

# OPINIONS OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS CONCERNING VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE PROGRAMS

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Agricultural education has undergone a tremendous change during the past decade. This change has resulted in a quantitative decline in programs, teachers and students in some states. This reduction has been due in part to factors such as integration, consolidation, industrialization, a wider variety of vocational offerings, better job opportunities for vocational agriculture teachers and the spreading national concept of local autonomy. While each factor has had its toll, studies by Shinn (1976), Kimmons (1977), and Clary (1977) indicated that the pendulum was still swinging in a positive path with regard to the acceptance of vocational agriculture.

In order to influence the changes toward a more positive direction, emphasis needs to be placed on analyzing those factors having had a negative impact on vocational agriculture and developing strategies for overcoming or improving situations which have created the negative impact. Knowing that local administrators greatly influence vocational agriculture programs, a need exists to collect data that portrays their perceptions of these programs.

## *Purpose of Study*

The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes of school administrators in various administrative positions toward their local vocational agriculture programs. The study was designed to determine if significant differences existed in attitudes of the administrators that would warrant reconsideration of the organizational structure of programs and teacher preparation in vocational education.

## *Methodology*

The population for the study consisted of all North Carolina public secondary school superintendents and vocational education directors plus all principals of public secondary schools with vocational agriculture as a part of their curricula. The study sample consisted of 50 superintendents, 50 vocational directors, and 100 principals. The study sample was in excess of thirty-three percent of the population for each type of administrator.

A confidential 45-item survey instrument was used to collect the research data. It was a slightly modified version of an

instrument originally designed and used by Webb (1959) and used in studies by Shinn (1976) and Kimmons (1977).

The instrument was mailed with a cover letter and a self-addressed envelope. Non-respondents were sent a follow-up letter three weeks after the initial mailing, with a second follow-up letter three weeks later.

Eighty percent of the instruments were returned, including a 77 percent return for principals, an 82 percent return for vocational education directors and an 84 percent return for superintendents. The data were analyzed using a chi square test for independent samples.

### *Findings*

Administrators are in a position to determine to a large extent the purpose of instruction in vocational agriculture programs. However, as reported in Table 1, there were no significant differences between or among the three groups of administrators ( $p=.05$ ) concerning the controlling purposes of vocational agriculture programs.

Table 1

OPINIONS OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS CONCERNING THE  
CONTROLLING PURPOSE OF VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE PROGRAMS

Controlling Purpose	Principals (%)	Superin- tendents (%)	Vocational Directors (%)	Combined Total (%)
Train for employment in farming	7.8	14.3	2.4	8.1
Train for employment in agricultural oc- cupations	55.8	66.7	87.8	66.9
Train for employment in any occupation	11.9	14.3	2.4	10.0
Provide general knowl- edge of agriculture	22.1	4.8	7.3	13.8
Other	2.6	0	0	1.2

The majority of all three types of administrators perceived the controlling purpose of vocational programs to be training for employment in agricultural occupations. However, 22.1 percent of the principals indicated that the controlling purpose was to gain general knowledge of agriculture while only 4.8 percent of the superintendents and 13.8 percent of all administrators selected that as the controlling purpose of the program.

As reported in Table 2, nearly half of the school administrators in North Carolina felt community attitudes reflected vocational agriculture as an essential part of a general high school education. The majority of the remaining administrators felt their community regarded the program as being essential only for persons concerned with agriculture. Only 11.9 percent of all administrators felt that their communities were indifferent toward vocational agriculture and no one felt that their communities were opposed to it. There were no significant differences between or among the groups ( $p=.05$ ) concerning attitudes of the community.

Table 2

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS' OPINIONS CONCERNING THE ATTITUDES OF THE COMMUNITY TOWARD VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE PROGRAMS

Community Attitudes	Principals (%)	Superintendents (%)	Vocational Directors (%)	Combined Total (%)
Regard it as an essential part of education	53.2	26.0	45.3	44.4
Regard it as significant only for persons concerned with agriculture	38.9	54.8	41.4	43.8
Indifferent toward program	7.8	19.0	12.2	11.9
Opposed to program	0	0	0	0

There were no significant differences ( $p=.05$ ) between or among the three groups of administrators regarding the primary reasons students enrolled in vocational agriculture, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

OPINIONS OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS REGARDING THE PRIMARY REASON  
STUDENTS ENROLLED IN VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE PROGRAMS

Primary Reasons for Enrolling	Principals (%)	Superin- tendents (%)	Vocational Directors (%)	Combined Total (%)
They plan to be farmers	50.6	52.4	53.7	51.9
Interested in agricultural occupations	88.3	76.2	85.4	84.4
Popularity of teacher	39.7	40.5	41.5	37.5
To become FFA members	29.9	23.8	31.7	28.8
For training in Agricultural Mechanics	39.0	38.1	34.1	37.1
To avoid other subjects	32.5	33.3	29.3	31.9
Other	0	0	0	0

Administrators indicated that the primary reason students enrolled in vocational agriculture was their interest in agricultural occupations. Other reasons students enrolled in vocational agriculture classes, by priority ranking, were students plan to be farmers, popularity of the teacher of vocational agriculture, to take agricultural mechanics, to avoid taking other subjects, and to become FFA members.

