

THE VISITOR

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A HAPPY AND PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR!

A Message to Teachers of Agriculture

"A happy and prosperous New Year" was the enthusiastic greeting accorded the writer the other day by several teachers of agriculture as they stopped at the office on their way back to school after spending Christmas with the folks down on the farm. "Same to you, and a lot of them" was the cheery, easy reply as the writer peered up from his struggle with the state course of study outline. (Most of the vacation was devoted to the preparation of the agriculture course of study for Minnesota.)

Now what better wish could be made for anyone than that he may be happy and prosperous? And how well these go together even though they are quite different. Happiness is a state of mind, a mental attitude which finds expression in our reaction to favorable environmental stimuli. Prosperity is an external condition which concerns itself with the material side of our lives. Although either one can be had without the other, probably the greatest personal satisfaction would come from the possession of both. Happiness does not depend on prosperity but it may be safe to say that the latter can easily condition the former. Well, you are right in thinking "What has this to do with the teaching of agriculture?" Maybe it hasn't anything to do with it but we wished "the same to you." Consequently, it may not be amiss to attempt an explanation of what we meant. Not much can be done directly about your happiness. That is subjective and must remain largely under the control of your inner self, and perhaps the psychologist, but this prosperity condition is objective and therefore the factors which influence it can be isolated and chased into the open where pot shots may be made.

The Point of View

The point of view to be developed here is that there is a close relationship between our prosperity as teachers and the way we carry on our work. Perhaps we are regarding prosperity here as analogous to success as a teacher. However, the teacher who aims at prosperity through teaching must meet with success according to the standards set by the group served. It is the purpose of this

discussion to review some of the commonplace factors that are considered important in the activities of the teachers of agriculture. Teachers of agriculture in the high schools are going to have greater opportunities for increasing their influences on American agriculture as an increasing number of the boys become the actual farmers of the future. It is generally conceded that the difficult and complex problems of agriculture must be solved by the farmers themselves. The students of agriculture today must recognize, understand, and know how to solve the problems they are to meet as farmers of tomorrow. Looking ahead with 1932 may we see in the following some suggestions for the improvement in the efficiency of the agriculture departments.

Attitude of the Teacher

Frequently we hear the local superintendent say that the teacher of agriculture has a good attitude toward the school and the work in the community. The superintendent likes to have the teacher of agriculture become an integral part of the school program of activities. Some teachers of agriculture appear to have the mistaken notion that the agriculture department is different from the other departments of the school and that he, as a special teacher, does not need to conform to the usual demands made on academic teachers. Fortunately, this attitude is rapidly disappearing. The teacher of agriculture should co-operate in every possible way in carrying on the various activities of the school and should in no way feel that he has the right to be accorded special privileges not consistent with the best interests of the school as a whole. "Enough said." We like to hear the superintendent say that he likes the professional attitude of the agriculture teacher.

The Course of Study

The course of study is an all important factor in the success of a department of agriculture in the high school. The teachers should at this time of the year take an inventory of problems included in the course of study to assure themselves again that the material included is based on the needs, abilities, and opportunities of the boys. The content should include what the boys need to learn and can learn rather than what

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Happy New Year

the teachers want to teach or can teach. A common fault is to include too much. Let us teach fewer things better.

Farm Practice

An important part of the activities of the boys who study agriculture is the farm practice program. In Minnesota there are two types of farm practice. These are the short-time farm practice or definite project and the long-time farm practice program or the broader program of farm practice. The former is required of all students who enroll for instruction in agriculture. The latter, which is considered more important, is desirable for farm boys who plan to take more than one year of agriculture and who have the opportunity and ability to go beyond the special project in their farm practice work. Each form of farm practice work should be preceded by special care in the selection of the activity to be undertaken. When the student has determined the kind of farm practice work he is going to do, he should begin a thorough study of the problems involved. The outcome of his study should be a complete plan for each activity to be undertaken. This study and planning should be carefully co-ordinated with the course of study materials and should be appropriately distributed through the group discussion activities and the individual work of the students. There should be no hiatus between the course of study and the farm practice of the students. The skillful teacher will develop each phase of these activities so that they will both be enriched to the fullest extent.

