

Award-winning agriscience teacher on his career, changes, Carroll students



Agriscience teacher Aaron Geiman, pictured in his classroom at North Carroll High School in 2017, received the Maryland Chapter of the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) Teacher of the Year Award. (Photo by Noah Scialom/Patuxent Publishing)

BY CATALINA RIGHTER CARROLL COUNTY TIMES

Aaron Geiman was named Teacher of the Year Award for the Maryland Chapter of the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE)

The Westminster High School agriscience teacher has been a Carroll County educator for 22 years and a National FFA Organization (FFA) adviser for 20.

In his classroom, he has attained 100 percent participation in work-based learning and supervised agricultural experiences for his students.

According to Angie McCauslin, supervisor of Career and Technology Education for Carroll County Public Schools, “Aaron’s passion for agriscience and teaching students who share that passion is a true example of teachers leading the charge and getting things done. He models what effective teacher leadership is, and does so every day for his students,” according to a news release from CCPS.

The Times caught up with Geiman to talk about his start in the teaching field and his focus on career-readiness.

Q: Is this award one that means something to you?

A: Well, yeah absolutely. To be recognized by your peers is always positive. The career and technical education field is often overshadowed by the academic fields at certain times. And so, it’s always good to advocate and help extend the abilities of career and technical educators.

Q: How did you get into agriscience, and why did you start teaching?

A: I was an agricultural student when I was a child, and took ag classes with now-Commissioner [Richard] Weaver. And he’s the one that told me I should be a teacher.

I was actually at home for summer break. And I was always an agricultural major [in] college, and he said, “What are you going to do?” and I said, “I’m not a hundred percent sure,” and he said, “You should be a teacher.”

And I thought about it. And a couple of weeks later doubled my major. And here we are 22 years later.

Q: A news release from CCPS noted that you help create and revise curricula that “reflect current practices in industry and education and prepare future professionals in science and agriculture.” Why is that important?

A: The value of including industry professionals is that they are our clients, right? They are buying our products. So if they tell us that there’s a specific characteristic or feature that graduates don’t possess, that they should, then that influences our curriculum revision.

If they say that there’s a new technology that they want us to make sure that students know when they graduate, then that influences our curriculum.

Q: Is that something where you find that what the industry asks for changes a lot?

A: At the top level, no, there aren’t gross changes. The long and the short of it is there are more than 300 careers out there. And of course, you always hear that saying that we have to prepare students now for jobs that do not yet exist. The transportable skills, aka the soft skills system, we spend a good bit of time working with kids on those. But we also then get into developing the good theoretical knowledge.

It’s an agricultural science program. So we spend a lot of time talking about science and how agriculture is an applied discipline of science. There are specific technical skills that change here and there, but the overarching themes do not.

Q: Is hands-on experience also important when people are looking for jobs in agriculture?

A: Absolutely. I would suggest that firsthand experience is valuable for any career pathway, whether its agricultural not. We do have the ability with the way the ag curriculum is set up. And then it was FFA and SAE, which is an experiential learning component to get kids experiences to more fully inform them about what they could do as a career and so forth.

Going all the way back to the beginnings of agriculture education and FFA, it was always focused on getting people ready to go into the world of work. As is all CTE stuff, like everything at the Career and Technology Center. We often think of those as trades, but the focus is on preparing people to leave and move toward their career. And if that career path intersects with college, or secondary education, or some type of technical school, that's awesome. It's pretty myopic to think that every kid needs college when they don't.

So, the hands-on component is just another way to more fully educate kids so that they can make wise decisions about what's going to work for them. ... We pride ourselves in ag and CT pathways is really career-focused, not just college focused. What you often hear about, not to polarize the issue, but career is the end goal, college might be a step.

Q: Being a teacher for a long time, do you get to see your students go on to careers in agriculture?

A: Yes, I've got numerous out there that are successful. ... We've gotten feedback from the University of Maryland folks, too, that ag kids from Carroll County here seem to be doing really well. They have a different level of preparation compared to some students from other counties in Maryland.

With being an educator, you're always forward contracting, meaning you won't see the fruits of your labors until five, six, seven years after they graduate. And sometimes you don't get to see that because, you know, the very mobile world nowadays, kids move away.

Q: Since you started teaching, are there things that are really different about it from when you began? Or have some fundamental things stayed the same?

A: Yeah, it's still teaching. Different tools have come around. We had few computers when I started teaching. Now it's pretty much everywhere there's computers. So that is a tool. But it's not the learning. So many people say kids learn better from computers. No. It's just the interface.

At the core of it, probably the pace of the world around kids has changed. The level of stress on some of these kids nowadays has changed. The ability for them to get anything anytime they want information-wise has certainly changed. But overall, I don't think the education itself has changed so much.

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