THEME

SOEP: URBAN PROGRAMS
Agricultural Education: A United Effort

The Secretary of Agriculture, John Block, has focused attention upon the need for the populace to understand and appreciate agriculture. His efforts to bring agriculture into the classroom are commendable.

Basics in education are discussed in the curriculums of the academic community as essential, but what is more basic than agriculture? The interpretation of basic, of course, differs. However, there is much that can be said about each person developing a knowledge of and an appreciation for agriculture.

Current Effort

The present efforts focus upon the elementary level of education. The effort wisely locates itself upon a specific unit of instruction for elementary students but upon integrating the instruction into existing curricula. The National Livestock and Meat Board is involved in developing some of the materials which will be utilized.

Teacher trainers in agricultural education learned quite some time ago that just to develop materials and disseminate them to teachers did not assure their utilization. Inservice education often accompanies the dissemination of materials to encourage teachers to correctly utilize the materials.

Elementary teachers should also receive in-service education on the utilization of new materials. Teacher educators and supervisors could act as consultants to enhance these efforts. They could help provide relevance and realistic examples to the efforts.

Vocational agriculture teachers and local agriculture supervisors could serve a similar role at the local level. They could provide local elementary teachers with assistance. Obviously, the APA's Farm to America program can be utilized. The approach, though, is to integrate the instruction into existing curricula and not just a one-shot unit on agriculture. This necessitates a more persistent commitment to assistance on the part of those associated with agriculture. The resulting benefits would likely be greater than with intermittent one-shot units.

Expanding the Concept

The effort to encourage the development of greater knowledge of and appreciation for agriculture needs to be expanded beyond the elementary school. Agricultural content could be easily incorporated into education at all levels.

The college curricula is not exempt. The course of study pursued by college students typically contain numerous basic agricultural disciplines. The BER's typically include coursework in the humanities, social sciences, communications, and mathematics. How many of these courses are relevant to agriculture? How many students in education, engineering, psychology, sociology, etc. take courses in agriculture?

How many Colleges of Agriculture offer a survey course which would be appropriate for non-majors?

The Problem

Progressing from formal to informal education, many adults could benefit from informative avocational programs. Given the image agriculture has with many in the general public, much education is needed. Many see agriculture as being oversubsidized by the government. The desire to demonstrate programs to diversify agriculture has not helped the overall image of agriculture. Agricultural educators have a lot to counter but we must begin somewhere.

Other educators will need to assist, since a united effort will be necessary in order to reach each group at the problem. Education requires long term efforts to produce desirable results.

Synergism

Independence is often a commendable trait. At times, however, it only fragments. Agricultural businesses, agricultural educators, farmers, the Cooperative Extension Service and numerous governmental agencies are all concerned with the same problem. To begin to solve the problem, the idea of whose turf or responsibility it is to inform the public must be resolved.

The Secretary of Agriculture has initiated an excellent first step. He is in a unique position of being able to pull together the groups, agencies and resources to fully assimilate the program. Representatives of these groups should be called together into a commission. The commission should form recommendations which specifically utilizes the unique strengths of each group. The program is too big for any one group alone; but, together, the process of education and ameliorating the misconceptions about agriculture can begin.

The Cover

Over 75 vocational agriculture programs are currently operating in the City of Los Angeles, California.
SOE — Urban Areas

Urban areas are noted for many things: heavy industry, high land costs, and diminishing open spaces. Consequently, agriculture, and particularly production agriculture, for the most part is not included among the occupations making up city life. Buildings, roadways, and high population densities make it difficult for many residents to grow even the smallest of agricultural enterprises. One local high school administrator from an urban area addressing an agriculture teacher conference noted, "Our agriculture department is surrounded by homes, apartments, and business — no open spaces, small pastures, or ranches.

No one would disagree that there are urban students who desire careers in agriculture. For that reason, we need to rekindle our focus from the need of agricultural programs in urban areas to the fulfillment of that need by providing sound instruction in agriculture to urban students. One of the important ingredients of instruction included in a successful vocational agriculture program is SOE projects which address in type and scope the hopes and aspirations of students needing vocational training in agriculture. Urban areas provide both opportunities and dilemmas for SOE projects. We should draw from examples of successful SOE projects in developing future SOE projects for urban students.

Case Study

The SOE Handbook, available from the National FFA Supply Service, provides us with a case study entitled: "Frank Carter: Can A City Boy Become A Rancher?" This case study provides many insights into how current SOE projects are successful in urban areas. The student defines his work with cattle on the school farm. His SOE project continues with placement on a ranch and, eventually, renting land for his cattle through the money he earned through his placement program. Similarly, a student with an interest in becoming an established florist in an urban area could start with a project using school facilities, seek employment (placement) with a local florist, and perhaps start a business with the skills and abilities learned through the SOE program.

What Does It Take?

In the case study mentioned above, Frank was very successful in his SOE program. What did it take for Frank to have a successful SOE project? Certainly, commitment to his SOE and career goals was the key factor. Who helped Frank determine and establish his goals? His vocational agriculture teacher! Who took on the ultimate responsibility for the school farm making sure Frank and other students would have housing for their animals? Who provided the creative thinking to find placement centers for the urban students? Successful SOE projects for urban students are highly dependent on the abilities of teachers to help students determine occupational goals, assume the extra responsibilities for facilities such as school farms, and exercise the ability to select and maintain placement centers.

Missing Link?

Accepting the fact that teachers are an extremely important part of successful SOE programs, then are future teachers being trained to meet the demands that urban SOE programs present regarding student projects? Are we training teachers to assume the role of the teacher in a traditional rural agriculture program, or have we effectively given future teachers the opportunity to interface with urban programs? Teachers must not only stress that rural and urban programs have many similarities, but that they also have many differences.

The Articles

Writers from many urban areas have addressed the subject of SOE in their agriculture programs. From these articles, teachers in urban areas will realize new opportunities for SOE projects. After reading some of the articles, urban teachers may want to evaluate their SOE projects to see if they are successful in giving students skills and abilities to enter occupations in agriculture.

SOE: Alive and Well in Nassau County

Agriculture is alive and well in the southern suburbs of New York State! Before I can even properly address the topic of SOE programs in the Long Island suburban region of New York State, I must dismiss some perspectives of New York itself. I was astounded, while attending the National FFA Convention in Kansas City, by the many misconceptions of New York State. At the FFA convention, many of the misconceptions were from students.

I was equally astonished with the further lack of understanding for agriculture in New York by adults in attendance at the 1983 AVA Convention in Anaheim, California. Contrary to popular belief, New York is not solely made of concrete. However, New York City can have so much notoriety that many cannot think beyond the city. True, it is pretty outstanding in its reputation — an area comprised only of 299.7 square miles and a population of over 7 million! Is there room for agriculture, you ask? You bet! Even in the middle of it all, it can boast many opportunities for vocational agriculture.

The Opportunities

When one thinks of a strictly suburban or urban area, agriculture is not one of the careers that comes instantly to mind. However, one must have a thorough understanding of agriculture and what it encompasses in order to truly comprehend its diversity in the suburban and urban setting. New York City has several schools teaching agriculture. The programs on Long Island are not the traditional agricultural programs that many may remember. No farm production and management classes or programs dealing specifically with agricultural mechanics. Why? There is very little employability in these areas for our students.

