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FOOD FOR THOUGHT*

**This article was based on the author's study: "Estimating the Need to Increase The Emphasis On Topics Relating To The World Food Crisis and International Agriculture in the Vocational Agriculture Curriculum."*

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"The fairest weapon man can wield is the plow in the farmer's field."[1]

Dr. Norman Borlaug, Nobel Laureate, stated in an address at the University of Minnesota that:

> The general mass of the people have lost contact with the soil . . . How many of our children in our grammar and high schools have been taught about food production? . . . Yet our building block is agriculture and it is necessary to feed a hungry world.[2]

This statement is not difficult to give credence to when applied to the 75 to 80 percent of the United States' population that live in urban areas but it is suggested as an observation that it may well be true that even many of America's rural and farm youth fail to recognize the responsibility, whether it be moral, humanistic, or scriptural, of those in agriculture to feed an overwhelmingly hungry and malnourished world.

An extremely limited survey, carried out by this writer, of 46 recent high school graduates now in a post-secondary college, from approximately 30 different Minnesota schools showed that 63% do not recall ever having their Vo-Ag instructor address the issues relating to world food shortages or problems of agricultural production outside of the United States. Of the 37 percent who responded that these issues were considered approximately one-third stated they were given very little or slight emphasis. The sample is admittedly small but it is significant to note that the students' average time of enrollment in Vo-Ag was 3.3 years.

In another more extensive survey completed by the writer, over one-half of a sampling of approximately 100 Vo-Ag instructors agreed or strongly agreed that students have developed little awareness to the problems, conditions, and methods of world food production and the influence it has on them personally. The same survey also showed that the majority of Vo-Ag instructors considered topics such as "The Green Revolution," "opportunities in international agriculture," "U.S. import/export policies" and "food surpluses and reserves" as having little importance to their program of instruction.

It appears, as a result of existing social pressures, standards that equate the level of earnings with the quality of life, and perceptions of what the "good life" ought to be, agricultural educators at all levels are tending to justify the existence and instructional content of vocational agriculture programs heavily on the potential of students achieving the financial and material success that is available in domestic agricultural and agribusiness occupations. This direction was indicated clearly through the previously mentioned survey in which 63% of the Vo-Ag instructors surveyed agreed that Vo-Ag instructors, in general, placed a greater value on the financial and material attainments of their students as being indicators of success than on the students social or humanitarian contributions. Another indication of this is observed when students are lured to and motivated in agricultural programs by beginning salary figures, net worth statements and other similar factors. Instruction resulting solely or largely from this type of influence, whether intentional through design or in flow with the current, often neglects to prepare students to make the necessary value and moral judgements which will provide the basis for future decisions regarding production, distribution and use of agricultural products in a complex nation and interdependent world. It is evident that questions need to be raised and in fact cultivated that will reconsider the fundamental philosophies of agricultural education in this area.

This is not to argue that instruction directed toward achieving profitable and efficient agricultural production and providing remunerative and meaningful agricultural related services should not be identified as fundamental objectives of vocational agriculture, but it is clearly evident that early philosophers of agricultural education, such as A.M. Field, of the University of Minnesota, held a broader view of what was to be expected from a good agricultural education program.

Human Values

> Teachers of agriculture might well place emphasis on the phases of farming that are essential to making the farm a home, a satisfying place in which to live a life. Social attitudes of adults are frequently the expression of the experiences they had as boys. Good character traits are not ordinarily acquired through lessons or lectures on the 'abundant life' but are developed through experiencing character building activities. For the young people, the Future Farmers of America provides an excellent basis for building programs of social and economic activities that will be of inestimable value not only to the young people themselves but to the entire community in which they live. In the process of teaching how to raise better crops, how to raise better pigs, how to build a better poultry house, the teacher must not lose sight of the *boy*. Theodore Roosevelt once said, 'If you are going to do anything permanent for the average man, you must begin before he is a man. Success lies in working with the boy.' After all, the boy, his ideals, attitudes, character, interests, and life habits, is the important product of the master teacher. A.M.F.[3]

It is also assumed, as identified in the formal objectives of both vocational agriculture[4] and the Future Farmers of America,[5] that those who eventually make and provide input for future decisions regarding the United States' agricultural policy, both at the local and national level, should be former students of vocational agriculture. It will be their decisions and the resulting policies that will eventually have, in some instances, significant impact on the remainder of the world, as in upcoming Congressional debates over national grain reserves, import/export controls on agricultural products, and commitments to food distribution through Public Law 480. It is therefore crucial that instructors prepare students for dealing with these and other problems of agriculture that they will face tomorrow as well as those confronting them today.

The price of coffee and bananas, the good rainfall and resulting good grain harvests in the Soviet Union and the uncertain availability of fuel oil and other sources of energy has, over the past year, made Americans, especially American farmers with regard to fuel and grain prices, even more aware of the nature of interdependence that exists between nations. Even during the crucial grain shortages of 1973-75 the issue was the dependence of others on the United States rather than the interdependence that actually existed and still exists.

With regards to the coffee situation, to the surprise of many, coffee purchases ranks second only to oil in international trade. Last year Americans spent $6 billion on coffee and consumed on the average 12 pounds per person. It is a curious phenomenon that exists when it takes a disruption in the supply of a luxury commodity, such as coffee, to make the issue of agricultural production in Brazil or Angola a relevant one.

It is also interesting to note that America's favorite fruit is not the American apple but rather the Central American banana. Last year each American consummed on the average 19.65 pounds of bananas which made the United States dependent on others for over 4 billion pounds of the fruit.

Whether present Vo-Ag students eventually become farmers, milkhaulers, political leaders or agricultural missionaries the increasing interdependence of nations with regard to food as well as fiber, energy and other consumer needs will, without a doubt, be the source of problems that they will have to confront in the years to come.

