

**Agricultural Teacher Education:
New Decisions or a March of Folly?**

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One of the most challenging and important honors that the profession of teacher education in agriculture can confer is the role of "Distinguished Lecturer." This is the unique opportunity for the lecturer to freely examine the status of the profession and share personal views, speculations and recommendations with a captive audience of respected colleagues. As one reviews the past lectures, there have been very valuable contributions to the thought and the practice of agricultural education at the university level.

It is important to study the past contributions to better understand the possibilities for today. Two popular historians have significantly influenced me as I have examined the profession of agricultural education. The first is the 1984 contribution of Barbara W. Tuchman The March of Folly. The second is Arnold Toynbee's monumental 1946 Study of History. Historians suggest that future planning is assisted by understanding of the past. Tuchman's thesis is that many times leaders and governments have undertaken policies that are contrary to their own interest. Perhaps some of the leadership in agricultural education, vocational education or education have been guilty of Tuchman's "March of Folly."

Toynbee warns about the danger of idolatry. He notes that idolizing past successes leads to "resting on the oars." Idolizing bureaucracies, leaders or legislated institutions as well as successful techniques are all dangerous for any civilization. "Idolatry is the Nemesis of Creativity" and when creativity ends, the civilization breaks down. Is agricultural teacher education guilty of resting on past laurels? Has there been a loss of creativity in the profession? Perhaps a view of the past will assist us in answering these questions and suggesting future directions.

Senior agricultural educators can remember an agriculture in the United States based on animal and steam power. They can also remember the 1930 introduction of Buck Rogers to the comic pages and how exotic the future appeared. The more youthful can remember the first atomic bomb and how atomic energy was going to solve the problems of the world. No, atomic energy does not seem to be the final solution nor does all that was predicted in Buck Rogers appear in our daily lives. What is sure is that there have been tremendous changes and that more are in the offing.

Agricultural education faces the dilemma of whether to be reactive or proactive. What is it about the profession that makes it unique and worthy of maintenance? Vocational agriculture has been the prisoner of the law. The law is the Federal legislation that created, extended and established the federally supported vocational education in agriculture program of today. Any who extensively study the legislative process are aware of the continuing compromises that determine the final make-up of any Federal or state statute. Have these compromises always resulted in the best vocational education in agriculture?

So what does this mean for the agricultural education of Century 21? In order to answer this question, it is useful to look at some of the profession's early writings. It is expected that this will help to place contemporary vocational education in agriculture in perspective and to suggest which if any of the profession's "sacred cows" merit our current defense and future promotion for the 21st century.

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R. M. Stewart in the 1943 lecture told us that:

In olden times when the leaders of a people had not matched their ideals with the comparable responsibility and service, their prophet called them to task and said, "The bed was too short that a man could stretch himself on and the covering was narrower than he could wrap himself in." The matching of our ideals with a realistic plan of action was never more needed in teacher education than today. The new days bring the need for a re-evaluation of 25 years of service, and the formation of a realistic plan of action. The bed should not be too short.

Does the passage of 43 years change the viability of Stewart's thesis? Carsle Hammonds observed in the 1942 lecture that in 25 years no group has yet succeeded in stating an aim for vocational agriculture to which all of us agree. A. M. Field noted in 1938 that agricultural education should be democratic in its service to people in the community. This was also echoed by the 1959 lecture of Herb Hamlin who stated that, "Appropriate agricultural education should be provided for all Americans, not merely for farmers or workers in agricultural occupations." There are many examples that we might call upon from the past literature but one of earliest and most interesting is the quote found in the September 1919 The Visitor from the University of Minnesota that printed, "The public school is wrongly organized when its main object is to fit for college. It should benefit the many rather than the few." There is little doubt that this is as true today as it was 66 years ago. These historical contributions will be called upon later as we look at the "new imperatives" of teacher education in agriculture.

