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UPDATE ON SUPERVISED OCCUPATIONAL EXPERIENCE PROGRAMS

by

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Editor's Note: This article presents the authors' effort to define what supervised occupational experience programs are in the present-day vocational agriculture/agribusiness FFA program.

Supervised occupational experience (SOE) consists of individualized learning activities of educational value conducted outside of scheduled class time under the supervision of a teacher, parent, employer, or other adults. These activities assist vocational agriculture students in achieving their educational and occupational goals. The primary purpose of SOE is to develop competencies needed in agricultural occupations. SOE is an integral part of the vocational agriculture instructional program that allows students to become involved in learning tasks performed by people in agricultural occupations.

A supervised occupational experience program (SOEP) is all of an individual student's SOE activities. Student's SOEPs are planned based on individual student's occupational goals and interests. The typical components of SOEPs are:

Ownership Activities:
- *production enterprises
- *agribusiness enterprises

Placement Experiences:
- *observation-exploration
- *directed laboratory (simulated experience)
- *placement in production agriculture
- *placement in agribusiness

Improvement Projects

Selected Agricultural Skills

Ownership activities involve students in developing competencies needed for managing and/or owning a production agriculture or agribusiness enterprise. Students have a degree of ownership of the materials or inputs required for operation of the enterprise. A student may own all of the enterprise or be a partner with a parent, brother, sister or someone else. The enterprise is managed by the student or, in the case of some partnerships, partially managed by the student. The enterprise is normally operated and expanded over time as the student develops management skills.

Some of the possible ownership activities are listed below. You will be able to think of others.

CROP ENTERPRISES

1. Corn
2. Soybean
3. Small grain (wheat, oats, etc.)
4. Hay
5. Vegetables (sweet corn, potatoes, cucumbers, etc.)
6. Fruit (apples)
7. Berry (strawberries)
8. Ornamental plants
9. Christmas trees
10. Forestry-pulp, logs

ANIMAL ENTERPRISES

1. Beef - cow, calf
2. Beef feeders
3. Dairy
4. Hog - farrow to finish
5. Weaning pigs
6. Hog - finishing
7. Sheep - flock
8. Lambs - feeder
9. Poultry
10. Horse - production
11. Rabbit
12. Fur-bearing animals
13. Honey bees
14. Game birds

AGRIBUSINESS ENTERPRISES

1. Lawn maintenance service
2. Sheep shearing
3. Soil sampling
4. Custom swathing
5. Horse training
6. Artificial insemination
7. Game farm

Placement experiences differ from ownership activities in that students use the agricultural work opportunities and facilities provided by employers, the community, or school to learn agricultural occupation related skills and information. A training plan and agreement is cooperatively developed by the student, teacher, and cooperating persons before students are placed.

Typical placement experience activities may be classified as observation-exploration, directed laboratory, placement in production agriculture and placement of agribusiness.

Exploration-Observation involves students visiting agriculture businesses including farms and ranches to obtain information about agricultural occupations through interviews and observation of tasks performed and equipment used. Students may have specified agricultural occupation interests and plan to study in these types of businesses or they may have a general interest in agriculture and plan to study a variety of occupations in various agricultural businesses.

Directed laboratory involves students working in school controlled laboratory facilities outside of their regularly scheduled class time. School laboratory facilities vary a great deal from school to school. Common directed laboratory experiences include:

1. Greenhouse work
2. Varietal plot work
3. Fertilizer plot work
4. FFA Chapter land operation
5. School forest work
6. Laboratory animal care
7. Chapter livestock care

Placement in production agriculture involves placement of students on farms and in production units as employees for the purpose of developing basic skills in production agriculture. The training plan starts with emphasis on development of the basic tasks performed by farm workers and progresses to include management tasks as students develop the necessary skills.

Placement in production agriculture is not limited to placement on farms. Students may work at nurseries, feedlots, farrowing to finish hog operations, broiler bird production units, laying flock operations, and so on. Students from farms occasionally are placed on farms with different enterprises than their home farm.

Placement in agribusiness involves placement of students in agribusinesses as employees for the purpose of developing the competencies required by workers in a selected occupation or occupational area. The businesses which serve as training stations are selected because they have opportunities for students to develop agricultural competencies — the jobs allow application of vocational agriculture classroom topics and development of additional skills and knowledge.

