

THE VISITOR

Devoted to the Interests of Agricultural Education in Minnesota Schools

Vol. XX

September, 1932

No. 1

IF I WERE STARTING A NEW SCHOOL YEAR

This month, over six thousand teachers of agriculture in the United States are beginning another year of work. Surely everyone is determined to make the new year the best year of his teaching experience. This can be done only by doing a better job of teaching than each one has ever done before. To make desirable improvements in our activities we must:

1. Possess the inherited characteristics, qualities, tendencies, and abilities that will make improvement possible.
2. Know what improvements to make.
3. Learn how to make the improvements we have selected as desirable.
4. Develop a self-evaluation technique so that we may know when worthwhile improvements are made.
5. Practice the improved experiences until they become progressively habitual.

It is the belief of the writer that every teacher can do a better job than he is actually doing. What a change there would be in our agriculture teaching program if every teacher really did his best. That raises the question as to what can be done to make improvement in the activities and life of a teacher of agriculture. The following items are suggestive of points where improvements might be made. Lack of space makes it necessary to omit a discussion for each item. If the statements stimulate thoughtful consideration on the part of teachers, they have served a useful purpose. The writer has prepared the list in answer to the self-directed question, "What would you do if you were starting a new school year as a teacher of agriculture?"

I would decide definitely to do my work better.

I would try to recognize my points of weakness and invent a way of making improvements.

I would fall in love with my job and consider it the greatest job in the world.

I would learn how to get real joy and personal satisfaction in my work.

I would expect some grief and disappointments but I would learn to capitalize on these as bases for new courage and greater effort.

I would spend some time every day in thoughtful consideration of my problems and how to make improvement in my work.

I would learn to smile in the face of discouragement.

I would be active in all worthwhile community improvement activities.

I would try to realize that dreams are useless unless they find expressions in realities.

I would realize that there is no substitute for hard work.

I would recognize the fact that it is the quality of our work which counts.

I would not select activities on the basis of selfish interest or from selfish motives.

I would aim at progress—not perfection.

I would have faith in myself, in my work, in my fellow beings, and in the possibilities of the future.

I would not leave for tomorrow what should be done today.

I would do more than is expected of me and I would expect some of my reward in heaven.

I would co-operate with others in worthwhile activities.

I would try to make good—excuses are not products of effort.

I would become well acquainted with the boys and share their joys and troubles.

I would cultivate the personal friendship of the parents.

I would be loyal to the school and its traditions.

I would try to master the technique of getting along well with people.

I would try to be honest and fair in my dealings with others.

I would make and cultivate new friendships with worthwhile people.

I would cultivate wholesome, altruistic attitudes towards life and my fellow beings.

I would base my content selection on the recognized need of the students.

I would set up definite objectives for each unit of work and for each lesson.

I would learn to know my community thoroly.

I would make good assignments.

I would make special effort to develop a good technique for individualizing my teaching procedures.

I would make careful daily preparation for my teaching.

in life does not depend entirely upon how ambitious and how industrious we are and how conscientiously we work but on what *kind* of work we are doing. When an occupational choice has been determined, the schools should provide acceptable preparation for satisfying pursuit in the chosen occupation. The farm boys and girls who have rather definitely decided to engage in one or more of the occupations of farming as a life activity have a right to receive special preparation to better fit them for the work of their choice. Farming has always been one of the major activities of the American people and there is no reason to believe that agriculture is not going to continue to retain its prominent place among the important industries of the nation. For this reason, Vocational Education in Agriculture should hold a prominent place in the total program of education of our rural population. Thoughtful people have come to believe that the solution of the ills that have befallen agriculture, complex as they are, lies in education as well as in legislation or donations.

Importance of Improved Method

As a group, farm folk have been relatively slow to recognize the importance of improved scientific method and to accept the value of instruction in agriculture as a sound basis for progress and improvement in modern farming techniques. The idea of learning how to farm in classrooms or from books or from other scientific literature has not met with the wholehearted approval of farmers in the past. Skillful doctors, efficient lawyers, and good business men are products of school preparation and there is no reason why successful farmers cannot be prepared as a result of school experiences. It is a matter of economic importance for the farmer to recognize the value of independent study as a necessary supplement to the information he gains through his so-called practical experiences.

The thoughtful farmers now believe that real progress in agriculture does not come from imitation but from study and experimentation. Permanent relief from the ills of present day agricultural conditions is more likely to come through the ability to think in terms of farm problems rather than through mere ability and endurance to work long hours. The modern farmer and the successful farmers of the future must work with their heads—hands alone will no longer suffice.

