

THE VISITOR

Devoted to the Interests of Agricultural Education in Minnesota Schools

Volume XLI

April 1954

No. 2

FARM MANAGEMENT POTENTIALS

by LAUREN GRANGER, Coordinator
Cooperative Project in Adult Education in Agriculture

During the past year it has been my privilege to have visited in more than one hundred schools in this state where vocational agriculture training for adult farmers is offered. Many times during the course of these visits as discussions with farmers, agriculture teachers, or other community leaders were proceeding, the following statement was often made by some person in the group: "Management is the key to successful farming." It is pleasing to hear such a statement made and I'm certainly in accord with it. You no doubt have found in your own experience and from reading in farm publications ample evidence to further support these views. However, in the face of this apparent complete agreement as to the importance of management abilities in modern farming, we find many communities where little training in farm management principles and practice is being offered to operating farmers on a continuing basis.

Reasons for not providing more adequate farm management instructions to adult farmers can be many and varied. But if we really embrace the community school philosophy of education, we should be willing to concede that farm management training for present and prospective farmers in any community needs to receive high priority from agriculture instructors. Where better can we concentrate our teachings in agriculture than on units designed to provide individuals with a working knowledge of the economic forces affecting farming and farm profits?

Teaching farm management is a most rewarding kind of educational activity for both the teacher and the students. An agriculture teacher has to be alert and very well posted on agricultural theory and techniques in order to guide top-notch farmers into procedures that will substantially strengthen their farm busi-

nesses for them. However, where teachers do accomplish business improvements with successful farmers, the results can have far reaching consequences of value to the farmer, teacher, school and community. For example, farmers who have increased their rates of returns from their farming resources of land, labor and capital because of farm management training at their local vocational agriculture department are in a stronger position to enjoy a higher standard of living for themselves and their families. Additionally, these same farmers are then apt to be more civic minded and more cordial towards voting in support of increased budgets for school purposes which could well mean more teachers and better facilities and equipment not only for the vocational agriculture department but also higher salaries in the entire school system. These are only a few of the many values that can be achieved by vocational agriculture teachers through effective farm management teachings in their school community.

Farm records are the life blood of any good farm management teaching program.

Without adequate records it is nearly impossible for a farmer to discover where he is strong or where he is weak in the organization and operation of his farm business. In order to design and follow through on a program of farming improvements with an individual farmer, the records are essential in highlighting where and what management problems need the most attention and to evaluate progress or lack of it in making these needed improvements.

Educational leaders in Minnesota have long recognized the potential of farm management training, and as a result, Minnesota has recently provided agriculture teachers with a well organized educational program in farm management. This is

VISITOR

Published quarterly during the calendar year in October, January, April, and July, by the Division of Agricultural Education, University of Minnesota, University Farm, St. Paul 1, Minn.

Entered as second-class matter at the post office at St. Paul, Minn., under the act of August 2, 1912.

Accepted for mailing at special rate of postage provided for in section 1103, Act of October 3, 1917, authorized August 2, 1918.

THE STAFF

LAUREN GRANGER GORDON SWANSON
 HARRY KITTS A. M. FIELD
 M. J. PETERSON, *Editor*

a new venture in adult farmer education, started in 1953 through a grant from the Hill Family Foundation. It has been entitled "The Cooperative Farm Management Study and Service." Perhaps the unique feature of this new farm management project is the fact that the local schools, the Minnesota State Department of Education and the University of Minnesota have joined forces in setting up a unified program of teaching, research and service in farm management that should be of great benefit to those farmers and agriculture teachers who take part in the program. The backbone of this new venture in adult farmer education is farm records. Every farm operator enrolled in the program must keep complete farm accounts on all phases of his business under the supervision of his local agriculture teacher. The Minnesota Experiment Station provides facilities for summarizing and analyzing the records kept by farm operators enrolled in the project. Additionally, the Experiment Station assists agriculture teachers in the cooperating schools in the use of farm record analysis as a basis for improving farm organization and practices and in showing the current values of farm records in determining management policies.

Unlimited teaching potential is to be found in any farmer's business records. The agriculture teacher will have such a host of individual and group problems drawn to his attention in the records that it will be physically impossible for him to organize teaching which will solve all of them. He will have to budget his time and efforts and work with the farmers on those problems whose solutions apparently will

be most profitable and can be solved quickest, cheapest and with the most ease.

