

# Growing Agricultural Literacy Through Teacher Farm Tours

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## OBJECTIVES

1. To increase local educators' understanding of local agricultural systems.
2. To strengthen alignment between agriculture and middle school science standards.
3. To increase teacher confidence in integrating agricultural concepts.
4. To promote classroom implementation of agricultural curriculum.



## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Agriculture contributes more than \$70 billion annually to Alabama's economy, and DeKalb County ranks #1 in the state for beef cattle and broiler production. Despite agriculture's economic significance, many students and educators are several generations removed from the farm and lack direct exposure to modern agricultural practices. This disconnect contributes to limited agricultural literacy and missed opportunities to integrate real-world agricultural examples into science instruction.

Middle school science curriculum includes standards related to ecosystems, environmental stewardship, biology, food systems, and applied sciences, all areas strongly connected to agriculture. However, many educators report limited familiarity with local production systems and available agricultural education resources. To address this gap, we implemented a Teacher Farm Tour designed to provide immersive, standards-aligned agricultural experiences for seventh and eighth grade science educators.



## ACTIVITIES

Teacher Farm Tour: Full-Day Immersion Experience

- Alabama Ag in the Classroom Overview: Introduction to standards-aligned curriculum resources, grant opportunities, and professional development programs.
- Murphree Seed Farm Visit: Exploration of specialty seed production, row crop systems, and modern agricultural equipment.
- Sand Mountain Research and Extension Center Tour: Guided tour of Auburn University research plots and facilities highlighting applied agricultural science, research, and innovation.
- Jubal-Lee Farms Visit: Exposure to fruit and vegetable production supplying local school systems and discussion of farm-to-school connections.
- Locally Sourced Agricultural Lunch & Producer Dialogue: Participants were served a locally sourced steak lunch highlighting DeKalb County beef production. The meal was prepared by the DeKalb County Cattlemen's Association and sponsored by the DeKalb County Farmers Federation. The meal served as an educational component, reinforcing farm-to-table connections while providing structured discussion time with producers and agricultural leaders.
- Curriculum Support: Each educator received \$100 in agricultural classroom materials funded by the DeKalb County Farmers Federation.
- Interactive Discussions: Question-and-answer sessions with producers, Extension personnel, and agricultural leaders to strengthen classroom partnerships.



## OUTCOMES

### Impact

Eight middle school science educators were able to participate in a full day immersion experience. Agricultural curriculum materials in the amount of \$800.00 were distributed directly to classrooms by the generous support from the DeKalb County Farmers Federation.

Post-tour feedback indicated:

- Increased awareness of DeKalb County agricultural production systems
- Improved understanding of how agriculture aligns with science standards
- Greater confidence in teaching agriculture-related concepts
- Intent to integrate agricultural examples into biology, ecology, and environmental science lessons
- Several teachers reported they were previously unaware of the scope of agricultural production within their own county and expressed interest in inviting local producers into their classrooms.

### Evaluation

Evaluation methods included a post-event survey and follow-up communication.

Results showed:

- Overwhelmingly positive feedback from all participants
- All participants reported increases in agricultural knowledge
- Increased confidence in curriculum integration
- Commitment from educators to implement agriculture-based instructional materials within the academic year

Findings indicate that immersive, experiential exposure to local agriculture significantly strengthens teacher awareness, instructional confidence, and classroom application.

Quotes from participants' evaluation forms:

- "I learned new ways to excite my kids about science"
- "The Ag world is super unappreciated"
- "It's neat to see our standards in real-life"
- "I didn't even realize these places were in our county"
- "I didn't know how much everything ties in to all our curriculum: science, math, ag"
- "We need young farmers that will keep ag going"
- "I learned the age of the average farmer is 58.1 years old and DeKalb County is #1 in poultry production"

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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