A few examples of occupations/jobs in which students are placed follow:

1. Greenhouse worker
2. Agriculture mechanic
3. Animal Technician
4. Milk tester
5. Feed store salesperson
6. Small engine mechanic
7. Dairy plan helper
8. Park maintenance persons
9. Conservation aide
10. Forestry aide
11. Nursery worker
12. Grounds worker
13. Garden store salesman

Improvement projects involve students in learning activities designed to improve the quality or value of property at home, in school, or in the community; the efficiency of a farm or agribusiness enterprise; or the quality of life experienced by the student's family or the community. Students usually do not own major inputs in the improvement project, but may own some items such as tools used in completing the project. A project plan and budget are developed and agreed to by the student, teacher, and other parties involved.

A few examples of improvement projects follow:

1. Soil improvement program
2. Building improvement
3. Soil conservation
4. Building remodeling/repair
5. Building construction
6. Upgrading electric wiring
7. Fence building/repair
8. Develop landscape
9. Plan and grow vegetable garden
10. Weed control program
11. Rat control
12. Machinery repair/reconditioning
13. Livestock improvement programs
14. Farm records and analysis

Selected agricultural skills are activities that students participate in to improve or develop skills or to generate interest in and understanding of agricultural occupations. Usually the skill is new to the student and is not a part of other SOEP components.

A few examples of selected agricultural skills are:

1. Earmark pigs
2. Castrate pigs
3. Calibrate equipment
4. Take soil samples
5. Germination tests
6. Plant trees, shrubs
7. Graft fruit trees
8. Propagate fruit trees
9. Fit animals for show
10. Shear sheep
11. Test milk for B.F.
12. Place concrete

A student's SOEP may include one type of activity (component) or a combination of all the various activities. The objective is to utilize the activities available to provide the best possible learning experience. The quality SOEP challenges the student and increases in scope and intensity each year that the student is involved.

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Summer programs have been the responsibility of Vocational Agriculture Programs since the first programs were established in the early 1900's. It is only in recent years however that legislation has provided for regulations governing the reimbursement of summer programs according to standards. C. M. Brewer has taught Vocational Agriculture for many years and is now a State Supervisor of Vocational Agriculture in Mississippi. The following article describes the rationale for organized summer instruction.

STATEMENT FROM AN ELDERLY VO-AG TEACHER

by

C. M. Brewer

(Reprinted from a newsletter published by the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education, Mississippi State University)

I'm a vo-ag teacher by choice—not by chance. I have been in this business for some time, long enough in fact, that my 10 year service pen is quite worn from use. It's Monday after the last Friday of the school year. I'm sitting at my desk in a classroom where the normal hum of school activities has been going on for the past 175 days. I can't explain why I'm here. Force of habit? Maybe. But more likely somewhat lost because even though I have experienced this abrupt change many times before, it's always a new experience to be dealt with in a different way. So I sit here in meditation. I must admit that I feel a little relaxed. There is always a feeling of tension in teaching, and for some unknown reason the last day of school seems to lift a load from my shoulders. I must admit that the regimentation imposed upon me by the programmed ringing of that darn school bell has caused an amount of nervous tension in me! I am reminded, however, that I do not have time to sit here and meditate for very long because I can see the busiest summer program ever before me. But I'm prepared and ready.

The school principal has a copy of my summer program in his files. The day by day plan pleases him because he understands that I will be responding to the needs of my constituents effectively. In addition to this and in accordance with a resolution adopted by our vocational agriculture teachers organization last year, I will furnish him with a written itinerary of my schedule of activities each week.

