

# THE VISITOR

Devoted to the Interests of Agricultural Education in Minnesota Schools

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## THE FAKE RUSTIC

by

Carl Pherson\*

"No matter how many farmers we plow under, those fake rustics gouge more money out of the government than all other pressure groups combined." Although this was said in jest by Groucho Marx in his autobiography, it does show the growing rift between the farmer on one hand and the consumer on the other.

Today I would like to bring out three definite points. They are: (1) The farmer is doing a good job. (2) The consumer is benefiting from this job. (3) Even though these first two points exist, there is a growing hostility between consumer and farmer. This affects every one of us in this room. If not because of our indignation after hearing the insinuations being hurled at the farmer, then because it hits us where we feel it first, our pocketbook and our stomachs.

Taking these points in turn, we find that the "country gentleman" is doing a good job. One farmer feeds himself and twenty-four others. Mister Farmer of 1939 needed 3.5% more acres to produce food for just eleven people. To keep our people fed, we only need 10% of our population; whereas in 1939, 24% tilled the soil, and in 1919 35% had to work on farms. When we find that India and China need three-fourths of their people to produce an inadequate food supply, we can readily see why the United States is on top. Even Russia needs 45% of her people to produce the very plainest of food.

Then, too, looking around, we find that the consumer is gaining from the efforts put forth by the farmer. The average family spends 21% of its income on food. In 1939, 23% had to be spent for food much less at-

tractive. Although these figures are pleasing, we find greater pleasure in pointing out that it takes less time to earn food. In 1939, you could have bought seven loaves of bread with the wages from one hour's factory work. Today, your work would buy ten loaves. You might say that it takes less time to earn a loaf of bread than it does to eat it. At this time it might be well to toss out a challenge. Can you eat twenty-nine pounds of potatoes in an hour? No, you can't! That's how long it takes the factory worker to earn them. Other foods? Eggs — two dozen then, three dozen now. Milk — five quarts then, eight quarts now.

However, the farmer has become the whipping boy of our uninformed citizens. He has been accused of gouging money from taxpayers. Much of the nation's press has not supported the farmer. To get statistical information for most of this speech, I could not go to *Life* magazine, *Time*, *Business Week*, or any other popular periodicals read by the consumers. I had to go to farm magazines! If the public's ideas are not corrected, then the farmer will lose the support of our congress. This was borne out by Secretary of Agriculture Freeman when he said, "If we drift along the way we have been, we will end up with a revolt in Congress and have no farm program at all."

An additional example of our uninformed public is this true report on what a woman in Illinois said after having to pay \$12.91 for a "grocery bill." "No wonder the farmers are getting rich." Here's what she got: 6 bottles of coke, 3 pair of nylons, 1 long-playing record, 50 pounds of salt used in softening water, 1 egg beater, a fifth of gin, 1 box of corn flakes, and 1 quart of milk. What did the farmer get? Three cents from the 29c box of corn flakes, and 10c from the 23c quart of milk.

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Well, now you have heard that there is a problem and that it does concern you. Then you sit back and say I'm only a farmer, or only a student, or only a teacher. There's not much I can do about that. Let me tell you, there's a great deal you can do. Arm yourself! not in order to hit the first man that says farmers are hayseeds. That only makes hard feelings. Arm yourself in order to tell the farmer's story, not to farmers but to consumers.

We can right "those practices and policies that are unfair." We can show that grocery stores don't just sell groceries any more. Let's face it, we don't want to go back to the old "cat in the crackerbarrel" stores again. However, we do not want air conditioning, cellophane wrapping, cans, boxes, food handlers, and clerks blamed on the farmer. That's not unlike a farmer charging his chickenfeed to his cows, just to make his chickens look better.

If you are asked why the actual food costs per family have risen \$243.00 in the past ten years, do more than just say "look

at how your income has grown and how your other costs have grown." Show that this 36% increase is small compared to the 43% increase in rent, 46% for transportation, and 60% for medical expenses. And what's more important is the breakdown of this \$243.00. Labor received \$130.00, transportation \$33.00, while other costs were \$73.00, taxes were \$4.00. That left the farmer \$3.00.

Yes, indeed, these are the times that try farmers' souls. Things have, in some ways, grown worse. In 1951, the farmer received 40c from the food dollar. In 1961 he received 38c. In no other industry does the most important producer get so little for his effort. In southern Minnesota, we get between 7 and 8 cents per quart of milk. A pair of stockings costing 50c was originally cotton worth 7c to the southern farmer. Housedresses from three to ten dollars have 33c worth of cotton.

We, in telling the farm story, can quote Senator George Aiken of Vermont. "The greatest stabilizing influence of the world's economy is United States agriculture. Take away our assurance of plenty of food and chaos could result."

From personal experience, you know that when your FFA chapter has good public relations, your standing in the community can be greatly improved. So, let's tell the "fake rustic's" story. Let's exert our influence in "our homes and communities that will stand solid for our part of that inspiring task."

## FACT OR FANTASY

"The only thing declining about agriculture is the number of people required on the farm to produce our food and fiber needs.

"Every other aspect of agriculture is expanding. The demand for farm products increases with every new mouth to feed. This demand is increasing at a faster rate than at any time before in history—in a world which has been characterized as having an exploding population.

"Every facet of agriculture and agriculturally related business continues to expand.

"The whole concept of agriculture is changing. A few years ago agriculture was considered to be somewhat synonymous with farming—including only production. Today it covers a wide range of occupations and services.

"Marketing has always been a part of agriculture. Yet many of the marketing functions which were once performed on the farm are now being done off the farm in warehouses, stockyards, processing plants and other marketing firms.

