

**AN ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION
RESEARCH ON IDENTIFIED PROFESSIONAL CONCERNS**

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Introduction

In the early 70's, concern was expressed by some agricultural educators that the research being conducted was not addressing important problems being confronted by the profession. Further discussion of the issue revealed that no comprehensive statement existed regarding the research needs in agricultural education. Agricultural educators discovered that they had not specified priority areas for research and development in agricultural education.

In 1975, the Agricultural Education Research Committee charged a subcommittee with the task of determining the perceptions of professionals in agricultural education concerning current professional concerns. The study was conducted, completed and reported. (Richardson, Shinn, and Stewart, 1976, 1977). The chief concerns of professional agricultural educators were identified in the study. The authors stated that:

The study was conducted to identify major concerns about agricultural education which would be helpful to program planners and researchers. The groups were asked to rate concerns, not research topics. It was felt that it is the role of the researcher to plan the research to impact the needs of agricultural education. (Richardson, Shinn, and Stewart, 1977, pp. 25).

Earlier, the Agricultural Education Research Committee had made provisions for compiling an annual national report of *Summaries of Research and Development Activities in Agricultural Education in The United States of America*. (McCracken, 1975, 1976; Mannebach, 1977). At the time of this writing, three annual national reports of the summaries have been completed. By analyzing the studies, it was possible to assess the extent to which the research reported was addressing the identified concerns of the profession.

Objectives

The primary objective of the study was to determine the extent to which the agricultural education research conducted from 1974 to 1977 was addressing the important identified concerns of the profession. A sub-objective was to draw attention to the professional concerns identified so researchers could assess the relevance of the concerns to their current and future research situation and update research priorities.

Methods

The primary methods used in the study were literature review and document analysis. The three *Summaries of Research and Development Activities in Agricultural Education* were reviewed to determine the extent to which the studies addressed the concerns identified by the profession. No attempt was made to identify or analyze agricultural education studies not reported in the *Summaries*. Additional data and priority rankings were derived from the professional "concerns" study (Richardson, Shinn, and Stewart, 1976, 1977) and related literature.

Findings

Research from a total of 35 of the 50 states (70%) was included in the three *Summaries* analyzed. Fifty-four studies were reported in 1974-75, 169 studies were reported in 1975-76, and 121 studies were reported in 1976-77. A total of 344 studies was reported over the three year period, a mean of 115 per year. The number of studies conducted by reporting states in any one year ranged from 0 to 46. Over the three year period, the number of studies reported ranged from one to 67.

Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Iowa, and Virginia accounted for 67, 63, 24, 21, and 21 summaries, respectively. The total number of summaries reported by the five states comprised 57% of the studies reported. Seventy-five percent of the studies are accounted for if the states of West Virginia, Minnesota, New York, and Indiana are included. They accounted for 18, 17, 14, and 13 summaries, respectively. The nine states, comprising one-fourth of the states reporting, conducted three-fourths of the research reported over the three-year period.

Data in Table 1 show the number, total, and total percentage of master's, doctoral, and staff studies reported in identified areas of professional concern. In the "concern" study, teacher educators, state supervisors, and a selected group of teachers

ranked their concerns in priority order. The concerns are listed in descending order in Table 1 starting with curriculum development. As can be seen from the data, other than the "non-applicable" concern, the largest number of research studies conducted and reported did have implications for the first priority concern, curriculum development. Over the three-year period, 87 (25%) of the studies reported had implications for curriculum development. Forty-six of the studies were masters, 21 doctoral, and 20 were staff studies.

Table 1 also reveals that 52% of the studies reported had impact on the first five areas of priority concern. However, only five studies were reported in the second priority area of funding and only 12 studies (4%) of the research focused on the fourth priority area of concern, the vocational agriculture teacher shortage. Forty-five studies were reported in the area of teacher education, the number three concern, while 27 studies were reported in the area of evaluation, the number five concern. The studies composed 13% and 8% of the research reported, respectively.

Lesser research attention was given to supervision and administration, adult education manpower needs, the FFA, and postsecondary education. Only one or two studies were reported over the three-year period in the areas of teacher certification, research, and urban program development. Ninety-five of the studies reported (28%) were judged as non-applicable to the priority concerns identified. They included 55 masters studies, 27 doctoral studies and 13 staff studies.

By region, the largest percentage of studies were conducted in the area of curriculum development. The Eastern and Western regions reported the highest percentage of studies having impact on the five highest areas of priority concern identified. Sixty-six percent of the studies conducted in the Eastern region and 64% of the studies conducted in the Western region focused on the top five priority concerns. By contrast, 49% of the studies reported in the Southern region and 42% of the studies reported in the Central region focused on the top five priority concerns.

