

Positions Held by Teachers, Teacher Educators,
and State Supervisors about Selected National Issues
in Agricultural Education

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Throughout the history of agricultural education feasible alternative positions pertaining to important issues in the profession have been identified, studied, and discussed (Gregory, 1929; Stenzel and Wall, 1973; Stimson and Lathrop, 1942; True, 1929). Scarborough (1980) and Swanson (1980) suggested that a continuous study and discussion of significant issues is important to the advancement of agricultural education. Lee (1977) stated that a consideration of the issues "stimulates professional discussion and enrichment" (p. 2). The profession has recently intensified efforts to critically consider priority issues affecting the future of agricultural education.

Thirty-two priority issues affecting agricultural education for the remainder of the 20th Century were identified during the National Agricultural Education Seminar held in Kansas City, Missouri July 15-17, 1980 (National Agricultural Education Seminar, 1980). Warmbrod (1974) proposed that feasible alternatives concerning an issue under discussion should be formulated and tested. This same logic appears to be applicable to the priority issues currently challenging agricultural education.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which alternative positions on nine selected issues in agricultural education in the public school system were acceptable to selected agricultural education teacher educators, secondary teachers, and state supervisors. The specific research questions were:

1. What are the alternative positions on the selected issues?
2. What is the extent of acceptance of the alternative positions?
3. What are the perceptions regarding the importance of further study and discussion of the issues?

Procedures

The researchers purposefully selected and described nine issues in agricultural education concerning the areas of program purpose, clientele served, program content, supervised occupational experience, the FFA, and program title. These issues were derived from "prioritized issues" identified during the National Agricultural Education Seminar in Kansas City, Missouri, July 15-17, 1980.

Essentially, the procedures for this study employed three techniques including (a) a review of related literature, (b) review and refinement by a jury of experts, and (c) the utilization of a modified-Delphi technique.

The researchers reviewed related literature to identify and describe alternative positions pertaining to each of the nine selected issues. Each issue and alternative position statement was then prepared in instrument format for review and refinement by a jury of seven experts. Jury members were selected by an independent third party with their expert status verified by self-ratings. A list of 79 alternative position statements formulated from the process answered the research question, "What are the alternative positions on the selected issues?" This process also provided for the collection of essential data needed to formulate a Delphi instrument.

The Delphi technique elicits perceptions from respondents who make a series of judgments, each successive one being made in the light of a summary of judgments of all participants on a previous questionnaire (Sweigert, 1975). Features of the Delphi including anonymity of individual responses, controlled feedback, and a defined statistical presentation of group responses (MacMillan, 1975) facilitates convergence toward a particular viewpoint with preserving minority viewpoints and controlling for the "bandwagon" effect.

Respondents for the Delphi process were identified from a pool of 146 prospective individuals considered to be expert with regard to the research question. Presidents of all state agriculture teacher associations were asked to nominate an expert teacher from their state from which forty-six useable responses were received. Fifty teacher educators were nominated independently by the President, President-Elect, and the two immediate Past Presidents of the American Association of Teacher Educators in Agriculture. Head State Supervisors were selected by virtue of their position.

The Delphi panel of 104 subjects with sufficient distribution among teachers, teacher educators, and state supervisors was confirmed from response to a mailing containing (a) an invitation to participate, (b) an expert status self rating form, and (c) the first questionnaire. Response to the second and third questionnaires used in the Delphi process included 94 or 90.4% and 86 or 82.7% of the 104 first round panelists. Twenty-three teachers, 37 teacher educators, and 26 state supervisors completed all three questionnaires. An examination of the data determined that convergence to any particular viewpoint could not be attributed to respondent drop-out.

A modified Delphi technique which employed a series of three successive questionnaires was deemed most appropriate to determine the extent of acceptance of the alternative positions and to determine the importance of further study and discussion of the issue. The first questionnaire of the Delphi process contained the list of 79 positions which were developed by the researchers and the jury. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree and to comment on each alternative position. The second questionnaire contained the same elements as the previous instrument and, in addition, reported to each respondent (a) the percent of panelists in agreement and disagreement with each position statement, (b) how the particular respondent voted on the previous questionnaire, and (c) a summary of the comments concerning each alternative position which were provided by round one respondents. Subjects were asked to consider the new information and to re-evaluate their stance on each alternative position using the same process identified for the first questionnaire. A third questionnaire was identical in format and process to the second questionnaire with one addition. Panel members were asked to indicate their perception of the need for further study and discussion of each issue by checking a four-point rating scale with the descriptors "very important," "important," "limited importance," and "no further study needed." Round three data were tabulated and summarized.