The Supervision of Farm Practice

Some teachers appear to have the idea that the supervision of farm practice is a summer job. The supervision of farm practice is not a "vacation" activity. It is an all year activity. The most exact-

ing supervisory work should be done when the boys are selecting and planning the farm practice program. If a good job is not done at that time, there will be little necessity for supervision during the summer. If the boys have their farm practice work carefully planned, there will be less need for much supervision during the summer. In fact, the boys are frequently too busy during the summer to be bothered with a teacher who has not sent them home with appropriate, thoroughly understood, and completely developed plans for the practical work they are to do. Good teachers use a portion of their summer time in teaching certain things that can be taught to best advantage at the time the activity actually occurs.

Of course the teacher of agriculture must do something during the summer. He must do something besides "visiting" the boys. Many of the boys need help and encouragement to carry on during the summer months and the teacher must find a way of rendering this service. In addition to the work with the boys who have enrolled for instruction in agriculture, the teacher should use the summer time for lining up future students and becoming acquainted with their personal and home farm needs. In fact, the supervision of the farm practice work of these students might well begin by directing their thoughtful attention to problems to be engaged in during the coming year. It will save a great deal of school time to have the boys begin with their plans and have their attitude towards agriculture well formed before the academic school year begins. Is this idealistic? No—just good sense.

In addition to the farm practice work the teacher should use the summer months for other worthwhile activities. Among these the following may be suggested:

Make professional improvement; complete records for reports to school authorities; engage in community activities; write stories for publications; prepare charts, and other illustrative materials; revise courses of study; "fix up" the agriculture room; improve the library; extend personal contacts with parents; conduct farm practice tours; contact former students; study community and individual farm needs; co-operate in club work or other extension work; catch up on neglected reading; plan appropriate revision for the annual and the long-time program of work; make inventory of results to learn if progress has been made; attend conferences; survey community for part-time students; and if there is time, rest a bit.

The Library

The library is not an old book's home. It is a place where youth can find the latest and most scientifically accurate information concerning live problems of present day farming. A real American farm boy does not want to know how his great grandfather raised his pigs. He wants to know how the best swine raisers today are managing the swine industry. Learning obsolete facts and reading about discarded practices have little value in the program for the preparation of modern farmers. There is no value in perpetuating errors of the past. For this reason each teacher should check his library with a view of replacing the out-of-date books and bulletins with the latest and best publications dealing with problems that are of local significance. The writer ventures the guess that over fifty per cent of the books in many of the agriculture libraries are more than ten years old, and many are beyond the teens. It is not a good use of a student's time to seek the solution of modern farm problems in obsolete literature. If we cannot bear to destroy the old book friends, let us at least establish an old book's retreat so that the boys will not need to waste time on them unless they like antiques or feel historically inclined. In other words, a well selected and well-kept up-to-date library is a distinct asset for the agriculture department.

Room

The high cost of living excuse comes in handy a great many times. But it doesn't cost much to keep the agriculture room clean, neat, and attractive. Let's take a 1932 look at the agriculture room. How does it score if we give one point for each affirmative answer to the following:

1. Are the floors clean?
2. Are the walls clean?
3. Is the blackboard clean?
4. Are the window shades in good repair?
5. Are the windows and sills clean?
6. Are the walls free from messy samples of products?
7. Are the desks and tables clean and in an orderly arrangement?
8. Are the chairs well arranged and equipped with silencers?
9. Are books neatly arranged?
10. Are bulletins neatly filed?
11. Are magazines well arranged?
12. Is the bulletin board material neatly arranged?
13. Are the walls free from a mass of miscellaneous pictures, charts, and other free material?

14. Is the teacher's desk neatly kept?
15. Are the floors, side tables, or book-case shelf free from miscellaneous illustrative material?
16. Is the milk testing equipment kept clean and put away?
17. Are supplies such as corn, soils, and grains put away?
18. Are the seed corn hangers put away when not in use?
19. Are the seed testers put away?
20. Are all your charts put away when not in use?
21. Would you be proud to have your friends inspect your agriculture room right now?

The state supervisor and the local superintendents frequently complain because the teacher of agriculture is a poor housekeeper. Why not enlist the co-operation of the boys in a new year's resolution to the effect that the agriculture room must be as orderly as the nature of the work will permit? An orderly, well-lighted, and cheery room adds much to the quality of work the boys will do. It is not necessary to have the walls littered with old dried-up and faded head samples of grain and grasses in order to add an agriculture atmosphere to the classroom.