Education in agriculture is one of the oldest American professions dating from the mythical lessons for Pilgrims on corn planting offered by Squantos. The definition of agricultural education in the history of the United States has been narrowing ever since. Teacher education in agriculture has been defined most often in terms of the vocational education laws of the time rather than by development of a viable scholarly definition by the profession. Preparation of vocational agriculture teachers is and remains a central responsibility of teacher education in agriculture. However, it is not the only responsibility. The broader responsibilities of teacher education in agriculture are addressed in many states. This has included international agricultural education, elementary agriculture (i.e. Food in the Classroom), inservice education for university agricultural personnel and education in agriculture for the general public.

Agricultural teacher educators have also been assigned to the areas of vocational teacher education or general teacher education in some institutions. The result of these assignments, with regards to the development of agricultural education, might be compared by analogy to the recent history of the Boy Scouts organization and the field of Home Economics. Both scouting and home economics have a long history of teaching skills (from generally well defined areas) to youth. Scouting's major emphasis was to teach youth about the out-of-doors and nature while home economics sought to teach skills about the home to both youth and adults. Both sought to change their directions so that they could become more "relevant" or to become all things to all people.

The traditional Scouts' Handbook became a source of information on how to cope with the inner city. Home economics left the area of teaching skills and subject matter tied to the home and began to teach concepts. Colleges of home economics became colleges of human ecology. It became possible to take a clothing construction course without assembling a garment. It became possible to achieve scouting honors without woodcraft skills. Both groups moved into areas that were historically handled by

other agencies. Scouting programs had little to differ them from boys/girls club activities. Home economics moved into areas such as conflict resolution that had long been the province of psychologists and others. Faculties of home economics began to gather clinical psychologists, lawyers, accountants, sociologists, economists and others that had traditional academic homes in other parts of the university. Their research and professional loyalties remained with their areas of academic preparation.

It appears that they forgot their roots. With a strong desire to achieve academic respectability, the land-grant mandate of service to the homemaker and scholarly inquiry in their unique fields were forgotten. Academic administrators seeking the mythical "holy grail" of the top 10 universities were delighted. Teaching does not support research, undergraduate laboratories are expensive to maintain, and preparing undergraduates to enter professions is contrary to the general education concept. Answering applied research questions of current concern to people of the state does not contribute to refereed journal articles and national reputations. Thus a loyal and vocal clientele group is not in place to support the program.

What is the state of the field of home economics today? The State of Washington abolished home economics programs at the University of Washington, and at Washington State University the College of Home Economics was merged with the College of Agriculture. This past summer, the University of Maryland considered abolishing the College of Human Ecology and parceling out the departments to three other administrative areas of the university. At present, this suggestion is not being considered.

Can agricultural teacher education learn from this recent history? When scouting returned traditional outdoors skills to the central core of their program, the numbers of participants significantly increased, and scouting has experienced a dynamic upswing in activity and support. Teacher education in agriculture first prepares secondary and post-secondary/adult teachers for American vocational education in agriculture. We must be careful not to forget the need to assure graduates who have sufficient agricultural skills to teach. Recent vocational legislation clearly indicates that continued funding for teacher education is shaky at best. Federal legislation is not sufficient reason to justify or protect vocational teacher education at an institution.

The future existence of agricultural education departments as we know them is in danger. Universities are merging programs into larger departments to achieve administrative efficiencies. Agricultural teacher educators are now finding rural sociologists, 4-H program leaders, Extension education, evaluation and faculty development specialists as well as information specialists and functions in their academic departments in colleges of agriculture. This is similar to the large vocational education departments created in the 1960's and 1970's in many colleges of education which included agricultural education.

These developments offer significant opportunities and dangers for the profession. The greatest opportunity is the possible future merger of the resources and commitment of Cooperative Extension to vocational education in agriculture as a client group. For more than 55 years, Extension has looked at vocational agriculture as a competitor rather than a potential partner in the task of education in agriculture. At best, vocational agriculture and Cooperative Extension have reached only about one-third of those who could profit from education in agriculture. Another possible positive outcome of broadening the academic base of agricultural education departments is the possibility of developing more sophisticated research

questions and methodology as well as encouraging synthesis of results from the respective fields to address new questions.