Summary of Growth of Vocational Agriculture Education  
in the Central Region and in Minnesota for Decade 1950-1960

	Region			Minnesota			% of Regional Increase Due to Minnesota
	1950	1960	% Increase	1950	1960	% Increase	
Number of Departments High School	2,777	3,180	14.5	168	284	69.0	28.7
Enrollment Young Farmer	111,048	131,579	18.4	8,276	12,574	64.0	25.8
Enrollment Adult	13,236	16,245	22.7	1,272	1,587	24.7	10.4
Enrollment	48,585	71,374	46.7	3,148	12,468	296	40.9
Total Enrollment	172,869	219,198	26.7	12,696	27,629	117.6	32.2

Source: U. S. Office of Education Report, 1961

"There will be more off-the-farm opportunities in agriculture in the days ahead. Over 10 million people have jobs today involving storing, transporting, processing and merchandizing farm products. Increased opportunities are found in businesses servicing agriculture. Farmers spend more than \$26 billion a year for goods and services to operate their business. This is about four times the amount spent 20 years ago for these purposes."

This statement was made by E. T. York, Jr., administrator for the U.S.D.A. Federal Extension Service, while speaking to the annual convention of Alpha Gamma Rho, a professional fraternity in agriculture. The statement is a short portrayal of the dynamic situation that agriculture is in today. Growth and advancement is discernible in all of the "Farm Based Industries" as well as in farming itself. Keeping the farmer educated in methods of staying abreast of this expansion is the job of Agricultural Education.

The vocational agriculture departments in Minnesota are meeting this challenge. An excellent example is to be seen in the courses offered in adult classes. In recent years much emphasis has been placed on business and enterprise analysis which serves as management's most important tools. Farm management techniques also make up a large portion of the course of study in the high school vocational agriculture classes. Because of the extremely large investments and the competitive aspects, which are common in today's agriculture, each enterprise must be analyzed very carefully before it is undertaken, continued, or expanded. Agri-

cultural education in Minnesota is furnishing our farmers with this necessary "know how."

The above table, taken from the Summary of the U. S. Office of Education and distributed in Minnesota by the State Supervisor of Agricultural Education in a memorandum of March 16, 1961, shows very graphically the extent to which vocational agriculture has grown, both in the Central Region and in our own state, during the past decade. The 296 percent increase in adult enrollment is particularly impressive. It shows that our farmers realize that agriculture is a rapidly changing industry, and that they are interested in keeping themselves informed of these changes.

Some statistics may show a declining rate of increase in the number of vocational agriculture departments throughout the United States in very recent years. The reason for this is that many smaller schools are undertaking consolidation and reorganization proceedings in an effort to form larger, more efficient systems. This combining of schools results in fewer high schools and therefore fewer agriculture departments. These consolidations do not affect the continuing enrollment increases or the increasing need for more personnel.

According to a report compiled by the Minnesota State Department of Agriculture Education, in considering the future of vocational agriculture in Minnesota, several general considerations can be made.

1. The number of farms in Minnesota decreased by 18% from 1951-1961, but the vocational agriculture education program

increased 29% in number of departments, 32% in enrollment and 57% in number of teachers. It is anticipated that the number of farms will continue to decrease in the next decade but at a slower rate. This decrease in farm numbers does not necessarily lead to a corresponding decrease in the number of people involved, as many of the larger farms will become two and three family units.

2. The larger farms and technical developments add to the complexity of the farm business. The large growth of vocational agriculture education during the past decade indicates that farm people are looking more and more to their local schools for an organized program of instruction designed to meet their needs.

3. The adult program will continue to show large increases. Added emphasis on a farm management and enterprise analysis course of study is finding much favor with adult groups.

4. Over 30,000 veterans, that have not been included in data presented, have taken instruction in the I.O.F. program. Some 20,000 of these are now farming and constitute an important factor when considering agricultural education during the next

decade. They are certainly potential enrollees in future adult classes and they will also be demanding vocational agriculture education for their sons.

5. At the present time approximately 25% of the beginning farmers in Minnesota are vocational agriculture high school graduates. A conservative estimate would place this figure above 50% by 1970.

6. Because of increasing interest on the part of schools and the farm people they serve, there will be a rapid increase in the number of multiple teacher vocational agriculture departments. This phase of the program will show the largest increase of any part of vocational agriculture education during the next decade.

These points demonstrate the important role that the vocational agriculture departments will play in the future. Because of the varied industries that are directly connected with agriculture and because of the diversified nature of farming itself, the basic field of agriculture in the broad sense must be included in the agriculture course of study. For this reason vocational agriculture has and will continue to have a place of eminence in all educational curriculums.

## SUMMER INSTITUTE ON FARM MANAGEMENT

Plans are underway to hold a farm management and business analysis institute during the summer of 1963 on the St. Paul campus of the University of Minnesota. Tentative plans include cooperation in the institute from the United States Office of Education, the State Department of Education, and the Minnesota Vocational Agriculture Instructors Association. Dates under consideration are the two-week period June 17-28. A minimum of 45 class hours in addition to field trips to farms, regional analysis centers, and local schools are being planned.

The improvement of instruction in vocational agriculture through the farm management and business analysis approach has proved to be effective. Because of the widespread interest in this methodology the University of Minnesota department of Agricultural Education has concluded that a

summer session institute would be a useful contribution to agricultural education.

The use of the farm management and business analysis approach to teaching vocational agriculture began in 1952 with a series of research studies and experimental teaching situations. A substantial grant from the Hill Family Foundation gave nourishment to the program at its inception. Since that time the "farm management approach" has received the endorsement and support of the Minnesota Vocational Agriculture Instructors Association and MVAIA members have demonstrated its practical value and professional merit. Management-based programs of instruction are now an integral part of vocational agriculture in Minnesota.

The Visitor welcomes indications from its readers as to their interest in participating in the institute.