Positions with Regard to Important Issues in Agricultural Education

Seventy-nine alternative positions pertaining to nine selected issues in agricultural education were identified. Table 1 lists the position statements pertaining to each of the nine selected issues.

Extent of Acceptance of Alternative Positions

The extent of acceptance on the alternative positions among teachers, teacher educators, and state supervisors was determined by the percent of agreement among the expert Delphi panelists. Out of the seventy-nine positions, all panelists agreed with 18 or 22.8% of the statements while all panelists disagreed with 5 or 6.3% of the positions. Forty-five or 57% of the positions were supported by 95% or more of the panelists.

The variability among teachers, teacher educators, and state supervisors on the percent of agreement on the positions was determined by the range. The range among the three groups was less than 5.0% on 39 positions, or 49.4% of the positions. Five, or 6.3% of the positions had a range among teachers, teacher educators, and state supervisors equal to or greater than 25.0%. Table 1 lists the position statements with the percent of agreement among all panel members and by groups of teachers, teacher educators, and state supervisors.

Table 1
 Positions Ordered by the Percent of Acceptance Among
 Expert Panel Members
 (n=87)

Issue/Positions	n	Percent agreement			Total
		Teachers	Teacher educators	State supervisors	
Purpose of Agricultural Education					
Orientation and Exploration	86	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Preparation for Employment or Self-Employment	86	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
To Develop the "Total Individual"	84	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Up-grading and Retraining	85	95.7	97.3	100.0	97.6
Preparation for Advanced Study at the Post-Secondary Level	86	95.7	97.3	92.3	95.3
Preparation for Advanced Study at the Baccalaureate Level	86	69.6	91.9	88.5	84.9
Develop the Abilities of Individuals to be Intelligent Consumers	86	73.9	78.4	61.5	72.1
General Education of an Avocational Nature	86	39.1	43.2	26.9	37.2
Clientele Who Should Be Served by Agricultural Education					
Students in Grades 9-10	86	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Rural Students	85	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Urban Students	85	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
In-School Youth with Social, Physical, and Economic Handicaps	84	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Students in Grades 11-12	86	100.0	97.3	100.0	98.8
Suburban Students	84	100.0	97.2	100.0	98.8
Females	84	100.0	100.0	96.0	98.8
Adults Seeking Employment in Occupational Requiring Knowledge and Skill in Agriculture	86	91.3	97.3	96.2	95.3
Out-of-School Youth	86	87.0	100.0	92.3	94.2
Out-of-School Youth and Adults With Social, Physical, and Economic Handicaps	84	52.2	91.7	88.0	79.8

Table 1 - (cont.)

Issue/Positions	n	Percent agreement			Total
		Teachers	Teacher educators	State supervisors	
Students in Grades 7-8	86	69.6	81.1	65.4	73.3
Out-of-School Youth or Adults Who Desire Knowledge and Skill in Agriculture for Personal Reasons	86	65.2	56.8	50.0	57.0
Students in Grades K-6	85	52.2	37.8	52.0	45.9
Content of Agriculture Education					
Agriculture Production	86	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Agriculture Supply and Service	76	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Agriculture Mechanics	86	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Agriculture Products	83	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Ornamental Horticulture	81	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Horticulture	81	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Renewable Natural Resources	85	100.0	97.3	100.0	98.0
Forestry	85	95.5	97.3	100.0	97.6
Other Types of Agriculture	85	95.5	97.3	96.2	96.5
Clientele Who Should Be Required to Conduct Supervised Occupational Experience/Practice Programs					
All Vocational Students Enrolled in a Production Agricultural Course of Study	86	95.7	100.0	100.0	98.8
All Vocational Students Enrolled in a Non-Production Agriculture Course of Study	86	95.7	97.3	100.0	97.7
Students Enrolled in Classes for Orientation in Agriculture Such as in Grades 7 and 8	84	27.3	22.2	23.1	23.8
Students Enrolled in Non-Vocational Agricultural Education Programs	85	26.1	25.0	19.2	23.5
Students Receiving Agricultural Instruction in Grades K-6	83	9.1	8.3	20.0	12.0

Table 1 - (cont.)

