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VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN AGRICULTURE  
FOR CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS

by

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Institutional Farms and Gardens

Farming and gardening are not recent innovations but rather well established programs fostered by correctional institutions.

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Institutional farms served a dual role by providing a resource for rehabilitating men and by furnishing food for the inmates. Whether major emphasis was placed upon rehabilitation or upon the production of agricultural crops and livestock depended somewhat upon the background of the farm supervisor and the objectives established for the institutional program. Little is written in the literature about agricultural education being a systematic part of institutional farming programs.

A review of the articles published about correctional agriculture reveals that many were written to extol production in terms of pounds of dressed meats, bushels of potatoes, and cases of canned vegetables; to report the annual gross farm income; and/or to praise the virtue of work as the approach to rehabilitation. It would appear from a limited review of the literature that the economic factor was given priority over rehabilitation and education in the farming programs of the correctional institutions throughout the Nation.

The real products of the farm used as an educational laboratory are rehabilitated men trained for gainful employment in meaningful occupations with satisfactory monetary rewards. If rehabilitation and education are important, then production of crops and livestock are nothing more than by-products of the institutional farm. Farms used as learning laboratories should not be expected to maintain themselves and earn a profit for the institutions unless that profit includes rehabilitated men as well as food produced. It is difficult to put a monetary value on the usefulness of a rehabilitated man over a period of years, while it is relatively easy to estimate accurately the value of the annual harvest of potatoes, sweet corn, and green beans. Useful men returned to their home communities by correctional institutions can sell vocational training to an informed public. At the same time bountiful yields of crops and livestock will be unknown to the same public. Which emphasis should be nurtured and encouraged at correctional farms--men or the crops they produce?

Much has been written about prison gardens which provide a therapy for some and bring beauty to the institutional grounds. At the risk of sentimentality, I believe that to observe seed germinate, to study the mysteries of growing plants, and to "soak in" the beauty and fragrance of a garden of flowers particularly at the beginning or end of the day, causes one to ponder the relationship of man to God. Prison gardens, however, can provide more than therapy and beauty to the inmate. I firmly believe that prison gardens should serve as a resource for teaching men and women basic and advanced horticultural skills. The prison garden could be an ideal setting for changing attitudes and developing sound values. A true test of progress would be that point in time when beautification of the grounds is initiated by the inmates rather than from orders by a supervisor. The followup test would be the placement of gardeners and landscapers in meaningful jobs upon their release from the correctional institution.

Educational activities accompanying institutional farming and gardening, it would seem, have been limited severely by the lack of qualified and certified teachers, insufficient funds with which to purchase supplies and equipment for the classroom and laboratory, and less than satisfactory course materials and class time. Do these deficiencies exist at many institutions simply because education interfered with production and work? It would appear that farms and gardens of the past were ideal educational laboratories used only sparingly for the occupational education of inmates.

### Agriculture is More Than Farming

Farming is only one of the many agricultural occupations. Less than five per cent of the population is engaged in farming. There are approximately seven million farmers and farm workers, while six million workers are supplying and servicing farmers, and another ten million workers are handling and processing farm produce. Off-farm agriculture provides jobs for more than twice the number of workers as does farming and ranching.

Until the Vocational Education Act of 1963, agricultural education at the high school level was limited to a program for preparing boys for establishment in farming. Presently, vocational education in agriculture in public school continues to prepare boys for the business of farming, but it also prepares boys and girls for off-farm agricultural occupations as well.

What are the major instructional areas in agriculture, you may ask? Other than farming or agricultural production which was discussed, the major instructional areas include agricultural supplies, agricultural mechanics (sales and service), agricultural products (processing and marketing), ornamental horticulture, forestry, and agricultural resources. Each area may be a separate curriculum. The areas are organized on the basis of clusters of occupations requiring competence in specialized agricultural subject matter fields.

The broadened definition of agriculture has encouraged many vocational educators to make employment surveys and to establish programs in one or more fields in addition to or other than vocational education for agricultural production. Studies in twenty-six states (19), mostly completed in 1964-1965, show that agricultural supplies, agricultural products, and ornamental horticulture are the off-farm businesses and services that will employ the largest numbers of workers needing knowledge and skills in agriculture in the next five years.

Therefore, agricultural production or farming and gardening are not a panacea for the rehabilitation and occupational training of inmates at correctional institutions. Time required to train for proficiency in farming is extensive, cost of getting established in farming is high, wages earned by farm laborers are relatively low, and need for farm workers has dwindled because of mechanization. These and

other factors should cause administrators to re-evaluate their institutional farm and garden programs. Training for entry or re-entry into the agricultural labor market must be realistic and thorough. Jobs must be available, they must be within the abilities of the individual, and they must afford a reasonable satisfaction and compensation.

#### Contributions Agricultural Education Can Make to Correctional Institutions

Instructors. Teachers are the most valuable resource agricultural education has to offer vocational education at correctional institutions. Teachers of agriculture have farm and agricultural backgrounds, hold baccalaureate and often advanced degrees, and they have acquired a wealth of teaching and human engineering skills and experiences. Over 10,000 teachers of agriculture are engaged in teaching youth, young farmers, and adults throughout the Nation. One teacher in four now teaches part-time in the new agricultural programs such as agricultural supply, agricultural mechanics, ornamental horticulture, or forestry, in addition to agricultural production and marketing.

