

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND FORESTRY

2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, OK 73105-4912

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FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Audrey Harmon, ODAFF, AITC State Coordinator, 405-740-0160, audrey.harmon@ag.ok.gov

Morrison teacher chosen for 2017 Excellence in Teaching about Agriculture Award

The National Agriculture in the Classroom Organization (NAITCO), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Farm Credit announced that Amber Bales of Morrison is among eight general education teachers from around the country selected as winners of the National Excellence in Teaching about Agriculture Award for 2017.

Bales, a third grade teacher at Morrison Elementary in Morrison, was the 2016 Oklahoma Teacher of the Year for the statewide Ag in the Classroom (AITC) program coordinated by the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry (ODAFF) and the Oklahoma State Dept. of Education.

In two decades of devoted teaching she has found many ways to promote agriculture through classroom lessons. Her students have germinated bean seeds to measure the sprouts, sampled purple vegetables and fruits to learn about anti-oxidants, designed an educational booth about buffalo for the county fair, and written agriculture haiku poems.

Her current agricultural focus includes organizing a food drive for the school each year and a separate food drive for a local homeless man. In addition, she started a farmers market in her community and is in charge of watering fruit trees at the school.

The passion Bales feels for agriculture spurred her to attend numerous local and state AITC training sessions and conferences. In 2015, she was one of the Top 3 AITC Teachers of the Year and in 2016 won the highest honor as Teacher of the Year.

“Oklahoma Ag in the Classroom is thrilled to have another one of our outstanding educators receive the National Excellence in Teaching about Agriculture award,” said AITC coordinator Audrey Harmon. “Amber Bales brings agriculture into her classroom, her school, her community and now she will represent Oklahoma agriculture on the stage at the National Ag in the Classroom conference. We have great educators all across Oklahoma using the Ag in the Classroom curriculum and they are all making a difference in the lives of students and spreading the positive message of agriculture.”

The kindergarten-through-12th grade teachers honored by NAITCO won the award for the innovative ways they use agricultural concepts to teach core subject areas of reading, writing, math, science, social studies, STEM and more.

“We’re proud of these award-winning teachers who demonstrate so well how effective agriculture can be when used as a teaching tool,” said Dr. Victoria LeBeaux, the National Agriculture in the Classroom Program Leader for USDA’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), which provides federal leadership and annual funding for NAITC.

“These teachers exemplify how easily connections to agriculture can be made in classroom instruction,” said Chris Fleming, president of NAITCO. “We honor them for the strides they make in agricultural literacy in their classrooms every day.”

The eight teachers selected for the National Excellence in Teaching about Agriculture Award are:

- Georgia elementary STEM resource teacher Marla Garnto whose students work with local poultry processor Perdue Farms on a ‘STEM Challenge’ in which students devise ways to improve efficiencies at the poultry plant.
- Maine team teachers Stephanie Enaire and Morgan Kerr who use agricultural concepts, a school garden and a classroom embryology project to teach across the curriculum to foster in the minds of their fifth, sixth and seventh graders a love of the environment and an appreciation of the importance of agriculture.
- Oklahoma third grade teacher Amber Bales who ties Oklahoma agriculture to her language arts, math, science and social studies instruction by putting a local twist on the story *Stone Soup*, involving her students in their school’s Farm to School program and planting cabbage and pea plants.
- Tennessee science teacher Debra Steen who uses growing plants and rearing animals to teach her fourth and fifth graders all the life sciences, including germination, tropism, photosynthesis, animal genetics and more.
- Utah elementary teacher Tiffany Porter who implemented a school-wide program involving a greenhouse, aquaponics system and weather station in which students design irrigation systems, determine the best plants to grow in these systems and the nutrients created from the aquaponics system, among other efforts.
- Virginia first grade teacher Jessica Pittman who uses counting different types of seeds to teach math, a Virginia Ag shapes lesson to teach geometry, and an aeroponic growing system to teach science, among other subject areas.
- Iowa high school science teacher DeEtta Andersen whose students in her biology and physical science classes develop biological buffers to clean a nearby water body, design wind turbines as part of an alternative energy unit and engineer starch-based plastics as alternatives to oil-based plastics.
- Kansas high school biology, ecology and forensic crime science teacher Denise Scribner who uses a school wildlife learning site to educate students about 300 varieties of native and cultivated plants, and soil types and profiles. In addition, students in her forensic crime science class learn about the biogeochemical cycle by investigating a mystery involving contaminated soil at a farm.

They will be honored by at the National Agriculture in the Classroom Conference “Show Me Agriculture,” to be held June 20-23 at the Sheraton Kansas City Crown Center in Kansas City, MO. NAITCO is a non-profit organization representing most of the 50 state Agriculture in the Classroom programs around the country. Its mission is to educate K-12 teachers and students

about the importance of agriculture by providing them with web-based materials, workshops and awards programs that demonstrate how agriculture can be used to effectively teach core subject areas.

For more information, contact Lisa Gaskalla at (352) 745-0246 or info@naitco.org

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Photo caption:

Amber Bales and her third grade students celebrated the announcement that she is one of eight teachers to be recognized as a winner of the National Excellence in Teaching about Agriculture Award for 2017. Bales and her class use the Ag in the Classroom curriculum in all subject areas at Morrison Elementary in Morrison, Oklahoma.

