

FARM EXPERIENCE FOR STUDENT TEACHERS

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The problem of insuring that each new teacher of agriculture be adequately prepared in farm experience, especially in the area of agricultural mechanics, is a difficult one. Many solutions have been attempted, and each teacher training institution has its own plan designed to provide experience in this area and to eliminate

the weak spots of teacher candidates. One method is to select only those candidates who possess an adequate farm background. Another is designing courses and curriculum to provide maximum experience in the areas needing additional strength.

The University of California, Davis, has utilized both of these ideas, and in addition has cooperatively developed a program with its Farm Practice Division for the many candidates who either do not have enough farm experience or (this problem has not been recent) whose experience is not broad enough in scope. This Division of the University is relatively new and operates with an on-campus and off-campus function. The off-campus function is to provide summer jobs for students on carefully selected ranches throughout the state. All students are eligible, including liberal arts students, although College of Agriculture and Veterinary Science students predominate. The on-campus segment utilizes a forty-acre practice farm where facilities for cultural practices, machinery repair, maintenance, and safe machine operation are provided. Students learn to operate this equipment, thus gaining practical experience. The student teacher program profits from both phases of this program, but during the graduate year, specifically from the on-campus phase.

During the semester in which student teachers are on campus, all student teachers enroll in this experience course under the direction of the Farm Practice Division. The student teacher spends one afternoon or morning each week learning to do those things in which he is weak or has had no previous training or experience. For example, if he has never operated a crawler tractor he can spend as much time as is necessary to become familiar with this piece of equipment. The same is true with bleeding a diesel line, learning to do hardfacing, overhead welding, or operating a wheel tractor. No units of credit are given, although each student is graded and this record is placed in his permanent folder.

In order to systematize instruction a basic pattern of experiences was worked out that all teachers should be able to perform. The four categories listed below are believed to be of major importance and instruction and practice center around these areas:

1. Servicing and lubrication of farm tractors, trucks, and farm equipment.
2. Proper operation of tractors, trucks, and other farm equipment, including field adjustment of farm equipment.
3. Preventive maintenance of tractors, trucks, and farm equipment, including minor repair and adjustment of these items.
4. Competence in the use of the tools and skills needed to perform the above operations.

Safe operation of equipment and safety in general is a part of all instruction. In practice each student teacher, under direction of the Farm Practice teacher (a former vocational agriculture teacher), inventories his abilities and then designs his own program, concentrating on those areas which need strengthening.

Because of the large amount of time required, students occasionally lament the fact no credit is given; yet the flexibility so necessary to developing individual needs would be lost if University course rules of time, tests, etc., had to be applied. For most students, considerable strengthening occurs, for here is a case where one gets out exactly in proportion to what one puts in.