Designing management improvements with farmers is real pay-off territory for agriculture teachers not only dollar-wise, but also in the terms of good public relations for the school throughout the local community. This type of adult farmer education can be a long stride forward toward reaching the goal of having the school effectively serve the educational needs of all citizens in its service area. The Minnesota Cooperative Farm Management Study and Service is one vehicle which agriculture teachers can use in accomplishing effective adult farmer teaching. We hope to see this vehicle constantly improved and utilized by agriculture instructors so that it continues to function as an efficient and modern educational tool for farm people.

HIGH SCHOOL FARMERS*

"Vo. Ag." Courses in America

By MARTIN WILSON

The vocational agricultural course in the country high schools of the United States, with its allied system of farm projects carried by the boys as members of the Future Farmers of America organization, is among the triumphs of American education.

At Milton, Georgia, the "Vo. Ag." instructor took me to see Gill Brown as an example of a leading F.F.A. member. We walked down the grassy field, amid the luminous enchantment of Georgian winter colours, and came upon Gill by the creek with horse and cart, loading sand for the byre. Seventeen and in his last year at high school, he is a handsome, well-built fellow with gentle dignity and confidence. He has one of the larger projects. Although still at school, he is farming in quite a big way, for his father is only a part-time farmer, having a daily job in Atlanta City. Gill's projects have progressed, therefore, from keeping one calf to the running of the greater part of the farm in full co-operation with his father. He has eighteen head of cattle, mostly Aberdeen Angus. He is handling eighteen acres of pasture, four of hay, and two and a half of corn. He keeps detailed records, accounts, and

* This article appeared in the January 23, 1953 issue of the Manchester Guardian, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, England.

costings, as all F.F.A. boys do. He pays himself for his own labour. Of the net income, most goes back into the farm for fertilisers or new stock; the residue is split between Gill and his father.

Meat and Peaches

I asked Gill if Aberdeen Anguses were not rather strange companions for the peaches of Georgia, but he launched into an expert paean: "Nice compact animals; smooth flesh; not rough and coarse." "That's a smack at me," said the instructor with a pleased wink. "He knows I keep Herefords." Gill explained that Anguses turn the sun away with their black hides and are not subject to pink-eye, and that the fatty particles are distributed through the meat.

Harry Elkins, the instructor, is himself a successful spare-time farmer, with Herefords, chickens, grape vines, and a nursery of box trees. At the school (where he has a qualified assistant for the hundred Vo. Ag. boys) he has established a full-scale cannery for the district; to this at the height of the season twenty-five families will come in a day, going home with up to three thousand cans of their orchard produce, or with the flesh of two cows cut up on the premises. This educational project is aimed at the whole community—bringing the community into the school, which is an objective dear to the heart of the American educationalist.

The Vo. Ag. course usually covers the last three years of secondary school, up to the age of about eighteen. Out of his school week the boy spends about ten hours in the two agricultural rooms, the workshop (where he tackles sizeable jobs of maintenance and construction of machinery and equipment appropriate to the district, generally using a battery of welding apparatus, lathes, and power tools), and the classroom laboratory.

The course is highly realistic. It is a cardinal principle that the boy learns best through the problems of his own farm; and detailed information about a score or more of farms is constantly under the class's survey. This contrasts with the theory of the English farm institute that the boy learns the general principles on the demonstration farm and can then apply them anywhere.

The American course unifies its studies around the problems of management, repeatedly emphasizing the make-up of the farm's policy, the economic application of labour and equipment, the recording, analysis, and costing of every process. It is in the cultivation of the "management" attitude that Vo. Ag. achieves distinctive success—an attitude notably characteristic of American farming.

The core of the whole scheme is the project, carried out on the boy's home farm in his spare time. The boy takes full responsibility for buying, nurturing, selling a cow, or pigs or poultry, or for cultivating and cropping an area of land, and for handling the produce. By the end of the third year he has completed a series of farming transactions of increasing size and may be on the way to starting on his own or in partnership, with a promising reputation at the bank—there are even instances of individual profits of ten thousand dollars. By virtue of his project, he is a member of his school's chapter of the F.F.A., a self-governing body in which he broadens his agricultural and general interests, enjoys social life, practices democratic procedures, learns to get on with his fellows.

