

RESPONSIBILITY OF TEACHER EDUCATORS TO YOUTH
ENTERING NON-FARM AGRICULTURAL OCCUPATIONS

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A national farm magazine recently stated that, "We worry, work and pass laws to take care of our food production, but few people show concern over the 700,000 farm youth who are placed on the job market each year. Without adequate training and education, these young people face a dismal future." I probably like many of you, deflected any accusation directed at us -- passively agreeing that somebody certainly should do something, but rationalizing that vo-ag teachers have already been overworked and under paid to the critical point; we have a dire shortage. Besides, not half enough farmers are now receiving vocational education. Never was the need so great for well educated farmers. Never have so many people been so dependent upon so few farmers. It is true also that vo-ag provides valuable background preparation for farm related workers.

The waning thought fled as I further rationalized that teacher educators have all they can do in selecting enrolees, providing pre-service and in-service education besides a little research and writing and a myriad of committee assignments.

All this tends to reinforce one's rationale and sooth his conscience. Additional support is mustered from a traditional literal interpretation of the Smith-Hughes Act "that such education shall be designed to meet the needs of persons . . . who are preparing to enter upon the work of the farm or of the farm home . . . that such schools shall provide for directed or supervised practice in agriculture, either on a farm provided by the school or other farm, for at least six months per year."

In spite of all the actual or assumed workloads and legal limitations, in spite of apparent justification to take the charge lightly, the need for specific vocational preparation for almost a third of our labor force, that engaged in agricultural non-farming occupations cannot be ignored! The accusing finger points directly at state leaders in agricultural education; yes, teacher educators.

Who would, who could, who should, more logically be expected to exert forceful, effective leadership in this area? The situation compels us to re-read the Smith-Hughes Act and to analyze it in light of new agricultural occupations and vocational education needs therein. One finds in the early general sections of that Act (preceding the aforementioned specific provisions) such statements as these: "that the controlling purpose of such education shall be to fit for useful employment . . . that for the purpose of cooperating with the states in paying the salaries of

teachers, supervisors, or directors of agricultural subjects there is hereby appropriated for the use of the states . . . (author's underlines). We find also that funds are provided "for the purpose of making studies, investigations, and reports to aid in the organization and conduct of vocational education . . . to make, or cause to have made studies, investigations and reports, with particular reference to their use in aiding the States in the establishment of vocational schools and classes and in giving instruction in agriculture . . . SUCH STUDIES, INVESTIGATIONS, AND REPORTS SHALL INCLUDE AGRICULTURE AND AGRICULTURAL PROCESSES AND REQUIREMENTS UPON AGRICULTURAL WORKERS . . ." (author's capitals). Note the wording. It does not read only "farm and farm processes and requirements upon farm workers." It seems to imply broader instructional programs where needed. The framers of the Act and the Congress were seeking to provide the vital vocational education needed within the occupational structure of their day and the future as they anticipated it. I believe they would have us do the same today. Toward this end, the writer recently helped to complete a study involving some 800 employers of 22,000 people working in non-farm agricultural jobs in 62 towns throughout Nebraska.

The employers were asked, in an interview, a series of questions designed to indicate the present and future employment opportunities for people with farm background, the nature of this employment and the type of background and training desired in employees.

Nature of Farm Related Employment Opportunities

Succinctly, the findings related to employment were as follow: most farm related firms engaged in sales or service activity; dealt with implements, feed and supplies; employed less than ten persons; and the jobs were of the skilled or semi-skilled nature. (See following Figures)

Types of Farm Related Firms

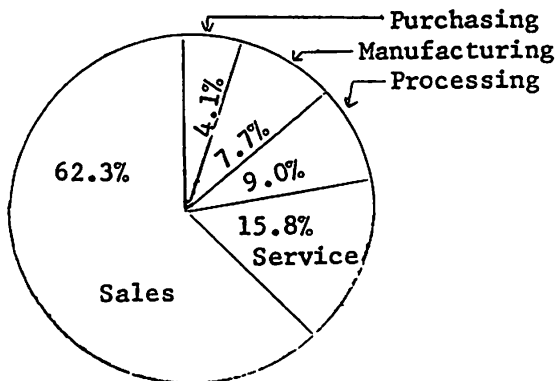


Figure 1.