Issue/Positions	n	Percent agreement			Total
		Teachers	Teacher educators	State supervisors	
Acceptable Types of Supervised Occupational Experience/Practice for Students Enrolled in a Production Agricultural Program					
Supervised Farming Projects (Enterprises)	84	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Projects of an Entrepreneurial (Ownership) Nature	86	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Projects Related to the Specialty Area in Which the Student is Enrolled	85	95.7	100.0	100.0	98.8
Farm Placement	86	100.0	100.0	96.2	98.8
Practice/Experience in the School Laboratory, on the School Grounds, or Farm Separate from Scheduled In-School Instruction	86	100.0	100.0	96.2	98.8
Cooperative Education Programs	86	95.7	97.3	100.0	97.7
Home and/or Farm Improvement Projects	86	100.0	100.0	88.5	96.5
Supplementary Farm Projects	86	100.0	100.0	88.5	96.5
Group Projects Related to Production Agriculture	86	100.0	94.6	92.3	95.3
Exploratory Experiences	85	73.9	75.7	80.0	76.5
Practice/Experience in the School Laboratory, on the School Grounds, or Farm During Class Time	86	69.6	59.5	76.9	67.4
Acceptable Types of Supervised Occupational Experience/Practice for Students Enrolled in Non-Production Agriculture					
Placement in Agribusiness	86	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Projects of an Entrepreneurial (Ownership) Nature	86	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Cooperative Education Programs in Agriculture	86	95.7	97.3	100.0	97.7
Projects Related Exclusively to the Specialty Area in Which the Student is Enrolled	86	91.3	97.3	100.0	96.5

Table 1 - (cont.)

Issue/Positions	n	Percent agreement			Total
		Teachers	Teacher educators	State supervisors	
Practice/Experience in the Laboratory, on the School Grounds, or Farm Separate from Scheduled In-School Instruction	86	95.2	97.3	96.2	96.5
Group Projects of a Non-Production Agriculture Nature	84	95.2	94.6	96.2	95.2
Home Projects of Non-Production Nature	86	100.0	91.9	84.6	91.9
Exploratory Experience	86	73.9	78.4	76.9	76.7
Practice/Experience in the Laboratory, On the School Grounds, or Farm During Class Time	86	60.9	54.1	80.8	64.0
Clientele Enrolled in Agricultural Education Who Should be Members of the FFA					
All Vocational Students in Production Agriculture	86	95.7	97.3	92.3	95.3
All Vocational Students in Non-Production Agriculture	86	95.7	97.3	92.3	95.3
Avocational Students	85	43.5	44.4	19.2	36.5
Vocational Students in an Orientation to Agriculture Course of Study such as 7th and 8th Grade Programs	85	26.1	33.3	19.2	27.1
Only Those Vocational Students Who Desire to Become Members	85	26.1	22.2	23.1	23.5
Aspects of the FFA Program Which Should Occupy In-Class Instructional Time					
Activities Specifically Selected to Develop Leadership, Citizenship, and Cooperation	85	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Selected FFA Activities Which Directly Relate to the Specialty Area of Instruction	86	100.0	94.6	96.2	96.5
Selected FFA Activities Which Can be Utilized Without Taking Time Needed to Teach Content of the Instructional Program	86	100.0	89.2	100.0	95.3

Table 1 - (cont.)

