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CONDUCTING PROGRAMS OF VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE TO MEET THE PRESENT
AND EMERGING RESPONSIBILITIES OF SECONDARY EDUCATION*

Harold Binkley
University of Kentucky

The basic philosophy of vocational education in agriculture must be kept clearly in mind as the profession moves to meet the present and emerging responsibilities of secondary education in vocational agriculture. Unless those who have cast their lot with vocational agriculture do some clear thinking and recommitting of themselves, much of the gain of nearly half a century in vocational agriculture may be lost. The basic philosophy of vocational agriculture is sound. It has been largely responsible for the success of the programs since the start. The need for farmer training is still increasing and is the most important and vital part of our job. It is basic training for a whole host of agricultural occupations, not farming. Likewise, there is an increased need for training those who are to enter other agricultural occupations--specialized training for those who are to enter agricultural occupations, not farming.

In the light of "too numerous demands" now and emerging, there will be a tendency to overlook the basic and fundamental things in a sound vocational program in agriculture. The people in vocational agriculture need to strengthen and make more effective the on-going program which is basically training in farming at the high-school level and for young farmers and adult farmers. To disregard this training and place too much emphasis on new programs will "scuttle the boat." At the same time, vocational agriculture cannot neglect the responsibility of developing new programs which will have as their purpose training high-school boys, young men, and adults in agricultural occupations other than farming.

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The Vocational Pattern of Instruction

The pattern of instruction in vocational agriculture is class instruction and directed or supervised practice in the agriculture dealt with in class. This must not be forgotten in any of our programs. Pressure will be brought to bear by school administrators, other teachers, and lay people to place less emphasis on the directed or supervised practice in the agriculture to be learned. The leadership in vocational agriculture must be alert and must "hold the ground" else it will lose the respect of the public for the quality of the program it has had over the years. Vocational agriculture has accepted the challenge of getting theory and practice experience together. This is perhaps the greatest challenge of the future. If theory and practice are not experienced together, they will not be learned together. Theory that is not associated with the practice in learning is not likely to be learned in a functional manner; it is not likely to increase one's ability in doing.

Over the years, the terms "supervised practice," and "Supervised farm practice" have been used. Perhaps as changes are made in programs there should be changes in terms used to express the various phases of programs. Substitute the word "experience" for the word "practice." The people in agricultural education have thought of "practice" as meaning improvement with each successive performance. And this is rightly so. However, this is "not so" with the psychologist. The word "practice" to the psychologist means mere repetition. The word experience has been and is accepted by the psychologist. How does the word "experience" substituted for the word "practice" sound? -- supervised experience in farming, supervised experience in agriculture, whatever the agriculture may be, supervised occupational experience in agriculture, supervised experience in ornamental horticulture, and so on.

In conducting programs in vocational agriculture to meet the present and emerging responsibilities of secondary education, teachers will be involved with some different people than they have been working with. They will be working with people in business, industry, and government. They will encounter organizations and institutions they have been bypassing such as labor unions, trade associations, and manufacturer's associations. There is excitement and satisfaction in conquering a whole new world. Vocational education in agriculture is well on its journey to a great new venture.

At the high-school level agricultural education cannot expect to train technicians. This, for the most part, is post-high school. High-school programs of vocational agriculture should be concerned with students' having "successful experiences" that are of high quality. If students can develop in high school a "pattern of success" they are likely to succeed after completing high school. The goal of the secondary school should be to prepare students for "job entry"--to enter a job with enough "know how" and confidence (a success pattern) to advance in the vocation. In many cases these young men will need additional in-service training on a part-time basis or by attending a technical school if they are to further develop the competencies needed in the many complex agricultural occupations.

If vocational agriculture can prepare high-school boys in the junior and senior years of high school: (1) for successful "job entry" into agricultural occupations or (2) can cause boys to discover and have a true interest in an agricultural occupation which will cause them to pursue further training in agriculture at the technical or professional level, it will have made a big contribution to the individuals and to society at large. And, it will have done its job well.