The pioneer farmers naturally had to earn to farm through the wasteful trial and error method. In the days of our grandfathers there was little information available about the science and art of farming. Years of scientific investigation and cumulative experiences have made available a body of principles and techniques that were unknown a few years ago. Farm folk can now learn in a year or two under the direction of a teacher of agriculture a multitude of things that would otherwise require many discouraging years if they had to be learned in the school of experience. Why not save our young folk twenty or more years by teaching them what the pioneers have found out by experience and what the scientist has found out by experimenting? The happiest and most successful farmers of the future will surely be those who have fortified themselves with the best information in the science and the art of farming. To be good farmers we must think good farming. To do this we must have modern ideas with which to think as well as modern tools with which to work.

Realizing that there is no substitute for education in the farm relief program the states in co-operation with the federal government have provided liberal financial aid to encourage the establishment of departments of agriculture in the high schools. At the present time, about 6,000 rural communities in the United States provide instruction in vocational agriculture for the students who are interested in farming as a life work. We speak of the community instead of the high school because the program for vocational education in agriculture includes instruction for groups out of school as well as for students enrolled for instruction in the high school. There are at least three types of instruction emphasized by the teachers of agriculture in the high school. These are:

1. All day instruction
2. Part time instruction
3. Evening school instruction.

All day instruction includes the work of the regular agriculture classes in the high school. Students may enroll for one or more years of instruction in agriculture as part of the requirement for graduation. Each course in Agriculture carries the same credit value as any of the so-called academic subjects.

Part Time Schools

The part-time instruction is designed to reach farm boys who are not in school. In communities where instruction in agri-

culture is not provided as a part of the school system these groups of farm boys are left to themselves without the opportunity for further schooling and without the counsel and guidance of some person interested in their problems. They are frequently referred to as the unidentified group. Many boys who leave school because they are not interested in the academic subjects are finding great satisfaction and profit in the practical instruction provided in the part time schools.

Minnesota has recognized the educational needs of the older farm boys and girls out of school by establishing four schools of agriculture. These are located at University Farm, St. Paul, Morris, Crookston, and Grand Rapids. For those who do not care to attend the local high schools, we strongly recommend the schools of agriculture where the intellectual, the social, the moral, and the physical well being of the students are under the watchful eyes of competent instructors.

High school graduates who desire further school preparation beyond the secondary school and who are capable of doing school work on the university level should consider the opportunities offered by the College of Agriculture.

These schools have dedicated themselves to the problem of preparing young men and young women to live a wholesome and worthwhile life in the most interesting and most challenging age that history has ever recorded.

Evening Schools

When a department of Agriculture is established in a high school, Dad goes back to school because the teachers organize evening schools for adults. The evening schools furnish opportunity for farmers to study their own problems and to become acquainted with the latest scientific information available concerning the activities on the home farm. These evening schools richly supplement the splendid work carried on by the agricultural extension division of the University. An important phase of the evening school classes is the social opportunity it makes possible for the farmers during the otherwise dull winter months.

Practice Follows Instruction

An important part of the activities provided in connection with each of the types of instruction is the practical work the students do at home. Students do not spend their whole time on learning things they may use *some* day. They make practical application of what they learn as a definite part of their study activities. Thus the boy or the farmer may study about better methods of feeding cows and then go home and actually feed the cows better. There is no cold storage learning in the vocational agricultural classes.

Teachers Well Qualified

The teachers of agriculture are well qualified to assume the duties of effective, progressive leadership in rural life problems. They themselves are farm boys who have in addition to their practical experiences completed the requirements for graduation from the College of Agriculture. In fact, many of the teachers of agriculture have also been enrolled in the graduate school of some prominent university. They are unusually well qualified to guide the agricultural activities of our rural youth to a higher level of efficiency and at the same time make living in the country more interesting and more meaningful.

Leaders in rural communities who are interested in better rural life activities are urged to cooperate with the local school authorities in promoting an effective program of instruction in agriculture for farm boys and farm girls. There are many communities in which we still find school systems that do not provide instruction in agriculture although farming is the chief occupation of the school patrons. These schools cannot adequately meet the needs of our modern farm youth.

If the local high school does not maintain a department of agriculture, the rural young folk in that community are deprived of the opportunity of receiving school preparation for entering the occupation of farming, if that is their choice of life work. The agriculture department in the high school is a community service department. Let us place one in every community where there is a genuine need for it.

A.M.F.