

History of Agricultural Education in America:  
The Great Individuals and Events

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Over the years, a number of historical examinations of the background and development of agricultural education in this country have appeared. Stimson and Lathrop (1942) examined the movement of the profession largely as it developed following the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917. In a later study, Ekstrom (1969) looked at the flow of events and leaders preceding that time. In addition, any number of state level histories of agricultural education have been developed.

Purpose

Two things emerge as the central foci in all such historical works: people who have made a difference and events that signal major accomplishments or turning points in the profession's development. It was not the purpose of those studies to single out individuals or events that have had the most impact on the profession. Rather, they were designed to chronicle in a nonjudgemental way all of the important contributors and contributions over the years. Clearly, certain individuals could be cited as among the greatest in our history and certain events could be cited as the most important to agricultural education. Yet, apparently no effort has been made toward that end. It was the purpose of this study to seek answers to two research questions.

1. What 10 individual members of the profession have contributed the most to the development of agricultural education?
2. What 10 events in the history of agricultural education have been most important in shaping the profession as it exists today?

Methods

Sample

The decision was made to secure knowledgeable respondents for the survey rather than representativeness of the profession. Agricultural education professionals consist largely of three groups: teachers, teacher educators, and supervisory personnel both at the state level and Federal level. A list of 10 of the most influential and

well known members of each of those groups was identified to give equal representation to each component. In addition, a list of 10 very prominent retirees, also taken from all three categories, was compiled. A conscious effort was made to insure representation from all parts of the country.

### Procedures

Each member of the panel was mailed two survey forms. The first requested that the respondent submit a list of the most important individuals in the history of agricultural education. The second asked the respondent to identify the most important events in the history of the profession. Names of recipients were included on the surveys because anonymity was not judged to be important. A cover letter was included to explain the purpose of the study and the process by which the panel had been selected. About two weeks later, a follow-up letter was sent to nonrespondents along with a second set of survey forms. After almost two months, a total of 33 (83%) members of the panel had responded.

Tabulation of the first round of the survey produced a list of 175 individuals and 47 events, each of which had been nominated by one or more respondents. The second round surveys were developed from the lists of nominations. Criteria for inclusion in the second round were: three or more nominations for individuals and two or more nominations for events.

This produced two second round surveys. The first was a list of 28 individuals in alphabetical order with no explanation as to their contributions. It was believed that the names should stand alone and that descriptions could bias the results. The second was a list of 35 events, again with no explanations but grouped into logical categories as follows: establishment of organizations or agencies, legislation, establishment of journals, and other events.

The respondents were asked to rate each individual and event on a scale as follows:

1. contribution NOT major (or not familiar to me),
2. minor contribution compared to others on list,
3. moderate contribution compared to others on list,
4. contribution important but not among greatest, and
5. ranks among greatest in our profession's history.

A cover letter was included to explain the selection criteria for inclusion of individuals and events on the second round survey. After a month, a total of 36 surveys had been returned for a response rate of 90%.

## Results

### Individuals

This study attempted to identify the greatest individuals in the history of our profession. Of the 28 persons listed on the second survey 18 were teacher educators, nine were supervisory or support personnel at either state or Federal level, and one was a local teacher. The decision was made not to reveal the specific rankings, therefore the 10 who were rated highest are reported here in alphabetical order, not in rank order. It is certainly interesting to note that all of the living teacher educators among this group are recipients of the Distinguished Service Award of the American Association of Teacher Educators in Agriculture.

Ralph Bender. Dr. Bender's contributions to agricultural education can be traced to several areas. First, he was known as a master teacher. Second, he was Chairman of the Department of Agricultural Education at The Ohio State University, Vice President of The American Vocational Association (AVA), and both Secretary and President of the Agricultural Education Division of AVA. And third, his scholarly activities include advising numerous doctoral students and co-authoring the publications of *Teacher Education in Agriculture*, 1972 AVA Yearbook, *The FFA and You*, and *Adult Education in Agriculture* which have all made a positive impact in agricultural education.

