

**Factors Related to the Career Decisions of Seniors  
Who Have Taken Vocational Agriculture**

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One observation can be made about teachers of vocational agriculture when career guidance is discussed: Career guidance has always been considered a part of their job. Teachers have often performed more of a guidance function than they have been aware. Several studies during the 1960's and 1970's (such as Eaddy, 1968) found that vocational agriculture teachers are often more effective than the school counselor in the area of career guidance.

Relatively little attention has been paid to career development in vocational agriculture in recent years. In an Ohio study in 1984, McCracken, Barrick and Beard studied the relationship of farm background to the educational and occupational plans of vocational agriculture students. One implication from their study indicated that "Because the majority (57.3%) of the students plan additional education beyond secondary school, the high school curriculum should serve to prepare students for further education as well as to immediately enter an occupation" (p. 56).

Arrington (1985) found that 73.4% of Florida's senior vocational agriculture students perceived (either agreed or strongly agreed) that their experiences in vocational agriculture helped them to choose an occupation. When asked about their vocational agriculture teacher's assistance in career selection, 88.4% agreed that their vocational agriculture teacher encouraged them to enter an occupation in agriculture, 77.3% agreed that their teacher encouraged them to consider attending college, 73.7% agreed that their teacher provided information on careers outside of agriculture, and 96.8% agreed that their teacher provided information on agricultural careers.

Findlay and Rawls (1984) studied the factors that influenced the agricultural career objectives of students attending historically black four-year institutions. The students indicated that their family influenced them most in pursuing their agricultural career objectives on all 24 guidance services studied.

Eaddy (1968) found that the persons with the most influence on the career choices of vocational agriculture students were ranked as follows: Parents, friends, relatives other than parents, school personnel, and clergymen. He also found that student occupational choices were based primarily upon personal interests, satisfaction and rewards, and that high school academic achievement records were related to student career choice levels.

This study was designed to determine the individuals who influence vocational agriculture students' career decisions and the factors that these students take into consideration in making career decisions. What parents, teachers and guidance counselors encouraged students to do after high school was explored. In addition, the differences in responses between vocational agriculture, other vocational, and non-vocational students were addressed. This information should be of value

in planning the vocational agriculture curriculum and in career related areas of the instructional program.

#### Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors and persons that have influenced the career decisions of vocational agriculture students and to determine if vocational agriculture students' responses differ from those of other vocational and non-vocational students. The objectives were:

1. Determine which factors have influenced the career decisions of Louisiana high school seniors who have taken at least one year of vocational agriculture.
2. Determine the persons who have influenced the career decisions of Louisiana high school seniors who have taken at least one year of vocational agriculture.
3. Determine if the responses regarding the factors and persons that have influenced the career decisions of Louisiana high school seniors who have taken at least one semester of vocational agriculture are distributed independently of other senior vocational and non-vocational students. (Non-vocational students are those students who reported that they had never taken a vocational course.)
4. Determine what parents, teachers and guidance counselors have encouraged Louisiana high school seniors who have taken at least one semester of vocational agriculture to do after leaving high school.
5. Determine if a relationship exists between years in vocational agriculture and whether the students perceived that the vocational agriculture program or the vocational agriculture teacher had an effect on the students' career decisions.

Even though the instrument identified those students who had taken at least one semester of vocational agriculture, most of the students so identified had taken one year or more of vocational agriculture because Louisiana requires that students take one academic year of vocational agriculture to receive credit. An option, one semester, was included in the instrument so that the instrument could be used in studying other vocational areas and yield comparative data.

#### Procedures

A closed-form questionnaire was developed by the project staff based on a review of the literature. The instrument was examined for content validity by a state supervisor of guidance programs, two professors who teach vocational guidance courses, 12 graduate students in a vocational guidance course, three school principals, and eight school counselors. These individuals indicated that the instrument had content validity.

The instrument was field tested with all students (1205) in three high schools of varied size, course offerings, geographic location and socioeconomic status. The field test was conducted with this large sample of students so that realistic instrument administration procedure could be simulated and because all students in the selected schools were used in the study. The field test confirmed that the instrument was valid and reliable and that only minor revisions were necessary. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients for the two scales in the instrument were  $r = .87$  and  $.88$ .

The population consisted of all senior students in Louisiana's public high schools. The sample consisted of all senior students in 43 Louisiana high schools. Students absent on the day of data collection were surveyed on the day of their return to school by a principal or school counselor if they returned within one week. No attempt was made to gather data from those students who did not return in one week. Since this involved very few students, non-response error was not a problem.

The sampling procedure used was a cluster sample within a stratified random sample with replacement (Snedecor & Cochran, 1980). The sample was stratified by five school sizes and three culturally diverse geographic areas. The frame for the study was taken from the Louisiana School Directory 1985-1986 (1985), which is the official listing of educational institutions in Louisiana.

