

# The Visitor

Devoted to the Interests of Agricultural Education in Minnesota Schools

Vol. LII

OCTOBER, 1965

No. 4

## EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF FORMER MINNESOTA VO-AG GRADUATES

Donald G. Johnsen

Department of Agricultural Education

For many years the vocational agriculture program has contributed to American agriculture. One of its most important contributions has been the providing of basic training to rural youth necessary in preparing them for proficiency in an agricultural occupation.

The training of youth for employment in an agricultural occupation should be the main concern of the high school vocational agriculture program. Training is most effective when it is geared to the present employment needs. Employment demands of agriculture today are considerably different from those of the past. In the past, vocational agriculture centered most attention on the occupation of farming. The opportunities in farming have diminished. However, there has been an ever increasing number of opportunities in other agricultural related occupations. Although there are many agricultural opportunities, there is still need for more vocational agriculture courses in high schools in many areas of the country. A report of the President's Panel on Vocational Education disclosed that of 3,733 public high schools in six states, only 45 percent offered agriculture courses.

While the training of youth to be farmers is still important to the economy of the nation it is not the only purpose of vocational agriculture training. The National Vocational Education Act of 1963 in its declaration of purpose stated: "It is the purpose of this part to authorize Federal grants to states to assist them to maintain, extend and improve existing programs of vocational education, to develop new programs of vocational education, and to provide part-time employment for youths who need the earnings from such employment to continue their vocational training on a full-time basis, so that persons of all ages in all communities of the state will

have ready access to vocational training or retraining which is of high quality, which is realistic in the light of actual or anticipated opportunities for gainful employment, and which is suited to their needs, interests, and ability to benefit from such training." The need for studies on employment is suggested in the Act by the following: "will have ready access to vocational training which is realistic in light of actual or anticipated opportunities for gainful employment."

The National Vocational Education Act of 1963 included the teaching of off-farm agricultural occupations as a responsibility of vocational agriculture. This legislation has many implications for the vocational agriculture program. The 1963 Act provided additional funds for vocational agriculture to permit instruction for all occupations which require a knowledge and skill of agricultural subjects. The new legislation thus broadens the field of instruction in vocational agriculture.

It has been published that there are more than five hundred occupations in the eight major fields of agriculture. Many of these occupations involve mechanical abilities. Nearly one-half of the in-school time of many vocational agriculture departments is devoted to mechanical training today. This change in emphasis has resulted in a large number of former students finding employment in many types of industrial work, as well as in the total field of agriculture. However, during the past few years the notion was raised in congressional hearings, and in some of the newspapers and magazines, that vocational agriculture was no longer important in training rural youth because there was no future in farming. There were even charges that vocational agriculture was "training for unemployment." Several employment studies in agricultural education have been conducted which refute these charges of training for unemployment. It was strongly recommended by the leading authorities in vocational education that

instruction in vocational agriculture should, as far as possible, be based upon the findings of surveys to determine employment needs in agriculture.

As a means of determining employment needs in agriculture, the American Vocational Association urged each state in 1964 to make an extensive survey to determine the employment status of former high school students of vocational agriculture.

The author recently completed a statewide study on the employment status of former students of vocational agriculture. All instructors of vocational agriculture in Minnesota were requested to participate in this study which was first introduced at the 1964 Conference of the Minnesota Vocational Agriculture Instructors Association. Reports were received from about 75 percent of the schools. The problem of the study was two-fold in nature:

(1) To discover how many of the former vocational agriculture students in Minnesota were employed.

(2) To determine the nature of their employment.

The primary purpose of this study was to determine the occupational status of former high school graduates and dropouts who had completed one or more years of vocational agriculture in the public schools of Minnesota. Information as to what former students were doing needed to be more definite than that which could be obtained from present follow-up reports. The results of the study were intended to be helpful in evaluating the present instructional program and in giving direction

to future programs for teaching off-farm agricultural occupations.