Clarence Bundy. Professor Bundy has had an impact upon agricultural education through his many books published in technical agriculture. These books can be found in almost every local department of agricultural education across the country. His writings have influenced a positive growth in students as they learned more about technical agriculture. He also served as the Chairman of the Agricultural Education Department at Iowa State University and was one of the strong proponents of supervised occupational experience programs.

Harold Crawford. Dr. Crawford has served as Chairman of the Agricultural Education Department at Iowa State University and he is noted for giving leadership to the profession through special projects and seminars. The most notable contribution was when he served as project director for the national standards project which led to the establishment of quality standards for the total program of agricultural education. Many states followed up the national project with the development of quality standards for implementation at the state level. These standards still serve as a benchmark for programs at both high school and university levels today.

Henry Groseclose. Professor Groseclose's contribution to the profession has centered around the FFA, an important component of the profession as noted by its second ranking in historical events. Groseclose, along with Harry Sanders, Walter Newman, and Edwin McGill founded the Future Farmers of Virginia in 1925 at Virginia Polytechnic Institute while they were on the faculty in agricultural edu-

cation. His early work served as a basis for the constitution and by-laws adopted by the FFA at its first national convention in 1928. He served as the first secretary and treasurer of the National FFA and to this day is given much credit to the development of the FFA as an integral part of the total program of agricultural education.

Carsie Hammonds. Professor and Head of Agricultural Education at the University of Kentucky, Dr. Hammonds was a scholar who led the profession nationally through his emphasis in teacher preparation. His book on Teaching Agriculture, although out of print, still serves as a basis for learning theory as applied to vocational agriculture teaching. His deep belief in problem solving and a humanistic philosophy in agricultural education made him a popular speaker at state, regional, and national levels.

H. M. Hamlin. Perhaps one of the professions' earliest and most prolific writers was Dr. Hamlin. He has authored or co-authored 42 books and more than 175 articles for professional journals. His most widely read book, *Agricultural Education in Community Schools* had great impact upon making local vocational agricultural programs truly community based and promoting the use of advisory councils. He served as Head of Agricultural Education at the University of Illinois and his lasting contribution to the profession might be his initial efforts in co-founding the *Agricultural Education Magazine* and serving as editor of the first volume.

H. N. Hunsicker. Mr. Hunsicker has been a most influential person by helping to guide the profession from a strictly farming based educational program to an agribusiness focus. Starting as a member of the Future Farmers of Virginia, he later served as a state supervisor and as National FFA Advisor. His role as Education Program Specialist, Agribusiness and National Resources Occupations in the United States Office of Education resulted in a number of the most notable events including development of an expanded definition of vocational agriculture, emphasis upon post-secondary schools, guidelines for young farmer programs, formation of National FFA Alumni, admission of girls into the FFA, and merging the New Farmers of America with the FFA.

Lloyd Phipps. Dr. Phipps' major contribution to the profession came while he was Chairman of the Agricultural Education Department at the University of Illinois. He was a prolific writer and believed in quality programs. His most noteworthy publication, still being used today as a framework for a local program of vocational agriculture, is *The Handbook on Agricultural Education for Public Schools*. Other writings centered around advisory councils, adult education, and agricultural mechanics.

W. A. Spanton. Dr. Spanton's career spanned teaching in high schools, serving as superintendent of schools, and serving as state supervisor of agriculture before becoming Chief of the Agricultural Education Service and National FFA Advisor in 1941. His initial contribution was helping to form the national judging contests in Kansas City in 1926 and 1927. This commitment to the program led to his

assignment of compiling a temporary constitution for the National FFA which was later adopted at the first National Convention in 1928.

A. W. Tenney. The period of 1943-57 was one of growth and change for the profession and A. W. Tenney, serving as Program Specialist in agricultural education in USOE, was in the forefront. His leadership gave birth to the Future Farmer Supply Service, National FFA Band and Chorus, FFA Goodwill Tour, National FFA Foundation, and the *National Future Farmer Magazine*.

### Events

Many important events have combined to shape the profession of agricultural education as it exists today. Nevertheless, some of those must have had greater impact than others. There was a tie for tenth place, and what follows is the list of eleven events judged by the panel of prominent agricultural educators to be the most important in the profession's history. They are listed in rank order beginning with the most important.

