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A GLIMMER OF HOPE

*Edgar Persons, Professor Agricultural Education

Picture yourself as a farmer in the Italian village of Roccapinalveti. It's a small village—so small most maps don't acknowledge that it exists. It's at the end of the road. You can go no further unless you trade your auto for a mule or donkey. You and all of your farmer friends live in the village.

Your farm is of moderate size by village standards, consisting of about 15 acres of land. Through generations of land ownership and inheritance practices your holdings are divided into 12 separate plots, each located in a different area of the mountainside and valley; land for olives, wheat, corn, pasture, hay, the family garden and perhaps a vineyard. Because yours is a mountain farm you pay no taxes, but the living is meager, the days long, and the work very hard.

As your land is limited, so are your other resources; two cows, eight sheep, two dozen chickens, a couple turkeys and a donkey constitute your livestock. Machinery is limited to hand tools and a plow which your faithful donkey carries for you each day as you start the long trek from your village home to the fields, some almost two miles distant.

The ruins of the old castle tell of the time hundreds of years ago when the farm scene was much the same—only the names and faces have changed. But there is a movement afoot that promises to change the scene and reorganize the scenery.

The Cassa Per il Mezzogiorno, a developmental agency financed by the Italian government has been charged with aiding the agricultural and industrial development of southern Italy. One of the important strategies for agricultural development has been the organization of cooperative farms. These farms, located in about two dozen villages, serve as a demonstration nucleus for the way in which the meager resources of individuals can be grouped into single operating units where it is possible to advantageously utilize modern agricultural technology.

The formation of the cooperative is voluntary. Membership may vary from as few as nine to as many as several hundred land holders who agree to operate cooperatively. Agreeing to operate cooperatively demands total commitment from the landowner. His land is assigned to the cooperative for 30 years, although he retains individual ownership and he must assist in the financing of capital improvements that will benefit the new organization.

The organization of the farm cooperative

closely parallels the cooperatives found in Minnesota communities. Governance is accomplished by a board of directors elected from the membership. The board in turn elects an executive council to handle the day to day operation of the business. Because most of the cooperatives are small, major decisions are made by consensus of the membership in meetings called by the executive council.

Why should some farmers of Italy yield their traditional agricultural organization and practices to the newer concepts of cooperation? What benefits do they derive or do they anticipate in the future?

The outlook for the traditional farmer is not bright. Hemmed in by the lack of land, capital and opportunities to mechanize or expand, the potential income from farming is certainly limited. Cooperating with each other provides an opportunity to pool resources into reasonable size units of organization which, with the help of the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno can establish economically sized herds of cows, sheep, swine and chickens. Along with business size comes the alternative of using more modern technology. The mule has been replaced by a tractor, the scythe with a mower, and the flail has given way to a stationary thresher or a combine.

To the Italian farmer, these improvements have offered some immediate, tangible benefits. Income has risen two to three times since the cooperative has been organized; farmers now have more time to spend with their families, the women and children are relieved of many of the hard tasks of primitive agriculture and can devote more time and energy to the home, the garden and the yard enterprises of chickens, rabbits, turkeys and other family holdings. The increased volume on the farms has also provided more strength at the market place. Products, which before were left unsold, now find ready markets because of more stable production.

Most important, the cooperative action provides two elements that hold promise for the future. Each cooperative structure has the services of an agricultural technician to aid the families in gaining expertise in using the technology which the farm has available. Since the general education level is about sixth grade with no vocational training, the opportunity for in-service education from a trained technician is a valuable plus. Farmers who previously had little business or managerial experience now speak in terms of costs of production and production efficiencies and look forward to more sophisticated analyses of their cooperative businesses. The impact of the cooperative organization on the outlook of youth who may aspire to become farmers has not been measured, but may be expected to

be positive. The horizon holds the prospect of a modern and viable agricultural organization. Certainly a prospect with more appeal than the lowly donkey trudging to the field.

Even in southern Italy, which sociologists describe as the poorest region of the western civilizations, there is a glimmer of hope. When people with a strong will to work, unite in a common cause the *whole* can be greater than the sum of the parts.