The teacher is the most important element in a training program. Best results are likely to be achieved when competent, fully qualified and certified teachers are employed to preside over agricultural classrooms and laboratories. In addition to a sound vocational and professional preparation, it should be the aim of supervisory personnel at correctional institutions to select emotionally stable teachers possessed of good judgment and interested in the challenge of delinquent behavior. In any setting, but particularly in the correctional setting, the influence of a competent, wholesome teacher upon his students may be more important and have more lasting value than the knowledge and skills he imparts.

Teachers of agriculture are located in communities near most, if not all, correctional institutions in the United States. The resource is available and ready to be tapped. It is a matter for someone to clear lines of communications, begin the dialogue, introduce the need, and make a formal request for the services of agriculture teachers.

Teaching Materials. The many and varied kinds of teaching materials are another resource agricultural education has to offer vocational education at correctional institutions. Out of necessity, stacks of teaching materials for vocational education in agriculture have been "cranked out" during the past several years. Off-farm agricultural occupations course outlines, modules, lesson plans, programmed materials, and transparencies were produced quickly at a time when expansion of the total program demanded them. The teaching materials, useful for initiating new programs and for updating ongoing programs, differed as much as the individuals who prepared them. Some were concerned with instructional levels, other with occupational objectives, and still others with just the reorganization of subject matter.

Teaching materials prepared for vocational agriculture in public schools at various levels for different age groups may or may not meet the total needs of instructors at correctional institutions. Manifestly, those materials are best which prepare for specific teaching situations. It is suggested here that teaching materials written and prepared for specific educational institutions and conditions must be carefully evaluated if they are intended for use in an institution of another kind. Only those teaching materials which contribute most efficiently and effectively to the course of study and the occupational objectives of the students and program should be used.

Agricultural teaching materials are available from state departments of education, Land Grant colleges and universities, and elsewhere. The Eric Clearinghouse located in The Center for Vocational and Technical Education at The Ohio State University publishes Abstracts of Instructional Materials in Vocational and Technical Education (6), a quarterly publication informing educators about new teaching materials. The American Vocational Association (15) publishes annually a listing of teaching resources specifically for agricultural education. Then, too, agricultural businesses and industries, United States Department of Agriculture, and agricultural societies and organizations make many kinds of teaching materials available just for the asking.

Laboratory Plans and Equipment Lists. Farms and gardens at correctional institutions, invaluable laboratory resources for agricultural educators, are not adequate in themselves for preparing inmates for off-farm agricultural occupations. Commercial-sized greenhouses, ornamental nurseries, and agricultural mechanics shops are examples of additional laboratory facilities believed necessary to support specialized occupational education in agriculture. In certain geographical areas, educational facilities which include real or simulated garden centers, roadside markets, floral shops, and agricultural supply stores can be used to advantage in preparing inmates for agricultural sales and service occupations.

The laboratory is a highly desirable facility for teaching occupational education. The laboratory should be managed and operated similar to that of its counterpart in the business world. And, too, each laboratory should be furnished with modern machinery and equipment regardless of the excess manpower readily available at the institution. The idea of a well-managed, modern-equipped laboratory is to lessen the amount of application or transfer of learning required in making the transition from class to the job and, thereby, increasing chances for success on the new job.

While suitable locations for vocational laboratories may pose problems relative to security at correctional institutions, specifications for laboratories should be similar to those used by public school teachers. Plans and specifications have been prepared, revised, and refined by agricultural educators for the various kinds of laboratories

mentioned previously. Concurrently, lists of machinery, equipment, and tools were prepared for use in the different kinds of laboratories, and in some instances, the items on the lists were ranked in order of importance for teaching and learning. Plans and specifications for educational laboratories; lists of machinery, equipment, and tools to furnish and operate them; and related research findings justifying them are all available upon request to personnel of correctional institutions.

### Summary

In summary:

1. It would appear that farming and gardening, firmly established at many correctional institutions, are utilized primarily for the production of food, beautification of institutional grounds, and for providing inmates with a kind of therapy. Updating inmates in and retooling them for occupations in farming and other agricultural occupations are of secondary concern.

2. Inmates should be prepared for occupations which list numerous job openings, provide a reasonable compensation, and require skills and abilities the workers are capable of performing. Agricultural supplies, agricultural products, and ornamental horticulture are the off-farm businesses and services which will employ the largest number of workers in agriculture in the immediate future.

3. The 10,000 teachers of agriculture are the most valuable resource agricultural education has to offer vocational education in agriculture at correctional institutions.

4. Agricultural educators have prepared many kinds of teaching materials written at several levels. The teaching materials are available to the correctional institutions at little or no costs. To be most effective, however, they should be adapted to the situational particulars of the institution at which they are used.

5. Farms and gardens, invaluable laboratory resources, need to be supplemented with additional laboratories for preparing inmates for off-farm agricultural occupations. Plans and specifications for greenhouses, nurseries, agricultural mechanics shops, garden centers, roadside markets, and other kinds of educational laboratories are available with lists of machinery, equipment, and tools to make them functional.

Personnel at correctional institutions and agricultural educators are destined to form closer professional associations. This Seminar may be evidence of the acceleration of that trend.

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