Again, several studies were judged to be non-applicable to any of the priority concerns identified. Thirty-seven percent of the studies reported in the Central region, 30% in the Southern region, 14% in the Western region and 12% in the Eastern region were placed in the non-applicable category.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which agricultural education research reported in the *Summaries*

Table 1

NUMBER, TOTAL AND TOTAL PERCENTAGE OF MASTERS,
DOCTORAL AND STAFF STUDIES CONDUCTED IN IDENTIFIED
AREAS OF PROFESSIONAL CONCERN: 1974-77

Identified Area of Professional Concern	Type of Study			Total	
	Masters	Doctoral	Staff	No.	%
Curriculum Development	46	21	20	87	25
Funding	3	2	0	5	2
Teacher Evaluation	17	11	17	45	13
Teacher Shortage	8	3	1	12	4
Evaluation	11	10	6	27	8
Teacher Certification	0	1	0	1	0
Supervision & Administration	2	3	1	6	2
Adult Education	12	5	4	21	6
Manpower Needs	3	2	8	13	4
The FFA	11	3	2	16	5
Research	1	1	0	2	0
Postsecondary Program	2	2	3	7	2
Urban Program Development	1	0	0	1	0
Administration	4	1	1	6	1
Not Applicable	<u>55</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>95</u>	<u>28</u>
TOTAL	176	92	76	344	100%

of Research and Development Activities in Agricultural Education from 1974-77 focused on identified professional concerns. A judgment was made to place certain studies in a non-applicable category. Some error in judgment regarding the primary classifications of the research reported may be present. However, a primary assumption of the study is that the research reported was classified into the priority areas appropriately.

Review of the findings indicated that agricultural educators are focusing research attention on some areas of identified professional concern. The top priority areas of curriculum development, teacher education, and evaluation were being researched by the profession. However, areas such as funding, the teacher shortage, teacher certification, research, postsecondary education, urban program development, and administration were receiving little attention.

These findings lead to several questions. Why are some areas of identified professional concern receiving so little research attention? Are there barriers to conducting research in these areas? What are the barriers? Interest? Time? Expertise? Resources? If researchers are not studying the areas of identified professional concern, should they be? Is a coordinated, programmatic research and development effort needed to focus on these concerns? If so, how can the profession get organized to do it? Or, on the other hand, can we assume that states conducting agricultural education research not reported in the *Summaries* are doing research in the identified areas of concern?

Other questions arise. Did Richardson, Shinn and Stewart (1976, 1977) identify the crucial concerns? Were the concerns classified in a broad, comprehensive area? Richardson, Shinn and Stewart (1976, 1977) attempted to collapse concerns into 14 categories so that data could be managed. Review of the 1976-77 Subject Index of the studies revealed some 115 subject entries. This finding sheds some light on the range of topics researched. Should we take pride in the fact that agricultural education research is being conducted in broad and diverse areas? Or, should we be concerned that 28% of the studies reported did not fit the categories of identified professional concern.

Research has typically been an individual endeavor. Students have been encouraged to study areas of interest to them. Yet in recent years, we have seen the trend and perhaps felt the pressure to become engaged in more programmatic research endeavors. Few states have become involved in obvious programmatic research in agricultural education. The most recent seems to be Iowa State University with its studies on the "perceptions toward philosophic principles" theme. Perhaps dialogue should be established with

researchers from Iowa State to find out what the outcomes of the programmatic research endeavor have been and to determine what implications are apparent that can be synthesized into the ongoing program. It seems obvious, however, that debate should be initiated regarding whether agricultural education research should be focused primarily on individual interests, on identified programmatic needs, or some other place on the continuum. There is certainly a need for research in all areas; however, the profession should debate and clarify its values and thinking regarding the issue.

Recommendations

In summary, I would like to offer some recommendations for our consideration. I hope that they can serve as a focus of debate as we continue our work on improving agricultural education through research and development efforts. They are:

1. Submit abstracts of agricultural education research completed to the person who is compiling and editing the *Summaries of Research and Development Activities in Agricultural Education*. Develop a standardized procedure for collecting the summaries when the research is completed by making the researcher responsible for preparing a research abstract which conforms to the format of the request. Development and adherence to this procedure will eliminate last-minute searches for abstracts of studies completed. Submission of the abstracts each year will also make more complete and comprehensive the true picture of research and development efforts in agricultural education.

2. Continue to develop and refine statements of concern and research needs. Richardson, Shinn and Stewart (1976,1977) are to be commended on the pioneer work which they have done to identify concerns. Using their study as a benchmark, periodic review should be conducted to identify shifting or emerging areas of concern.

3. Researchers in agricultural education should consider the identified areas of professional concern when designing research studies. Knowledge of the areas of concern may allow the researcher to shift emphasis or add a dimension to the planned research which would help answer questions in identified areas of professional concern.

4. Continue to study the research and development efforts in agricultural education. Analysis of the research reported in the *Summaries*, 1974-77, revealed a dearth of research in agricultural education. If research and development are to lead the way, we must periodically step back and analyze our efforts.

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