Our students derive and derive in the many speciality areas of agriculture. Conservation, horticulture, floral design, horse handling and small animal care are the five major areas of agriculture currently taught in Nassau County. Urban areas provide many opportunities for SOE projects. Urban residents often need the services of landscapers, lawn maintenance personnel, and florists. Many cities provide residents with recreational areas, including unique employment opportunities like horse stables and racetrack, providing opportunities for horse trainers, groomers, and veterinarians. Urban areas are noted for their parks and conservation areas which need foresters, landscapers, and wildlife specialists. The opportunities abound for those properly trained.

Facilities Are Important

At Nassau County Technological Center, our facilities provide the first encounter for our students with their SOE projects. We have extensive facilities on a 20 acre plot of rolling fields and woodland. The main building of our complex is a horse stable, constructed from an old estate. It houses our (oral) shop in the front wing, and, as was originally intended, houses horse stalls and storage in rear wings. The upper floors of the complex are devoted to administrative and classroom space.

A separate barn complex has facilities for up to 20 horses. Students receive instruction in paddock, racetrack, laboratories for the small Animal Care program at Nassau Technological Center are designed from actual working conditions of local businesses.

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and pasture maintenance. The floral design program has a complete laboratory with three large walk-in refrigerators. The conservation program utilizes the many acres of fields and woods for management and equipment use. The program is well-equipped, including two boats providing training in marine studies at a local marina. Our horticulture program has three greenhouses stocked with plants of many varieties from the most common to the exotic to provide a wide experience. The program utilizes a plot of land for landscaping experiences as well as landscaping the grounds of the entire agriculture complex as needs dictate.

The small animal care program has a facility complex which includes specialized rooms for housing, and includes a full grooming laboratory, animal health examining and clinical rooms. The numerous well-equipped facilities in all program areas allow students to maintain their SOE projects on-site.

Placement
The second phase for many SOE projects involves a placement program. Specially trained placement counselors provide employability lessons to all students. These students are then encouraged to seek jobs in their respective fields in their communities.

The inclusion of special counselors is important since we serve 220 students from 36 school districts. The agriculture teachers are responsible for the on-site SOE programs. For offsite SOE's, placement counselors do visitations, as well as supply employers with employability assessment forms which are returned and reviewed quarterly as to student skills performance and work related attitudes.

Dedicated Teachers
One of the most necessary ingredients to successful urban SOE programs is dedicated teachers. Teachers are hired at Nassau. Technological Center as experts in their respective areas of agriculture. They are dedicated to the importance of student SOE programs and strive for the best in their respective areas. Urban SOE programs are challenging and, as many areas become more urbanized, the need for teachers familiar with and trained for these programs becomes more than a necessity.

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Urban Programs — A New Direction

Agricultural education programs have traditionally been located in rural areas to serve the needs of students desiring to pursue careers in production agriculture or agribusiness. Such programs have stressed the importance of experience-based teaching which relates classroom instruction in agriculture to student experiences resulting from their supervised occupational experiences.

Future agricultural education programs will undoubtedly continue to focus on developing specific skills and abilities in students which are necessary for their placement and advancement in agricultural career fields. However, agricultural educators should begin to examine whether career preparation is their sole mission.

The world in which we now live is characterized by an increasing degree of interdependence. The agricultural sector of our economy is no exception as its products, policies and politics influence the entire economic and social structure of the community, state, nation and world. Few would deny that the role of agriculture is becoming more interrelated with all other aspects of our society. However, many citizens, particularly in urban environments, fail to understand or acknowledge the important role which agriculture plays in each of our lives. The question which this situation poses for agricultural educators is then: "Should agricultural education programs expand their focus to provide educational opportunities to an audience other than agricultural career oriented populations?" and if so, how?

The question posed is not new to our profession and is one which has been characterized by heated debate as it appears to affect traditional agriculture education programs. However, as new problems emerge which affect our profession and programs, we must be willing to make the changes necessary to address those problems. Ignoring the problem has never been an acceptable solution.

Also, past experience has shown that inevitably other forces, most notably legislative mandates (e.g., Vocational Education Act, 1963), may be brought to bear on our programs which require that changes be made. These forces often target a broad range of programs and may not address problems specific to agricultural education. Problems which we now face in our profession need to be addressed by our profession rather than by legislators who may not fully understand the implications of their solution.

New Program
Johnson County Community College in suburban Kansas City (Overland Park, Kansas) initiated a two-year Agribusiness program during the 1983-84 school term. Being located in a relatively affluent suburb of a large metropolitan area mandated the need to develop a program to serve students with limited production agriculture and agribusiness experiences. Although the initial goal of the program was to prepare students for agricultural careers, many students have enrolled in various agribusiness courses for reasons other than career preparation. Course evaluations have attempted to identify students' rationale for their enrollment in each of the agribusiness course offerings. Responses collected were categorized into three basic areas.

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Many students revealed their interest in the agriculture courses were based on the desire to secure a position in an agricultural or to improve their skills and abilities if they were already employed. For these students, career preparation or advancement served as the motivating force underlying their enrollment.

A second category of students reported they were interested in developing their skills and abilities in a specific subject matter area. However, their goal was not to secure a position in that career field. Rather, their goal was to use the information acquired to improve their management of an avocational endeavor. For example, one student who was enrolled in a Fundamentals of Animal Nutrition course held a B.S. degree in computer science and was employed as a Systems Analyst in a local business unrelated to agriculture. He reported his reasoning for enrolling in the course was to improve his feeding program for a purebred Angus beef herd which he owned and cared for in the evenings and on weekends. When confronted, he indicated that his current and future salary potential exceeded his income from considering beef production as a primary career due to the high opportunity cost. However, his need for skills was quite similar to that of other beef producers in order to properly manage his enterprise.

The third category of enrollees indicated their interest was due to the desire to increase their knowledge of agriculture for platonic reasons. Many students simply wanted to broaden their understanding of the world in which they live and realized that agriculture, food, and food production played an important role. For these students their enrollment was a means to examine an industry which had previously been a mystery to them. Most students in this category reported they were amazed at the breadth of the agricultural industry and the varied opportunities it presented.

New Directions

Realizing that future students and society will be uniquely different than those of the past provides the impetus for developing agriculture programs to meet different needs. Research at Iowa State University (1976) has suggested that future programs should serve three functions. Each of the functions identified recognizes the fact that students seeking instruction in agriculture may have different objectives.

Career oriented students must continue to be provided with educational opportunities which will allow them to develop the skills necessary for employment in agricultural fields. As technology and demand for agricultural products increases, the need for competent agriculturalists will likewise increase. Agricultural education programs of the future must not only prepare students in order to maintain a supply of agricultural workers who can continue to provide food and fiber products which are essential to our lives.

The second function of agricultural education programs is to provide educational opportunities for students desiring to develop knowledge and skills in agriculture but do not intend to pursue a career in that field. In the past, many persons have assumed a position requiring students in our programs to have a career orientation change these negative perceptions, motivate students and continue to justify an educational program. A well planned and implemented Supervised Occupational Experience Program (SOEP) is a key element.

