The Visitor

Devoted to the Interests of Agricultural Education in Minnesota Schools

Vol. LXXI Winter, 1984 No. 1

From Our Point of View
Paul M. Day and William Hohenhaus

Paul Day is State Supervisor of Secondary Vocational Agriculture and Dr. William Hohehnaus is a Post Secondary Specialist of Agriculture Education at the State Dept. of Vocational and Technical Education.

Paul Day

We are grateful to Dr. Marvin, as well as to the Visitor staff for the opportunity to share some thoughts and concerns with our professional colleagues in Agricultural Education.

Our article will be an empirical, prophetic, truthful, positive appraisal of the State of the Art in Vocational Technical Education in Agriculture.

We trust that our viewpoints will be useful to the profession in helping the new initiates, as well as the seasoned veterans gain an understanding of the events and activities effecting Minnesota programs.

A review of the literature indicates that the Minnesota legislature authorized, in 1905, local options for counties wishing to establish schools of Agriculture.

In 1909, ten schools were provided aid to encourage the development of Agriculture Departments. Two years later the legislature funded fifty additional departments, and in 1912 the Department of Agriculture Education was established at the University of Minnesota, with A.V. Storm as Department Head.

The organizational meeting of the Association of Agriculture Instructors was held in October 1911. Theodore Sexauer of Albert Lea was elected president. By 1913 the first Annual Summer Intensive Training Course for Teachers of Agriculture was held at the College of Agriculture.

In 1914, Mr. Storm published the first issue of the Visitor. By the time the Smith-Hughes legislation was passed in 1917, what we now know as the Minnesota Vocational Agriculture Instructors Association (MVAIA), had conducted its 7th Annual Meeting.

This brief synopsis vividly illustrates that Minnesota was a pioneer in the establishment of Agricultural Education programs.

The venerated A.M. Field, provided the philosophical foundation for those who followed. Like the pioneer Agricultural educators, each succeeding generation has experienced frustration, controversy, turmoil, seemingly insurmountable crises and continuing change.

Despite the recurring emergencies and temporary stalemates, the profession has consistently demonstrated its capacity to develop the leadership to effectively counter and/or overcome the challenges that confront it.

We are not convinced that today's challenges are insurmountable. We believe that Agricultural Education can and will remain a viable, expanding entity in our state.

To do so, we must eliminate the pessimism, the negativism, as well as the reluctance to change which has invaded our ranks, clouded our thinking, and created despair and disillusionment in the minds of some.

A number of the recent changes in Education have been incipient in nature. This phenomenon is demonstrated most dramatically in the decrease in the number of public school students. The decline, first predicted in the late 60's, becomes discernible in the mid seventies, severe in the early 80's, and by the late 1980's will begin a modest upward trend.

The impact on the secondary schools, while abating, is now impacting enrollment in post secondary institutions.

A variety of innovative arrangements has enabled beleaguered school districts to retain their schools. In rare instances consolidation has occurred.

Agricultural educators have met the challenges by having one instructor, at the secondary or adult level, serve two schools. In other cases, some VoAg instructors serve as both the high school, and as the adult instructor.

Federal litigation has influenced federal and state legislation relative to financing education. Minnesota, noted for its progressiveness, relies on the state income tax for a high percentage of its aid to schools, which is based on the number of pupil units enrolled: [1]To maintain equality for all, those districts with a large assessed valuation receive proportionately less state aid. Local education agencies, faced with declining pupil units, high assessed valuation and escalating operational costs have two alternatives to maintain sufficient cash flow: 1). Reduce staff 2). Seek a levy referendum approved by the voters.

In predominately rural districts, passage of a levy referendum places an unequal burden on the owners of agricultural land.

Accompanying a modest decrease in the total number of farm units in Minnesota, is an increase

[1]Pupil units are calculated in this manner: Number enrolled in: Kindergarten x .5; grades 1-6 x 1.0 and grades 7-12 x 1.4.

in the number of larger farm units, as well as numbers of smaller farms, and a subsequent decline in the number of mid-size units. These changes create a non-traditional clientele for secondary and adult instructors. Unique and specific programs must be designed to meet the skills of students at the opposite ends of the spectrum.

