

PROFESSIONAL INVOLVEMENT OF COLLEGIANS IN AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

Vanik S. Eaddy
Assistant Professor

Agricultural Education
Auburn University

A fundamental principle of learning is that one learns more effectively and more permanently when the process to be learned is performed. The value of "learning by doing" has been proven countless times throughout the development of vocational agricultural education. The FFA was founded and a reputation built upon involving students in an applied and intensive learning situation where active participation resulted in improved ability to perform skills and competencies desired.

There is a general agreement that the model for vocational agriculture at the secondary school level has been strengthened and undeniably successful because of the incorporation of the FFA into the instructional program. This valuable lesson has not been well heeded in post secondary and higher educational levels of agricultural education. Agricultural teacher education programs have generally not taken full advantage of collegiate youth organizations to capitalize upon their unlimited potential for developing professional leadership competencies. The need for student clubs in post secondary agricultural education programs has been documented by Iverson and Feck.¹ They have also concluded that teacher education programs should be revised to prepare prospective post-secondary teachers for their role in advising subject matter related youth organizations.

The development of professional agricultural education collegiate organizations has not paralleled the growth of the FFA. Collegiate FFA Chapters may be established in two- and four-year institutions which have agricultural teacher education programs. Such chapters are permitted charters as auxiliary organizations under the provisions of the National FFA Constitutions and By-Laws. Membership is usually open to students studying agriculture and to former FFA members. Members are expected to pay State and National dues, but until recently there were no meaningful and constructive ways to participate in leadership activities beyond the local level. Where collegiate FFA chapters are established, a program of work is usually designed for social and professional activities considered desirable by the members and advisors. The extent to which collegiate FFA chapters are successful in developing leadership talent is usually dependent upon the presence of dynamic student leadership and the emphasis placed upon this phase of work by the chapter advisors.

Organizations have been developed in several of the agricultural teacher education institutions which are patterned somewhat after the

model established by the collegiate FFA chapters. These organizations are usually local in scope and function more or less in social and professional roles. Among these, but not inclusive are Agricultural Career Clubs, Society for the Promotion of Agricultural Education, Agricultural Education Clubs, Student NVATA Clubs, and Agricultural Clubs. Membership is usually established at the convenience of the club concerned.

The Alpha Tau Alpha (ATA) was begun in 1921 and is a National Honorary Fraternity for students majoring in Agricultural Education. Membership usually includes sophomore, junior, and senior college students in institutions where vocational agricultural teachers are prepared. Some chapters of ATA provide for associate or junior membership until pre-requisites for regular membership are met. Scholarship and leadership qualities are sought among initiates and the program of activities encourages the development of these talents. The ATA holds an annual National Conclave² during the National FFA Convention in conjunction with the National Student Teacher Conference.³ Both of these activities serve to promote fellowship, expansion of innovative ideas, and professional involvement of collegians with students and professors of agricultural education throughout the United States.

In spite of the valuable experiences previously mentioned, many students in agricultural teacher education are never provided the opportunity for truly meaningful and stimulating professional development. A variety of professional collegiate organizations are in existence, but there are few if any efforts to provide an articulated program of activities from the local to the national levels. In addition, there are limited facilities available to effect a diffusion of ideas among organizations. A vehicle should be established for sharing the innovative ideas developed by these diverse organizations. In short, there is a need for coordination between existing organizations to provide for cooperative development of professional leadership talent.

A suitable framework is needed to initiate, develop, and promote leadership competency based activities of students in agricultural teacher education. Professional Involvement of Collegians in Agricultural Education is a model designed to permit emerging talent to develop through active performance of professional competencies required of teachers. PICAIE is a concept of participation by members of collegiate organizations which function to promote the professional agribusiness and natural resources occupations. A major concern of PICAIE is the preparation of collegians to become advisors of local FFA chapters.

The structure proposed will provide the opportunity for meaningful participation in professional leadership activities at the local, state, regional, and national levels of responsibility. PICAЕ is not intended as a new organization; rather it is envisioned as a consortium of existing collegiate organizations having similar aims and purposes.

The following statements provide a background of support for a broadly based professional youth activity model.

- a. A majority of participants in National FFA Seminar-- Operation Update, March 6-9, 1972, agreed that National FFA dues should not be paid by collegians unless satisfactory participation was developed.
- b. Teacher educators have revealed that inadequate time is available to provide professional experiences in the pre-service curricula which contribute to the development of FFA advisory competencies. This contention was supported by the AATEA Ad Hoc Study Committee on the FFA.⁴
- c. The future of the FFA organization is dependent upon the development of superior and effective leadership.
- d. A relevant flexible FFA can exist only if it is truly integral to the vocational agribusiness instructional program.
- e. Meaningful, practical, stimulating and involvement centered activities are needed to promote participation in professional collegiate programs.
- f. A similar concept of collegiate involvement in professional activity was suggested by Price.⁵

Collegiate leadership activities should be extensively organized at the local and state levels in order to permit a maximum number of students to participate. This is essential for the development of a majority of students who may be unable to attend regional or national conventions. Regional and national participation in professional leadership activities should be provided to offer incentives, as well as for the educational and social advantages of association with peers representing divergent cultural and regional backgrounds. A sharing of professional experiences and ideas might be considered a fringe benefit of collegiate participation at local, state, regional, and national levels.