Future Farmers of America

The Future Farmers of America organization is one of the most important features of the program of instruction in agriculture. Membership in this national organization for farm boys should be an inspiration to any boy who is seriously interested in the opportunities in farming. Although the organization is relatively new, it has a membership of over 50,000 farm boys distributed over forty-three states. The activities of the Future Farmers of America are definitely co-ordinated with the program of work for the departments of agriculture in high schools. Teachers should discuss with the boys the plan of organization of the F. F. A. and should co-operate with them in case they decide to establish a local chapter.

Each year, approximately ten boys in Minnesota are awarded the degree of Minnesota Farmer. Each local chapter in the state should have at least one candidate for this honor. The responsibility, if not the duty, of the teacher of agriculture as local adviser is to encourage the boys to plan and put into operation a program of activity that may win for them the recognition made possible through the F. F. A. Two boys from Minnesota can be recommended for the *American Farmer* degree in 1932. Again

the teacher must take the initiative in directing the activities of the boys who wish to become candidates for the highest honor awarded by the National Association of the Future Farmers of America.

Before the activities of the new year begin to pile up on us, let us get busy and inject new life into the local F. F. A. chapter. Co-operation appears to be one of the keys to the solution of some of the problems of rural life. Like happiness, the spirit of co-operation is subjective. It is an attitude that must be developed within an individual before it can find expression in the life of the individual. In order to be good co-operators, people must think good co-operation. A good way to secure a background for co-operative activities is to experience them by working with other people. An excellent place to gain experience in co-operative activities is to work with other boys on common interest problems in the local chapter of the Future Farmers of America. The activities of men are frequently the expressions of the experiences they had as boys. A good F. F. A. chapter is an excellent training ground for future co-operative activities.

Community Activities

The all year employment of teachers of agriculture makes it possible for them to assume a definite rôle of leadership in the various activities usually carried on in local communities. In budgeting their time, the teachers should not overlook the opportunities for service in co-operating with the activities of the county agent, the 4-H club work, P. T. A., county fair board, community club, commercial club, and many other local groups.

Good teachers can think of more things to be done than it is humanly possible to do. For these teachers, the problem becomes one of selecting the most desirable and most strategic things to do. A teacher who can identify the most important activities to be done can usually also discover the most effective method of doing them. These are the progressive teachers. You know, no teacher stands still. He is either progressing or regressing. Let's check up to see whether we are going or coming.

Thoughtful teachers will recognize in the discussions on surplus production a danger that someone will raise the question as to the need for employing anyone to emphasize still greater production. It may be desirable therefore to give increased emphasis to the activities bear-

ing more definitely on social problems. The summer months afford excellent opportunities for leadership activities not directly related to the techniques of farming but rather to the techniques of living on farms.

Farm Mechanics

It is with a feeling of regret that we observe a rather decided decrease in the amount of attention given to the teaching of farm mechanics to the agriculture students in the high schools. There has perhaps never been a time when farm repair and construction activities were so important as it is during the present period of depression. Farmers must in some way make the old binder or the hay rake do for at least another year. During normal times even minor repairs are taken to the shop in town. Now even major repairs must be done at home. Teachers should revive the good old days when instruction in farm mechanics was an interesting and valuable part of the preparation for farm boys. A definite part of the farm practice program for students in agriculture should be devoted to the mechanical activities on the farm. It may be necessary at first to develop an appreciation for the present necessity for increased attention to the economic problems involved in repair and minor construction work on the home farm. Each student should be encouraged to make a survey of what needs to be done at home. The results from the survey will point the way for developing a group of activities appropriate to the need of the farm. The boys as a rule enjoy mechanics and if the problems are well selected, the work will result in a distinct saving for the home farm. It is not necessary to enumerate a list of jobs here. Most farms are fairly teeming with things that can be done. There are motors to be overhauled, machinery to be cleaned and repaired, tools to be sharpened, roofs to be fixed, fences to be repaired, harnesses to oil and repair, farm utensils to be soldered, belts to be laced, and perhaps some plumbing to be done.

Any needed work that can be done in the field of mechanics will be a saving for the farmer. And farmers are interested in a system of education that can show a money value. The mechanical activities in modern farming are too important to be omitted from a well-balanced program of instruction in agriculture.

And now there is just space enough to wish you a happy and prosperous new year!

A. M. F.