#### Results of the Study

The sample studied consisted of 8180 students of vocational agriculture who had completed one or more years of training and had graduated or dropped out of high school during the school years 1953-54, 1956-57, 1959-60 and 1962-63.

Over 93 percent of the former students in the study were high school graduates. The majority of the students, over 60 percent, completed all four years of vocational agriculture offered in high school. There was a general increase in the enrollment of vocational agriculture students in the state of Minnesota.

The percentage of former students employed was exceedingly high; over 99 percent of the former students were employed. Only 0.60 percent were unemployed at the time the study was conducted. The rate of unemployment decreased proportionately with the number of years of vocational agriculture completed. The unemployment among students with one year of vocational agriculture training was 1.37 percent and those with four years was only 0.38 percent. The unemployment rates among the former vocational agriculture students were extremely low when compared to the national averages for students of similar age and school background. The national average for males 16 to 24 years of age was about 7 percent. The percentages of former students employed and unemployed by years of vocational agriculture completed is shown in Table I.

Table I. Percentages of Former Students Employed and Unemployed by Years of Vocational Agriculture Completed

Employment Status	Years of Vocational Agriculture Completed				Total all students %
	1 year %	2 years %	3 years %	4 years %	
Employed	98.63	99.25	99.27	99.62	99.40
Unemployed	1.37	.75	.73	.38	.60
Totals	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Almost one-third of the students were engaged in farming. There were over five times as many full-time farmers as there were part-time farmers. The number of farmers in both the full and part-time categories increased proportionately with number of years of vocational agriculture training received. The total percentage engaged in farming increased very sharply

for students completing all four years of vocational agriculture as compared to those who completed one, two or three years. The number of years that students had been out of high school had no direct effect on the percentage who were involved in farming. The percentage of former students entering farming in Minnesota remained fairly stable throughout the ten-

year period represented in the study.

Slightly over one-third of the farmers were involved in partnerships and just under one-third were farm owners. Farm renters and laborers accounted for the remaining one-third. Over 63 percent of the part-time farmers were classified as farm owners. The number of years of vocational agriculture completed had no direct relationship to the number of former students who owned their farms. However, the percentage engaged in partnerships increased proportionately with each additional year completed.

Over one-half of the students who completed their high school education in 1954 owned their farms. The partnership arrangements were most prominent for the students graduating in 1960 and 1963 — over forty percent of these students were engaged in partnerships.

A little over ten percent of the former students were employed in off-farm agricultural occupations. There was a general increase in the percentage of former students so engaged in accordance with the additional years of vocational agriculture completed in high school. The greatest number were employed in livestock products, followed by agricultural supply and service and agricultural processing and marketing respectively.

The percentage of students employed in off-farm agricultural occupations increased proportionately with the number

of years the students had been out of high school.

Slightly over 14 percent of the students were employed in occupations of a mechanical nature. Only about one out of every twelve of these students were in an agricultural related occupation. However, it could be assumed that the mechanical training received in vocational agriculture contributed toward the number in the non-agricultural related mechanical occupations also.

The value and effectiveness of the vocational agriculture program was borne out by totaling the number of former students in farming and non-farming agricultural occupations. Over forty percent of the students were so engaged. By adding to this, the students who were employed in mechanical occupations relating to training received in vocational agriculture, over 54 percent were so engaged.

In order to determine the employment of former students in the available civilian labor force, the students who were in schools, military service, and deceased or disabled were excluded. Over 55 percent of these students in the civilian labor force were engaged in farming or agricultural related occupations. Almost three-fourths of the former students were employed in farming, other agricultural or mechanical occupations that related to the training they received in vocational agriculture. Table II shows the distribution.

Table II. Numbers and Percentages of Former Vocational Agriculture Students in Farming Occupations, Off-Farm Agricultural Occupations and Occupations Related to Mechanical Training Received

Occupational Group	Number of Students	Percent of Total Students	Percent, excluding those in school, military and deceased or disabled*
Farming	2557	31.26	41.71
Off-farm agricultural occupations	843	10.30	13.75
Mechanical occupations (not agricultural related)	1065	13.02	17.37
Totals	4465	54.58	72.83

\* Excluded to represent the percentage of available civilian labor force employed.