The third function of agricultural education is that of providing instruction in the significance of agriculture, food, and food production. This aspect of our educational programs has become more important as the agricultural sector of our economy experiences increased scrutiny from an ill-informed public. Greater emphasis should be placed on educating the general population on the problems facing agriculture today in an attempt to gain support for agriculture in these troubled times.

Many agricultural education programs have addressed each of these three to increase their knowledge of agriculture for platonic reasons. The Food For America project is one means that has been used to increase awareness of agriculture in elementary school children. Children's fairs, and agricultural displays that are held in FFA week are other examples. Test results are often published in newspapers with little or no mention of the per acre cost of production or profit at any level. These efforts are often directed toward improving public relations. However, the opportunity exists to increase the educational value of these activities without reducing their public relations potential.

Summary

Agricultural education programs of the future should expand their target audience to include all members of the community. Although each individual student will not walk into the classroom for instruction, efforts should be made to address the different objectives of those who do not enter our programs. Additional efforts should be made to educate the essentially na'ive public on the problems facing agriculture today and how those problems affect each of us.

Population shifts from rural to urban environments places an even greater burden on agricultural educators with direct access to urban populations. New methods of delivery must be identified and utilized to accomplish that task. Urban agriculture education programs are uniquely situated to make an important contribution in this direction. The responsibility for initiating these actions rests with the agricultural education profession. Without efforts in these directions the gap which presently exists between agriculture and the consuming public will undoubtedly widen.

Reference

BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-ENVIRONMENT EDUCATION. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University. Agricultural Education Department, 1976.

THE AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION MAGAZINE

Urban SOE: A Vehicle For Growth

The urban school is often found to exist in a maze of difficulties associated with unresponsive students, negative public perceptions and a general lack of community support. Although the problems may not be unique to urban schools, research indicates that they are frequently more prevalent in the urban environment. In an era when accountability in educational programming is paramount, how can educational programs in urban schools change these negative perceptions, motivate students and continue to justify an urban existence? A well planned and implemented Supervised Occupational Experience Program (SOEP) is a key element.

The urban school setting possesses its own set of assets and deprivations in regard to Supervised Occupational Experience Programs. Opportunities for placement in agriculturally related occupations are often abundant. On the other hand, the scope and type of production-oriented Supervised Occupational Experiences may be limited by a lack of facilities, city zoning or disapproval of neighbors. Despite the problems associated with entrepreneurship, this type of SOEP is a vital aspect of any vocational education program, regardless of location.

SOEP — A Community Project

A study of trends and issues for urban schools in the 1980s uncovered several factors common to highly successful school systems. One significant factor affecting success was the active participation of parents and citizens in the educational process. Supervised Occupational Experience Programs offer an excellent avenue for such involvement. In the urban setting, backyard gardens, suburban lots become livestock facilities and local businesses become training centers for placement students. Without genuine citizen and parental support, SOEP in the urban school may become an uphill battle.

By DALE PERRETT AND DONALD SELL

(Editors' Note: Dr. Perrett is an Assistant Professor of Agricultural Education and Agricultural Mechanics in the Department of Agriculture at Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, Texas 75962; and Mr. Spalding is Instructor of Agricultural Education at Klein High School, Spring, Texas 77373.)

To the student, parental participation is a sign of personal interest. Students are much more likely to receive encouragement and praise from parents who are active in their children's education. It is also evident that parents receive a great amount of intrinsic value from seeing their child succeed and knowing they had a part in that success.

At Klein High School in Houston, Texas, a number of yearly activities are used to promote both vocational agriculture and SOEP. A community booster club is instrumental in locating and securing facilities for production enterprises. The club also sponsors a yearly project show which affords recognition to vocational agriculture students. Livestock and poultry enterprises are often transported to local day care centers where children discover the real sources of meat, eggs and milk.

The Klein Independent School District in 16 years has grown from basically a rural school to three large urban high schools. As new schools were built, new teachers...

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SOEP projects at Klein High School may include cooperative placement as shown by this student placed part-time in a meat processing business.

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As part of the Veterinary Assistant Program at Klein High School, students may be placed as assistants at local clinics.
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hired, and new developments formed; SOE has been instrumental in developing and maintaining positive public perceptions concerning the value and need for vocational agriculture in the urban setting.

The Motivator

The principle of motivation may be better described as the principle of meaningfulness. Meaningful learning is created through the use of real life situations which is the backbone of SOE. Through SOE, many students learn for the first time the real meaning of economic principles and terms such as supply, demand, and price. Students are motivated to excel, thus improving attitudes and productivity.

The results of the changes become evident in other areas such as improved class attendance and grades. Urban students, which may have had only limited opportunities for personal achievement, may finally get the chance to stand out from the group and be a part of a success-oriented group. Peer recognition and group identification become positive influences on the student.

Without a doubt, the process of any educational system to motivate students hinges on the ability of the teacher to manage the learning environment. SOE is no exception to this theory. The experience program should include variety and be tailored to the ability level of each student. If the SOE is not challenging, the student may quickly lose interest. If the SOE is overwhelming, the student may give up and become discouraged. As in any curriculum, the SOE should be paced so that interest is maintained throughout the entire year. This may be especially true in urban areas where a wide variety of disciplines are available to vie for the student’s interest.

The teacher must set the standards for the SOE. Research has indicated that highly effective teachers seldom accomplish under average teachers do. They set behavioral standards and demand that students do their best. Teachers may obtain maximum performance from students through praise, encouragement and attention to evidence of genuine progress.

The Work Ethic

Recent articles in the journal Urban Education described the complexities the urban student faces in the transition from youth to adulthood. Of significant importance is the inability of the student to understand the world of work. Likewise, finding suitable employment is one of the most important developmental tasks urban students face in an effort to adjust adult roles in society. A suitable and meaningful SOE may serve as the catalyst to make the transition as smooth as possible.

The influx of people to the Houston area has brought with it a heterogeneous student population. Where students once learned work ethics from parents or relatives down-on-the-farm, urban students in some cases have had little opportunity for such instruction. The changing structure of the family has seemingly delegated more of the responsibility to the commercialization of the old adage “a day’s work for a day’s pay” to the teacher. Through the development of a work ethic, students gain a sense of control over both themselves and their environment. Also, worth ethic establishes a sense of value to other people.

All students entering Klein High School must assume the responsibility for some type of SOE. Basic standards are established, and students are made aware of the importance of SOE. Students with little background in agriculture are encouraged to assume an SOE of moderate scope until some basics are learned in the classroom laboratory. As students progress, they are encouraged to expand into larger enterprises, pre-emplacement laboratory training, or placement in agriculture.

In 1962, the net income from the Klein Supervised Occupational Experience Program was $52,000, of which $39,000 came from placement in agriculture. Obviously those dollars translate into positive educational experiences for the urban student.

The Future

U.S. News and World Report confirmed that there are approximately 2.4 million farms and ranchers in the United States. For each job on these farms and ranches, there are 5.2 jobs in agriculture and related occupations. This ratio translates into 21 million agricultural-related jobs, or approximately one-fourth of all civilian employment. Numbers may sometimes be misleading, but these figures leave little doubt about the importance of well-trained young men and women to the future of agriculture.