One of the greatest dangers of the new "eclectic/super departments" is the difficulty that "acadamaniac" administrators have in understanding departmental missions. If one is in a commodity department, such understanding is easy to establish. However, service to teachers, youth groups, inservice education for vocational agriculture and extension personnel as well as development of teaching materials are not activities that most new generation administrators see as important enough to reward with tenure, promotion, salary and resources. These new administrative postures operationally demonstrate that the land-grant concept is no longer viewed as a central mission of the institution. Needed applied research for the profession is discounted as being unimportant since it does not result in refereed journal articles. And concurrently dissemination of the results of applied research is not well supported. This contention is directly supported by a 1984 paper by G. E. Schuh which calls for revitalizing the applied in our land-grant university mission statements.

Small agricultural education departments of two or less faculty members are in particular difficulty at this time. The demands of offering a comprehensive undergraduate teacher preparation program and conducting requisite inservice and Master's instruction fully involve the teacher educators in a small department. The opportunity to conduct research and publish nationally is severely limited. The "tenure trap" is likely to haunt the new assistant professors. In one two-professor teacher education area at our institution (not Agricultural Education), no one has achieved tenure since 1968.

Overall institutional shortfalls in funding are a looming danger for teacher education in agriculture. The new style administrators are proposing the elimination of those departments or programs which are not efficient or do not have the potential for national reputations. The newly released resources from these program eliminations will then be shared among "programs with more promise." Decreasing enrollments in colleges of agriculture, decreasing overall high school enrollments, increasing high school graduation requirements and increasing university-wide teacher education requirements all are combining to cause enrollment concerns in teacher education in agriculture programs.

These concerns and lessons of history lead me to make some suggestions for the future strength and viability of the profession. The first and primary responsibility of teacher education in agriculture is to vocational education in agriculture. These are our roots and the area of our foundation. However, the responsibility of the professor of agricultural education must be expanded to cover all of education in agriculture, not just for the federally supported vocational programs. Education from kindergarten through the adult must become the province of the profession.

The profession itself must determine the future direction of agricultural education. If we do not accomplish this task, others will do it for us. In regions like the Eastern Region of the AATEA, multi-state teacher education programs might be imposed in various convenient geographic areas. An even worse situation could be no teacher education programs in many states. This era might mirror the recent history of supervision personnel numbers across the nation.

Teacher education has had a tendency to be reactive rather than proactive as far as their current status. Teacher education in agriculture has many friends. These friends should already be involved in state-wide advisory councils for teacher education. Vocational education in

agriculture legislation should be considered for each state that includes teacher education. Agricultural education nationally is a three-way cooperative relationship between teachers, supervisors and teacher educators. When one suffers, all are hurt. Quality programs call for strength in all areas. Politics is not a dirty word but a reality for our profession. Active involvement in the political arena is a must for survival.

To work hard and do a good job of preparing teachers is not enough to assure continuation of the profession. The realities of today's university and state-wide political climates mandate that teacher educators must actively develop and sell their missions of education in agriculture for all citizens to administrators and then achieve the scholarly requirements for tenure and promotion. We must also carefully seek out and serve the clientele groups requiring service. In some cases, this service might be in a developing country or even within their own college.

We cannot commit the folly of standing by and watching agricultural education supervision and vocational agriculture teaching suffer further erosion. We must remain actively involved in assuring adequate vocational agriculture access for a wide cross-section of students. All of agriculture faces a shortage of future potential leaders, scientists and teachers. Strong supervision and state leadership of vocational agriculture programs is mandatory. Those with professional memories that reach prior to the 1963 Vocational Education Act can attest to the problems faced by many states. As Benjamin Franklin told his revolutionary colleagues, if we do not stand together we will hang one by one.

I charge the profession to again be proactive. We must establish directions for professional service and activity that will be much wider than our historic responsibilities to Smith-Hughes supported agricultural education. The total United States population needs education in agriculture. The potential of international agricultural education has yet to be tapped. Teacher educators must become more politically active in supporting and defining the profession. To look back and have pride in our past is very satisfying. Toynbee reminds us, however, that such idolatry limits creativity and assures decay. Forward looking creative activity will assure continuation of the profession for Century 21.

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(Continued on page 26)