*Dr. Persons recently joined a group of farm families and instructors from the Faribault farm management education program in a study tour of cooperative farms in southern Italy. This article is a reflection of some of the new enthusiasm generated in Italian agriculture by the organization of cooperative farm units.

A CHANGE IN THE CURRENT

Milo J. Peterson, Professor Agricultural Education

Anyone who has lived long enough to remember high school in the 30s, 40s, 50s and early 60s will surely recollect the assumption that college education was the logical consequence of a high school diploma. To be sure, there were always a few who were not verbally gifted or mathematically inclined. These were shunted into whatever "vocational" courses might be available. In rural areas such students would usually find themselves in either agriculture or home economics. In urban areas, however, their choices were more limited and the resources available to non-college preparatory courses were extremely scarce. There were exceptions, of course, but this situation prevailed more often than not.

The failure of many, if not most, public school administrative personnel to recognize the need for, and significance of, vocational education at the secondary and adult levels was a tragedy. Of even more serious consequence was the impact of college entrance re-

quirements on the secondary school curriculum. High school curriculums were developed only after careful perusal of college catalogs. The real educational needs of the community and the interests of students was of secondary importance.

Consider the case of a young man we will call Bill. He was an excellent mechanic and had a deep interest in becoming an electrician. In his high school the course, which was euphemistically called "shop," gave him an opportunity to build a bird house or a broom holder. The closest thing to electricity was the section on that topic in the physics class. But Bill stuck it out and in due time, after completing the college preparatory curriculum, he graduated. As expected by his parents, Bill entered a liberal arts college. In six months he left and took a job with a gasoline service station pumping gas, working on automobiles and thoroughly enjoying himself.

Any reader of *The Visitor* can recall many similar cases. In some cases the individual may have completed college with a "good liberal education." But when it came to finding employment, a period of training in a business school or similar institution was usually necessary.

Then Came The Change

As might be predicted by any student of educational history, changes in an educational system occur gradually. But economics and sociological influences are finally felt and have an impact on the administration of public educational programs. In this instance it seems appropriate to pay tribute to the Minnesota School Board Association. When they could not lead they would follow and support, but certainly they had a part in the leadership that developed vocational education in Minnesota. It may be trite, but true, that this kind of support and leadership had a "spillover" effect up and down the Mississippi valley. One can surely single out many individuals who have a part in this movement, but William Wettergren must be identified as a leader. William Wettergren has courage and a truly built-in faith in public education. The leadership he has provided is hereby gratefully acknowledged.

As vocational education developed in the public schools it became a kind of a bandwagon. Education for the entry level employment skills suddenly achieved a high priority. Even certain schools in the Red River Valley who had previously prided themselves on the number of graduates who went into foreign missionary work turned their attention to serving the community that supported them.

This change was influenced by a number of factors. The deterioration of rural communities with a major influence. The population movement, which has been traditional in the United States since Ely Whitney invented the cotton gin, was a part of the influence. In this

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THE STAFF

ROLAND L. PETERSON	GEORGE COPA
FORREST BEAR	GORDON SWANSON
EDGAR PERSONS	CURTIS NOREMBERG
GARY W. LESKE	MILO J. PETERSON

R. PAUL MARVIN, *Editor*

connection, it might be noted that the migration of rural population to urban centers was reversed only in periods of severe economic recession. One could starve to death slower on a farm. In recent years we have witnessed an urban to rural trend without a severe economic distress period.

At this time, with the advent of career education giving added impetus, vocational education has achieved respectability. The impending world famine will no doubt further emphasize the importance of vocational agriculture and underscore the shortage of teachers of agriculture.

Whither Teacher Education

As a result of the chronic undersupply of teachers of agriculture relative to the demand, there have been pressures for "shortcuts" in the preparation of teachers. The argument has been raised that credit should be allowed for experience, thus reducing the number of credits required for certification.

There also has been a periodic hue and cry for provisional or temporary certification accompanied by in-service training to fill in the chinks. This was patterned more or less after the procedure followed in Trade and Industrial Education.

