

THE FUTURE OF VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE

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Twenty-nine years ago I entered the field of agricultural education as a teacher of agriculture in a high school. As I view what has happened in these years, it is difficult to be a pessimist. When we see what Smith-Hughes funds have done in eighteen years in spreading the gospel of agricultural education in high schools, the part-time and evening work, the Future Farmers of America, and in training teachers for the field; we are optimistic, and yet we must look at the other angle and ask: Just how successful have we been?

In this great convention, our Agricultural Section has been pondering over a philosophy for agricultural education. It is worthwhile for we must settle that question. However, Thomas H. Briggs, Professor of Secondary Education at the Teachers' College, Columbia, was asked to write on the subject: "What is a good Secondary School?" for the "Clearing House" for April, 1934. He confessed that "he, for one, was embarrassed. We have never reached any complete agreement upon what a good secondary school is." Dean C. J. Anderson, Wisconsin College of Education, writing on unsettled educational problems in the Wisconsin Journal of Education for November, 1935, said: "If you could change the present day high school, what would you make of it?" Evidently, we have not as yet a philosophy for secondary education and so, it seems to me that we may liken agriculture today to a good football team. We have seen some good teams this fall, but winners were more-or-less experts at the fundamentals of blocking, tackling, etc. I am worrying over the fundamentals of vocational agriculture, for the future of vocational agriculture depends, not necessarily on our philosophy, but more upon these fundamentals; better teaching of agricultural classes, better directed practice, more part-time work, etc. The future of vocational agriculture depends on us doing a better job in teaching vocational agriculture in the high schools throughout the country because,

1. Funds for the future depend on doing a better job. We have made progress but we cannot say we have done a good job in vocational agriculture to date. The numbers we have reached have been small, we have scarcely scratched the surface of the field.
2. We are not all agreed on how we shall teach vocational agriculture. Shall we degenerate from the practical, applied basis with our community problems, our part-time and evening school work, "Learning", to be just a six-hour teacher of another subject of little interest to the community. When I view the way our work is developing in some sections, I feel more-or-less a radical. I have not always followed our group in trying to follow the prevailing methods of trades and industries, and applying them to agriculture, but when we drop from the vocational viewpoint and attempt to narrow our field materially to high school classes, I become more-or-less a radical.

3. The future of vocational agriculture in the United States will depend upon what we as teacher trainers do for the young men in our classes and those in the field in the next five to ten years. What ideals are we going to give them of their job? We cannot be satisfied with the present methods of teaching, directed practice work, or in the meeting of the young people who are out of school. These three are our fundamentals and hope of the future. After all, the future of agriculture will depend largely on the ideals and view points of our program of work which we give young men who attend our classes.

Much of the future of vocational agriculture will depend on how we meet the fundamentals. It would be impossible to discuss all, but good teaching is first. There are some that are not as apparent. I can briefly discuss two in this short talk leading to our discussion.

Directed Practice: The Smith-Hughes law says there shall be six months of directed or supervised practice. How successful have we been? What is the important thing to be gained from directed practice? I think in terms of planning for success, skills, and success means "profit" and cost of production. That is, as we measure our directed practice work, we come to a vital problem, the financial side and we must know how to keep better financial records for directed practice. I am emphasizing one part of directed practice - the financial record. I realize we need better planning of projects, we need to think in terms of financial success, but let us think of this one thing "financial records" for a few moments. There are two attitudes growing up concerning the matter of records today. May I read an excerpt from a letter which I received from a supervisor. I had written to him concerning a statement on project records and their importance. He said: "It was with a great deal of interest that I read your comments concerning the matter of supervised practice records and accounts. I am ready to throw entirely aside all project record keeping and accounting on our vocational agriculture supervised farming enterprises*****that is just about the position I have come to in the light of our seventeen or eighteen years of unsuccessful efforts in attempting to secure project records and accounts from students of vocational agriculture which have only proven to be worse than useless."

"I have finally come to the conclusion that it is apparently a hopeless task. In other words, I realize when I am licked; and unless supervisors, teacher trainers and teachers are willing to cooperate more actively and enthusiastically I feel that project records and accounts should be definitely thrown into the discard rather than continue them on their present disgraceful basis."

What is at fault for this condition of poor records? I lay it directly to the teacher trainer. We have discussed project records but we have not given the young men of our classes actual experience thru doing. Just because these boys, in many cases, have had directed practice is no reason we should neglect to give them that experience in our training classes. Someone has said that eighty percent of our teachers do not appreciate the fundamentals of project record accounting. What of our boys? It appears that we as teacher trainers must give them this experience. They should become familiar with computing and analyzing of

projects. The future of directed practice rests with us. I am not discouraged in what we have done. I realize that we forget how little the boys who come on year by year know concerning the field of records and accounts. We must teach the fundamentals of project records. We are not all discouraged for let me give you another attitude in response to a letter in which I asked if the teacher trainer were willing to abandon all financial records. He replied, "In answer to your question, 'Are we making progress in working with financial records on projects?'; I would say emphatically, yes. This progress is and probably will be slow. In my judgment, the factor that helps most in making progress in this line is careful work by supervisors and teacher trainers with teachers in small groups, and even singly, on specific situations arising in those teachers' experiences.*****"

I believe more strongly than ever in the possibilities of project records accurately kept and thoughtfully used as a means toward the development of the ability of boys to think straight and hard concerning their personal problems. Some of these times we will develop enough skill and ingenuity in our teacher training and supervision to make all teachers understand the possibilities of the use of records. Then, I have no fear about the difficulties of getting the records kept."

What would directed practice be without financial records? "A farm without records is like a clock without hands." I asked our friends the 4-H club people, if they would not have better work if financial records were omitted. They responded "We would lose much." One of the leaders carried the question to the field and the young people responded "We get so much from our records." I am sure that our directed practice would be an absolute failure if financial records were abandoned, and yet this problem is before us as teacher trainers.

The Boys Out-of-School. We have developed our full-time schools and we have found that we can have schools for the adults, but what of this large neglected group which we sometimes call the part-time group? The group of young men out of school from fourteen to twenty five years of age, is a harder group to reach, but the future of vocational agriculture will depend upon how we direct our young teachers to meet this group. In my own state, Wisconsin, surveys of five counties show that 71 out of 100 Wisconsin farm boys, twenty to twenty five years of age, have not gone beyond the eighth grade. If these are to be our farmers of the future, what are we doing for them? There is another group. All too often the young men who complete the high school training and take one, two or three years of vocational agriculture and are graduated, are forgotten. These two groups, the graduates of our agricultural courses and the boys who never enter our classes are our problem. Personally, I believe, these two groups of out-of-school youth are more important than the adults of the community as an educational problem.

What are our teachers of agriculture doing for this neglected group? The Colleges of Agriculture are conscious of this group and are studying the problem. Their extension departments are organizing courses for these young men. A few years from now when additional funds are asked, will the Smith-Lever, or the Smith-Hughes men receive the funds? The group which does the best job should get the funds. Personally, I feel that this group of young people is our

greatest challenge.

We must aim to do better instructional work in our all-day classes as well as in part-time schools. We cannot forget the importance of financial records and better planning of our directed practice work. When it comes to a choice between the adult group and that group of young people of approximately fourteen to twenty five years of age, who have not yet assumed the responsibilities of farm management, I believe we must recognize this young group as more important than the adult farmers. I hope that some of our men may do evening school work and some other of the many things a teacher of agriculture may find to do in a community. Let us study our problem and do fundamental things before doing the jobs of other groups.