As Ralph L. Pounds and James R. Bryer, in their book The School in American Society, suggest:

> It seems that the biggest contribution that education might make to world understanding would be the education of the generation now in school to the realities of the world situation. This means assessing realistically the nature of the world in which we live. It also means a positive effort toward international understanding.[6]

Former Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, pointed out in a recent address that time is an important element and failure to recognize global interdependence will lead to severe consequences.

> Unless we become aware of our global interdependence the Western World as we know it will not survive. If each region attempts to move independently, tests of strength will develop; and as crises arise within nations (inflation, hunger, shortages), people will turn to

authoritarian forms of government for solutions[7]

No longer can a nation, group or individual successfully isolate themselves from the rest of society completely and remain productive and lead contributory lives. Such attempts only increase the burden shared by the rest. As Rene Dubos expresses it: "As we enter the global phase of human evolution, it becomes obvious that each person has two countries, his own and planet earth."[8]

Further evidence to support the need for instruction of this type is found in scriptural teachings, specifically the teachings of Christ, which directs each individual to show greater sensitivity and responsiveness to existing and future human needs. The scriptures are also explicit in their direction concerning the benevolent use of the earth's harvest of food in times of need. Such teachings are viewed as being consistent with the fundamental philosophies of both the American educational system and those of agricultural education. Such factors that so strongly influence the values and attitudes of so many should not be ignored when considering instructional content, regardless of setting.

Whether from the macrocosmic viewpoint of microbiologist Dubos or from the perspective of the vocational agricultural classroom in rural America, the implications of interdependence involve us all and need to be addressed.

Therefore it is recommended that the following suggestions be seriously considered by teacher training institutions for vocational agriculture, state directors of agricultural education and instructors of agriculture:

1. Efforts should be made to develop and distribute instructional materials, including teaching guides, resource materials and audio-visual materials, for use specifically by vocational agriculture instructors on the issues of world food production, distribution and the world food crisis. Evidence from the previously mentioned survey of Vo-Ag instructors indicate that there exists a desire on the part of instructors to obtain information and instructional assistance on such issues.
2. In-service workshops or classes should be organized which are directed towards increasing the awareness of vocational agriculture instructors to the issues relating to the global interdependence of agriculture and to provide assistance that would allow them to more effectively present such issues in their classrooms.
3. Specific course work should be offered and suggested to agricultural education students (training to be vocational agriculture instructors) that provide instruction on the issues of world agricultural interdependence and increase their awareness to the problems of agricultural production and distribution in both the developed and developing areas of the world.
4. Efforts should be made to improve the quality and increase the selection of resource materials available for student use on the issues of global interdependence as it influences agriculture. At this time, according to contacts made with over 100 Vo-Ag instructors, there appears to be a lack of periodicals, books and audio-visual materials that address these issues in Vo-Ag libraries.
5. Efforts should be made to approach the issues of global interdependence in all areas, on an interdisciplinary basis. Global interdependence is a broad area and encompasses a great deal and therefore should not be considered the responsibility of one discipline or instructional area. In the area of agricultural interdependence, agricultural instructors could address issues concerning production and production problems; economics instructors could provide instruction on the role of agricultural products in the world's economy and identify the role of embargos, tariffs, and trade agreements; and geography instructors could be responsible to cover the areas of climate, important crop growing regions, geographic trade barriers, etc.
6. Efforts should be made to overcome the low level of student awareness and insensitivity where it exists to the problems of world food production, distribution and the world food crisis. Suggestions of potential methods that could be used are as follows:
   - Utilization of community and in-school resource people who have had international experience to address specific topics in the classroom. Examples of such people are Peace Corp volunteers, agricultural missionaries, University staff, etc.
   - Students should be encouraged to participate in community activities,

relating to international problems, that offer service and contribute to developing their values and attitudes. Examples of such activities are those sponsored by CARE, UNICEF, Church and Civic groups.

— Students should be encouraged to participate in international educational experience programs such as Rotary Exchange, 4-H Travel and Work and the FFA's Work Experience Abroad Program.

— FFA activities that relate to global interdependence such as Forum topics, displays, banquet themes and international sister chapter should be encouraged.

Regardless of subject matter area or method used it will not be sufficient that students are only provided instruction on the existence and interrelationships of global problems but that they be encouraged to develop a sensitivity and kinship towards such problems; that instruction is offered on the constructive changes that are needed; and that motivating and rewarding activities be provided at the local school level that will cause students to desire to become involved with the planning and implementation of the needed changes.

Since completion of the study, from which this article was derived, the author has received numerous requests from Vo-Ag Instructors seeking sources of information and materials that could be used in the agriculture classroom to develop student awareness to the issues relating to international agriculture and the world food crisis. As part of the study, approximately 50 agencies and organizations were contacted concerning the availability of educational materials that would be appropriate for public use. A list of instructional materials and relevant information is available by contacting the author of this article at the following address:

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FOOTNOTES

1. Old Amish saying.
2. Dr. Norman Borlaug, address given at St. Paul Campus, University of Minnesota: December 1975.
3. The Visitor, October 1933, Vol XXI, No. 1, A. M. Field, Editorial, p. 2.
4. "Objectives for Vocational and Technical Education in Agriculture," U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, OE-81011, 1966.
5. Official Manual for Future Farmers of America, Future Farmers of America, Alexandria, Virginia, 1971.
6. Ralph L. Pounds and James R. Bryer. The School in American Society, 2nd Edition. The MacMillian Co., New York, 1967, p. 446.
7. Henry Kissinger, News Conference, October 12, 1974, Washington, D.C.
8. Only One Earth, Barbara Ward and Rene Dubos, W.W. Norton and Company, New York, 1972, p. 2.

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