The F.F.A. has its local and national organisation and its set codes. But the projects and circumstances of individual members vary enormously. Robert Parent, of Louisiana, a bashful youth of French descent, started with a quarter-acre of strawberries which he sold by the roadside to buy a Hereford heifer. He will now add a poultry project. Frank Szallach is on a poor hill holding on the outskirts of the Adirondacks, unlike the trim roadside farms of the plains with their huge gleaming silos angled in orthodox pattern to the twin barns. A stocky, cheerful nineteen-year-old in steel-rimmed spectacles, he tells us of his first calf and of how later he made his contribution to the family farm by improvising a silo, driving a circle of fencing into the ground, lining it with sisalkraft, and adding further layers as the silage built up. Proud old Szallach, an immigrant Pole, still finds difficulty with his English. Frank is chairman of the school chapter of the F.F.A. and in the full stream of American life.

Family Farms

Apart from the highly specialised and almost industrialist sectors of American farming—cotton, tobacco, wheat, California fruit—the basis is family farms, with few hired men and nothing comparable with the English corps of farm workers. Vo. Ag. also meets the needs of many Americans who are not farmers' sons but wish to take farming. At Mount Baker, beyond the Rockies, Glenn Ziegler, a canny and experienced instructor, has encouraged the renting of four plots totalling twenty-two acres for sweet corn, oats, and barley. At San Luis Obispo, in Central California, several town boys have taken over a stretch of land, negotiated a loan at the bank, built pens, put in fencing, plumb, ing, troughs. They harvest the hay. The land carries thirty steers, and each boy owns one or more. In rugged Vermont State, out of the twenty-six high schools with Vo. Ag. courses several own small forest tracts, up to eighty acres, as an education not only in the technicalities of timber management and marketing but also in the conservation of natural resources, which is an American problem constantly pressed upon the young.

To all this the Vo. Ag. teacher is the key. He is generally a man of good farming background. He is resourceful, practical, accepted by the farmers as a man of knowledge and experience, up to date with the fruits of current research. Indeed, it is part of his duty to help the adult community and hold classes and discussion groups of F.F.A. members who have recently left school and of older farmers. He has to deal competently with machinery and maintenance as well as with husbandry and management. This section of the teaching profession carries a high reputation. There are special rates of pay, which may even exceed the headmaster's; and the Vo.-Ag. teacher often owns the roomiest of the cohort of teachers' shining limousines which generally lines the school's driveways. He has a comprehensive training of four or five years at a university, which has included effective pedagogic instruction, carefully supervised teaching practice, and the study of an F.F.A. and its rural community. There are well over ten thousand Vo. Ag. teachers in the United States, and 150,000 young-

sters emerge annually from their care.

Here is one of America's greatest resources in the improvement of her agriculture and the enrichment and stability of her rural life.

THE PRICE OF SUCCESS

I often wonder what it is that brings one man success in life and what it is that brings mediocrity or failure to his brother.

The difference can't be in mental capacity; there is not the difference in our mentalities indicated by the difference in performance. In short, I have reached the conclusion that some men succeed because they cheerfully pay the price of success, and others, though they may claim ambition and desire to succeed, are unwilling to pay the price.

And the price is—to use all your courage to force yourself to concentrate on the problem in hand; to think of it deeply and constantly; to study it from all angles, and to plan:—

To have a high and sustained determination to put over what you plan to accomplish, not if circumstances be favorable to its accomplishment, but in spite of all adverse circumstances which may arise. Nothing worthwhile has ever been accomplished without some obstacles having been overcome.

To refuse to believe that there are any circumstances sufficiently strong to defeat you in the accomplishment of your purpose. Hard? I should say so. That's why so many men never attempt to acquire success, answer the siren call of the rut and remain on the beaten paths that are for beaten men. Nothing worthwhile has ever been achieved without constant endeavor, some pain and constant application of the lash of ambition.

That's the price of success as I see it. I believe every man should ask himself: Am I willing to endure the pain of this struggle for the comforts and the rewards and the glory that go with achievement? Or shall I accept the uneasy and inadequate contentment that comes with mediocrity? Am I willing to pay the price of success? The time to begin is now!