

The Visitor

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REFLECTIONS FROM STUDENTS OF AGRICULTURE EDUCATION

Introduction

By Gordon I. Swanson

The Division of Agricultural Education encourages writing projects in courses taken by undergraduate students. This issue of *The Visitor* features the writing of two students. Mike Karlsrud discusses the values acquired in a rural setting and Linda Diers discusses the privilege and the opportunity associated with being a vocational agriculture teacher.

To Honor Rural Opportunities *By Mike Karlsrud*

Perhaps the most influential persons in our lives were either our fathers or our grandparents. The first fishing trip, the hands-dirty example of the work ethic, the first attempt to drive the tractor, and the first time pulling an implement. It all brings back memories of wanting to do more, thinking that I knew everything and being reminded that I didn't. Growing up in a rural community, on a crop, dairy and sheep farm, provides a basis for reflecting on where one acquired some of the recurringly useful

knowledge. In the following paragraph I will discuss this as honoring rural opportunities.

Education stems back to formative years with our parents. "Thou shalt go to church, thou shalt not lie," and many other phrases of what we were to do and how we were to act, soon these became a way of life for us - and we hardly sensed what was happening. Soon thereafter, we began picking up ideas and beliefs held by our parents and, not much later, found out ways to establish our own agenda.

It was my grandfather who first took the risk of having a twelve-year-old kid drive the tractor around the yard. It was a fantastically large tractor - a 22 horsepower Farmall B with "cultivision." Needless to say the following day in show and tell at school my classmates knew that I was now driving a big tractor - not one of those silly ones with pedals (which we all had). The following summer Grandpa let me pull my first implement - an old hay rake. The thought of doing something constructive - that I was actually farming made me feel euphoric. I had to know why I was pulling this machine up and down the field, and Grandpa told me. At last at the age of twelve I was learning

about agriculture and acting like an adult.

Grandpa perhaps taught me the most important things about agriculture and about life. Many lessons learned in life came not from classrooms but from social gatherings, the intimacy of a father/son chat, or a respectful and grateful grandson being informed and trusted by his Grandpa. Perhaps these lessons could be taught by other instructors in a sterile setting of a classroom, but when the test came around, would we have passed?

The agriculture sector is unlike any other. It has pride, a set of rules and a special flavor which is easily recognized. Chances are pretty slim that a city-reared child will have the chance to learn the do's and don'ts of tractor driving, to actually pull implements, and that a job is not done until the "last bale is unloaded." Yet these and many more seemingly simple lessons taught to us by our families and reinforced by our neighbors, have become the hallmarks for our lives.

The teaching of technical skills to students in Agriculture exposes them to much new information, but such will never substitute for the ideals and beliefs that generations of God-fearing, hard-working families, friends and neighbors have instilled in them from years gone by. It is an exercise which has few techniques or fancy charts, but ideals that are explained in churches, at auctions and in conversations after a long days work. These are the enriching and enabling experiences which urge us to honor rural opportunities.

The Future of Vocational Agriculture: It's Up to Us By Linda Diers

The modern scene of vocational agricultural education is a vibrant and growing picture which is continually expanding to new horizons. The role of today's high school vocational agriculture instructor is difficult to describe. The possibilities which exist are endless and the number of new activities which can be implemented in the curriculum is countless. Those who are committed to the furthering of vocational agriculture education have an exciting future. The role differs from that of other teachers in that it reaches beyond the classroom. It includes the responsibility to make contact with the surrounding community and to tap its resources.

It is not only an enormous challenge but a rare privilege to step out of one's comfort zone and begin the task of impacting the surrounding area with the importance of vocational agriculture. The degree to which one takes hold of opportunities will determine the effectiveness of the vocational agriculture program. In our hands, we hold the future of America's rural youth. The level to which they succeed will be largely our responsibility. With these ideals in mind, let us now examine the measures we can take to prepare ourselves and the ways in which we can affect our students, their families, and the community in which we live.

