

# Give thanks to ag teachers

**C**RISES come and go. Many folks 30 years ago said vocational agriculture was doomed. Then came innovative horticulture programs, taught in inner cities. Afterward, vocational agriculture was reborn as agricultural science. Some 200 high schools in Indiana still offer ag programs.

Enter Tony Bennett, the new superintendent of public instruction, and it's a new day for education. He announced plans this year to make schools adhere to 180 days of instruction, not allowing half days of teacher training to count. Despite loud criticism, he's held firm.

Eyebrows went up in rural communities when the Indiana Department of Education relieved veteran Bob Juncker of his duties in February, just a few months before planned retirement. Admittedly, a number of middle-level managers were axed in sweeping changes at DOE. But his departure signaled there were no sacred cows under this new regime.

At first some teachers, even veterans, panicked. Calls for emergency meetings and dire predictions of no ag programs and no FFA spread like wildfire. Just where would this new administration stop? What was their vision for vocational education in Indiana?

## Cool heads prevail

Just exactly what DOE plans to do with vocational education still remains cloudy. The person allowed to talk to you insists agricultural education is very important. Yet the same person also tells you they've only been on the job for a month.

Meanwhile, the leadership of the ag teachers left panic behind, and instead took a close look at where ag education has been, where it is today and where it



## Indiana Prairie Farmer Says

By TOM BECHMAN

might go. Following the vision for education issued by DOE's Bennett earlier this spring, leaders within the teacher's group have made painstaking efforts to discover how agricultural education programs could meet his criteria, without sacrificing what ag programs already do well. Hats off to Travis Scherer, Wolcott; Tom Wallace, Spencer; Dale Butcher, Lafayette; Ben Helms, Bloomfield; Tom Daugherty, Miami County; and many more. As you've learned, ag teachers put together a vision of their own.

They're also working hard to earn a place at the table when DOE makes important decisions. DOE didn't come to them; they went to DOE. Although not at first, DOE now includes Purdue in the loop as well.

## New day

What will ag courses look like in five years? Odds are they will be more science-based and more geared around helping students meet educational standards. They'll still be hands-on, but students may be building model barns to see how much snow their roofs can stand, rather than constructing cattle feeders and nail boxes.

Scherer, a key player in this debate, says it goes much deeper than just the FFA. And it does. But he also says that without ag programs, there is no FFA, perhaps the greatest youth leadership development program ever devised. For that reason alone, it's worth making sure

ag education isn't left behind when DOE plows forward toward its new vision.

If you see an ag teacher, thank them. They're shouldering not only the needs of current students, but also trying to protect the right of future students to learn about ag science and FFA. We all owe them deeply.

## Our View

By TOM J. BECHMAN

## Who do your kids listen to?

**W**HEN I was a vo-ag teacher some three decades ago, my FFA students on a trip conned me into watching the original "Halloween" movie. "It's just an innocent, fun movie," one said. Yeah, right! Five minutes into it I wasn't sure if I could survive the blood, guts and horror.

I couldn't imagine seeing anything scarier ever until a teen brought me a DVD from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, or PETA. It was distributed by [peta2.com](http://peta2.com). The teenager obtained it simply by responding to its Web site, asking for information for a class project.

I popped in the DVD. About three of the more than a dozen clips was all I could stand. There was blood and guts and violence, most of it documented in black-and-white for effect.

That wasn't the scary part. Scariest of all is the fact that unsuspecting, naive people, many of them children, would watch this stuff. And many would believe it happened every time. Why not? Who would go to so much trouble just to stretch or distort the facts?

PETA, that's who! Here are lines from the DVD: "Cows are just milking machines." "Sows in crates go insane from lack of stimulation." "The ears of baby pigs are mutilated and their tails are chopped off."

One clip compares dogs to pigs, claiming that if pigs said "woof," they would be treated differently. Bucolic scenes with pleasant music depict dogs romping at play, punctuated by dimly lit, black-and-white ghastly shots of over-aggressive farmhands mistreating pigs, slamming them on the concrete to kill them, then cussing at them all the while.

Numbers the video threw out as facts were also suspect. A stern voice showing a cow barely able to walk claimed 40% of all dairy cows going to slaughter are lame. The same voice claimed 100,000 animals per year must be dragged off the truck at the slaughter plant, yet they're still used for human food. This simply isn't legal or true.

Next time you want to be scared silly, don't waste your money on the newest, cheesiest, Halloween rip-off movie. Simply go to [peta2.com](http://peta2.com) and ask for the DVD. And as you watch it, imagine hundreds if not thousands of young, impressionable kids are watching it, too.

The only statement in the entire video I'm sure is true is this one: "PETA isn't going away." Talk about scary!

## Reader appreciates plug for FFA

I just read your "Our view" column in the May 2009 *Indiana Prairie Farmer* ("Times also difficult for FFA," Page 31). As a current member of the (Indiana) FFA Foundation board of directors, I want to thank you for your supportive comments about the Indiana FFA organization as a whole, including chapters, the Indiana FFA state association and the FFA Foundation. It's certainly true that fundraising in difficult economic times is a challenge whether for immediate operations support or for longer-term, visionary goals, like the Give Hope campaign. Like the old saying goes, the only way to eat these two elephants (annual giving goals and the Give Hope campaign) is in small chunks.

For example, if just 25 alumni, parents and supporters from each FFA chapter gave \$100 per year over five years to the Give Hope campaign, we would meet our initial funding goal.

Similarly, if another 25 people from those communities gave \$100 per year to the general fund campaign, we would set fundraising records never before accomplished.

Depending upon the size of one's automobile, that could be the equivalent of a few fill-ups per year. Please note, this is not a complaint or an indictment, but simply a way of giving a frame of refer-

## Reader's Report

ence to the fundraising situation.

As with any fundraising campaign, of course, the challenge is getting in contact with all the individual supporters of the greater FFA organization. Your column this month is a great help in reaching those supporters. Thank you.

**Matt Rekeweg**, vice president, Halderman Cos., Wabash

## Horse therapy works

Several issues back (March 2009, "Challenged kids thrive with horses," Page 54) was the story from Purdue University regarding equine therapy. We are so happy in Brandywine Township (Hancock County) to have the Edelweiss Equine Assisted Therapy Center. Richard Bowen, an Eli Lilly retiree, and his daughter, Elisa Bowen Bell, have started this program. They have many volunteers who work with them.

The facility is located at Richard and Joannie Bowen's, 5214 South Highway 9. I thought perhaps you might be interested in what they have accomplished, and that they continue to provide service.

**Milly Tucker**, Greenfield

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