Vocational education is not a luxury afforded to urban schools; it is a necessity which must be maintained through the effective use of the FSA classroom/laboratory instruction and Supervised Occupational Experience Programs.

References


Bridging the Gap in Urban Areas

According to the National Handbook on Supervised Occupational Experience Programs, supervised occupational programs of vocational agriculture students in a national priority to bridge the gap between where students are and where they want to be. Supervised occupational experience consists of all planned practical activities conducted outside the scheduled class time in which the student develops and applies agriculture knowledge and skills. Students in SOEP are supervised by teachers, parents, employers, or other adults who assist in achieving their educational objectives. The competencies should be determined cooperatively by the student, teacher, parents, and employer.

Objectives

What are some of the objectives of SOE programs in urban areas? The basic objective of urban supervised occupational experience programs is to help students bridge the gap between vocational education and employment. Other specific objectives may be listed as:

1. To provide an opportunity for students to develop specific occupational skills in agriculture.
2. To provide an opportunity for students to develop abilities and skills necessary to successfully compete for gainful employment in horticulture.
3. To provide an opportunity for students to develop a sense of personal worth as well as leadership, citizenship, and responsibility for the development of their environment.
4. To provide an opportunity for students to develop basic and correct concepts.
5. To provide an opportunity for students to develop proficiency in record keeping skills.
6. To provide an opportunity for students to experience on-the-job training in placement and ownership.
7. To provide an opportunity for students to develop responsibility and self-confidence to manage or own an agribusiness.

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A student receives hands-on experience in the school laboratory at Rouse T. Washington High School, New Orleans, Louisiana.

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Students examining new variety of white potato at an SOEP.
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9. To provide an opportunity for students to earn and manage money.
10. To provide an opportunity for students to receive on-the-job training in agriculture in order to enter the world of work.
11. To provide an opportunity for students to develop skills in the organization of business, principles of management, and legal aspects of business.

To provide an opportunity for students, parents, teachers and employees to cooperatively set supervised occupational experience programs. These are but a few of the many objectives that SOE projects help accomplish for students in urban areas.

Bridging the Gap

With a strong emphasis on work experiences, many urban vocational students are facing a dilemma. The problem with which they are confronted is having the facilities available to carry out a meaningful program of supervised occupational experience. Urban students come from widely varying backgrounds and may have had little or no previous agricultural experience.

Mr. James D. Richmond, Jr., teacher of vocational agriculture at Broadmoor High School in Baton Rouge, states: "There is a need to be creative in helping urban students select their SOE projects. The traditional or farm-oriented projects are usually not available to urban youngsters. The students' access to transportation plays a key role in the selection of their SOE projects."

In order to bridge the gap between training and employment, Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver high schools in New Orleans have launched an agricultural program concentrating on agriculture training for the horticulture industry. SOE projects consist of horticulture crops, such as citrus fruits, vegetables, flowers, and nursery stock. The course of study in Vocational Agriculture/Agribusiness (I, II, III, and IV) for the City of New Orleans is designed to train students in the field of Ornamental Horticulture with specific training through SOE for the following careers:

1. Floriculture Industry
   a. Greenhouse Production
   b. Greenhouse manager or owner
   c. Wholesale Florist/Broker
2. Landscape Designer
   a. Interior and Exterior Designer
   b. Landscape Contractor
   c. Landscape Architect
3. Nursery Industry
   a. Nursery Production
   b. Plant Propagator
   c. Garden Center Manager or Owner
4. Turf Grass Industry
   a. Golf Course Manager
   b. Golf Course Employee
   c. Groundskeeper

Placement

In Baton Rouge, placement in agribusiness occupations is one avenue open to many urban students. Garden centers, hardware stores, meat and produce markets, nurseries and landscape contractors are but a few of the available employment centers. Placement in these businesses is an excellent opportunity for any enterprising student interested and familiar with the business of agriculture.

In most urban areas, there is an abundance of those agriculturally related businesses that need part-time help with a vested interest in providing more than just a job. Younger students will have more difficulty in finding openings of this nature because of labor laws or hiring policies at many businesses, but the third and fourth year agriculture student should find no such barriers. Many school systems give credit for cooperative placement in agribusinesses providing added incentive to the student.

The doors are not completely closed to urban students having production projects as their SOE program. The numbers are lower than for the rural resident, but there are a few areas on the fringe of urban development where enterprises such as horse farms or pick-your-own vegetable and fruit plots abound. Owners of unused land in Baton Rouge and New Orleans are glad to have their property used for projects in exchange for the maintenance the land receives. Plots like these are being used for growing crops by students interested in production projects.

For students who have no facilities at home or who have problems with transportation to a job, the school land laboratory or school garden can provide suitable facilities for SOE programs. Individual garden plots, greenhouse space, or plots to grow nursery stock can be provided for those students who have no other alternatives. There must be a distinction between classroom or laboratory instruction and projects. The student must realize that the SOE program must be an individual project that requires out-of-school time even if it is located on campus.

Students enrolled in the inner city agriculture/agribusiness programs have been placed in occupational training stations around the city. Vocational agriculture/agribusiness plays a significant role in Baton Rouge and New Orleans communities. Community service is rendered to schools, churches, homes, organizations (both private and governmental) and individuals.

Ownership

Students enrolled in vocational agriculture/agribusiness programs in metropolitan Baton Rouge and New Orleans, Louisiana, are growing into ownership through their SOE programs. Some students have a combination of ownership, placement, improvement, and supplemental agricultural skills involved in their SOE programs. In some instances, students prepare or cultivate their own lawn and garden tools and contract horticulture jobs throughout the city. Some students are now being launched into co-ownerships with agribusiness firms in the city. Here are a few examples: lawn/garden maintenance business, landscaping business, pest control business, fruit and ornamental horticulture plant production and vegetable production (on city and private property).

Summary

There are any number of possibilities open to urban vocational agriculture/agribusiness students with regards to SOE programs. The important thing to remember is that the individual agricultural teacher, parents, and prospective employer should all be involved in planning and implementing the program. Accurate records should be kept and supervision should be comprehensive. The benefits of a well-planned, well-organized and well-supervised SOE program will always be involved in the study of vocational agriculture/agribusiness present and future.

The SOE programs in the City of New Orleans, Louisiana, are very unique in that the agriculture programs are housed in the middle of a booming metropolis. Students are low income city dwellers living in housing projects and crowded rental units with very little space, which would make it almost impossible to carry on an active SOE program. But, through creative inventions, ranging from rooftop projects to employment through governmental agencies, urban students are able to participate in the experiences shared by rural Americans.

Remaining 1984 Themes on SOEP

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Urban SOE: Can It Survive?

To become a success in vocational agriculture, a student must first decide on an SOE program. Just as rural agriculture students might choose crops from beef, dairy, swine, or crops, so must an urban student choose a project, perhaps in nursery, landscaping, floriculture, vegetable crops, or many of the sales and management opportunities offered within these and other areas. While the rural student can work on a program and goals for the home farm, the urban student must be totally dependent on the local school system and agriculture program to provide the experiences that cannot be achieved elsewhere. Programs chosen by urban students can vary from some gardens to school projects completed in the nursery or greenhouse.