Smith-Hughes. The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 was the only event rated a perfect 5.0 by all respondents. Generally recognized as the cornerstone of all of vocational education, including agricultural education, it laid out the organizational structure for the profession which still exists today (Barlow, 1967). It called for implementation of farm practice programs, specified the purposes of agricultural education, and provided federal monies to initiate the program on a nationwide scale.

FFA. The establishment of the Future Farmers of America ranked second. One of the four main components of vocational agriculture according to Phipps (1980), the FFA may well be our most effective motivator of students. It is worth noting that Professor Henry Groseclose, who is remembered primarily for his work in FFA, appears in the 10 individuals listed earlier, undoubtedly for that reason.

Expanded Definition. The original shape and purpose of agricultural education were given by the Smith-Hughes Act. By the early 1960's it was apparent that training of farmers was no longer adequate as the sole purpose for agricultural education. A widespread movement began to expand the definition of the profession to include training for occupations other than that of farmer. This became legalized in the Vocational Education Act of 1963, which will also appear later in this list.

Twelve Month Contracts. The development of twelve month contracts allowed vocational agriculture teachers to provide supervision of farm project programs during the summer months. This valuable tool also provided time for summer inservice workshops and other teacher conferences. Much that is of value in agricultural education can be attributed to some degree to the year-round approach to the program.

NVATA. The establishment of the National Vocational Agriculture Teachers Association in 1948 was surely a milestone in the profession. The organization has proven to be an effective mechanism in promoting professionalism among teachers. In addition, it has proven a valuable tool in helping to shape legislation affecting the profession.

FFA Foundation. The establishment of the FFA Foundation in 1944 provided a support mechanism for vocational agriculture programs through the FFA. It involved the agribusiness community in a substantive way in the promotion of vocational agriculture activities.

Admission of Girls. Female students were systematically excluded from participation in vocational agriculture by the Smith-Hughes Act. In a large measure that remained true into the 1960's. It was not until 1969 that the last technical barrier to girls in the program was removed with the official admission of girls into the FFA.

Morrill Act of 1862. The Land Grant Act (Morrill Act of 1862), although preceding the formal establishment of vocational agriculture as a program, must nevertheless be considered a cornerstone of the profession. It was through this landmark legislation that the national system of land grant schools came into being. It was also this law that gave impetus to the development of agricultural education in its broader sense.

Public Law 740. The granting of a federal charter (PL 740) in 1950 gave special status to the FFA organization. It also made legal the long standing concept that the organization was an integral part of the curriculum of agricultural education.

Public Law 88-210. The Vocational Education Act of 1963 (PL 88-210) officially expanded the role of vocational agriculture and made inevitable its movement into diverse occupational areas, a situation discussed earlier. But in addition, it greatly expanded the federal role in agricultural education. Many view this landmark legislation as detrimental to agricultural education because it removed the earlier service area identification that had been in effect since Smith-Hughes. This act and its subsequent amendments brought into question the very structure of the program as it had been previously known.

SOEP. During the early years of the existence of agricultural education, the use of a supervised farm project program was mandated by federal legislation. Over the years, and during the 1960's in particular, this limited definition of occupational experience was expanded to include all of those things now referred to as Supervised Occupational Experience Program (SOEP). The expansion from the farm project approach to the broader SOEP was selected as one of the major events in the profession's history.

### Conclusion

This study sought to identify the greatest individuals and events in the history of the profession of agricultural education. A panel of distinguished members of the profession, both active and retired, was used to generate the lists and then to rate them.

Looking at the list of great individuals in the profession most were teachers of vocational agriculture during their professional lives. Of the 10, seven were noted as teacher educators being known most widely for their writing. The remaining three served at the national level in administrative positions and became known for their leadership activities. One person on the list is still active in the profession.

The list of major events in the history of the profession is topped by the Smith-Hughes Act. Examination of the list shows the importance of federal legislation in the development of agricultural education because three separate laws emerge among the eleven most important events. Also, the importance of the FFA to the profession was supported with three events directly relating to that organization.

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