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FARMING PROGRAMS—A CRITIQUE

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Writing an editorial about supervised farming programs in this publication is equivalent to writing about womanhood in the Atlantic Journal or honesty in government in the New York Times or mother love in the Woman's Home Companion. We are against sin and we are for farming programs. The readers of the column might reasonably be expected to have given years of thought and effort to the development and improvement of farming programs. Certainly readers of this journal are aware of the significance of supervised farming programs as tools of teaching. What, then, should be said here that may stimulate further effort and still greater dedication to improved education for farm people through farming programs?

In the beginning of vocational agriculture the basic legislation required at least six months of directed practice in farming. This was almost immediately corrupted into the fragmented "project" which has been the major stumbling block to building effective learning experiences into farming programs. It seems reasonable to suppose that the requirement of a minimum of six months of directed practice in farming meant just that. With ingenuity worthy of better things the administrators of vocational agriculture at the high school level permitted academic classroom instruction and the one-calf project to substitute for real directed experience in farming. Nothing could be calculated to hinder the development of farming programs more effectively. The simple project, while ideal for 4-H Club work, lacks breadth, depth, and comprehensiveness. The most serious weakness, or at least a very serious weakness, is that the one-calf project or its equivalent

is unrealistic in that it inefficiently partitions a farm enterprise, worships pseudo-ownership of the boy's calf in Dad's herd, limits the development of junior partnerships at the enterprise level, and tends to isolate the farming program from classroom instruction. The "project" is something carried out on the farm and only incidentally related to the total instructional program. The "project" concept of farming programs leads to vocational agriculture as an extension of 4-H work with some classroom study and perhaps some shop work thrown into the bargain. This also leads to over-emphasis on production of farm products during the first years of Vo-Ag when more emphasis might constructively be given to mastery of basic skills and techniques necessary to farm production and equally "respectable" as elements of a farming program.

Just as the requirement for directed practice in farming was "adjusted" in the name of convenience and expediency, so also has the total program of vocational agriculture been skewed drastically in the direction of instruction for those not engaged in farming. Adult farmers, who stand to benefit immediately from vocational agriculture, have received scant attention. Here are ready-made farming programs that present opportunity for something more than the one-calf project approach. Adult education provides the best opportunity for real vocational agricultural education. And yet it is the high school-FFA part of vocational agriculture that has, through the years, had more than the lion's share of time, money and attention. Captive audiences, composed of high school boys, have occupied the teacher's time. Practically all of the resources avail-

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able to vocational agriculture have been given over to the high school-FFA program. Thus it follows that farming programs have been considered in terms of high school students who have not yet entered upon a farming occupation. What of those who are presently farming and who can benefit from improvement in their farming programs right now? The exclusive application of the farming program idea to high school-FFA instruction has had a crippling effect on the proper development of young farmer and adult education. As a result, many, if not most, of the young and adult farmer programs now in operation are non-functional, academic and frustrating to the really good Vo-Ag men who are "under the gun" in the community schools of America. Here indeed one finds the "No Man's Land" of vocational agriculture.

One need only analyze the wordage expended on farming programs in the Summaries of Studies and in this journal during the last ten years to conclude that farming programs are something that are very necessary to high school-FFA teaching, but hardly applicable to young farmer and adult education. Although this thesis will be rejected by the thoughtful reader, the fact remains that the development of a functional farming program approach to teaching young and adult farmers has been assigned a seat out in the left field bleachers.

Discussions by generalists in education invariably are rooted in the "needs of the child." The needs of adults are seldom, if ever, mentioned. Has this phenomenon carried over into vocational agriculture with a vengeance? Is this the influence that causes some of us to conceive of our task

as working only with captive groups of high school boys who are not farming and probably will not farm? There is a very immediate danger that the real vocational agricultural education will be delegated by default to non-school agencies. Apparently substantial numbers of us are so busy with the one-calf project that we haven't time for the larger needs and greater opportunities for vocational education among adult farmers. Yet it requires no crystal ball to predict that the full realization of the learning-teaching potential of the farming program concept will be found in the arena of adult education.

A major challenge confronting agricultural education in the public schools is the modernization and projection into adult education of the methods used successfully at the high school level. In this projection there will be some casualties of professional jargon. Imagine counselling Farmer Jones, or in Minnesota, Farmer Larson, on his "supplementary farm practices" or helping him plan his "supervised" farming program! These are nice terms that have meaning to teacher trainers, supervisors, and some teachers. But because of their orientation they are not very functional in a teaching operation. It is further suggested here that the assessment of outcomes of our teaching in terms of changes in the farming programs, especially of adult farmers, is done "by guess and by gosh." We are flying by the seat of our pants unless accurate and complete farm accounts become the basis of teaching built around farming programs. The "project" books and "supervised farm records" of the high school-FFA classes must be blended with and grow naturally into the farm management accounting system provided for farmers by the agricultural experiment stations of the various states. This will give substance to the hope that instruction is built around the farming programs of the students and that data are at hand to identify what these farming programs are.

The unique opportunity of vocational agriculture to remain at the growing tip of educational method lies precisely in the further development, experimentation, improvement and use of farming programs as a vital teaching tool.

The Professional Look

The following article has borrowed heavily from an editorial by Mr. Seelig Lester, membership secretary of the New York State Vocational and Practical Arts Association. Mr. Lester's editorial was published in the November, 1956 *Viewpoint* of New York State.

