

# OCCUPATIONAL EXPERIENCE REQUIREMENTS FOR CERTIFYING AS A TEACHER OF AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION: A NATIONAL SURVEY

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*Supervised occupational experience programs are an essential part of vocational education in agriculture.* A statement of this type has echoed through many professional meetings, teacher education classrooms, inservice sessions and vocational agriculture departments of this country. Agricultural educators would quickly rise to defend the SOEP concept and practice to any critic. Do we practice what we preach? If SOEP is essential to developing competence within the students in our program, should the same concept not hold true for the preparation of competence within teachers?

Historically, many states have long-standing requirements or regulations pertaining to the occupational experience requirements necessary to teach, particularly in production agriculture. The decade of the seventies, and perhaps earlier in your state, has seen a marked increase in the number of undergraduate and graduate majors in Agricultural Education who aspire to certify in taxonomy areas other than production agriculture but have come to the program without occupational experience. Even the production agriculture taxonomy area finds students, both men and women, who have not been reared on a farm or had previous experience in production agriculture. On the one hand, because of the teacher shortage, these students are heavily recruited and warmly received; while on the other hand, a nagging question is posed to the profession relative to what occupational experience is needed to assure competence in the technical aspects of agriculture to certify these people as teachers.

With an increasing number of students preparing to become teachers who were not reared on a farm, or who have not had experiences in the appropriate taxonomy area, a study was proposed to determine what the requirements were in each state.

## *The Research Question*

What are the occupational experience requirements and/or regulations of the states needed for teacher certification in Agricultural Education?

## *Definition of Terms*

For the purpose of this study, the following operational definitions are applied:

*Occupational experience.* Time spent to gain competence in technical agriculture.

*Requirements.* Those standards imposed by a teacher training institution and/or state certifying unit that are not a part of law or of a state plan.

*Regulations.* Those standards that are a part of a state law and/or a state plan.

*Recommendations.* This implies a suggestion only and is neither a requirement nor a regulation.

*Multi-forms.* Term used to describe the varying regulations by type of certificate and/or taxonomy area present in some states.

### *Limitations of the Study*

The following limitations apply:

1. Since numerous replies were in letter form and were the respondents' interpretation of the regulations and/or requirements, the accuracy of some might be questionable.
2. Data were gathered during the year of 1978 and might not now apply.
3. Interpretation by the writer for the purpose of condensation may not have gleaned the intent of the verbal passages. (Some appear to have built-in loop-holes.)
4. Data were gathered relative to certification at the secondary level and post-secondary was purposely excluded.

### *Methodology*

A descriptive study was conducted using survey methodology to determine the current status of occupational experience to meet certification requirements and/or regulations. Teacher educators thought to work with certification were identified in the forty-eight contiguous states, and they were contacted by letter soliciting their reply to a request for the requirements and/or regulations for their program and/or state. At the end of one month a follow-up letter was sent to all non-respondents. Replies were received from thirty-eight states (79%) by the end of another month. No "double-dipping" was done to sample the remaining non-respondents (21%) and compare their results with the respondents, which hinders generalizability of the results.

Results of the replies are presented in summary form since the study is descriptive in nature. Tables are presented that reflect commonalities of the requirements and/or regulations.

## Results

The following tables are compiled to tabulate and summarize the replies reported.

Table 1

### SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

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Number not requiring occupational experience	10
Number recommending occupational experience	4
Number requiring one year	7
Number requiring two years	9
Number requiring three years	3
Number requiring multiforms	5
Total States Reporting	<u>38</u>

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Table 2

### STATES WITH NO REQUIREMENTS OR ONLY A RECOMMENDED LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE

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<u>States Reporting No Requirements</u>	<u>States With Recommendations</u>	<u>Years</u>
Delaware	Alabama	3
Florida		
Georgia	Idaho	Unspecified
Louisiana		
Missouri	Maryland	Unspecified
Mississippi		
North Carolina	Vermont	2
South Carolina		
Texas		
West Virginia		

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Table 3

LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE REPORTED BY STATES

One year or 2000 hours	Two years or 4000 hours	Three years	Multiforms
Arizona	Colorado	Connecticut	California
Illinois	Indiana	Kentucky	New Hampshire
Minnesota	Iowa	Massachusetts	New Jersey
Montana	Tennessee		New York
North Dakota	Nebraska		Ohio
Virginia	Nevada		
Wisconsin	Pennsylvania		
	Utah		
	Washington		

Table 4

TABULATION OF NUMBER OF STATES REQUIRING A COMBINATION  
OF OCCUPATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND FORMAL EDUCATION

<u>Formal Education</u>	<u>Years of Work Experience</u>							
	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>
High School or Equivalency					1	3		1
One year post-high school					1			
Two years post-high school			3	1				
Three years post-high school				1				
B. S. in related area		1	2					
B. S. in Agricultural Education	1	2	2					

California, Idaho, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana and Nebraska indicated that their requirements could be met while in college through directed experience. Most directed experiences were to be supervised by Agricultural Education faculty, were to earn credit toward graduation, were required to be between 360 and 2000 hours, and were in ratios between 1:4 and 1:2, with directed hours counting more than unsupervised experience hours.

A tally of the states not having requirements and/or regulations revealed that two were currently working on them, one prescribed this to be a necessary future task, and one reported that such requirements would serve as a deterrent to recruitment and affect an already low supply of teachers.

Perusal of the replies indicates the following trends:

- (1) As formal education requirements and/or regulations decrease, there is an increase in occupational experience requirements;
- (2) documentation of occupational experience is required in a majority of states and is usually in the form of a letter from an employer or second party;
- (3) approval of occupational experience meeting minimal standards is the function of the teacher training institutions in all except a few states where state departments were jointly consulted;
- (4) 25 percent of those reporting required that the experience be obtained after the age of 14, and 12.5 percent required it after the age of 16;
- (5) two states noted that experience had to occur within the last five years, and one state says within the past ten years; and
- (6) one state specified that the years of occupational experience had to be consecutive.

### *Discussion*

These results seem to indicate a wide diversity of occupational experience requirements and/or regulations pertaining to the certification of teachers in Agricultural Education. This lack of consistency is apparent as one reviews the tables and items presented. Undoubtedly, this diversity has resulted from individual states reacting to situations wherein teachers for special taxonomy areas had a diversity of experience, emergency certification of teachers was necessary due to teacher shortage, and/or local autonomy was coupled with political pressure.

The implication from this exploratory study is the need for greater consistency in philosophy and policy concerning the requirements and/or regulations. Practically, with states having a teacher shortage trying to recruit prospective teachers from other states, can you imagine the consternation and frustration faced by a teacher encountering this diversity? Why should it be that a teacher certifiable in the home state is not certifiable in a neighboring state? An attempt to provide greater consistency across states would necessitate compromises from almost all parties involved. A multiform system would in all likelihood be necessary in order to satisfy the needs of most.

Numerous states are giving thought to either establishing or revamping their occupational experience requirements. This may require revising the legislation, the state certification requirements, the state plan for vocational education and the graduation requirements at the certifying institutions. Any of these actions may require considerable negotiation and committee work. Professionals in Agricultural Education could remove the inconsistencies and inequities in the requirements through a concerted effort.

The ultimate bottom line in most discussions of occupational experience requirements generally is that the quality of the time spent is more important than the quantity. No one would likely argue with this point, but we should not let it stand in the way of reducing the present inequalities. The assessment of quality is likely to remain so subjective that the profession could wrestle with that for years. Therefore, let us address the factors that we can enumerate and eliminate the inequities or inconsistencies that do exist.

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(Yung, Haynie, and Jennings--Continued from page 34)

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