Areas in Which Farm Related Jobs Exist

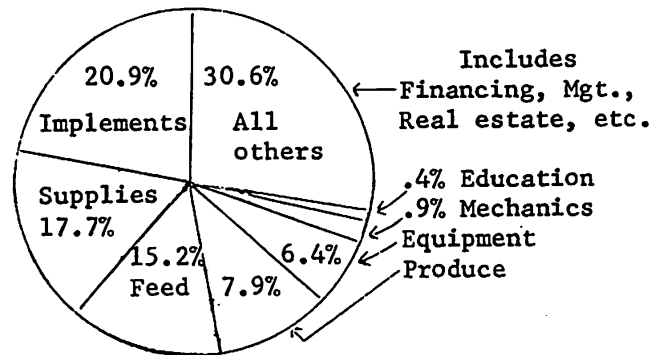


Figure 2.

Numbers of Employees in Farm Related Firms

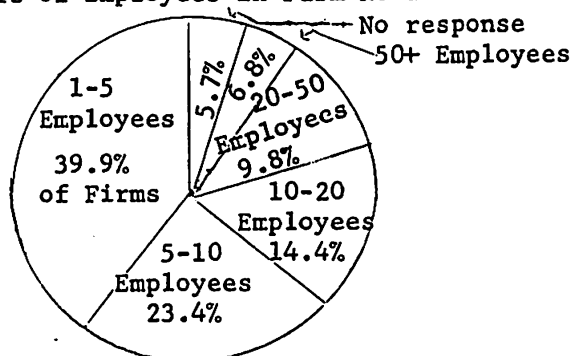


Figure 3

Kinds of Farm Related Work

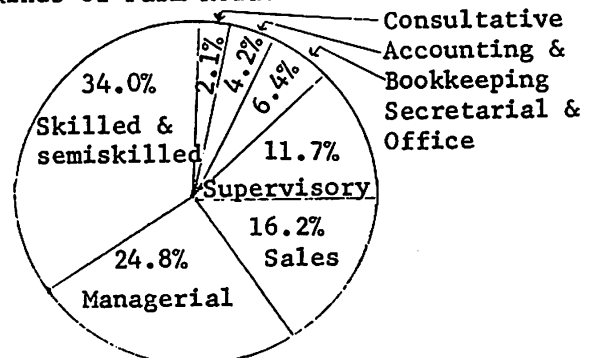


Figure 4.

The employers interviewed were quite optimistic about their employee needs in the future. Almost three-fifths of the 800 representatives anticipate a need for more employees by 1965. They expect to employ both greater proportions and larger numbers of employees with agricultural backgrounds. About one-half of them expect to add from one to five people. Only three percent expected a decrease in numbers of job opportunities. Salarywise, as one might expect, both starting and top salaries were generally higher as education and experience requirements for the job increased. The possible exception is in sales work. With relatively little formal education required, both numbers of job opportunities and salaries were favorable for sales. Of course, at the pinnacle of the job ladder salarywise, are managers.

The employee replacement policies of the farm related firms have educational implications which influence youth seeking employment. Jobs requiring more training and experience are largely filled by promotions within the organization. The largest number of opportunities open to new individuals from outside the firm are at the lower skill levels. Therefore, if a person wishes to secure employment in higher paying jobs, those above semi-skilled levels, some sort of training is needed. (See Figure 5)

Percentages of Employees Hired from Outside the Firm
(or Types of Jobs Available to New Employees)

