
An examination of university programs reveals that the function of agricultural education departments in the preparation of teachers of vocational agriculture is most similar to what needs to be done in extension preparation and, therefore, the departments should be given a responsibility for extension.

Ralph E. Bender

Teaching must be our first and foremost priority at the undergraduate level . . .

Surely not all courses within an agricultural education department can be applied toward extension education--and they shouldn't be.

Harold R. Crawford

EXTENSION EDUCATION SHOULD NOT BE A PART
OF
AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

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In an attempt to present the views of the author, who will be presenting remarks against the issue of agricultural education departments having an extension education program within the department, three major areas will be discussed. They are implications for the (1) undergraduate program, (2) graduate program, and (3) department administration and organization. It should be noted that these views are presented to encourage thought and consideration of the issue rather than reflect firm convictions of the author.

When one thinks or hears of a department of agricultural education having the leadership and administration of an extension education component within the department, it sounds great on the surface. Yes, great because most educators are prone to count numbers and look for bigness which means more administrative problems, more budget accounts to keep, more staff problems to solve and the need for more and better organization.

The Undergraduate Program

At the present time in most states there does not seem to be a common curriculum for the educating of persons to be extension workers. It can be argued that agricultural education has as good a curriculum as any for the preparation of extension personnel. This may be true for those persons who are going to be in agricultural extension work, but not necessarily for those in community resource development or

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human development and family life. Is the person who is trained in agricultural education with a firm base in technical agriculture going to be adequately educated for these types of positions? The answer is clearly "no" and this is the reason why in most universities, the extension service does not have a common core curriculum for the educating of their personnel at the undergraduate level.

From another point of view, the question is "How can the staff in agricultural education promote a positive attitude within their undergraduates toward the teaching profession if there is always another planned option for them?" In other words, this situation could lead to departments of agricultural education not having a very high percentage of their graduates pursuing positions as teachers of vocational agriculture. Since there has been a shortage of vocational agriculture teachers in most every state, it appears that the major emphasis of every agricultural education department should be focused upon training persons for vocational agriculture teaching positions. It can't be done if we leave the impression that teaching is good, but so are occupations in extension, farming, finance, and agribusiness. Preparing teachers must be our first and foremost priority at the undergraduate level. We need good teachers and our very best undergraduates should be urged to enter this profession.

More and more educators are realizing the value of occupational experience for their undergraduates. Yet on the other hand, how much time in a four-year curriculum can and should be devoted to on-the-job experience? In the Teacher Education Section of the *Standards for Quality Programs in Agribusiness Education*, developed and validated by personnel within our profession, it is recommended there be a minimum of ten weeks spent in student teaching. Some teacher educators even question if this is enough and, thus, are providing opportunities for students to have experience in the public schools prior to their student teaching experience. If this is necessary for graduates who are going to be teachers of vocational agriculture, it should also be valuable for those who are pursuing occupations in extension. Should those departments of agricultural education that have a common curriculum for the preparation of their graduates for teaching vocational agriculture and extension provide and require their students to have both extension and student teaching experience? They surely should if their students are to have the option of being hired and well-prepared for either occupation. Some may say that both types of experience will be beneficial to the student. The author agrees; yet questions if there is enough time within the typical four-year undergraduate agricultural education curriculum to provide this amount of on-the-job experience.

The Graduate Program

A more common situation across the United States is for extension to hire graduates from assorted backgrounds and out of a variety of undergraduate curricula. This is especially true for those persons whose major responsibility will be in youth work. As a result, agricultural education departments may be serving as the departments where extension personnel may pursue a graduate program. As more and more people wish to have an emphasis of extension education within their graduate programs, the staff members within the department of agricultural education start to believe that there is a need for a program for extension education. Also, this is an opportunity to build a larger graduate program. As a result, courses are developed for agricultural and extension education that will serve persons with both teaching and extension occupational goals. Surely not all of the graduate courses within an agricultural education department can be applied toward extension education--and they shouldn't be. Therefore, one of two things happens. Professors have to make application of course content to extension or the extension-oriented student must understand that this course is designed for the traditional graduate student with an undergraduate agricultural education degree and who probably has been a vocational agriculture teacher. The students accept this and know that the course isn't primarily designed for persons with extension backgrounds or career goals in extension but it will fit into their graduate program. Of course, one must admit that the "teacher" makes the difference and that some courses surely do fit the needs of persons both in extension and agricultural education.

Teacher educators in agriculture should be the very best teachers in colleges and universities because they have been professionally trained for this assignment. Rather than exert effort toward expanded programs with an extension component, it may be more productive for agricultural education departments to provide service courses for graduate students from other technical agriculture departments. In this way, those graduate students in extension programs may also enroll for the courses.

Very few postsecondary agriculture teacher preparation programs are being conducted across the United States; yet, postsecondary programs are growing in number each year. There is a definite need for well-trained persons as postsecondary teachers. Isn't this a major responsibility of teacher education in agriculture? Would it not be better for faculty members in agricultural education departments to exert efforts in developing and conducting a high quality postsecondary preparation program than to spread into another area such as extension education?

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Department Organization and Administration

A department that is conducting agricultural education and extension education programs will need to have staff members who have had experience in both fields of work. Quite likely this means diversity of backgrounds and could even result in misunderstanding when policy issues are discussed and approved by the faculty in a department. As an example, how does the department head conduct a total staff meeting on the topic of "improving the course entitled 'Youth Group Organizations' " when one portion of the teaching staff members have had their experience and interest devoted to 4-H and the other to FFA. It undoubtedly can cause concern among staff!

Of course, the good administrator is one who knows how to manage a department that has more than one component within the total program, such as extension education, but it must be realized that it will mean extra time for meetings, a program with more than one direction, a more detailed system of accounting, more staff evaluation, answering to different administrators, and being represented at more meetings.

From an administrator's point of view, the author believes that the head of a department of agricultural education has plenty to do in order to develop a creative, quality and well-organized program for the educating of persons for positions as vocational agriculture teachers, postsecondary teachers of agriculture, state supervisors, and teacher educators. It's a matter of priorities; the author thinks this should be first and, to do it right, there will be little time for another program such as extension education.

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