By 1975 to 1983, Pleasant Ridge Park Area Vocational Education Center Horticulture program has had eight State Champions in the nursery or floriculture classes, three State Farmer Degree recipients, hundreds of blue ribbons in the State Fair FFA contests, and still this is not enough. Regardless of how successful individual students or teams perform, there are other considerations which ultimately decide a program’s success and survival: student recruitment, employer support, and support from local and state administration.

Recruiting, Placement, and Support

Recruiting urban students into the program is a primary concern in establishing and maintaining the program. In most urban areas, agriculture curricula and programs are placed in vocational education centers, which limits the enrollment to juniors and seniors. Thus, every year the horticulture program must compete with other vocational areas for students. At the present time, Pleasant Ridge Park draws students from four high schools. Recruiting urban students, therefore, involves not only in meeting and competing for these areas, such as welding, auto mechanics, and drafting, but is also compounded by the limited views of family tradition and unfamiliarity with horticulture as a viable vocational area.

For any program to be successful in the urban area, it must have the support of the home industry. The program at Pleasant Ridge Park has been fortunate in this respect. Since 1974, the number of cooperative employers has grown from one to fifteen. Students view placement as a strong selling point when seeking for a career. Some businesses take at least five students per year and place them automatically within their business.

Our horticulture students attend regular high school classes for the first three periods per day and then leave the home school to work in an assigned business for the remainder of the day. In order for each cooperative educational experience to work, the program must be well-coordinated by an agriculture teacher with the ability to work out any problems which may arise and employers who are supportive of such a program. One key element leading to support is having employers involved in the planning of the curriculum. At the present time, our Advisory Committee, consisting of five of the local employers, meets twice a year to plan for the future and review the past in order to receive needed changes and provide guidance to the ultimate success of the student. The cooperative program has averaged placing or finding jobs for ninety-five percent of the horticulture students since 1979.

Support from both local and state level agencies for the development of urban programs is also essential. "We're different" is a phrase I have used many times, but the difficulty arises with the ability of educational agencies to understand the difference. In all honesty, I had problems at first in understanding urban programs. This was due primarily to the fact that I grew up involved with rural agriculture programs, attended Eastern Kentucky University, and completed my student teaching in rural Kentucky. It took a great deal of trial and error in order to accomplish an understanding of urban programs in agriculture. State vocational agriculture agencies who so successfully lead, guide, and direct rural programs need to develop the same kind of positive attitude toward urban programs. To do this, a cooperative and combined assistance of both the local community and state agencies is necessary.

Rural and urban programs could become great assets to each other if both are nurtured properly. Not only must agricultural crops be grown, but they also may be marketed. What better way to accomplish this than to train urban students to handle, sell and disperse crops grown in rural areas? Teaching urban students should never be left out of any state plan. The urban student may be one of the great resources we have left to develop, and I look forward to the day that urban programs are accepted and looked upon as being as important as rural programs.

SOE For Urban Vocational Agriculture

Vocational agriculture has historically centered around the student's SOE programs. These real-life applications to the classroom experience have taken on many new and varied forms. What started as livestock and crops owned and cared for by the student are now agriculture jobs, small business ownerships, exploratory career experiences and laboratory simulations. There are still students who own and care for livestock and crops, but as vocational agriculture found a place in urban settings, traditional SOE’s changed to fit the need.

Programs That Work

Two of these atypical programs can be found at Graff Area Vocational Technical School in Springfield, Missouri. Located in a city of 15,000 in Southwest Missouri, Graff AVTS offers two programs in vocational agriculture. Natural resources conservation offers a two-year, broad based program in soil, water, and resources conservation. Horticulture is also offered as a two-year program emphasizing floriculture, nursery production, and landscaping.

In horticulture, the laboratory is the SOE for the student. While many students are employed part-time in local horticulture-related businesses, the greenhouse laboratory serves as the primary business employer of the student.

First-year students serve as the entry level workers for the business. Students learn plant and materials identification with the second-year students serving in managerial capacities for the business. A great deal of emphasis is given to the understanding and value of plant production relationships skills and knowledge by workers. Customer relations are stressed at each area in the business so that students may be able to offer suggestive selling and plant management tips while being helpful and cooperative.

Students set production and sales goals for the business each year. The students, employers, and business records have proven to be essential in analyzing the success of the students in achieving the predetermined goals. With the entire horticulture program commercially as possible, a great deal of responsibility is placed on the second-year students as managers. This responsibility has contributed to the high percentage of program graduates that enter horticulture related fields of work and/or attend college to major in horticulture.

This laboratory SOE has been a major factor in the success of FFA judging teams in floriculture and nursery/landscaping. Graff has always placed well in district, state, and national contests in these areas of competition.

The horticulture instructor believes that the laboratory SOE is successful because the instructor is based on a survey of competencies collected from area florists, nurseries, and landscapers. These business people completed the survey to determine the skills they desire in workers hired during a typical year. Surprisingly, the businesses desired students with good work skills (reliable, dependable, cooperative, etc.) as much as those with good technical skills. This is still another reason the laboratory is run as a commercial business.

Approximately thirty students participate in the horticulture program each year. A large majority of the students are female with about 60 percent of them being from the city and the remaining 40 percent coming from outlying schools in more rural areas. While some students own greenhouses of their own or work in greenhouses or florist shops, the school laboratory serves as the major SOE at Graff AVTS.

The natural resources conservation program has the same number of students, but their demographic make-up is different. The majority of students in this program are males with about half from the city and half coming from area schools. All entering students possess an interest in the outdoors. The SOE in this program consists of both laboratory and exploratory experiences.

The laboratory SOE consists of activities carried out on a local farm. Plant and tree identification collections are developed by each student, as well as competencies in surveying, measuring, mapping, and planting. Good design, terrace layout, and waterway construction. Records and notebooks are kept on many of these activities.

Graduates of the natural resources conservation program are placed with survey crews, parks departments, zoos, conservation departments, and forestry departments. Many of the program graduates go on to college to become landscape architects, foresters, agronomists, or wildlife management specialists.

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SOE For Urban Vocational Agriculture

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The exploratory SOE helps many of the students make a career choice by exposing the student to the responsibilities of an occupation. This SOE program dates by allowing students to spend time with people in different careers, documenting their day-to-day tasks and activities. Students spend several days with the people involved in conservation jobs. This allows them to make more intelligent choices in career selection before pursuing more advanced education or training.

FFA activities that correlate with the laboratory and exploratory SOE in natural resources are the soils and land judging contests. Members also look forward to the beginning of a new forestry contest next year. Graff has also been very successful in the soils and land judging contests on the district, state, and national levels.

Accomplishments

These two programs are indicative of the new and innovative supervised occupational experience programs that are proving to be extremely beneficial to vocational agriculture students. Those programs are more likely to remain in particular SOE's, laboratory and exploratory projects are stressing the major points that SOE's always have:

1. Establishment in an occupation.
2. A second-year experience as part of the student.
3. A relationship between classroom instruction and real-life situations.
4. Supervision by teachers, parents, and employers.

THEME

Tropical Fish Don't Count

By FLINT FREEMAN

(Issued to: Mr. Freeman is Professor and Head of the Department of Agricultural Science/Vocational Agriculture at California State Polytechnic University in Pomona, California 91761.)

