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THE FIRST FOUR YEARS OF THE MINNESOTA ADULT VO-AG FARM MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

by

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Today increased mechanization and the rapid technological advances in agriculture are placing more and more emphasis on the necessity for farmers to have top grade farm management knowledge and skills. With our larger and more complex farming units, the farm operator nowadays must be very proficient in farm management if he is to realize a satisfactory living level from his farm. Thus, we in vocational agricultural education have a great challenge and a real opportunity to serve farm people more effectively through teachings which will help them to develop into more capable farm managers.

Minnesota educators have long recognized the need for more effective and more widespread training opportunities for farmers in farm management. Five years ago a cooperative, state-wide educational program of research, training and service in farm records and farm management was started in the high school vo-ag departments throughout the state. The key groups responsible for this new approach to adult farmer education were:

1. The Minnesota Vocational Agriculture Instructors Association
2. The Minnesota State Department of Education
3. The University of Minnesota.

A unique feature of this educational project has been the use made of farm records and the farm business analysis. Each participating farmer keeps accurate records of his farming affairs, and then annually these accounts are summarized at a regional analysis center. The resulting data provides good factual evidence as to what patterns of farm organization and farm operation pay off in the most farming profits in any particular year for the various farmers in the regional study. Further, the farm business analysis has

been an excellent teaching medium for the teachers to use in helping the farmers to appraise strong and weak points within their own farm business, in planning for specific farming improvements and for evaluating rates of progress toward goal achievement.

As the Minnesota Vo-Ag Farm Management Program completes its fourth full year of operations there are many items of interest to be reviewed. It is especially pleasing to note the steady growth and acceptance of this kind of adult farmer education in the schools and communities around Minnesota. Starting from scratch in 1952 the program has progressed to the point where at the present time more than four hundred farm operators in over seventy-five schools throughout the state are active cooperators in the program.

Another noteworthy feature of this educational enterprise has been the amount of interest and support it has received from many different groups and agencies. Chief among these has been the Hill Family Foundation of St. Paul, Minnesota. This Foundation in 1953 granted funds to support the project for a three-year period and in 1956, because of favorable progress achieved, they extended their support for two additional years.

Among the host of other organizations helping to start this farm management training program was the Farmers Union Grain Terminal Association of St. Paul, Minnesota. This agency provided funds during the first two years to help the cooperating farmers pay for their individual farm business analyses.

This history would not be complete if mention were not made of the many other groups who have given so willingly of their time and money in helping to get this basic and fundamental educational pro-

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gram for farmers started throughout all of Minnesota. The following groups are among those who have made significant contributions to the program:

Community Level

Chambers of Commerce
 Local banks
 Production Credit Associations
 Local farm cooperatives
 School boards and superintendents of schools
 Local community leaders
 Radio and TV stations
 Community newspapers
 Local advisory councils

Statewide Level

The Minnesota Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Commission
 The Minnesota Bankers Association
 The Minnesota School Board Association
 The Minnesota Association of School Administrators
 The Minnesota Farm Bureau
 The Minnesota Farmer Magazine
 The Minnesota Farmers Union
 The Farmer Magazine
 The Minneapolis Grain Exchange
 The Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank
 Minneapolis and St. Paul daily newspapers
 The Farmers Home Administration
 Radio Stations WCCO, KSTP, KUOM
 Minnesota Soil Conservation Service
 Minnesota Area Vocational Schools
 The Farm Credit Administration
 The Minnesota State Fair

Nationwide Level

The Agricultural Education Magazine
 The National Vocational Agriculture Teachers Association
 Better Farming Methods Magazine

All of the above groups have made ex-

cellent contributions to the overall success of this kind of farm management training for adult farmers in Minnesota schools during the past four years. However, the major portion of the planning, promotion and work in the program has necessarily been carried on by the three groups who originally launched this educational venture—namely, the Minnesota Vocational Agriculture Instructors Association, the Minnesota State Department of Education and the University of Minnesota, with the support of the Hill Family Foundation.

The Minnesota Vocational Agriculture Instructors Association has provided yeoman service in building and strengthening the farm management program. Various teacher committees have worked diligently each year to improve all phases of this kind of training for adult farmers. Also, their official publication, *The Ag Man*, has carried many articles by teachers, administrators, teacher-trainers, and others highlighting the vital importance of using the farm management approach in every vocational agriculture department throughout the state. Since the final success of vocational agriculture instruction rests in the hands of the individual teachers, it is pleasant to be able to report that Minnesota agriculture teachers have shown remarkable professional pride in the manner in which they have fitted this new farm management training project into their busy schedules.

Various activities by the Minnesota State Department of Education have been a real aid in helping to develop this specialized adult farmer education in the schools of Minnesota. Perhaps their most vital contribution has been to encourage the area vocational schools to serve as regional farm records analysis centers. For the year 1955, three of the six outstate area vocational schools analyzed records for cooperating farmers in their region of the state. For 1956 two additional area vocational schools served in this capacity. Thus farmers living in any section of Minnesota can have their individual data analyzed and interpreted to them before the busy cropping season begins.

The University of Minnesota has served this program in a variety of ways. The

Department of Agricultural Education has coordinated the project throughout the state for the past four years. Also, it has conducted pre-service and in-service courses, both on and off the campus, to instruct present and future vocational agriculture teachers on how the program can be operated in a local community school.

Agricultural Extension has cooperated in several ways, the most noteworthy of which is having its specialists in farm management conduct workshops for vocational agriculture teachers around the state. They also periodically mail out to the vocational agriculture departments late research findings in farm management so the teachers can incorporate this information into their instruction.