The purpose for using this design was so that identified subgroups (by school size and area of state) within the population would be represented in the sample in the same proportion that they existed in the population. This plan allowed for fairly accurate estimates of each stratum and much more accurate estimates of the overall population. The largest sampling error anticipated in any cell was less than one percent, with the error rates by strata being lower.

Data were collected from 3,853 students who were surveyed from an estimated population of 45,000. The large number of students surveyed was due primarily to the cluster sampling included in the sampling plan and to data collection constraints placed on research conducted by organizations external to the local school systems. The sampling plan ensured the integrity of the data.

All data were collected on-site by a project staff member during April 1986. Packets with pencils, instruments, answer sheets, and instructions for each group monitor or homeroom teacher were distributed by the project staff. The instrument was administered during the homeroom period or during a morning activity period. The instrument took approximately 20 to 25 minutes to complete.

Descriptive statistics were used to describe the data relative to Objectives 1, 2, and 4. The chi-square test of independence was used to determine if the response to selected questions were distributed independently of whether the student had taken vocational agriculture, had taken other vocational courses, or had not taken vocational courses (Objective 3). The Spearman rho correlation coefficient was used to determine if a relationship existed between years in vocational agriculture and whether the vocational agriculture program or teacher had an effect on the student's career decisions (Objective 5). A set of descriptors devised for use with correlation coefficients (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 1979) was used to express the strength of associations. The alpha level was preset at .01 because of the large sample size.

Of the 3,858 students involved in this study, 830 had taken vocational agriculture, 2,776 had taken some other vocational course or courses, and 252 had never taken a vocational course in high school.

#### Factors Important in Selecting a Career

The students were asked to indicate if selected factors were important to them in selecting a career by marking either yes or no. The percentages of students who responded yes to each factor are presented in Table 1. As the data indicate, the factors that received the most yes responses from students who had taken vocational agriculture were

"interest in this work," "working conditions," "salary or wages," and "personal satisfaction." These factors were also the top factors for other vocational and non-vocational students.

Table 1  
Factors Affecting the Career Decisions of Seniors (n = 3,858)

Factor	Percent of Senior Students Responding Yes			Chi- Square
	Vocational Agriculture	Vocational, Not Vo-Ag	Non- Vocational	
Interest in this work	90.1	93.4	85.9	23.94*
Working conditions	84.5	90.0	80.2	33.64*
Salary or wages	84.8	87.5	82.3	7.92
Personal satisfaction	84.7	88.4	84.7	9.42*
Availability of jobs	78.8	81.2	72.8	11.45*
Work experience	74.7	72.4	62.2	14.89*
Status and reputation of occupation	71.8	75.8	66.7	13.54*
Indoor or outdoor work	66.3	58.2	52.4	22.86*
Fringe benefits	66.3	69.3	64.8	4.19
Length of time for train- ing	64.6	61.3	57.4	5.06
Cost required to prepare for this career	64.5	63.7	57.8	3.83
Special talents or abili- ties	63.4	68.2	66.5	6.60
Financial backing is available	62.2	62.3	55.2	4.85
Contributions to society	54.3	59.0	52.2	8.78
Geographic location	48.8	45.6	41.4	4.83
Friends, parents or rela- tives working in the occupation	47.6	35.9	33.1	39.47*
Insistence of parents or relatives	45.1	34.3	28.6	38.35*
Marriage	41.1	41.6	36.0	2.89
Inheritance of a farm or business	32.4	18.8	20.1	68.45*
Family tradition	32.8	21.7	20.6	44.07*

\*p<.01.

The chi-square test of independence was used to determine if the responses were distributed independently of whether the student had taken vocational agriculture, whether the student had taken other vocational courses, or whether the student was a non-vocational student. Eleven of the analyses resulted in significant chi-square values (Table 1).

Students who had taken vocational agriculture or other vocational courses responded yes more often than non-vocational students on nine of

the 11 factors for which there were significant chi-square values. This indicates that these factors were perceived to be of greater importance to them in selecting a career than for non-vocational students. The two exceptions were "personal satisfaction" and "inheritance of a farm or business."

Persons Affecting Career Decisions

The students were asked to indicate if selected persons influenced their career decisions by marking either yes or no. The persons and the percentage of students who responded yes about each person are presented in Table 2. The data indicate that the persons who received the most yes responses were the mother, father, friend, and the person in the occupation, in that order.