The traditional Supervised Occupational Experience Program (SOEP) may be supplanted and the career objectives of students will likely be oriented to off-farm, agriculturally related occupations. Additional instructional time will be necessary to bring these students "up to speed", in the basics of technical agriculture.

On the other hand, students from large, highly specialized units will likely have as much or more knowledge, and experience in specific interprises as their instructors.

While agribusiness, industry, and private consultants will continue to provide more technical information to farm operators, and managers, the need for economics, financial planning, credit management, budgeting, marketing strategy, and other phases of decision making related to production will increase for students at all levels.

The needs of adult operators, if not met by Agricultural and Extension Education will be fulfilled by private or corporate vendors.

Accompanying the decline in the number of students is a continued decrease in the percent of the population with children attending school. Currently less than 35% of the population have students in K-12 programs. By the end of the century this percentage will decrease to 25% with an attendant loss of advocacy for adequate financial assistance for schools. Approximately one third of these students will be from single parent homes.

The increasing utilization of micro computers by business and industry will be adopted by farm units. We are convinced that a rapidly, escalating number of production units will convert to double entry accounting.

Businesses servicing production units will become major users of debit-credit accounting. Agricultural educators who do not provide instruction in electronic accounting will find other disciplines providing this component while suffering staggering losses of enrollment.

We believe that the Agricultural Education major must become competent in double entry accounting, as well as in understanding the guiding principles of Agri-business management.

Additional competence in contemporary Agricultural marketing, as well as financial planning, management, economic principles and decision making must be an integral part of the pre-service preparation of secondary, and adult instructors.

From a practical stand point, post secondary instructors in the off-farm agriculturally related programs, will come directly from business and industry. An overwhelming percentage of these instructors will possess a baccalaureate degree in Technical Agriculture.

Due to the rapidly, ever changing technology, in-service updating Vocational Agriculture instructors will become a lesser function of teacher education. We envision practicing teachers utilizing the services of commercial, and private agribusiness or industry firms, as well as increasing reliance on, and utilization of psychology, and the social sciences to effectively cope with the wide range of abilities and educational needs of their students.

A renewed national clamor for excellence in education is another perceived crises which has received unprecendented publicity. In the volumes of literature which have been published since **A Nation At Risk** was written, few experts have advocated the strengthening, and expansion of Vocational Technical Education.

The demand for increased requirements in math, science, foreign language, computer literacy, English and history are reminiscent of the late 1950's — when launching of the Russian Sputnik created similar passionate outbursts.

Once again, the pendulum has begun its journey from one extreme to the other.

With the passionate cries for increased requirements in the basics, the mystique of high technology, which few can define in relevant terms, there is a lack of advocates for improvement in the application of bodies of knowledge students are expected to master.

Agricultural Education has, since its inception, concerned itself with the application of the scientific, and mathematical principles. Our profession has focused upon the cognitive domain. The development of the ability to learn how to continue to learn, to use knowledge gained to solve problems, rather than solely acquiring competency in performing manipulative skills which will rapidly become outdated, has been one of the strengths of Vocational Agriculture.

At the high school level, the students supervised practice program, defined today as the Supervised Occupational Experience Program, was the vehicle utilized in the relevant application of the basic scientific principles learned in the classroom.

The heterogeneous aspirations of students since passage of the 1963 Vocational Education Act, confused teachers, teacher educators, and state supervisory staffs for nearly two decades.

Far too many school administrators, who become frustrated when learning does not occur in the traditional 2-4-6 mode, clamored for its demise.

We owe much to those who defied the decision makers, as well as those who refined, and developed contemporary Supervised Occupational Experience Programs (SOEP) models.

An article in the January 1984 **Phi Delta Kappa**, pointed out the validity of the teaching process initiated by our founders. Current federal legislation contains references to Supervised Occupational Experience Programs (SOEP). Minnesota Commissioner of Education Ruth Randall suggests an individual education plan (IEP) for all students not unlike the individual development programs designed, and utilized by our predecessors, and practiced by many instructors today.

As we have attempted to point out, our profession has incurred cycical change since the early 1900's. It is highly probable that we will note recurring change in the future.