Local professional leadership activities may involve a variety of forms including an active organization which establishes a program of work and conducts regularly scheduled meetings. Serving this purpose could be existing collegiate agricultural education clubs. Ideas are unlimited for effective leadership development at the local level. In all situations a premium should be placed upon student participation in activities which will allow hidden talent to emerge and to develop.

Suitable leadership activities may include any number of performances or contests which involve competencies required by teachers and advisers. These activities could be integrated into college course work assignments or variable credit hours could be awarded. In all performances, a prime consideration should be practicality. Suggested examples:

- a. Written papers on assigned topics such as a chapter BOAC project, an annual FFA program of work, a curriculum for integrating FFA into vocational agribusiness, and journal articles or newsletter releases for professional consumption might be proper. Newspaper releases or spot announcements could be prepared for use on local radio or television.
- b. Presentation of assigned papers to peers could become a competition whereby one's graded paper and essentials of public speaking could be developed into a combination performance. The use of educational media should be emphasized in the presentations.
- c. Extemporaneous speeches could be contested on topics germane to the FFA.
- d. Parliamentary law contests might be conducted on a modified basis.
- e. Collegiate organizations could assist in conducting the FFA contests for secondary students at local, district, or state levels.
- f. Suitable service projects could be undertaken by collegiate groups.

Collegiate division competition may be conducted in Land, Dairy, and Livestock Judging and in the FFA Agricultural Mechanics Contest. (This was tried experimentally in 1973 in Alabama involving

three senior and six junior colleges which offer agricultural education or agribusiness technology.)

A consortium of agricultural education organizations would be necessary to provide collegiate leadership participation at the state, regional, and national levels. There should be established a forum for the exchange of ideas, fellowship, and perhaps competition among students throughout the United States. The previously suggested competitive events could be expanded from local to national level competition if desirable. If competitive events are considered undesirable activities above the local level, they may be supplemented or replaced by professional conclaves planned especially by collegians for their leadership development. Adult advice could be provided by teacher educators when necessary.

PICAE could be organized at the regional level in a manner similar to the Regional Agricultural Education Conferences to permit participation by the collegiate agricultural education organizations existing therein. Student officers could be elected with advisers appointed or chosen by the student membership. (A convocation was tried experimentally at the Southern Agricultural Education Conference, 1973, which involved collegians and professional staff members in planning proposals for future collegiate activities.)

A convocation of delegates from each region could be assembled in Kansas City during the National FFA Convention as a part of the National Student Teacher Conference. If national level competition for collegians is deemed desirable, competitive events could be scheduled at this time. Collegians should also be permitted to assist in the staging of the National FFA Convention. National programs should reflect collegiate involvement in professional activity with an emphasis upon sharing ideas, associating with others who cause things to happen, and a commitment to the aged philosophy of learning by doing.

PICAE should involve the members of all professional collegiate organizations having a common goal of preparing FFA advisers and teachers of vocational agribusiness and natural resources occupations. PICAE could include these organizations mentioned but should not be limited to Collegiate FFA, Alpha Tau Alpha, Agricultural Career Clubs, Agricultural Education Clubs, and the Society for the Promotion of Agricultural Education.

Summary

PICAE is envisioned as a consortium of existing collegiate organizations having similar aims and purposes. Anticipated desirable outcomes presently identified are these:

- a. The primary outcome will be to provide prospective teachers of vocational agribusiness and natural resources occupations the opportunity for professional pre-service participation, leadership experiences, and insight into the role of the FFA advisor.
- b. Potential professional leaders could be identified and allowed to emerge through active performance in leadership competencies required of persons who will become teachers of vocational agribusiness and natural resources occupations.
- c. PICAE could function in a coordination role to facilitate the exchange of professional ideas to plan for involvement centered activities of Collegiate FFA, Alpha Tau Alpha, Agricultural Education Clubs, and other similar organizations at the state, regional, and national levels.
- d. Professional involvement activities could be democratically planned, coordinated and conducted by collegians with the advice and assistance provided by selected adult advisers.
- e. Existing collegiate agricultural education organizations may be strengthened and their memberships increased through a vitalized and challenging program of work.
- f. A framework could be established to permit state, regional, and national activities for collegians which emphasize professional leadership development.
- g. Competitive events could be developed which provide collegians the opportunity to apply lessons learned in professional and technical study.
- h. Efficiently organized and effectively managed collegiate agricultural education organizations could become extremely valuable tools for recruiting capable students into the profession.

FOOTNOTES

¹Maynard J. Iverson and Vincent J. Feck. "Suggestions for Helping Post-Secondary Teachers of Agriculture to Work with Student Organizations," The Journal of the American Association of Teacher Educators in Agricultural Education. Vol. 13, No. 5, 1972, pp. 9-14.

²James Albract. "Thirty-third National Alpha Tau Alpha Conclave--Kansas City Highlights," The Agricultural Education Magazine. Vol. 45, No. 8, 1973, p. 180.

³Richard Z. Zimmerman and Robert W. Walker. "Reflections on the National Student Teacher Conference," The Agricultural Education Magazine. Vol. 45, No. 8, 1973, p. 181.

⁴Bob R. Stewart. (Chairman) "Preparation of Teachers of Agriculture to Serve as FFA advisors." A Preliminary Report of a Study Conducted by the AATEA Ad Hoc Committee on the FFA. Presented to the AATEA General Session, Portland, Oregon, December, 1971.

⁵Robert R. Price. "Collegiate FFA: A Meaningful Experience," The Agricultural Education Magazine. Vol. 41, No. 9, 1969, pp. 222-223.

* * * * *