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WHY DO WE NEED SO MANY VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE PROGRAMS — OR DO WE? OR CREAM: HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

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Most Americans would probably agree that the number of farmers this nation needs is far less than ever before. Most educators and sociologists would suggest or even endorse a reduction in vocational agriculture programs. One of the more outspoken to this issue is Kuvlesky who states that for rural education to become more effective the tendency of schools to maintain vocational agriculture as the most important vocational program for adolescent boys must be altered.¹ He also speaks to the issue of rural schools not offering educational programs geared to adult needs and desires.²

In our haste to improve let us not throw out the cream with skim, but let us instead develop a richer cream. Does cream rise to the top?

A major contributor to the success of American agriculture has been the vocational agriculture program. "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."³

The training of youth for employment in agricultural occupations should, I think, be the major objective of the high school vocational agriculture program.

Training for agricultural occupations is considerably different than in the past. In the past much more emphasis was placed on production agriculture with little emphasis being placed on agriculture related occupations, the occupations that serve production agriculture.

Now, the emphasis due to changes in employment demands is more and more swinging to agriculturally related occupations.

Furthermore, the Vocational Education Act of 1963 demands in part that vocational agriculture education must include in its program a curriculum that provides training for occupations both actual and anticipated. Many of the hundreds of agriculture related occupa-

tions involve mechanical abilities. Nearly one-half of the in-school time of many departments is devoted to mechanical training.⁴ Hence, many students find employment in industrial work.

In 1964, Johnsen undertook a study to determine how many Minnesota vocational agriculture graduates were employed, and the nature of their employment. Listed below are the tabular results of his findings.⁵

Table 1. 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	

Table 2. 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 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.

The findings and the implications of this study are significant. Some of the more interesting are:

1. The percent of former vocational agriculture students employed was over 99 percent.
2. The rate of unemployment decreased with the number of years of vocational agriculture completed.
3. About one-third of the former students were employed in farming.
4. A little over ten percent of former students were employed in off-farm agricultural related occupations.
5. Just over thirteen percent of former students were engaged in mechanical occupations (not agricultural related).
6. Over 54 percent of former students were employed in occupations related to training received in vocational agriculture

(over 72 percent of those in school, military, and decreased or disabled are excluded).

Summing up the value of vocational agriculture program in Johnsen's own words: "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."⁶

MORE CREAM?

Success of former students can also be measured service and performance achievements in areas not related to occupational choice and in occupations unrelated to agriculture.

Tom found that students who had studied vocational agriculture in high school had higher collegiate scholastic averages than pupils who had not studied vocational agriculture in high school.⁷

Krebs found that students majoring in agriculture at the University of Illinois did better if they had studied vocational agriculture in high school.⁸

Pumper and Sledge at Wisconsin found that former vocational agriculture students did better in agricultural disciplines and chemistry and achieved at the same level in the liberal arts.⁹

In other studies it was determined that former students of vocational agriculture high school programs remain in college at a higher rate.¹⁰

Vocational agriculture students also value the importance of post-high school education. Piper determined that approximately 80 percent of the young men with vocational agriculture training who did not become established in farming, had pursued some post-high school education.¹¹

STILL MORE CREAM?

Vocational agriculture also has programs of continued systematic instruction for adult farm families in the area of Farm Management Education. This program also has proven to be founded on firm ground as evidenced by the findings of Persons and others in a classic study into the economic benefits of adult vocational agriculture. Some of the findings of the study are:

1. There is a direct and positive relationship between total farm sales and the num-

ber of years enrolled in the Adult Farm Business Management Education Program.

2. The above relationship is also true for Return to Capital and Family Labor.
3. Labor earnings per participant as compared to years of participation show leveling off after initial sharp increase and then rise sharply after several years of participation in the program.
4. Benefit-Cost analysis benefits to participants of Farm Management Programs was calculated to be 4:19::1.
5. Benefit-Cost analysis benefits for the community were calculated to be 9:1:12

CAN WE HAVE RICHER CREAM?

What is career education?

Career education — "The total effort of public education and the community aimed at helping all individuals become familiar in the values of a work oriented society, to integrate these values into their personal value systems, and to implement these values into their lives in such a way that work becomes possible, meaningful, and satisfying to each individual."¹³

What does this mean for vocational agricultural education?

It means becoming more effective, means reaching more people, means reaching people at younger and older ages, means reaching people who are disadvantaged, and socially disregarded.

So far we have examined where vocational agriculture has been and how effective the programs have been. Let us now attempt to determine what vocational agriculture programs should be initiated and possible ways to implement the suggestions.