There is a fundamental difference between a jobholder and the professional practitioner. The jobholder engages in his activity merely to earn a livelihood while the professional is more concerned with advancing the art which he practices. Teachers of agriculture have maintained that they are professional practitioners rather than jobholders and as such have banded together and by unity of purpose and united action the art and the science of agricultural education have been advanced. To develop this unity of purpose and to make united action at the professional level possible is the basic purpose of an organization such as the Minnesota Vocational Agriculture Instructors Association.

There is a Job Ahead

As agricultural educators we stand at the crossroads. The nation is desperately in need of trained personnel, yet there are many who, not understanding the purposes of agricultural education in communities of the country, maintain that agricultural education is being overemphasized. It is claimed that with the number of farmers decreasing vocational agriculture is becoming less necessary. This, of course, overlooks the fact that even if the number of people engaged in farming decreases to five million it will still be the largest single occupational group in the country. This negative point of view also overlooks the tremendous increase in the number of occupations directly related to and depending on farming.

Since the beginning of vocational agriculture, the program has attempted to keep abreast of the needs of the community and the people living in the community who are entitled to the best possible educational opportunities. There is, of course, always the danger of complacency as a result of the growth and ex-

pansion in agricultural education. This could have disastrous results. Surely the MVAIA will not permit outside forces to attack the program without putting up a vigorous fight. This should be accompanied by the development of a dynamic and flexible program of agricultural education which moves with the times, with the prosperity of our national economy and the security of the nation.

Let's Work Together

Each of us at one time or another has met with some success and some failure. As individuals we must rely at the beginning on practices and techniques which others have followed successfully. If we are to reach our goal of having the best possible education for those who want and can profit from agricultural education we must enlist the talents and skills of each individual carrying forward the work which must be done. This is in essence the reason for the existence of the MVAIA and constitutes an impelling reason for each teacher of agriculture to become an active member.

State Fair Time is Coming

This article could well be introduced by calling attention to a publication recently put out by the National Education Association. This manual, called "Education Goes to the Fair" was developed under the direction of Dr. Howard Dawson, lifetime worker in rural education and the moving spirit in the Rural Department of the NEA. Readers of *The Visitor* who have not yet seen this manual are urged to write to Dr. Dawson for a copy.

Throughout Minnesota, as in other states, members of the FFA, FHA, school bands, choruses and other groups are making preparations for participation in the State Fair. In Minnesota the theme of the Education Department for 1957 is "Building a Strong Nation."

Surely the theme for 1957 is appropriate. Building a strong United States of America has always been the goal of public education. It is fitting then that this goal be recognized and dramatized as Minnesota citizens stand on the threshold of a

centennial commemoration. Minnesota has had a real part in building a strong United States of America. Indeed, citizens of Minnesota have contributed to the cause of freedom throughout the world. The United States is strong because the states which comprise it are strong. Minnesota is strong because the family units, the churches and the public schools are strong.

The Education Department of the Minnesota State Fair provides opportunity for the schools to tell the people the exciting story of building a strong nation. Booths, demonstrations, State Fair Singers, Parade of Pep Bands, and individual exhibits are among the channels through which the schools in Minnesota may demonstrate to the people of Minnesota their part in building a strong nation.

In the spirit of the public schools of Minnesota will be found the spirit of the future of its people. The building of competent individuals is the mission of the public schools. To this end the Minnesota State Fair welcomes those who join with it in helping to build a strong nation of free individuals.

A variety of opportunities for interpreting this theme to the one million people who come to the Minnesota State Fair each year includes booths, exhibits and displays on an individual basis, music demonstrations, a quiz contest and other events. If the pattern which has been developed over the past years is any indication, it may be predicted that the FFA, under the direction of vocational agriculture instructors, and the FHA, under the direction of home economics instructors, will again provide the backbone of the exhibits, displays and demonstrations at the Minnesota State Fair. Other areas making significant contributions are industrial arts, elementary schools, business and distributive education clubs, health education and musical groups.

Looking back over a period of years of participation in county and state fairs, a

number of observations come to mind. County and state fairs are among the important educational institutions of America and this is particularly true of Minnesota. The public schools have usually had a part in county and state fairs but have generally failed to take full advantage of the opportunities that are available. In some cases this has been because the schools are not in session at the time the fairs are held. In other cases, it has been because of a lack of interest or again it may have been because of insufficient knowledge of the opportunity.

From individuals and groups representing public schools that have taken part in the county and state fair activities, certain lessons have been learned. To be effective, a demonstration, booth or other display must follow certain rules. A good display follows the pattern of good advertising. The first glance catches the eye and the second identifies the main theme or idea of the display. It is important to center on a single theme or idea rather than to clutter up the display or confuse the demonstration with too wide a variety of ideas. Color, sound, models, and motion all play an important part.

There is a certain atmosphere about a fair that appeals to the spark of youth in all fair-goers. The cattle, hogs, sheep, poultry and horses all "dressed in their Sunday best;" the shine of the new machinery; the squeals from the Ferris wheel riders; the symphony of the merry-go-round; the hot dogs, hamburgers and soda pop; fruits, vegetables and flowers; booths; exhibits; the bands; displays and demonstrations all combine to create a festive atmosphere. In this setting there rests an opportunity for schools to tell the story of better public education in a unique and effective way. To all those who will take part in their county or state fairs this year, *The Visitor* extends congratulations and best wishes.