I have just returned from our university sheep unit, sorting Rambouillet yearling ewes with a freshman animal science student who wants to be a veterinarian. This student came from an urban high school with no agriculture background, and was asking such questions as: "What is a ewe lamb? How can you tell a sheep from a goat?" My immediate thought was that it is too bad this student did not have the advantage of taking vocational agriculture in high school. He would have had much less to learn at this point.

But, I wonder if this is really true today, particularly in urban high school agriculture programs. Is it in these programs where the mission of vocational education in agriculture and its relationship to SOE programs can most easily be misunderstood, thwarted and, in some cases, simply ignored.

Before you jump to the conclusion that this author probably believes that real agricultural education occurs only in rural areas or on the family farm, let me assure you that everywhere you wear boots, cowboy hats, and chew tobacco, I don't. Meaningful education in vocational agriculture occurs when we keep a clear eye on what our task is, both in an historical sense and in the present day.

The Task of Vocational Agriculture

Our task really has not changed much. It is to provide vocational instruction; that is, to learn how to do things, not just learn about things in agricultural subject areas so that students may obtain gainful employment in or pursue further study of agriculture. Supervised occupational education programs are those which are ideally designed to augment classroom instruction in agriculture in order to provide the invaluable personal experience and involvement in agriculture which does not occur in the classroom setting.

SOE in Urban Areas

Agricultural supervised occupational experience programs may be easier to initiate and conduct in a rural setting than in an urban setting. Graff has also been very successful in the soils and land judging contests on the district, state, and national levels.

We find within many urban vocational agriculture programs excellent vocational SOE programs which involve the production of fish, birds, other small laboratory animals, purebred dogs and cats, and, yes, even monkeys. I know this to be so as I have seen them, discussed them with students and teachers, and have witnessed their inclusion in vocational agriculture record books submitted as a part of the State Farmer Application process.

Some of these projects are very large in scope. Students are learning skills and have excellent records, are making good profit and many seemingly lead to employment opportunities for students. These supervised occupational experiences are for obvious reasons. Students who live and attend school in high-rises have less chance of raising animals than those in rural areas, and often have less opportunity to observe or feed the birds and other small laboratory animals. However, because of the urban location, there are many opportunities for urban students to participate in supervised occupational experience programs.

SOE in Urban Programs - Teachers Can Make It Happen

While the Vocational Education Act of 1963 provided support for expanded programs of vocational agriculture, it presented tremendous new challenges to agricultural educators as they sought to maintain the vitality and worth of SOE programs. As new programs in off-farm occupational areas became established, teachers soon realized that the traditional SOE ownership programs were not enough.

SOE Adolescence

Although twenty years have come and gone since SOE programs began to take on a new look, agricultural educators are still not fully satisfied with the quality of SOE programs in these expanded programs, many of which are located in urban areas. However, when one considers the fact that traditional SOE ownership programs have been in place over 50 years, SOE programs in off-farm programs are relatively new. In fact, SOE programs in urban programs now appear to be in their teenage years - a period when they are headed and needing clear direction from the parents of the profession. But, with a firm commitment to high quality SOE programs from teachers, SOE programs can serve as a viable component of urban programs today and in the future.

Problems and Opportunities

The very nature of urban programs, the program structure, subject matter, sociological environment, and student backgrounds, dictates an innovative approach to planning and developing SOE programs with students. Factors such as limited home involvement, little or no travel support, program duration (one or two years), and lack of student identification with the FFA and agriculture all affect the teacher's ability to make the SOE phase of their urban program successful. When SOE programs are tailored to better suit the nature of the urban program, success can be achieved.

At first glance, there appear to be very limited opportunities for students to develop good SOE programs in urban programs. Certainiy, ownership programs are not a possibleiy, or are they? If the agriculture program is closeiy aligned with the agricultural focus and needs of the community, the opportunities for SOE programs in urban programs may exceed those in rural programs.

In the Barrington High School horticulture program, as well as in the urban Chicago area, students are involved in a variety of SOE programs, including ownership programs. These urban entrepreneurs are producing horticultural plants, greenhouse construction and management, fruit production, sales, and services. Largest of the school facilities in this matter can parallel the home ownership programs in rural programs.

SOE placement opportunities are also numerous in urban programs. Over the years, students at Barrington High School have gained working experience in landscaping, greenhouse construction and management, fruit production, sales, and many other areas, in addition, cooperative

THEME

By EB OBERHOLLER and CARL REID

(Issued to: Mr. Oberholler is a Vocational Education Teacher at Barrington High School, Barrington, Illinois 60010.)

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education programs can provide invaluable experience for students enrolled in urban programs.

Improvement projects and supplementary skills are also significant elements of SOEs programs in urban programs.

As a planner, the teacher decides many things about the SOE program that will play an important part in its overall success. The SOE program should be positive and as close as possible to fail-safe, especially for the beginning student. To accomplish this, the time frame on each segment of the program should be small, perhaps quarterly, rather than yearly.

Plans for the program may begin in the first weeks of instruction, and a proposal should be due in two or three weeks. Good planning is part of a good program. After planning, students should write a proposal that tells the instructor clearly what they would like to do, how they intend to do it, what it will cost, and who will pay the expenses. The instructor will have an opportunity to review these proposals before projects are begun to give students suggestions on how their project plans may be improved or how potential problems may be solved. SOE program records should also be planned at this time.

As a facilitator, the teacher helps students recognize what they would like to accomplish and how. If students are unable to identify a SOE project, particular projects should not be assigned. Instead, several ideas should be presented to students for their consideration. SOE projects are more likely to be successful if they are chosen by the students. Posts of past projects can illustrate good SOE programs conducted by previous students. Pictures, slides or taped interviews can give them some feel for what a project might be accomplished.

The teacher may also need to place students in contact with a person or business in order to plan their SOE project. If SOE programs are related to students’ interests, placement may begin at the planning stage. Assistance in planning should come from the teacher and the work supervisor. All communities, especially in areas of study, have experts ready to lend a hand. Local businesses, landowners, local government officials, and country clubs, are examples of such people. Teachers can use these experts to highlight areas of need in their community. Teachers can also use this information to help students understand the need for the SOE project.

Another responsibility of the teacher is to provide encouragement and support. When students encounter problems with their SOE programs, they need to feel free to share those with the teacher. Strategies that encourage this sharing include a weekly summary of progress on the project, informal discussions with students on a regular basis, or discussing problems encountered by former students with their SOE programs and how they were resolved.

The teacher as an evaluator is also a familiar role. A thorough evaluation gives students some feedback for planning an expanded SOE program the following year. Involving students in the evaluation process should be part of the total SOE experience. At Barrington High School, students in horticulture participate in their SOE program evaluation by describing what they learned, explaining how they would approach the same project differently a second time, and indicating their plans for SOE programs expansion in the coming year. If others played a role in the SOE program, then they, too, should be a part of the evaluation. Having parents not only approve the program, but also participate in the evaluation process, is good for the overall school public relations program and for the student and his/her parents.

