

A NEOPHYTE LOOKS AT AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

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The writer's experience in agricultural education is limited to activities as a student and educator during the last two decades in the development of agricultural education. Others within the profession have seen it develop from infancy and could perhaps more ably describe current weaknesses. However, from a neophyte's point of view, the following is a brief diagnosis which suggests the presence of certain ills or weaknesses presently confronting agricultural education.

A Defensive Approach

It appears as though the single consideration which can cause most members of the profession to offer strong support is for a crisis to seriously threaten its continued existence. We appear to have a team that is effective in preventing our opponents from crossing our own goal line; however, we are seemingly a "one-platoon" team lacking a "scoring punch" of our own. Primacy is a major premise upon which effective programs of public relations are based. We need to tell our story before the development of a crisis -- an offensive that will diminish the need for a continual defensive approach. Those who are first in getting their viewpoints before the public have the advantage of primacy.

Inbred Public Relations

Our best articles in public relations and program development have been written primarily for our co-workers. We frequently congratulate each other and attempt to fortify our program's ego without giving first consideration to those from without our profession who are either grossly uninformed or misinformed concerning our program. Few articles by those in agricultural education are appearing in the NEA and other state educational association magazines. Far too few articles for a variety of other significant educational and agricultural publications are being prepared by members of our profession. Brochures and pamphlets prepared to promote an understanding of our program have often slighted administrators, guidance counselors and others with whom we are obligated to work in close cooperation.

A Failure to Critically Evaluate

While perhaps a major focus of our efforts should be directed toward program objectives and their accomplishment, we must do more than strive to maintain the status quo. We are only deceiving ourselves when we fail to evaluate our program, identify shortcomings, and fail to take appropriate measures to make necessary improvements. An effective program is obviously one which continually makes an effort to avoid obsolescence and exhibits ability to adjust to current needs.

Pessimism

There is some evidence which tends to support the assumption that some state and local leaders in agricultural education are pessimistic about the program's future. More positive action is needed to strengthen the place of our program in future public education efforts, and to diffuse a spirit of optimism to newcomers of our profession.

The preceding diagnosis is certainly far from being exhaustive or comprehensive. Our program (like people) needs a periodic examination to determine its continued "fitness." The responsibility of seeing that this is accomplished belongs to each of us.