

Prospecting for Purpose in the Golden State
The American Association for Agricultural Education (AAAE) Western Region Conference
September 9-11, 2024 Chico, CA

From September 9 to 11, 2024, members from the Department of Agricultural Education and Agricultural Sciences attended the Western Region AAAE Conference hosted by California State University, Chico in Chico, California. Two faculty members, Dr. Josh Stewart and Dr. Jonathan Velez, and two graduate students, Teague Teece and Michelle Borges, represented Oregon State University (OSU) throughout the conference. Through the disciplines of agricultural education, agricultural communications, and agricultural leadership, faculty, staff, and students have the opportunity to attend AAAE conferences through the country to represent their university.

The three-day conference entailed a specific theme for each day. For day one, *Discovering California Gold*, consisted of California agriculture industry tours. There were four tours highlighting Northern California Central Valley's top commodities of wine grapes, almonds, rice, and olive oil. Conference attendees toured New Clairvaux Vineyard, 4 Corners Hulling and Shelling, Lundberg Family Farms, and California Olive Ranch. After the tours, the day concluded at the Chico State University Farm with a taste of California wine reception, graduate student activity, and networking dinner.

The second day of the conference's theme was *Mining for Ideas*, where attendees presented academic research posters and papers on Chico State's main campus. The first session was the innovative idea poster presentations where Michelle Borges presented her poster titled, *Let's Walk and Talk: Using Walking Interviews to Explore Agritourism Operations*. The poster session moved into the paper presentations where students and faculty from across the Western states presented their research in relation to agricultural education and agricultural communication disciplines.

A recent Ph.D. graduate student from OSU, Dr. Natalie Baumgartner, submitted part of her dissertation titled, *Exploring What School Based Agricultural Education Teachers Narratives say about their Lived Experiences Pertaining to Working with English Language Learners*, presented by her advisor Dr. Josh Stewart.

"I was fortunate to present research from Baumgartner's dissertation. Natalie finished her PhD in June but was unable to attend the conference, so I filled in for her. I really enjoyed Western Region conference this year, it was surrounded by great people and conversations," Stewart said.

A former high school agriculture teacher and now a new Ph.D. student for the department, Teague Teece had the opportunity to attend her first AAAE conference.

“As my first time attending Western Region AAAE, I am excited to utilize the ideas I learned and further my professional connections with the brilliant colleagues I met,” said Teece.

Honoring Golden Achievements was the third and final theme of the conference with the research poster session to start day three. Michelle Borges presented her research poster titled, *The Farm to the Board Room: An Autoethnography Approach and Interviews with Women in Agriculture*.

Following the poster session, attendees presented more research papers from various universities for the western region of the U.S. The conference ended with an awards ceremony. OSU’s Department of Agricultural Education and Agricultural Sciences Assistant Professor Dr. Haley Traini received the AAAE Western Region Outstanding Early Career Member Award. Traini has worked for the department since August 2019 and has research interest in leadership education, international agriculture, and school-based agricultural education.

Dr. Jonathan Velez, Department Head for Agricultural Education and Agricultural Sciences was pleased with the OSU’s representation at the conference. He looks forward to bringing the information learned to the department for this academic year.

“Our conference provided an amazing opportunity for us to engage with the California agriculture community, connect with academic colleagues, and explore ways to strengthen agriculture education, leadership, and communications,” Velez said.

The Agricultural Education and Agricultural Sciences department serves approximately 300 students each year with dedicated faculty and staff. By attending this AAAE conference, new ideas of research and future collaborations are brought back to provide students the knowledge and tools for their future careers. To learn more about the WAAAE, please visit:

<https://aaaeonline.org/Western-Region>.