The business of conducting programs to meet the present and emerging responsibilities of secondary education boils down to two basic tasks: (1) Deciding what programs are needed and can be supported with adequate supervised experiences at the local or community level. (This supervised experience is contingent upon the opportunities that exist or that can be made available to students), and (2) Developing good plans for getting the program started and carried through on a sound basis. These two points well done is 90 per cent of conducting programs and will require a lot of hard, "soul searching" work.

There are some fundamental steps that have to do with getting squared away to conduct programs: These twelve points apply equally to a commitment to the basic program--training in farming and to the development of new programs.

Fundamental Steps in Planning Programs

1. Develop policy for education in agricultural occupations. -- Ideally, a local school system will have a general policy which will encourage the development of programs in agricultural education and provide guidelines for their development. Unfortunately, most educational institutions do not have such a policy. Basic policy has to be revised or new policies developed. To proceed without adequate official policy that is understood by all who are affected by it may be fatal to a new and promising program. The Center for Research and Leadership Development in Vocational and Technical Education at Ohio State University has developed a bulletin entitled Policy and Administrative Decisions in Introducing Vocational and Technical Education in Agriculture for Off-Farm Occupations. This publication covers such issues as the policy-making process, clientele, purposes, evaluation, staffing, planning programs and procedures, organization and administration, finance, facilities, research and development, public information, and relationships.
2. Plan programs and procedures. -- Once there is a governing policy, programs and procedures can be planned in keeping with it. Many persons may help develop them. Teachers of agriculture, other vocational teachers, teachers of academic subjects, and guidance counselors should be involved with curriculum directors and principals in shaping programs. "Involvement of people" in planning programs and procedures is the best way to develop and "build in" a thorough understanding of the program. Understanding insures enthusiastic support.

Administrators should approve procedures in selecting, recruiting, and scheduling students, establish policies governing student behavior, transportation, purchases, and many other matters of school routine. The procedures must be clear, agreed upon, known to all affected, and should be scrupulously observed.

3. Use advisory committees. -- Almost everyone who has had a part in starting programs in agricultural occupations or who have made major adjustments in on-going programs knows the value and almost necessity of using advisory committees. An advisory committee is not a substitute for a board of education; the board of education should not delegate any of its policy-making functions to such a committee. Neither is it a curriculum-making body; no professional educator should allow a committee to take over his professional responsibilities. Such a committee is properly a lay committee that consults with and recommends to a governing board matters regarding policy and works with it. A board or a professional staff should never be obligated to do what an advisory committee recommends.

The committee should be representative of the public as well as of employees. A word of caution: The advisory committee should be carefully oriented in terms of what the school is setting out to do in providing training in agricultural occupations, what the pattern of instruction will be, and what standards are to be adhered to, before it is asked to render advice. This will keep the advice it gives within the "ball park."

Advisory committees can be helpful in many ways. They can:

- Indicate the kinds of training needed
- Enlist support in a community or area
- Assist in recruiting students and placing students
- Assist in securing training stations
- React to curriculum proposals
- Recommend working conditions and types of experience to provide students
- Recommend wage scales and consultation with labor people
- Reflect public reactions to programs offered.

4. Provide adequate funds, facilities, and teacher time. -- Education in agricultural occupations is not cheap education. The costs will be high because the classes will be typically small; equipment will be expensive; teachers must be well paid since they must be competent enough to hold responsible positions in the industries and businesses for which they are providing training; and expenditures for operation, library, and visual aids will be high.

The temptation to use substandard, cramped facilities and discarded equipment; to reduce teaching time below the requirements; to provide a minimum of supervised occupational experience; and to omit expenditures for adequate teaching aids, will continue to be strong. It is possible to influence public perception of the importance of a program by the buildings and the other facilities provided.

Providing adequate teacher time to do the job is a must. The teacher must have time to study his community and larger area adequately to determine the needs of the program, to develop training stations, to set up his course of study, to develop the necessary understandings by parents and cooperators, to make this day-to-day preparation for teaching, to give the necessary supervision, and to do the many other things associated with sound training programs.