The use of teachers' aids has also been proposed from time to time. However, the supply of qualified aides is apparently as inadequate as that of qualified teachers.

While all of the foregoing have been tried none have been successful. Vocational agriculture has been successful primarily and precisely because of the quality of the teachers. Anything less than a four-year degree program with a major in agricultural education can almost be guaranteed to turn out something less than the best prepared teacher.

Vocational agriculture appears to be a victim of its own success. It has achieved respectability and has enjoyed a steady growth rate. Basic to these developments has been the seedbed of sound teacher preparation. To tamper with the seedbed is to court disaster. The answer to the problem of an inadequate supply of teachers is more extensive and intensive recruiting. Lowering the standards for certification will be a temporary palliative at best.

To be sure there have been attempts to recruit and undoubtedly there will be more. It might be appropriate to propose that each state organize a permanent on-going recruitment program through its State Agriculture Teachers Association. Thus a structured recruitment program could be instituted that could monitor the supply and demand situation as a part of its recruitment function.

A trend that has accelerated over the past decade has been the grouping of the several fields of service in vocational education into a single administrative unit. This inevitably leads

to the development or combination of courses within the department or division, which are theoretically equally valuable to people in all fields of service. In certain instances, such as philosophy of vocational education, this can be justified. However, caution must be exercised. While all vocational education operates from a common philosophical base, each field of service has its own particular expertise. To institute courses such as "methods of teaching vocational education" will be of little value. To develop teachers in each field of service requires special methods courses in each field of service. It has been said before, but it needs to be said again. Too much homogenization can be a contribution to the generalization of vocational education.

A FABLE

Maxine M. Peterson

Coordinator of Domestic Affairs

Once upon a time there was a handsome prince, Vocatio Educado (known in the Kingdom of Education as Vo-Ed). He was young, with much promise. He had some younger siblings—there was Vocatio Agricola (known as AgEd) and Helena Ecolo (known as Home Ec) and the twins, Technician and Indus (known as T & I) and Bernardo Indus (Business) and some younger whose names had not been chosen.

Now it so happened there was a wicked witch of Academia in the Kingdom of Education. She had, years ago, given her approval to Elementary Education and Secondary Education, but only as long as they spawned such offspring as Bachelors, Masters and Doctors. But after centuries of such offspring, suddenly Vocatio Educado was begat. The wicked witch was beside herself in rage. What stray had come between Ellie Ed and Secon Ed to produce offspring that were not Bachelors, Masters or Doctors? And it wasn't as though Ellie and Secon were proud of this new addition to the family. In fact, they did their best to hide the little prince, ignoring him, dressing him in leftover garments, not acknowledging him in high places. And then those siblings following! It sent the Kingdom of Education into almost Civil War.

"Ah Ha," said the wicked witch of Academia. "I will return the Kingdom of Education to its rightful pinnacle in the world. I will put my hex on Vocatio Educado, and through him to his siblings and they will all turn into one gigantic Frog." And so she did.

And for some years, Vocatio Educado appeared to many as an ugly frog, quite unappreciated and often unloved. He would hop about from high school to high school, sometimes even venturing to a university. He would be fed a bit, but never nurtured. Always he waited for the day when Princess Public Ap-

preciation might find him—for if she did and she gave him her kiss *THEN* he would again become a Prince—Prince of the Kingdom of Education.

And do you know what happened? All of a sudden in 1962, Princess Public Appreciation gave him a very light kiss, saying "you really aren't that ugly. You have much to give to the Kingdom of Education. Come, little frog, I can't do it with one Congressional Act, but this will be the start. Now I turn you and your siblings into real people in the Kingdom of Education. But remember, one small kiss from Princess Public Appreciation is not lasting.

You will turn back to an ugly frog hopping about from school to school, department to department, commission to commission until you prove to the wicked witch of Academia that you have as much and more to give to the Kingdom of Education as the Bachelors and the Masters and the Doctors. Each of you have so much and each of you must give so much. For that is the only way Vocatio Educado and his siblings can contribute and compete in the whole wide world."

This fable is, of course, unfinished. Only time can provide the ending.