Before we step into a new position as avo-ag instructor, it

is important that we explore the history of the community to which we are moving. First of all, it's important to get an understanding of the values, ways of working and organizational patterns. All eyes will be on us as we are in the public realm. Make it a point to meet people and listen to what they have to say. We should be conducting a continuing inventory of this new community. Rural communities are rich in heritage, culture and tradition. We should make use of the social interactions and get to know the people.

As a teacher of vocational agriculture, we have many duties. Our students are our first responsibility. We will be teaching a variety of courses as well as instructing the Future Farmers of America organization. Although our students are a priority, it is important that we take time to meet with other teachers. This includes teachers within our school as well as other vocational agriculture instructors in the surrounding area. We will need an opportunity to join and talk with others who are encountering some of the same experiences that we are. We will be relieved to know that our problems and frustrations are not unique and we will enjoy a laugh or two as our fellow teachers relate similar instances.

We also have other responsibilities outside the classroom. One of the most important is our interaction with our student's parents. One of the first contacts we may have with parents is the parent-teacher conference. We should schedule one of these early in the school year at an appropriate time so the parents are sure to be

available. This is an excellent opportunity for us to get to know each other. A false assumption is that conferences are only scheduled when the student is having problems. On the contrary, conferences are appropriate at any time and while the parents really "know" their children, we know from experience the characteristics of that particular age group. As we talk to Mom and Dad, we must be sure to tell them about the positive aspects of their son or daughter. This will put them at ease and all will leave the conference encouraged and better-informed. The personal visits we make to the home of the student are also a vital link in our relationships. It gives our students a chance to show off their projects, hobbies and jobs. A vocational agriculture instructor who is just as comfortable walking through the barn as demonstrating in front of the classroom will go far. After all, what better way to start you day than to lend a hand milking cows, feeding pigs, or gathering eggs on your way to school?

One important support group for which we will become very thankful is the FFA Alumni. This diverse group can prove to be very resourceful and supportive of our work with your FFA chapter. Let them know how much you appreciate their efforts and see to it that the FFA members have a chance to interact with the real "veterans." A potluck supper and volley ball game will go a long way in developing strong ties between the alumni and the active chapter.

Your final step will be to promote a vocational agriculture in our communities. Vocational education was founded on the concept

f service and it is necessary to interpret this concept in a very visible way. Community service projects such as planting trees, picking up garbage along roadsides and raking leaves for shut-ins are great opportunities. It teaches our students practical labor that has a return of building in the minds of the people a respectful image of the chapter. Only as the vo-ag instructor and the surrounding community work together can vocational education become and remain what it ought to be.

The responsibilities of a vo-ag instructor are many and varied. Remember, we are helping to shape the future of vocational agriculture by educating tomorrow's leaders. The zeal with which we go about our tasks will spur on our students to set high standards and goals. They will attain those goals through successive means of learning concepts and putting them into practice as they follow the example set by us.

Responding to Challenge *Edgar Persons*

A great deal of energy has been directed this year at a program of redesign for teacher education. Spurred by the commitment to focus document and the Dean of the College of Education's response to it, we have sought ways to redesign programs of Agricultural Education that lead to licensure. In the weeks and months ahead you will have opportunity to react to the redesign plans. Teachers, administrators, potential students, business and industry will all be asked to

provide some guidance in the focus on redesign. We welcome critique and suggestions for improving the plans that have been formulated for responding to the challenge for change and improvement.

In brief, the plan calls for three major revisions. The basic program for teacher licensure at the B.S. degree level will remain in place with a number of significant program changes. More innovative, is a new B.S. degree that will utilize experiential learning to provide some of the technical content. Much of the work previously done in SOEP will guide this phase of the program.

A major change will be the development of a licensure program for post-baccalaureate students. The final details of this plan are still in draft form.

Watch for announcements of the draft revisions so you can be prepared to help the Agricultural Education Division develop a final plan that will improve agricultural education in Minnesota.

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