Issue/Position	n	Percent agreement			Total
		Teachers	Teacher educators	State supervisors	
Record Keeping for Individual and Chapter Awards	86	100.0	89.2	100.0	95.3
Fund Raising Projects Which Use Minimal Class Time That Relate to Agriculture, Have Educational Value, and are Conducted According to Sound Business Practices	86	100.0	83.8	100.0	93.0
FFA Activities Which May Not Directly Relate to the Specialty Area in Which the Student is Enrolled	86	91.3	86.5	100.0	91.9
Preparation for Judging Contests Related to the Specialty Area in Which the Student is Enrolled	86	100.0	86.5	92.3	91.9
Planning Any FFA Activity	86	82.6	78.4	92.3	83.7
Preparation of Individual Award Applications	86	87.0	54.1	80.9	70.9
Conducting Any FFA Activity in the Chapter Program of Activities	86	52.2	45.9	69.2	54.7
Preparation of Any Judging Contest	86	43.5	18.9	53.8	36.0
The Title Which Should be Used to Describe Agricultural Education Programs					
Vocational Agriculture	85	56.5	67.6	52.0	60.0
Vocational Agriculture/Agribusiness	85	39.1	16.2	32.0	27.1
Agricultural Education	85	4.3	16.2	16.0	12.9
Agriculture/Agribusiness/Natural Resources Education	85	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Vocational-Technical Education in Agriculture	85	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Agricultural Education and Renewable Natural Resources	85	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Agricultural and Natural Resources Education	85	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Agriculture/Agribusiness Education	85	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Need for Further Study and Discussion of Selected Issues in Agricultural Education

Mean scores were used to prioritize the issues in terms of perceived need for further study and discussion. The issues most in need of further study and discussion dealt with clientele who should be members of the FFA, type of supervised occupational experience/practice needed by non-production and production agriculture students, and the purpose of agricultural education with mean scores of 2.60, 2.58, 2.53, and 2.53 respectively. Clientele who should conduct supervised occupational experience/practice and appropriate clientele for agricultural education followed with mean scores of 2.49 and 2.43 respectively. Mean scores of 2.29, 2.16, and 1.78 were calculated for the issues dealing with in-class time for FFA activities, program title, and content of the program to form the seventh, eighth, and ninth priority ranks respectively.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from the analysis and interpretation of the data in the study:

1. Expert teacher educators believed that a broader range of clientele were acceptable for FFA membership than did expert secondary teachers and state supervisors.
2. Expert teacher educators were less willing to accept aspects of the FFA program as in-class activities than were secondary teachers and state supervisors.
3. The extent of consensus on a majority of the positions is very high among the experts in agricultural education. Yet, some of the experts supported some modifications or additions to the positions as stated through written commentary.
4. A pool of experts can be identified who possess the necessary experience, and knowledge and are willing to address the question of "what should be" with respect to major issues in agricultural education.
5. Through dialogue and discussion, agricultural education secondary teachers, teacher educators, and state supervisors will move toward consensus on important positions which pertain to major issues in agricultural education.
6. The issues in greatest need of further study and discussion include clientele who should become FFA members, acceptable types of supervised occupational experience/practice for non-production and production agricultural students, and the purposes of agricultural education in the public school system.

Recommendations

1. The agricultural education profession should consider developing a general philosophy with regard to major components of the agricultural education program applicable throughout the United States, while maintaining appropriate flexibility for local program adaptations.
2. The professional associations should consider providing continuing leadership to studying, discussing, and identifying acceptable positions of the profession with regard to important issues in agricultural education at the national, state, and local levels.
3. The joint staff of teacher educators and state supervisors in each state should consider formulating positions which specifically address issues important to the future of agricultural education in the respective states.
4. The agricultural education profession should develop specific efforts to continually study, discuss, and identify positions concerning important issues in agricultural education such as devoting space for articles in the professional publications and appointing committees through the Agricultural Education Division of AVA to address specific issues.
5. Graduate and undergraduate students should utilize issue and position statements as focal points for discussion and further study.
6. Replication of this study or components of this study should be conducted periodically to (a) identify trends and (b) provide considerations for determining future direction in the agricultural education profession.
7. Issues important to agricultural education, in addition to those in this study such as prioritized issues from the National Agricultural Education Seminar, should be studied according to methodology employed in this research.
8. Future researchers should consider panelists' written commentary in this study to identify additional positions and to sharpen the focus of those positions already identified in this research.
9. Further research concerning the issues addressed in this study should focus on those issues receiving the highest priority ranking.
10. Where there is a large amount of variability among teacher educators, secondary teachers, and state supervisors concerning the acceptance of a position, further study and discussion is recommended.

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