As reported in Table 4, a majority of the school administrators believed that students receive adequate general education when taking four years of vocational agriculture.

The chi square was not significant at a .05 level, indicating no significant difference among opinions of different administrators.

Table 5 shows that the opinions of administrator groups did not differ significantly ( $p=.05$ ) when justifying the program based on students entering farming. When observing the combined totals, 36.9 percent of the sample felt that less than one-fourth of the program graduates need to enter farming in order to justify a program and 25.6 percent indicated that the number entering farming upon graduation from high school was unimportant.

Table 4

RESPONSES OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS WHEN ASKED, "IN YOUR OPINION, DO STUDENTS WHO ENROLL IN VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE FOR FOUR YEARS RECEIVE AN ADEQUATE HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION?"

Responses	Principals (%)	Superintendents (%)	Vocational Directors (%)	Combined Total (%)
Yes	90.9	76.2	85.4	85.6
No	5.2	11.9	9.8	8.1
Undecided	2.6	9.5	2.4	4.4
Other	1.3	2.3	2.4	1.9

Table 5

RESPONSES OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS REGARDING THE PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS THAT SHOULD ENTER FARMING UPON GRADUATION FROM HIGH SCHOOL IN ORDER TO JUSTIFY THE PROGRAM

Percentage of Students Entering Farming	Principals (%)	Superintendents (%)	Vocational Directors (%)	Combined Total (%)
Less than 10	18.2	9.5	7.3	13.1
10-24	27.3	16.7	24.4	23.8
25-49	14.3	21.4	29.3	20.0
50-74	7.8	9.5	19.5	11.3
75 and over	0	9.5	4.9	3.7
Percent entering farming is unimportant	31.1	28.6	12.2	25.6
Other	1.3	4.8	2.4	2.5

When examining administrator opinions about justifying programs based on the number of students entering non-farm agricultural occupations upon graduation, Table 6 shows that 26.9%

believe that a program can be justified with less than one-fourth of its graduates entering non-farm agricultural occupations, and 21.9% said that the percent was not important.

Table 6

RESPONSES OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS REGARDING THE PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS THAT SHOULD ENTER NON-FARM AGRICULTURAL OCCUPATIONS UPON GRADUATION FROM HIGH SCHOOL WITH FOUR UNITS OF VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE

Percentage of Students Entering Non-Farm Agricultural Occupations	Principals (%)	Superintendents (%)	Vocational Directors (%)	Combined Total (%)
Less than 10	6.5	7.1	7.3	6.9
10-24	27.0	11.9	14.6	20.0
25-49	19.5	30.9	29.3	25.0
50-74	14.3	9.5	36.6	18.8
75 and over	0	16.7	7.3	6.3
Percent entering ag-related jobs is unimportant	31.1	21.4	4.9	21.9
Other	1.3	2.4	0	1.3

However, there were significant differences ( $p=.05$ ) between principals and the other two groups of administrators in their belief that 75% or more of the students should enter non-farm agricultural occupations in order to justify four units of vocational agriculture. Also of interest was that 36.6% of the vocational directors indicated that between one-half and three-fourths of the students should enter an agricultural related occupation in order to justify the program while only 14.3% of the principals and 9.5% of the superintendents identified that percentage range as sufficient for program justification.

When asked if vocational agriculture programs provided the basic occupational preparation needed to enter farming immediately after high school, a majority of the administrators answered yes.

There were not significant differences ( $p=.05$ ) among the different groups of administrators making up the study sample. A majority of the administrators also indicated that vocational

agriculture programs prepare students to enter non-farm agricultural occupations immediately after graduation from high school. The opinions of the different administrators were very similar regarding preparation for entering non-farm agricultural occupations, and there were no significant differences ( $p=.05$ ) among the study sample.

Table 7

RESPONSES OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS WHEN ASKED, "DOES VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE PROVIDE THE BASIC OCCUPATIONAL PREPARATION NEED FOR YOUTH TO ENTER FARMING OR NON-FARM AGRICULTURAL OCCUPATIONS IMMEDIATELY AFTER GRADUATION FROM HIGH SCHOOL?"