SOE program evaluation can be simple or complex. For example, in evaluating improvement projects perhaps only three questions should be asked: How did it go? What was good and/or bad? What would you do different next time and why? Pictures are easily used in evaluation of projects that instruction could not reach, unless they were on the site at a specific time. Pictures of the site before the work was done, during the work (preferably with the student in foreground), and afterwards, or at the time the work is visible can help in describing the project. Evaluation is as good as an on-site teacher evaluation. A library of good, completed SOE programs with evaluation comments can be very helpful to beginning students as they plan and identify their SOE programs.

The teacher as a diagnostician is a professional at work — analyzing the needs, strengths, and weaknesses of particular students. After the evaluation process is completed, several questions should be addressed for planning future SOE programs. Should the student complete another similar project to gain confidence or increase skill levels? Should this project be expanded to include a new area? Does the student have increased or changed interests? Should they be pursued? How does the future SOE program ideas and the past SOE program fit together? Has the student’s interest waned? Might another area be better for the next SOE program? What are the student’s career goals? What skills will be needed to meet these goals? Are there techniques in the field that should be understood and mastered through SOE programs?

Summary

Perhaps in no other phase of the vocational agriculture program do teachers experience greater excitement about the potential of a student than in the planning phase. However, in working with SOE programs, teachers must identify their program standards or expectations and make these clearly known to the students.

Teachers should interact with one another to obtain ideas and develop their SOE program expectations. The teacher that carries out the five functions of planning, facilitating, supporting, evaluating, and diagnosing will make the SOE program as meaningful as possible.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor:

Your editorial in the February 1984 issue of The Agricultural Education Magazine must not have been read by those of us in the profession. You suggested that the expectation of a supervised occupational experience program (SOEP) was unreasonable and unfair for many vocational agriculture students. You based this conclusion on the facts indicating a decline in the quantity and quality of SOEPs, and the enrollment of many students with career objectives in areas other than agriculture.

SOEPs serve many purposes, only one of which is growth into an agricultural occupation. Supervised occupational practice has been shown to be related to more learning (greater achievement) by students. Students develop personally in the areas of responsibility, financial independence, managerial ability, work habits, cooperation, self-confidence, self-concept, initiative, and creativity. They develop interests, participate in financial planning, gain work experience, and develop special areas of expertise. Teachers can improve instruction by using SOEP programs of students as interest approaches, as sources of problems for study, and as applications of classroom instruction. It is obvious that SOEP programs are needed in vocational agriculture for all students. The justification for SOEP programs need not include much more than whether or not the student intends to pursue an agricultural career.

The challenge to the profession is to assist teachers and students in developing meaningful SOEPs especially for non-farm students. Perhaps SOEPs must remain flexible in many ways in the future, but supervised practice must remain an integral and important part of education in agriculture for all students.

Cordially,

J. David McCracken, Professor
Department of Agricultural Education
The Ohio State University
Theme

SOE: Its Importance In Urban Areas

Agricultural education in urban settings has been in existence for a long time, but only in the last twenty or so years has the concept of agricultural education in urban areas begun to grow a growing acceptance. Many agricultural educators felt that urban agricultural education was not feasible because of the need to give students the kind of supervised occupational experience that was feasible in rural settings.

An article appeared in the National FFA Convention in 1969 involving young women from a southwestern state in the U.S. to which two educational programs were being conducted by the young ladies. The young ladies pointed out that their experience in florist work was giving them marketable skills in marketing and merchandising. The skills were similar to the ones the young men were learning in their florist work.

One major point is that agriculture is not true of urban areas in which urban areas then one is either doing his/her eyes or is unable to accept the fact that agriculture is more than feedlots and thousands of acres of grain.

Urban vocational agriculture is here to stay. Our cities are not going to disappear. To the contrary, as our population grows, our cities will continue to expand and the need for urban agricultural products will continue to increase. Urban agricultural education will have to expand to meet the needs of a growing urban populace. Urban supervised occupational experience programs will become more and more important as these cities grow.

Ownership

Urban vocational agriculture programs can and do use supervised occupational experience programs as a means of developing agricultural competencies. There are many programs in cities, such as the Urban Ag programs in the large cities, supermarkets, wholesale houses, garden centers, florists, florists, hospitals, and many other places. Urban programs help students develop competencies that duplicate activities that will be found in industries in the urban areas.

Ownership in urban supervised occupational experience programs is not used to a large extent. There are many reasons for this. One example is discouraging ownership might be that one acre of prime land in the central part of an urban area could cost up to a quarter of a million dollars. There are, however, a few students who do own their own businesses, usually in the agricultural service and sales. Many students graduate from high school with their own landscape maintenance business, tree business, florist business or small engine repair business. These students have been trained in the vocational agriculture classroom, gained experience through placement and started their own businesses. The more prevalent form of entry into agricultural industry is through placement with a larger employer in the urban area.

Placement

The Handbook On Supervised Occupational Experience

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lists several examples of placement programs but tends to overlook those programs that would have direct application to urban areas. An examination of a few examples might be worthwhile.

In production agriculture, there are opportunities for students to gain occupational experiences in the production of and care of animals for use in research and/or medical instruction. One major city has one hospital where more than 50,000 square feet of animal care facilities housing many types of animals, from mice to horses, used in medical research are kept. Research facilities such as these need large numbers of mice, rats, rabbits, dogs and other animals for their work. People are needed to raise and care for the thousands of animals produced annually for research and medical instruction.

Other animal care facilities in urban areas are pet shops, zoos, and societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals. All these businesses can use people who have a good working knowledge of agricultural principles.

An additional area in production agriculture is greenhouse crops. Crops such as pot plants, cut flowers, tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce and watercress are often grown in urban areas. Since qualified help is always needed, these greenhouses often provide an excellent source for student placement.

In agricultural sales and services, students may find employment in wholesale markets selling items such as flowers and floral supplies, or fruits and vegetables. As many as fifteen million people may pass through the Quincy Market area of Boston one year. Persons passing through this market have available for purchase an extremely wide variety of items from prime cuts of beef to salad to cut flowers to seafood. The above mentioned items are all agricultural in nature. Because of the highly competitive nature of this market, there is demand for persons knowledgeable in their subject matter.

In agricultural mechanics, there is a great demand for persons who can both sell and repair small engine equipment. Lawnmowers, chain saws, and sprayers, as well as many other pieces of equipment, are used by home owners in beautifying their homes.

In agricultural processing, there are thousands of jobs. Many of the jobs involve the packaging of meats and produce and then attractively displaying these commodities.

However, meatcutters, and others who might process the agricultural product prior to sale are also needed. One area not often thought of is the inspection of perishable crops. Every railroad car or truck load of perishable material shipped into an urban area for sale must be inspected to see that it is fit for human consumption.

In natural resources, there are many opportunities. Previously mentioned were parks and recreational sites. Other possible sites for student placement might be abutters and municipal golf courses.

In horticulture, there are the areas of floral businesses, landscaping and nurseries. One should not overlook municipal and private display gardens. Many cities employ trained horticulturists to maintain horticulture displays around the city. Municipal and private cemeteries also require people with horticulture knowledge.

In forestry, many opportunities for placement are provided by parks. Power companies are concerned with trees as they relate to power lines. Some cities have departments which employ trained persons to plant and care for the shade trees that line the urban streets.

Other agricultural areas that might be used for placement sites for urban students are environmental departments that deal with water or air quality. Many industries employ people to test the water put back into rivers after manufacturing. Industries also employ people to ensure that clean air is being returned to the atmosphere after the manufacturing process is completed.

