

# THE VISITOR

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Devoted to the Interests of Agricultural Education in Minnesota Schools

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## TAKING AGRICULTURE OUT OF THE BASEMENT

The theme song for this issue of THE VISITOR is, *Take Agriculture Out of the Basement*. And this is how it happened. In reply to the question: "Why do you not have a department of agriculture in your high school?" several superintendents said: "We do not have any suitable basement room." And that's that. Now, whoever conceived the idea that agriculture should be taught in a dungeon? There is nothing dark and mysterious about teaching or about studying agriculture. As a subject it embodies a wide range of scientific information which includes contributions from every science known to man. As an art it comprises highly developed skills, challenging problems, and intricate manipulative activities which demand the broadest spread of human abilities.

Agriculture is not a fad nor a new "ism" that has recently appeared on the educational horizon. In fact, it is the oldest, the most discussed, and the most fundamental industry history has evolved. It has always been and probably always will be the limiting factor in the development of the moral, social, economic, and religious standards of the human race. Let the farmers lay down their hoes for even one season and the wheels of industry would soon stop, the world's culture would break down, our highly developed civilization would totter and the world would be thrown into consternation and confusion. Men would become raving beasts, morals would break down, and the traditions of art, music, science, and literature would be scattered to the winds. Fortunes would become as "sounding brass and tinkling cymbals," and the triumphs of science and civilization would fade away as the dew before the morning sun. And so we could go

on and paint a picture of distress and despair that has had no parallel in the history of human experience. But that is not the purpose of this discussion. We merely wish to point out the fact that agriculture is an important and worthwhile subject for study for those who are or who expect to be engaged in the agricultural occupations.

It should not be necessary to present any arguments to show why the basic and most fundamental industry of the people in a community should be accorded a place among the subjects for study in the schools of the community. When schools located in agricultural communities fail to provide instruction in agriculture they fail in one of the fundamental purposes of public school education. Farmers themselves as well as school men have been relatively slow to recognize the value of school preparation for the farming occupations and have been somewhat reticent about demanding that instruction in agriculture be made a part of the public school curriculum. The reason for this is probably rooted in tradition rather than in any feeling that it is not worthwhile. When schools were established in the early period of our history there was little, if any, organized scientific information available in the field of agriculture. The early schools were concerned with the so-called three R's. As additional subjects were added they naturally were selected for their cultural value, (not agricultural). This naturally became the accepted policy. It has been difficult for the vocational subjects to break the rather firmly fixed tradition.

Years of cumulative practical experiences enriched by results from extensive research in the field of agriculture has made available an abundance of content

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for courses in agriculture. The response has been a rapid increase in the number of high schools where agriculture is included as a subject for instruction and study. In the early years little was known about techniques of teaching vocational subjects. Consequently the teachers naturally employed the methods that had been developed in the field of general education. For this reason agriculture in the high school has been subject to some criticism in the past because it was considered too "academic." This "evil," if it really existed, has been overcome by the present program for instruction in agriculture. Increased emphasis is given to the practical application of the class room instruction. Through the program of farm practice the students begin productive work through the special projects and emerge at the end of their years of study with a long time farm practice program that involves the productive and managerial activities of the entire home farm.

If there ever were, there certainly no longer exists, any reason why the agriculture class room should be located in the basement. The idea must have originated in the early days when suggestions were made to the effect that the agriculture room should be located on the ground floor so as to be easily accessible to farmers should they care to "drop in" for advice from the teacher. Perhaps another reason is the fact that at one time it was considered very important to locate the agriculture room on the basement level so that farm machinery could be brought in for study and repair. These reasons for a special location of the agriculture room seemed good in theory but in practice it has been found that farmers are perfectly capable of finding the agriculture teacher up where the sun shines. The double door bugaboo has also lost its significance because it has been discovered that farm machinery can be studied

as well or better in places other than the class room.

Superintendents have discovered that agriculture is a respectable subject and can be brought out of its hiding place in the basement. Now in many schools the agriculture room is one of the best rooms in the building. As a matter of fact, in schools where they are crowded for space the agriculture room is shared with the science teacher, the English teacher, or teachers of other subjects in the school. And none are hurt thereby. A reason for the changed attitude is that as agriculture is taught now greater emphasis is put on the practical applications at home of the results from class room study. For example, farm machines are studied at home or at school but they are repaired as part of the farm practice work at home. Increased attention is given to the out of school learning activities of the boys enrolled for instruction in agriculture.

Combining the agriculture and science room may in many cases provide better equipment and teaching facilities for agriculture than is possible if a separate small and poorly located room is used. It is a matter of economy to have each room used every available hour of the school day. No room should be used for class purposes if the floor is more than three feet below the ground level.

Of course, it is an advantage for the teacher of agriculture to have a room of his own where he can keep his books, bulletins, and other materials used by the students. The same thing is true for any teacher who uses the modern methods of teaching where directed study and individualized instruction are emphasized. The point of interest is that the problem of finding room for agriculture is not so difficult as some school men seem to think it is. The writer is unable to see any reason why the room question should be the limiting factor in the case of agriculture any more than it is in the case of such other subjects as Latin, history, or mathematics. If there is real need for including a subject, let us find room for it some way. We challenge anyone to show why there is not urgent need for instruction in agriculture in rural communities.

Teachers of agriculture do not believe that sharing the room with other teachers is sufficient cause for not including agriculture in the school offerings. The nature of the activities carried on by the department determines the degree of inconvenience in sharing the room with

other teachers for class work. Usually during the first year or two the room can be shared with other subjects without disadvantage to agriculture. After the department becomes well established it is usually best to have a separate room for the equipment and the numerous activities developed as a part of the program for the students in agriculture.

Education in agriculture is not any longer an experiment. Farmers have come to regard it as an investment and the best endowment they can bestow on their children as safeguards against failure in their future agricultural activities. For this reason school boards and superintendents are urged to give careful consideration to the problem of providing instruction appropriate to the needs of the young people who are interested in entering one or more of the occupations of farming as their choice of a life work.

A. M. F.

#### "IT PAYS TO LOOK WELL"

On his return from a visit to one of our agriculture departments a student said: "I read real character in the life of the agriculture teacher as soon as I stepped into the agriculture room." It so happened that the same day a superintendent of schools in a Minnesota city called at our office, and during the course of conversation he said: "I had to call the agriculture teacher to task for carelessness in his personal appearance." And then to cap the climax the state supervisor reported that on his last series of visits to teachers he checked off twenty-two departments that are not kept in an orderly manner.

The teacher to whom the student referred is a man who is extremely careful about the way he dresses, the manner in which he keeps the agriculture room, and the way he uses the English language. The teacher to whom the superintendent referred is a man who is careless in the matter of clothes. He seems to feel best when he wears baggy trousers, hunting boots, and an old leather waist coat. A few grease spots here and there are no cause for worry. The agriculture room is always in disorder.

It does seem that there is some relation between the way a person thinks, speaks, dresses, and the way his class room looks. If we step into an agriculture class room and find the equipment, the books, the bulletins, the magazines, and the supplies carefully put away in an orderly manner, we may expect to find the teacher of agriculture to be well

groomed and appropriately dressed. Order is said to be the first law of heaven. Let us bring just a little bit of heaven into the environment of the young people with whom we work during the most important habit-forming period of their lives. Most of the things we do in life are the habits we have formed. The habits are the expressions of the way we think about things. Some people can be happy in an environment where everything is in disorder, others are not happy until everything is in order. The habits, the attitudes, the ideals are exceedingly important phases of the learning activities of students. These may not be taught as objectives in our lessons, but they are exceedingly important concomitant learnings in our school activities.

The students in agriculture should be taught to take pride in the appearance of the class room. This same idea will be reflected in their work. The written lessons will be more carefully done. The farm practice plans will be arranged in an orderly sequence and the reports will be more carefully prepared.

But what is the use of philosophizing further? What we wanted to say is that there is nothing about the teaching activities of the teacher of agriculture that calls for a lower standard of clothing, grooming, or room appearance than for any other teacher in the school. It is not enough to have the room straightened up once or twice a year. It should be kept orderly all the time. The bulletins should be filed, and the magazines should be arranged so as to present a pleasing appearance. The bulletin board should not be a catch-all of old clippings, pictures and notices arranged in cyclone fashion. It should be a place where materials of current interest are kept. The students as well as the teacher should feel a responsibility for keeping the material up to date.

The superintendents and the state supervisors like to see good housekeepers in the agriculture department.

A. M. F.

#### NEWS ITEMS

Leigh Harden, a recent graduate from the College of Agriculture, has been appointed to the position as teacher of agriculture at Lakefield, Minnesota. Mr. Harden is to assume the responsibility of carrying on the excellent program of work developed by Raymond Larson. We have much faith in Mr. Harden's ability, and it is a pleasure to add his name to our list of teachers of agriculture.

T. F. Mason, who graduated from the College of Agriculture in June, 1931, has accepted the position as teacher of agriculture at Moorhead. Mr. Mason's native state is Kentucky, so it is safe to say that he knows his horses. But he drives a Buick. The best wishes of THE VISITOR go with him.

Hugh Firmage has accepted the position as teacher of agriculture at Le Center. Mr. Firmage graduated from the College of Agriculture in 1927. For several years he held the position as teacher of agriculture at Osceola, Wisconsin. During the past years he has held the position as county agent in Le Sueur county. THE VISITOR is pleased to say "Welcome home, Mr. Firmage."

### After Dinner Parties

The University of Minnesota Press will give a series of radio "after dinner parties" at 8 o'clock Tuesday evenings during March. In the studio of WLB, the University's broadcasting station, four characters—a hostess, a college professor, and two other guests—will engage in informal discussion of a number of current topics. Dates and subjects are planned as follows:

- March 1: Can a Third Party Survive in American Politics?
- March 8: The Prairie Pioneers—Heroes or Ne'er-do-Wells?
- March 15: Should College Students Earn Their Expenses?
- March 22: Are the Classics Dead?
- March 29: How can Minnesota Birds Be Saved?

The four parts will be played by students from the department of speech, trained and directed by the head of that department, Professor Frank M. Rarig, and A. Dale Riley, campus dramatic director. It is hoped that these programs, based on material contained in books published by the University Press, will be both entertaining and educational.

### Illustrative Materials

No teacher can do his best in teaching agriculture without an abundant supply of suitable illustrative material. Each teacher of agriculture can easily recall instances when he was sorely in need of samples of grains and examples of diseases in plants or animals in order to

help the students to a better understanding of the problems presented for study. May we suggest that each teacher keep a classified list of the illustrative materials he needs so as to have a guide for use in collecting the supply for next year. An important summer activity of the teachers of agriculture is to gather teaching and study helps for the following year. Like reference materials, the illustrative materials should be kept up-to-date. Frequently teachers keep for teaching purposes samples of grain varieties that are no longer recommended for the community. At times grain samples or samples of grasses and legumes have been kept so long that they are discolored and damaged in other ways. Students do not like to work with these museum materials.

Let us begin now to make definite plans for a complete revision of our illustrative material needs for next year. For Agriculture I, an abundance of material is needed for demonstration purposes. The plans should not only include the actual materials that are needed but should also include provision for labeling, classifying and storing the materials. Threshed samples may be kept in glass jars (Mason jars). Head samples, corn and leafy plants should be stored in mouse-proof boxes that are tight enough to permit fumigation to destroy insects. Samples of disease infected plant and animal tissues may be preserved in suitable liquids.

Some teachers have the idea that all these samples should be kept on display in the agriculture room at all times. This is not only unnecessary but also undesirable. In fact, many of these displays present an untidy appearance in the agriculture room. For example, one teacher succeeded in getting together the entire skeleton of an animal. This occupied a prominent and permanent place in the front of the room, altho it was seldom used for teaching purposes. How stimulating this display must have been to the students as they came to class day after day for a period of three years. Perhaps it is the most lasting impression they got from the agriculture course. Would it not be more desirable to keep illustrative materials in a store room? The teacher can then bring them out for display and use as they are needed. The students will be more interested in the materials if used in this manner and the teaching value of the illustrative material will also be increased. A. M. F.