Summer programs have been a part of my profession since 1917. My predecessors and I have accepted this tradition because many have believed that a legal standard had been written about it long ago. Not so, I learn. I know of it because of challenges and successes to change that system. I rationalize that to lose the summer program destroys 1/4 of me as a professional person. Can this possibly be when I can hardly get everything done now? But I contemplate a moral issue also. Have I the right to ask for more than some others receive? I certainly can justify my involvement in this part of vocational agriculture because it enables me to give the instruction and supervision students and farmers need during the most productive season. I must admit, however, to some neglect in informing others who have a right to know the activities of this public servant. For a long time it was difficult for me to plan a summer program, but now I find it rather easy to do by following the important responsibilities mandated for me in Senate Bill 2610, which provides that "...the state appropriation shall not be used to reimburse high schools which do not conduct programs of vocational agriculture for twelve (12) months per year. ...further, that said reimbursement shall only be available to those high schools whose teachers of vocational agriculture are responsible for the following programs of instruction during those months between the academic years: (a) supervision and instruction of students in agricultural experience programs; (b) group and individual instruction of farmers and agribusinessmen; (c) supervision of student members of 'Future Farmers of America' who are involved in leadership training or other activity required by state or federal law; or (d) any program of vocational agriculture established by the Division of Vocational Education of the State Department of Education."

I have found it easy to plan a summer program by simply detailing the provisions of this Act to comply with the needs of my community. For example:

(a) "Supervision and instruction of students in agricultural experience programs" comes rather easy for me, since it is an educational experience leading to the student's occupational objective. I do remind myself, however, that I am no different from my fellow teachers in Mississippi in that we have not involved many students in agribusiness programs. I must give more attention to this matter because the largest segment of people involved in the industry of agriculture are in agribusiness.

(b) "Group and individual instruction of farmers and agribusinessmen" is important to me. I understand that our state office is now working on a plan which will enable me to be more responsive to the needs of farmers and agribusinessmen. Under terms of the new arrangement we will be able to organize our farmers and agribusinessmen into groups for regular class and supervised individual instruction. This pleases me in that is complies with Senate Bill 2610 and affords me an opportunity to work more effectively. It does impose a problem, however, in that I do not feel technically competent to deal with all subject areas of our ever changing agriculture. I must secure the services of resource experts, as needed. Needless to say, it is also important that I become more involved with professionals in other agencies and organizations so that I can best represent those who depend upon me.

(c) "Supervision of student members of 'Future Farmers of America' who are involved in leadership training or other activity required by state or federal law" is a favorite activity for me. Public Law 740, 81st Congress, imposes specific responsibilities upon me by legislating the role of the FFA as an integral part of the instructional program in vocational agriculture. I cannot as a teacher overemphasize the importance of the FFA in developing competent leadership. This calls to my mind that several leadership development events are scheduled this summer.

These include the state FFA Convention, the FFA Speech Clinic, FFA chapter officer leadership training, agricultural field days and other area and local events.

(d) "Any program of vocational agriculture established by the division of vocational education of the State Department of Education" is included in Senate Bill 2610. I suppose this covers all of the other opportunities we have, such as the Vocational Teachers Conference. I look forward to attending all the professional improvement meetings and exchange of ideas with my fellow teachers. Many other responsibilities will also require my attention this summer. I must find time to repair equipment and get the needed supplies.

Truly this promises to be a very busy and productive summer, but before I break this spell of meditation, I would just like to thank God for having been born in a land where I can experience all the advantages derived from "labor and tillage of the soil" and now have the opportunity to serve the good and industrious people who work with our natural and renewable resources to sustain life on this planet.

I suppose that with the passing of summer I will remain true to form and when the welcome chimes of the school bell alert me to the beginning of a new school year in September, I'll say "all prospects lead me to believe this will be the best school year ever." It's been a good life and it all has to do with "the rising sun and a new era in agriculture."

The following was taken from acknowledgements in the preface of a PhD dissertation by Dean Swanson. I enjoyed the message from the statements and thought it particularly significant coming from someone outside of the teacher education field.

—R. Paul Marvin, Editor

TEACHING

I have often wondered why college and university faculty members are so often referred to as "instructors" rather than "teachers". College catalogs, the most ubiquitous form or consumer oriented advertising in higher education, nearly always provide the names of instructors. I cannot account for the vernacular, but it nonetheless strikes me as fortunate — I have frequently been instructed but rarely been taught.

The term "teacher" should have a special meaning reserved for it. It should be an honorific title that is earned rather than claimed, and there should be no doubt whether or not a person is a teacher. The term should connote not only a gifted individual who has attained high achievements — many are qualifed to be instructors — but, more importantly, the skills and enthusiasm with which the person shares his wisdom.

The dissertation research reported here represents the results of my efforts over several years and the mark of a great many of my teachers. It is therefore appropriate to acknowledge those people who have in one way or another inspired the author and this effort.

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