Slightly more than one-third of the former students in the study were employed in non-agricultural occupations.

One-fourth of the students of college age (those who graduated in 1963) were pursuing a post high school education. Almost one-fourth of the post high school

students were enrolled\* in agricultural colleges. There was a marked increase in the agricultural college enrollment among former students who completed four years of vocational agriculture over those completing fewer years. The enrollment in agricultural colleges almost tripled for

students who had completed four years of vocational agriculture, as compared to those who had completed only three years. Almost two-thirds of the post high school students attended non-agricultural schools; however, this was reduced to about one-half among those who had completed four years of vocational agriculture. About twelve percent attended vocational-technical schools.

Every seventh or eighth former student was serving in the military service. Most of the students who were permanently located were living in their home community.

#### Implications and Recommendations

The results of this study cannot be interpreted as disclosing the individual needs of students; however, they should prove beneficial in indicating the direction in which the vocational agriculture program might be planned.

There is no question that the teaching of off-farm agricultural occupations is very important in today's agriculture. The attention given to agriculture in the past focused almost entirely on the farming aspect. Rural youth today are finding it increasingly difficult to enter into the occupation of farming. However, with increasing scientific and technological advances in farming, there has been a corresponding increase in the number of occupations related to agriculture.

It has been generally estimated that about forty percent of the working force in the United States is employed in an agricultural occupation and the numbers in off-farm agricultural occupations outrank those in farming by about three to one. The results of this study showed over forty percent of the students in farming and agriculture, but only a little over ten percent of the former Minnesota vocational agriculture students were employed in off-farm agricultural occupations.

Perhaps the most important result of the study pertained to the number of former students employed, over 99 percent. Any educational program that has over 99 percent of its former students employed cannot be "training for unemployment" as some critics have contended. It would seem that the vocational agriculture program has the desirable combination of many factors which trains individuals who want to work and can find jobs.

Most of the former students were employed in occupations for which they received training in vocational agriculture. Almost three-fourths of the students employed in the civilian labor force were in

either farming, off-farm agricultural or mechanical occupations that related to the training received in vocational agriculture. Since over 99 percent of the former students were employed, and almost three-fourths were employed in occupations for which they received training, it can be concluded that the vocational agriculture program in Minnesota is fulfilling the objectives of training students according to employment needs.

This study indicated the direction which the state might follow in planning future instructional programs. However, it cannot point to the needs of the local departments. There need to be more studies conducted dealing with some of the specific areas within off-farm agricultural occupations to discover where needs are most prominent. Local studies are necessary to determine local needs.

There are certain to be many changes in the vocational agriculture program of the future as compared to the program of today. However, the basic underlying principles will not change. Regardless of the type of program or mechanics under which it operates, the important thing is that it meets the educational needs of those persons enrolled.

#### An Agriculture Teacher's Pay Is Not Always Measured In Money

The letter below is an example of this for Odell Barduson and Emery Krech of St. James High School. The letter is written by Richard Gaalswyk, an honor student at Yale University. The editor hopes this letter will be a source of inspiration to other teachers of agriculture.

"Dear Mr. Krech and Mr. Barduson,

"I just want to write a short note congratulating you and the chapter for the wonderful achievements this year. I read with interest everything in the paper about the FFA and can sincerely say that it gives me a great deal of pride to hear of the outstanding accomplishments. Speaking from my own experience, I know the great amount of satisfaction to be derived from the work and rewards which go into and result from being a member of a FFA chapter such as St. James is. I don't feel far enough removed from it yet to say, 'this is what FFA meant to me,' but I can say that the pride associated with it is certainly very strong still and is reinforced even more when one hears of the continuing success.

"All is well here.

"Sincerely, Richard Gaalswyk"