Responses	Principals (%)	Superintendents (%)	Vocational Directors (%)	Combined Total (%)
<b>Farming:</b>				
Yes	54.5	57.1	56.1	55.6
No	27.4	14.3	9.8	18.1
Undecided	18.2	23.8	26.8	21.9
Other	2.6	4.8	7.3	4.4
<b>Ag Related Occupations:</b>				
Yes	46.8	59.5	61.0	53.8
No	28.6	14.3	14.6	21.3
Undecided	20.8	23.8	22.0	21.9
Other	3.8	2.4	2.4	3.1

### Conclusions

To the extent that the facts obtained and the opinions expressed are accurate, and insofar as respondents are representative of the whole, the following conclusions may be drawn as of the time this study was made.

Vocational agriculture is believed to be vocational education. Vocational agriculture should have responsibilities for training students who enter non-farm agricultural occupations. Students enroll in vocational agriculture because they are interested in occupational training for jobs in the agricultural industry.

Students still receive good general education when allowed to take four years of vocational agriculture. Students are being prepared to go immediately into farm or non-farm agricultural

occupations after graduation from high school, but placement should not be used as the measure of program accountability.

It appears that a reconsideration of the overall organizational structure of vocational agriculture programs and teacher preparation in vocational agriculture education is not warranted at this time.

### References

- Clary, Joseph R. *"Status of Vocational Agriculture and the Changing Roles of the Teachers of Vocational Agriculture in North Carolina."* North Carolina State University, 1977.
- Kimmons, Marian. *"Opinions of School Administrators Concerning the Programs of Vocational Agriculture/Agribusiness in South Dakota."* South Dakota State University, 1977.
- Shinn, Glen. *"Opinions of School Administrators Concerning the Programs of Vocational Agriculture/Agribusiness in Missouri."* University of Missouri, 1976.
- Webb, Earl. *"Opinions of School Administrators Concerning Selected Aspects of the Program of Vocational Agriculture in Missouri."* 1959.

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- Hull, William L. and McClay, David R., *"A Comparison of Programmed and Lecture-Discussion Methods of Teaching Farm Credit to High School Youth and Adults,"* Bulletin 722, Agricultural Experiment Station, Pennsylvania State University, 1965.
- Legg, Otto P., *"Programmed-Instruction and Lecture-Discussion Methods Compared for Effectiveness in Teaching Agricultural Finance to Vocational Agriculture Students,"* Unpublished Doctor's thesis, Pennsylvania State University, 1962.
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(Bryant--Continued from page 28)

### Summary

In this report, 94 of the 338 graduates of our program are teaching vocational agriculture today. This number of teachers represents roughly one-fourth of the vocational agriculture teachers in North Carolina. From this analysis, it is clear that our institution can claim to be only one contributor to the supply of vocational agriculture teachers in the State, with other institutions in and out of North Carolina contributing approximately three-fourths of the teachers.

Our findings would generally support efforts to sharply increase agricultural education enrollments in our State. This points to the need for a strong recruitment program in agricultural education. Unless this happens, and if the next 15 years follows the pattern established during the past 15 years, the following trends can be expected:

1. Very few graduates who enter non-teaching occupations following graduation will enter teaching positions later.
2. Over half of our graduates who enter teaching will leave teaching for another occupation over a 15-year period of time.
3. The percentage of graduates choosing not to enter the vocational agriculture teaching profession may increase with time.

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(Hemp--Continued from page 4)

Love, Gene M. "An Introduction to the Philosophy of Agricultural Education" *The Journal of the American Association of Teacher Educators in Agriculture*, Vol. 19, No. 1, March, 1978, pp. 2-10.

Morrill, J. Glenn. "Florida Project Agriculture--Basis for Improving Instruction," *The Agricultural Education Magazine*, Volume 47, Number 1, July, 1974, pp. 20-21, 23.

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(Reilly and Welton--Continued from page 51)

7. Studies in this and other areas relating to the teacher shortage should be continued. Leadership in research of this kind should be provided by professional organizations, and financial assistance should be afforded by state departments of education.

#### References

Reilly, Phillip. *"Factors Which Encourage Kansas Vocational Agriculture Teachers to Remain in Teaching."* Unpublished master's thesis, Kansas State University, 1979.

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#### AG DIVISION RESEARCH MEETING

The seventh annual Agricultural Education Research Meeting is scheduled for December 5, 1980, in New Orleans, Louisiana, with Dr. L. H. Newcomb of The Ohio State University serving as chairman. The meeting will be held in conjunction with the Convention of the American Vocational Association and will convene in the Mardi Gras I Room of the Marriott Hotel, with registration beginning at 8:00 a.m. The first session will begin at 8:30 a.m. in the same room. Make plans now to attend this important meeting!