The chi-square test of independence was used to determine if the responses were distributed independently of whether the student had taken vocational agriculture, whether the student had taken other

Table 2

Persons Affecting the Career Decision of Seniors (n = 3,858)

Person	Percent of Senior Students Responding Yes			Chi-Square
	Vocational Agriculture	Vocational, Not Vo-Ag	Non- Vocational	
Mother	71.2	69.3	63.9	4.46
Father	66.1	57.3	55.8	20.85
Friend	57.2	53.7	53.9	3.04
Person in the occupation	56.5	54.8	46.9	7.00
Grandparent, aunt, uncle or other relative	49.6	43.7	37.2	14.53*
Brother or sister	43.0	36.4	33.5	13.34*
Other teachers	36.0	37.2	38.6	0.62
Guidance counselor	29.9	29.1	22.8	4.75
Vocational agriculture teacher	29.3	5.6	5.0	375.34*
Military recruiter	28.3	16.5	19.9	55.40*
Business and office occupations teacher	22.1	27.1	12.9	28.49*
Coach	21.5	13.1	16.5	33.63*
Principal	19.7	11.0	13.1	40.79
Industrial arts teacher	19.0	11.7	8.3	34.63*
Pastor, priest, rabbi or other clergy	17.4	11.2	12.3	21.58*
Home economics teacher	16.0	11.2	5.4	23.58*
Marketing and distribu- tive education teacher	14.9	11.2	8.8	10.65*

Note. All students did not have the opportunity to know all vocational teachers, and some schools did not have all programs.

\*p<.01.

vocational courses, or whether the student was a non-vocational student. Twelve of the analyses resulted in significant chi-square values (Table 2).

Students who had taken vocational agriculture or other vocational courses responded yes more often than non-vocational students on 9 of the 12 persons for which there were significant chi-square values. This indicates that these persons were perceived to be of greater importance to them in selecting a career than for non-vocational students. The three exceptions were responses for military recruiter, coach, and clergy (pastor, priest, rabbi, or other clergy). For these three persons, the non-vocational students responded yes more often than other vocational students with higher numbers of vocational agriculture students responding yes than for the other two groups.

As expected, the largest difference among the range of distributions existed for one individual, the vocational agriculture teacher. The data revealed that only 29.3% of vocational agriculture students perceived that the vocational agriculture teacher influenced their career decisions while only 5.6% of other vocational students and 5.0% of non-vocational students perceived that the vocational agriculture teacher had an effect. The next highest differences occurred for relatives (grandparent, aunt, uncle or other relative), military recruiter, and father.

#### What Students had Been Encouraged to do After High School

When asked what selected individuals had encouraged them to do after high school, 66% indicated parents, 81% indicated teachers, and 78% indicated counselors encouraged them to go to college. The remaining responses were in the categories of attend vocational-technical school, work full time, or go to the military.

#### Relationships Between Years In Program and Students' Perceptions of Teacher/Program Effect on Career Decisions

Spearman's rho was used to determine if a relationship existed between whether a student indicated that the vocational agriculture teacher had affected the students' career decisions and the number of years that the student had been enrolled in vocational agriculture. A value of rho = .27 indicated that little if any correlation existed.

Spearman's rho was also used to determine if a relationship existed between whether a student indicated that the vocational agriculture program had affected the students' career decisions and the number of years that the student had been enrolled in vocational agriculture. A value of rho = .38 indicated that a low positive relationship existed. Students were more likely to indicate that vocational agriculture influenced their career decisions as the number of years in vocational agriculture increased.

#### Conclusions and/or Recommendations

For vocational agriculture students as well as other seniors, parents influence these students' career choices more than any other person, with the mother being more influential than the father. State staff and teacher educators should encourage vocational agriculture teachers, counselors and other teachers to consider this factor when working with current students and when recruiting prospective students.

For vocational agriculture students, the vocational agriculture teacher is about as influential as the counselor with regard to career

decisions. Teacher educators and state supervisors should inform vocational agriculture teachers of this finding. They should be encouraged to recognize counselors as being equally influential with the vocational agriculture students and more influential with all other students in the school. Strong support and cooperative efforts between the vocational agriculture teacher and the guidance counselor are warranted.

Interest in the work, working conditions, salary/wages, and personal satisfaction are the leading factors perceived to influence seniors in career selection. The students' perceptions of these factors, as well as other leading factors, should be given strong consideration by vocational agriculture teachers in planning their curriculum.

The differences in responses between vocational agriculture students who had taken at least one semester of vocational agriculture and all other senior students indicate that a uniqueness exists in the career decision making patterns of the vocational agriculture students. High school teachers, counselors and administrators should further examine how different students make their career decisions and, if needed, modify the career guidance program accordingly.

Little if any correlation existed between years in vocational agriculture and perceived effect of the vocational agriculture programs on the student's career decisions. A low positive relationship existed between years in vocational agriculture and the perceived effect of the vocational teacher on the students' career decisions. Additional research needs to be conducted to confirm these findings. If these findings are reaffirmed, state supervisors and teacher educators should immediately undertake efforts to address this issue.

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