What would we recommend as solutions to the concerns which we have enumerated? Try the bakers dozen which follows: 1). Insist on excellance from your students no matter where or whom you teach. If you lack administrative support, seek a position where the Board of Education, the administration, and the faculty are committed to a philosophy of excellance. 2). Determine whether or not you possess the necessary technical, and professional competence for your position. The key to successful programs at all levels, is and always has been the instructor. 3). Increase your working knowledge of the methods utilized to fund education in Minnesota, then inform your fellow faculty members, parents, students, Advisory Committees, and supporters. 4) Demonstrate how you incorporate the basics (math, science, communications) in your instructional programs to parents, Advisory Committee members, Agriculture/Agribusiness representatives, alumni, the media, and others. Above all, use correct grammar, and spelling in your speaking, and writing. 5). Publicize the fact that Agriculture is, and always has been a high technology industry. 6). Initiate innovative and creative methods to meet emerging instructional needs. 7.) Accept change as inevitable, then design strategies to adapt to acceptable change. 8). Be futuristic in your outlook. 9). Maintain the professional competence documented by our predeccessors. Realize that your professional obligations may require more than the traditional work day. 10). Involve yourself in the political process to insure that the profession maintains its viability. 11). Assume the initiative for quality programmatic leadership at each level. 12). Devise strategies to strengthen the profession by eliminating ineffective, inept, and incompetent personnel from our ranks. 13). Become positive about the future of your profession, and the industry we serve.

William Hohenhaus

In 1945 a new element of Vocational-Technical Education emerged in Minnesota. The legislature designated the responsibility of establishing post-secondary institutions of Vocational-Technical Education to the State Board of Education.

33 AVTIs were established in Minnesota communities by the Board from 1947 (Mankato) through 1972 (East Grand Forks). All the schools were established as part of K-12 school districts except 916, 917 and 287. Suburban Hennepin, Dakota County, and 916 were established as intermediate districts with specific levy capabilities.

The Area Vocational-Technical Institutes experienced a steady growth until it became the second largest delivery system of Higher Education in Minnesota. The phenominal growth mode continues through FY'84.

Recently two factors have had an impact on the growth of the AVTI system. In 1977 the legislature legislated the AVTIs into current budgeting mode. The 1979 legislature established student tuition.

In 1983, the legislation created a new governance system for post-secondary and adult vocational-technical education. The new agency became reality as of January 1, 1984. The Board of Vocational-Technical Education is composed of an eleven member Board and a Director.

Many challenges face the redesigned post-secondary agency in the future.

The continuing decline in high school graduates will force an accelerated effort in recruiting potential students. For the first time in the history of the AVTIs developmental process, part-time students become a reality. Hopefully, adult extension and full-time adult will be utilized in calculating student contact hours to generate ADMs.

Accelerated tuition costs and changing technology dictates the necessity of upgrading curriculum content and the format for the delivery of same. The traditional program curriculum must be disassembled and reassembled in segments that are relevant, palatable and affordable to the student. These courses will be utilized in building programs needed by the student rather than forcing the student to conform to a program.

A cooperative effort must be generated between institutions of Higher Education as they all compete for a limited number of potential students. Acceptance of credits from one institution by another becomes a necessity.

More accurate supply and demand data must be generated in order to make judgements pertaining to restriction or expanding of programs to meet the need of industry.

The rapid change in technology and the diversity of delivery systems generates the need for teacher upgrading. Instructors from industry must be utilized for their expertise to upgrade our teachers technically. Some of this expertise may come from the post-secondary instructional staff that have a technical degree and several years of work experience. They may become an element of a cadre of teachers. Restructured methods courses will be required to demonstrate innovative techniques in delivering curriculum.

We believe that we can overcome the obstacles that face us, just as the early leaders adjusted to continued challenge and change.

As indicated earlier, our professional has successfully adapted to changes. While the past is prologue, we must use the history of the past to cope with the present, as well as future challenges.

VOL. LXX THE VISITOR No. 4

Published quarterly during the calendar year in Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall by the Division of Agricultural Education, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, Minn. 55108.

Second class postage paid at St. Paul, MN.

Publication #661580