The Agricultural Economics Department provides the procedures for keeping and analyzing the farmers' records. In addition, they teach farm management courses to all vocational agriculture students at the undergraduate level and to experienced vocational agriculture teachers during summer sessions or in off-campus classes.

Two key developments took place in this adult farmer educational project during its first four years. First was the financial aid given by the Hill Family Foundation. This support made it possible to effectively coordinate the program throughout the state and among the many cooperating groups. Second was the establishment of regional analysis centers in the area vocational schools. This gave the program a permanent place in the public school system of Minnesota. It seems reasonable to predict that those who have played a part in the establishment of this program will have good reason to be proud of their work.

DR. A. M. FIELD RECOGNIZED

At the annual banquet of the Agricultural Education Club at the University of Minnesota held in February, special recognition and honor was given to Dr. A. M. Field, Professor Emeritus of the University of Minnesota and the former head of the Department of Agricultural Education.

Former students and colleagues of Dr. Field who took part in this recognition recalled the days when his successful high school teaching of vocational agriculture earned him the nick-name of "Alfalfa" Field and when his initials (A.M.) caused many of his friends to call him "Morning" Field. The membership of the Agricultural Education Club presented Dr. Field with a certificate of recognition for his fifty years of service to Agricultural Education. This was presented to Dr. Field by Mr. G. R. Cochran, State Supervisor of Agricultural Education, on behalf of the students. Mr. Bernard Beadle, former teacher of vocational agriculture and presently staff member of the Agricultural Extension Service, reviewed some of the experiences and changes that have taken place during the past fifty years in education. It may be concluded from Mr. Beadle's remarks that students are still just about the same.

The Visitor is glad to take this opportunity to add its word of recognition to the contributions of Dr. A. M. Field. He has been teacher, adviser, administrator, counselor, and friend; and for all these things he merits a sincere expression of gratitude.

EXCERPTS FROM A LETTER

Every now and then a letter crosses the desk of the editor that helps to make up for some of those things that didn't turn out the way we had hoped they would. *The Visitor* would like to share with its readers some excerpts from one such letter. This letter came from a young teacher with a wealth of natural ability and an inquiring mind. To be sure, he shared with all beginning teachers certain qualms about actually taking responsibility for conducting a program of vocational agriculture for the farm people of a community. How well he has succeeded in meeting the challenge can be gleaned from the following excerpts from his letter.

". . . Things are developing reasonably well as far as my teaching program is concerned. My students are finally beginning to produce as I felt they could. It has been a long haul, but it is a real satis-

faction to see the desired attitudes develop. I have really found out how long it takes to do a real job of teaching and to develop a program. I well remember thinking during my blissful undergraduate days that it would be a matter of maybe two or three months before things were humming along just the way I wanted. My students are on the beam and eager to learn and I must say discipline problems have completely disappeared.

"My FFA chapter has cleared over \$300 out of their activities so far this year. Our FFA gilt ring has seventeen gilts on the farms of the boys and is progressing well. We have sixteen dairy herds, including more than 250 cows, on a regular milk-testing program. We have a seed germination and soil testing program in operation and this year will have about thirty students with about 150 acres in various corn production programs and a variety of demonstration plots. The net worth of thirty-nine high school students enrolled in vocational agriculture as of last January 1 was more than \$28,000.00, with an average of something more than \$550.00 per student. A comparison between classes indicates a nice growth—freshmen about \$250 each, sophomores somewhat more than \$400, juniors between \$700 and \$750 and the seniors' average is about \$1325.

"We are using the Vo-Ag Planning and Record Books and the boys seem to take pride in keeping them in good shape. This has improved each year during the past three years since I began teaching. We are also using the Minnesota Farm Account Books more and more in our teaching program. My freshmen students are keeping complete records on one farm enterprise, sophomores on two farm enterprises and the juniors and seniors are keeping the Minnesota Farm Account Book as well as keeping records on their own farming programs. This gives me considerable pride.

"They are using our FFA Program of Work as a basic course of teaching material and the boys really like the farm management approach. I personally feel that it is educationally sound and practical, judged by my experience here. One of the good things about it is that it leads

so naturally into the young farmer work and from there into the adult program.

"Our chapter will have at least a couple of State Farmers this year, which is good for the chapter morale.

"I remember you urged us to have a weekly column in the local newspaper and I have done so. Thinking I was overworked, I skipped a couple of weeks but when members of my adult class began to ask, "How come?" I resumed them immediately and feel that this is certainly worthwhile. Our local editor always seems to be happy to have the column written and has told me he feels this is an added service to the readers. I am, of course, very happy because the editor always puts the column on the front page.

"I hope to be in for summer school this year and get caught up on what's been going on in the recent past. Hope to see you then.

Sincerely yours,
_____,"

SUMMER SESSION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

In just a matter of weeks colleges and universities throughout the United States will be buzzing with the activity of summer sessions. Prominent among the individuals who make up the summer session classes will be teachers who are returning to the campus for professional improvement, for refresher courses and, in many cases, for work toward an advanced degree. The scene on the St. Paul Campus of the University of Minnesota is no exception to this general rule. It is anticipated that between one hundred and one hundred and twenty-five teachers of agriculture will be back on the campus for professional retooling.

The First Summer Session on the St. Paul Campus of the University of Minnesota will begin on June 17.

The Visitor extends a welcome to all prospective students and expresses the hope that this summer session coming up in 1957 will prove to be one of the best in the long series of such programs.