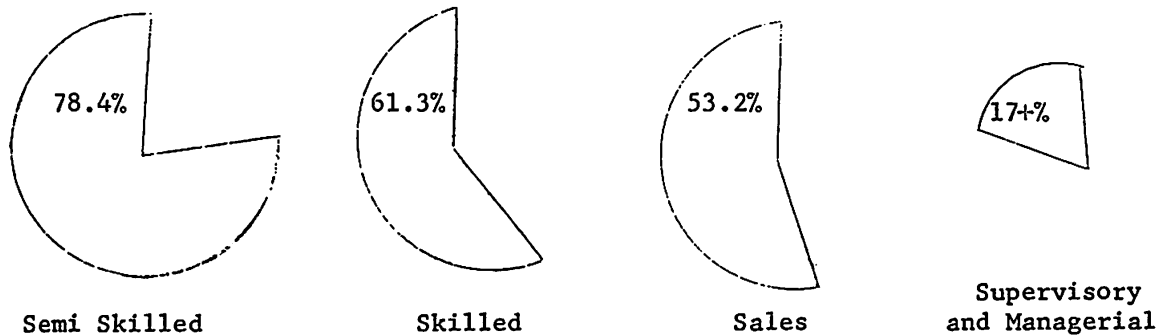


Figure 5.

Agricultural Background and Training

The overwhelming majority, nine out of ten, employers involved in this study desire employees with a "general knowledge" background in agriculture. Three-fourths expressed a strong desire to have employees with a background in livestock production. Another large group expressed a desire for farm machinery maintenance and mechanical skills on the part of workers. Attitudes, farm business management, and crop production followed as being desired agricultural background.

The employers interviewed indicated that they desired different kinds of agricultural backgrounds for different skill levels of work. With the exception of sales work, as responsibility and earnings increased the desire that prospective employees have college training increased.

A fourth of the employers indicated that their sales workers should have college training while 36 percent indicated their sales workers should have lived on a farm. At the lower skill levels, a third to a half of the agricultural business representatives desired employees with farm residence backgrounds, while a fourth to a third specified agricultural education in high school. Agricultural education in college was more desired in employees at the supervisory, consultative and managerial levels.

Regarding areas in which employers find employees deficient, "lack of business knowledge" appeared most prominently. This was followed with deficiency in mathematical ability, lack of ability to sell and inability to effectively express ideas orally. Leadership ability and English usage followed closely.

When queried about the nature of employee problems in agribusiness, by far the greatest problem appeared to be the need for training and retraining and insufficient time for this training. Such things as employee turnover and attitude appeared among other problems.

After identifying certain employee problems, the interviewers suggested a number of ways to provide the necessary training. About half suggested that schools should equip the workers with general occupational education and the company should provide specific job training. Most employers indicated that secondary schools should provide training in such areas as occupational safety and health, worker relationships, understanding business opportunities and typical business organization and business accounting procedures. They said that the company should be charged with training in such areas as company relations, buying and stocking and appreciation of the place of business. Post-high school education appeared to be needed for employees in financing work.

About half of the respondents suggested that an arrangement whereby students would work in the firm part-time during the school year would be most effective in preparing workers. Almost as many suggested work in the business during vacations. One in four specified that school and company personnel should cooperatively plan and conduct training programs for employees in agricultural business and industry.

Although the employers suggested that training for non-farming agricultural jobs might best be accomplished by students, in some manner, working part-time in the job, when asked if they employed high schoolers, only a third replied affirmatively. Reasons given for not employing these youngsters included "no need," "legal complications," "lack of experience and dependability." Those who did employ high school students were pleased to have the readily available, economical part-time help, and it reportedly enhanced growth into the company.

These points seem clear: (1) Employers in farm related occupations are not assuming the responsibility of educating their employees, (2) the proportion of workers able to secure unskilled employment is decreasing, (3) the numbers of skilled, technical, clerical, managerial and sales jobs are increasing, (4) many rural youth will inevitably enter non-farming agricultural jobs and (5) although their farm backgrounds and experiences are valuable, they will require considerable education to qualify for and advance in satisfactory employment.

Whether it be supplementing of high school courses, area schools at the post-high school level, community colleges, on-the-job cooperative training, or some other method, it is apparent that the need is great to enable these thousands of rural youth who leave the farms to become better qualified for skilled and technical

or professional jobs. The needs must be ascertained in the various states. We must mentally pioneer then actively plan and push for the much needed vocational guidance and occupational preparation for these young folks. They are our most valuable crop!

The responsibility for exert positive leadership lies upon our shoulders! As leaders in solving agricultural problems, we must immediately recognize this tragic recess in agricultural education, this loss of manpower and brainpower to both agriculture and the nation as truly the greatest single agricultural problem of our day.