rations, horse shoeing and daily care of miniature horses and donkeys.



Photo caption: Oklahoma Farm Bureau Women's Leadership Team was recognized for serving as room moderators during the conference. Members include (from left to right): Mignon Bolay, Paula Sawatzky, Linda Fox, Kitty Beavers, and Marcia Irvin.



Photo caption: More than 300 educators attended the 2017 AITC State Summer Conference.