THE RICHER CREAM, PART 1 — VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE IN K-6 PROGRAMS

Vocational agricultural educators should, while working with the elementary school teachers, integrate basic agricultural concepts into the elementary programs.

Children in the K-6 should be exposed to the world of agricultural work in an educational program that involves both learning and doing.

The vocational agriculture teacher can and should take a leadership role in one or more of the various areas.

1. Serve as a resource person for elementary teachers.
2. Promote and conduct in-service workshops to acquaint elementary educators

- with the occupations within the community.
3. Review curriculum materials and teaching aids that deal with agriculture to be sure they will provide accurate impressions to the children.
 4. Serve as a teacher for agriculture oriented occupational exploration.
 5. Help with the development of satisfactory curriculum.
 6. Give the elementary teachers assistance in planning and developing learning centers in the school which are related to career education.

THE RICHER CREAM, PART 2 — VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE IN 7-9 PROGRAMS

The vocational agriculture program in junior high school programs should continue the integration of basic agricultural concepts, using agricultural examples in sciences, mathematics, and social studies. Students should also be placed in supervised occupational experience programs where they can (probably for the first time) have a "hands-on" program for selected occupations. "Classroom activity concurrent with the supervised observation experience would enable students to discuss what they observed with fellow students, hear other students' experiences, and form a basis for tentative vocational choice."¹⁴

THE RICHER CREAM, PART 3 — AGRICULTURE EDUCATION FOR ADULT WOMEN

Women, too, need to be brought more into the fold of vocational agricultural education. This is especially true for farm wives in today's ever-changing and evermore complex world of agriculture.

Short series (3 or 4 meetings) on selected topics would fulfill many of the needs of women.

Suggested topics might include:

1. Agricultural machinery seminar
2. Small engine operation
3. Will, titles, ownership transfer
4. Farm math

THE RICHER CREAM, PART 4 — AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION IN PRISONS AND REFORMATORIES

"For years correctional institutions have pondered over the preparation of those persons in prisons, so that upon reentry into society those persons might become productive individuals. The institutions over the country

have done little or nothing about the problem. Maybe there is a lack of funds and human resources or maybe we good citizens don't feel that prisoners are worth the funds and effort. However, the reasons are not clear as to why the correction institutions have not solved the concern."¹⁵

Agricultural education can speak to this issue by:

1. Offering inmates through vocational agriculture courses, an opportunity to acquire an entry level job skill.
2. To identify job placement opportunities for the inmates who are graduates of an approved program upon their release or parole.
3. To serve as a "real" link to the world of work outside the prison walls.

THE RICHER CREAM, PART 5 — AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION FOR THE DISADVANTAGED

Probably no other group can benefit more from the incorporation of career education into vocational agriculture than the disadvantaged.

However, the characteristics which need to be emphasized are somewhat different from the conventional vocational agriculture programs.

Some of the characteristics are:

1. Curriculum must be geared to teaching agriculture for practical and specific skills.
2. Class periods must be longer to compensate for the slower rates of learning.
3. The teacher-pupil ratio must be lower than traditional vocational agriculture programs.
4. Supervision for supervised occupational experience programs must be more frequent and for longer periods of time.
5. Disadvantaged students cannot be graded on the same basis as nondisadvantaged students.

THE RICHER CREAM, PART 6 — VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE ALSO NEEDS AN OUTREACH IN AREAS OF VOCATION- AL AGRICULTURE FOR MINORITIES AND ALSO RETIREES

We, in agriculture, have an opportunity and responsibility as never before. Quoting from Paul Day in an address at a national seminar on career education:

In my opinion, we have a golden opportunity to adopt a concept which will benefit the people to be served by AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION in the future. We

have been handed the ball—let us not fail to advance Agricultural Education. Career education, especially in agricultural occupations, will likely increase many fold, but only if:

- (1) Vocational agriculture can be strengthened to accommodate the response to the choices students will make to enter the industry of agriculture.
- (2) There is an alertness to the demand for new occupational roles and the renewed importance of some present roles.
- (3) The public in general can be made aware through career education of the fact that the worldwide food industry is now on an emergency basis. (The world food supply today is not more than thirty days ahead of empty plates.)

These are but a few of the reasons why agricultural occupations will re-emerge into new and increasing importance—and in particular those related to production and management. In a very short time, agriculture inputs generated on the land will become relatively more important than those generated off the farm.¹⁶

In this the era of career education it becomes imperative that we, as instructors of vocational agriculture, examine our educational modes and objectives in relationship to the modes and objectives of career education. This is important because if we are to maintain our rightful place in the educational system we must not become stagnant but must become dynamic and flexible in an evermore complex world of work and play.

Either block, carry the ball or get out of the way.

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