5. Involve people in general education. -- Essential contributions to programs should be made by persons other than vocational educators. Employers in most agricultural occupations in the studies reported, have often ranked general competencies in such areas as personality, ability to work with people, honesty and integrity, personal appearance, work habits, and communicative skills high among the chief requirements for the jobs they have to offer. Teachers of English, speech, mathematics, science, and other related subjects should be an integral part of a comprehensive staff required in the operation of training programs. The leaders in vocational agriculture must cause these people to feel they are making a definite contribution to the success of the programs.

6. Involve other vocational services. -- The contribution to be made by agricultural educators in providing training in agricultural occupations may vary from a small part to 100 per cent of the total training program. Some of the occupations for which agricultural educators may assist in providing training may be claimed by distributive education, business education, or industrial education. No attempt to take these fields from their claimants is implied. There is only a desire to delineate them, indicate training needs, and suggest cooperative programs to which all will be able to contribute. Agricultural education will be greatly handicapped if it undertakes to provide new programs without the assistance of colleagues in the other vocational education services -- either by training students "direct" or by helping to prepare teachers of agriculture to conduct the programs.

7. Work with labor and the Employment Security Offices and other governmental agencies. -- Many people conducting new programs will have their first contacts with organized labor, whose cooperation in some places will be imperative. Arrangements can sometimes be made whereby school training is substituted as part of apprenticeship.

Many in agricultural education do not know about the Employment Security Service. They will need to establish close contact with it in providing education for agricultural occupations. This service is highly cooperative and able to aid them in many ways. It may help in recruiting, testing, and counseling out-of-school prospective students; aid in planning programs; secure part-time occupational experience for students in training; and assist in placement. The good will and support of this agency will aid materially in providing effective programs.

Certain laws that govern the employment of young workers must be observed. These are important in providing occupational experience while students are in training. The laws and rulings to be observed vary from state to state.

8. Develop programs in cooperation with employers and organizations.

-- Experience in providing education for agricultural occupations indicates the necessity for working closely with the prospective employers of those who will be trained and with organizations of employers. Likewise, there is the need for working with the businesses that will provide occupational experience (on a seasonal basis), but who may not be in the market for additional employees. Many area, state, and national trade associations have indicated their need for better trained workers. They have helped to initiate and guide programs and recruit students. The cooperation of employers is a must in providing occupational experience for students during their training, which frequently leads to permanent employment.

9. Selling the program, recruiting, screening, and counseling students.

-- When a program is conceived and plans are made to implement it, there is still the "selling job" to do. The program will need to be sold to parents and prospective students. At the same time the program will need to be sold to agricultural businesses to provide supervised experience, and later the employers of those trained.

Securing (or having) enough students so that training costs per person will be reasonable and selecting students who are likely to succeed in the training program and later on the job are serious problems seldom faced in providing the older types of training in vocational agriculture. If a boy failed with his farming program, who knew about it? What if he fails in an agricultural business?

High-school students admitted to 11th and 12th grade programs in agricultural power and machinery, agricultural-supply business, ornamental horticulture, and like fields should be those who are seriously preparing for work in them on graduation or who desire further study in technical schools or colleges of agriculture.

10. Flexible scheduling. -- First, in what agricultural-supply businesses will the boys be placed for supervised occupational experience? After placement for supervised work experience the schedule should be set up at the convenience of the employer-cooperator -- scheduled at time when "business is going" and when he can make effective use of the students as employees. In many states this will come after Christmas. The blocks of time for work should be 3 to 4 hours in length. Second, this means scheduling all classes at school for the students enrolled either in the mornings or afternoons. This must be planned well ahead of time, before students' schedules are made out for the year. Perhaps, in April for the coming year.

11. Update one's qualifications in an agricultural occupation. -- Teachers must know well what they are to teach. There are short courses which can be taken and much individual reading can be of help to teachers. In addition, teachers should not overlook the possibility of working in one or more agricultural businesses to learn firsthand what the competencies are for successful employment. Doing this several days and taking detailed notes will develop a keen insight into the training tasks that are challenging vocational agriculture today.

12. Public information. -- Let the public know what the agriculture picture is. What we are doing -- what the results are -- and what we need to do and involve them in it.

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