The previous lists are not exhaustive, but do include some suggestions where successful placement activities have been carried out. For teachers who use a little imagination, the opportunities for SOE placement in urban areas are endless.

Changing Attitudes

McCormick (1962), in his opening address delivered at the National SOE Workshop held in Washington, D.C., stated, "Today's problems demand knowledge which influence their attitudes, drives, habits, and goals. Most students are learning to make money, securing a job, doing something worthwhile, satisfying personal needs, seeking economic independence, developing self-con..."
SOE: Its Importance in Urban Areas

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...fidence, obtaining job satisfaction, assuming responsibility and developing self-esteem.

It is interesting to note that he did not say most rural students or most urban students but most students. Urban or rural, these students have the same concerns and needs. They all desire the same chance to make a career in a chosen profession and many, many of them should and will want to make their career in an agricultural one.

In order to make urban programs successful, the agricultural educator needs to be able to sell administrators on the year-round nature of the agricultural industry. Most rural school administrators know the importance of a year-round vocational agriculture program. Urban administrators, on the other hand, do not see the need for a year-round program because they do not understand that agricultural commodities are being produced and bought and sold in their city every day, year-round. Consequently, urban administrators need to be exposed to the year-round concept by teachers, parents and industry representatives preparing for selected agricultural occupations. If students enrolled in specialized vocational agriculture classes, such as horticulture, are needed to acquire these occupational competencies, they must have an opportunity to actively engage in skill development tasks. The in-school vocational agricultural period is one of ways in which time is provided for practicing and learning horticultural skills.

As teachers, we know that the rates and levels of skill learning vary considerably among our students. Differences in motivation, academic ability, and career goals are only the most obvious variations in the amount of time students are willing to spend practicing a learning task. Although equal amounts of time may be allocated for the practice of a specific skill, equal amounts of learning do not necessarily occur. Are there certain variables that affect the amount of time students are actively engaged in learning tasks?

Mississippi Study

A study was recently conducted in Mississippi to answer this question. Five horticulture classes at four different vocational centers participated in the study. Each vocational center had at least one, 320 square foot fiberglass greenhouse. Land laboratories at the school ranged from one-tenth of an acre to 4 acres. One of the centers had a lair house.

Four male vocational instructors took part in the study. They ranged in age from 36 years to 53 years. The age of the students varied from one year to 25 years. A total of 47 students were enrolled in the horticulture skills course. Thirty-one of the students were black and 16 were white; twenty-four were male and 23 were female. Seventy-five percent of the students had an "A" or "B" grade average in horticulture. Only one student, upon graduation from high school, planned for a career in the horticulture industry.

Four observational visits per horticultural subject were conducted during the second semester of the 1983 school year. The observer stayed in the class during the entire time scheduled for horticulture, but only recorded observations during laboratory instructional time. To obtain a representative sample of student behavior, the observer looked at each student just long enough to decide what he or she was doing, marked the appropriate symbol on an observation form, and repeated the process for each student enrolled in the horticulture class. What was learned from this systematic observation of student behavior during an in-school laboratory period?

Results

Students were asked to be practicing horticultural learning tasks for an average of 71 percent of the total observational time. Thirty-one different learning tasks were performed during the visits including weeding hanging baskets, taking crop inventories, transplanting seedlings, and mixing growing media. Ninety-five percent of the tasks were classified as requiring low-level cognitive abilities and 84 percent of the tasks involved basic body movements.

Students were off task for an average of 29 percent of the observational time. Standing idle was the most frequent reason for coding student behavior as off task, accounting for 13 percent of the observational time. Other off-task behavior included wandering around leaving the laboratory area, and horseplay.

Most students were actively engaged in learning tasks more frequently than female pupils. The average on-task score was 81 percent for males and 60 percent for females. Scholastic achievement, attitude towards school, and career goal were not found to be related to student on-task behavior. What implications can we draw from this information?

Recommendations

Both male and female students need to be involved in all aspects of laboratory instruction. Learner objectives and skills to be practiced should be planned according to the gender of students enrolled in the vocational class. Planning a variety of academic activities may help to involve students in learning tasks that require both high- and low-level cognitive abilities. Waiting on customers and trouble shooting pest problems are two activities that most frequently require evaluation and synthesis on part of the students.

Individual differences in academic ability, career goals, or attitude do not necessarily mean corresponding differences in the amount of time students are willing to spend practicing a task. Other variables need to be identified and investigated that can help explain some of the differences in student on-task behavior. Perhaps teacher supervision and laboratory management practices have a greater impact on student on-task behavior.

Although in this particular study, students were on task 71 percent of the time. Achieving high on-task-levels is a hollow achievement if no attention is paid to what students are actually learning. Until, as teachers, we have some knowledge about the type of skills being practiced during specific in-school periods, time becomes an empty concept.

We need to be doing more than just keeping students busy during a specific class period. Providing students the opportunity to practice meaningful, job-related tasks during laboratory time is a major challenge and responsibility for all vocational agriculture instructors.
1983 NVATA Awards

The NVATA Agriculture Teacher Recognition Award is sponsored by the Pfizer Agricultural Division and presented to the vocational agriculture teachers who served as advisors to the winners of the National FFA Agricultural Proficiency Awards in Poultry, Beef, Diversified Livestock, Dairy, and Swine Production. (Left to Right) Brian Kosel, Owatonna, Minnesota (Dairy Production Award); Tom Beals, Territory Sales Representative, Pfizer Agricultural Division, Vista, California; Rex Mayfield, Tuscumbia, Alabama accepted the Poultry Production Award for Andrew McCay, Danville, Alabama; Bill J. Stewart, Douglas, Wyoming (Diversified Livestock Production Award); Jonathan Pierce, Athens, Tennessee accepted the Swine Production Award for Johnnie W. Meggs, Lexington, Tennessee; and Duane A. Van Sickle, Cardington, Ohio (Beef Production Award).

The NVATA sponsors an "Ideas Unlimited Contest" annually to give classroom teachers an opportunity to share ideas. Puritan National sponsored the plaques. Pictured are the persons who accepted the awards on behalf of the state associations: (Left to Right) Ted Johnson, President-Elect, North Dakota Association, West Fargo, North Dakota; Lloyd Doster, President, California Association (National Winner), Little Rock, California; Mark E. Stunkard, Oklahoma Association, Fairland, Oklahoma; Cy Vernon, President, North Carolina Association, Yanceyville, North Carolina; Kenny Graham, President-Elect, Missouri Association, Farnamont, Missouri; and F.H. Stillwagen, Pennsylvania Association, Allentown, Pennsylvania.

The NVATA Outstanding Service and Cooperation Award was presented to the American Association of Vocational Instructional Materials (AAVIM) Athens, Georgia. AAVIM has given strong, continuous support to vocational agriculture. Dale Butcher (right), NVATA National President, presented the award to Harold Parady (left), Executive Director, AAVIM, during the awards program.

Persons who have made outstanding contributions to the NVATA and the vocational program in agricultural education are awarded "Honorary Life Membership." Dale Butcher (right), NVATA National President, presented the award to Floyd McCormick (left), Professor, Agricultural Education, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona.