THEME: How Others Perceive Us
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EDITOR'S PAGE
Through the Eyes of Others

Everyday we work with a program that we understand very well, enjoy and appreciate. We are sometimes a lured when other groups of people do not comprehend or possibly appreciate the program or our efforts with the same level of enthusiasm. What image do we have with those outside the profession? How do they perceive our program?

This question constitutes the theme for this issue. The theme attempts to encourage those in the profession to hypothetically step apart from their current role and examine what is the nature of our program. The authors of the articles present their perceptions. Several publics we should consider include students, the general public, agri-industry, administrators, teacher peers, and legislators. When we possess positive attitudes, we perceive others’ perceptions of our audiences are definitely of interest, some of the detrimental aspects may aid us in identifying those areas in need of improvement.

Students

Vocational agriculture is a part of the total vocational education system and, hence, suffers from some of the inherent negative stereotypes. Students in the public school systems, in general, often perceive the course of study in agriculture as being less rigorous than other subjects.

Vocational agriculture students often are exposed to comments from their peers that elude to their being enrolled in a easy course. Students in our courses are often stumped as the less academically capable. Some academically capable students, who would otherwise be interested in vocational agriculture, avoid the area because they do not wish to be stumped in that mold.

Many students perceive our program to be dominated by laborious activities. "Are you taking shop? "Are you enrolling in FFA?" These questions highlight the lack of understanding of the program that exists.

General Public

"Vocational education is for the other person’s child.” People have consistently supported the concept of vocational education but really do not want their child enrolled.

Vocational agriculture is often faced with this problem. In some cases, the student that proposed to study agriculture in college does not enroll in vocational agriculture because of the image of the program, that of their parents or guidance counselors. As Kurt notes in Alaska, a poor concept of the overall importance of vocational agriculture is an obstacle we must strive to overcome.

Agri-Industry

One of the most frequently voiced perceptions by this group is that our instruction is at a level that is too elementary. Some prospective employers wish for an emphasis on human relations skills while others advocate the technical. No clear consensus seems evident.

The profession must assure that students are competent in the needed areas. Supervisors and teacher educators must take a holistic approach. Teachers must adapt curricula to the local level. Is your curriculum relevant? When was the last time it was reviewed? We will be reviewed as current when we truly revise outdated curricula.

Administrators

Most administrators see teachers of vocational agriculture as busy, but not more so than other teachers in the system. They envy, or jealously, our base of contacts and influence in the community. Our programs are often perceived as burdened by red tape and regulations. The per student cost of the programs come under close scrutiny. We are often seen as “prima donnas” excepting exceptions to usual policies and procedures.

Peers

Other teachers also often perceive us students as the less talented and vocational content as less rigorous. As Jim Howard notes, the image we present to our peers is not always as good as it might be.

The result of these negative impressions, whether they be upon fellow teachers in the local system or upon other teachers of vocational agriculture, has a permanent and often irreplaceable effect upon those with whom we work. Coupling these effects with the common requests for consideration for our students to be excused for a special event, the impression of expecting too much. We can do much to improve how we present ourselves to exhibit a better appearance and cooperative attitude.

Legislators

Our image with legislators is best characterized as politically naive. Legislators are much more likely to recognize the term FFA advisor than teacher of vocational agriculture. Since most legislators come from and represent urban areas, they often perceive that the industry for which we are training is diminishing. Agricultural surpluses indicate that the industry is already over producing; thus, education and trained workers are not needed.

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Through the Eyes of Others

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The profession is capable of energizing a limited pressure group. This goal is, in fact, not politically significant. The concern expressed is often to maintain the status quo.

Conclusion

We in agricultural education, have often ignored how others perceive us. We have relied upon the overall exigency of our program to sustain us. We can no longer afford this luxury. If we are to maintain viable programs, we must begin to positively affect all of our audiences.

How Others Perceive Us

In speaking to his fellow scientists Albert Einstein is reported to have once said, "It is a man's destiny that his destiny must always be the chief interest of all technical efforts. Never forget it among our diagrams and equations.

To make this statement applicable to agricultural education, we might paraphrase it to say: The concern for people and their destiny must always be the chief interest of all those in agriculture. Never forget it among your day to day problems that lose their importance in the larger picture of making a difference.

Our concern for people has always been an important plus for agricultural education. The same need of helping people remains an important part of agricultural education and is the primary reason why people make agricultural education their career.

Some Groups of Others

While being of service and helping others is basic to agricultural education, the quantity and quality of service is only the first step. Of almost equal importance is how other people see agricultural education. Are they impressed? Do they understand the program? Has agricultural education made a difference in their lives? Have we had direct contact with people in the program? Would they support vocational agriculture?

And these and other questions need to be asked often of several groups if the vocational agriculture program is to prosper and to provide the help needed by agriculture and the public. Who are these others with whom the agricultural education program should be concerned? The following groups should understand, appreciate and have a good perception of vocational agriculture.

Students of Agriculture

In a complete program of vocational agriculture, there are three types of students. Typically, these are the high school students, young farmers and adult class students. It is imperative that these people be interested in and enthusiastic about the program and the value they are receiving from the program. The local vocational agricultural department cannot long endure if those directly involved do not have positive feelings.

Other School Students

The strength and value of a vocational agriculture department can often be determined by talking with other students in the school. Is the FFA an important organization in the school? Does the blue jacket have valued meaning? Is the vocational agriculture teacher considered important? Are the students, agricultural students in the school?

In most high schools, the students have a good perception of the worth of each program and the students in that program. If the agricultural program is to grow and develop, it must be respected and liked by the in-school students. Student perceptions can change and do make a difference. We must recognize this and work to project a good image.

School Personnel

How the school administrators and teachers see the local vocational agriculture department can have tremendous impact on the success and future of the program. Enrollment and budgets are often determined entirely by persons other than the vocational agriculture teacher. If the department is viewed as being strong and having a positive influence, added support is forthcoming.

Vocal and cooperative support results when other teachers in the school like what they see in the agricultural program. If the agricultural students perform well in other classes, the teachers are more likely to be impressed and supportive. Particularly important is the perception that the agricultural teacher(s) have of their own department. If they are positive in their outlook, like their work and students and believe they are doing some good, the department will be stronger. As the teachers go, so goes the agricultural program. How true, how true?

Adults in the Community

In addition to the young farmers and adults directly involved with the local vocational agriculture department, there are at least two other groups with whom we should be concerned. They are the adults directly involved in agriculture and the general public. Because of their occupational interests, it is very important for the first group to have positive feelings about the department or this may mean their assistance in one of the departmental or FFA projects or activities.

The general public needs to be kept informed about vocational agriculture, the program and the activities and accomplishments of the students. This may best be done through a strong public relations effort concerning the agency, school program, the FFA and the young and adult farmer programs. Positive public relations result in a positive image which results in positive perceptions on the part of others.

Advisory Committee Members

The importance of the local advisory committee to the future of the vocational agriculture department cannot be over emphasized. The committee provides direct support for and to the department. How it perceives the department usually goes a long way in guaranteeing the success of the department.

Local Government Officials

In addition to the local school administrators and the board members, it is very important for the local officials to have a good perception about the vocational agriculture department. Political decisions are made that may directly or indirectly affect the agricultural department. The teachers of agriculture should know these people, elicit their support and help them be aware of and understand the agricultural program.

Conclusion

Other groups could be listed. Hopefully, these will suffice to make the point that how others perceive us is important. Teachers, students, advisory committee members, school authorities and others must be concerned about and build a strong program and project a positive image. Departmental programs, enrollment and activity support are all affected by how others see us.

The Cover

Teachers of agricultural agriculture often perceive that they are inside the proverbial fish bowl under the watchful eye of scrutinizing observers. (Photograph courtesy of Boyd Hastings, Vocational Agriculture Instructor, Montgomery County Joint Vocational School, Clayton, Ohio 43114.)

The advisory committee must be kept informed about the strengths and weaknesses of the program. The members need to be worked with individually and as a group to continually strengthen the program. As the teachers of agriculture work with their students, administrators and others, they will want to keep the committee informed about progress being made and help needed.

The advisory committee is an important interface group between the vocational agriculture department and the community. It must be used effectively.

A Local Director's View

Many programs in agricultural education have not kept pace in quality offerings. This will no longer suffice. Students are becoming more interested in program selection. They are more critical of program decisions that will provide effective instruction in meeting needs of the job market.

Secondly, I believe that agricultural education should continue to emphasize leadership development through the FFA organization. The FFA has developed a strong reputation because of the excellent leadership that has been developed through the activities which have been an integral part of the agricultural education curriculum.

Leadership development should be provided for all students not just selected individuals. I see a decreased em-
A Local Director's View

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A continued emphasis on leadership development is necessary.

Many of the skills needed for job entry level in agricultural careers will be taught in the laboratories of a department of agricultural education, and that school administrators endeavor to make such provisions for the supervision in the school schedule.

Developing extended contract time should be carefully planned with school administrators. It is also, essential that such plans be executed in a professional and business-like manner. Accountability for the use of resources is important. Expressions such as "I need the time off during the summer months" or "what is there for me to do since the students are out-of-school" should not be a part of the teacher's working vocabulary.

There is much that a teacher should be doing. In fact, there is more to do than there is time. Consequently, much planning is needed to accomplish those tasks given the higher priorities. Developing a more positive professional attitude on the part of teachers in agricultural education becomes a necessity.

What About the Future?

About all we really know about the future in agricultural education is that there will be a change. There are, however, certain current trends from which several conclusions about the future in agricultural education can be drawn.

First, I see a trend toward more of the skills needed in the agricultural careers being taught within the laboratories. Curriculum in agricultural education becomes competency based, the skills that are job relevant in the agricultural machinery careers may be taught within the laboratory of the school.

From the experiences that we have gained in our situation here in Appomattox, I know that the skills necessary for job entry level in careers in agricultural machinery service are reasonable expectations in the instructional program. As the higher technology develops with computer applications, more of the skills needed for job entry levels in the agricultural careers should and ought to be taught in the school laboratories.

Since more of the skills will be taught at the school, there will be a lesser need for supervised occupational experience programs. This does not contradict my earlier statements about the supervised occupational experience program, but indicates a shift in where such supervised practices will take place.

I believe we will see an increasing need for land laboritories to provide the opportunities to develop competencies needed in areas of animal husbandry: crop production; soil, air, water conservation and forestry. A decrease in the number of students from farms or suitable sites for occupational experiences will create a demand for instructional sites on school grounds.

These situations will demand competent instructors who must show evidence of being capable of delivering a product as well as being in a position to provide related instruction. To bring about some of these facilities will call for some creative and innovative teachers and administrators. However, if agricultural education is to survive the challenges of an ever expanding compulsory or required courses for high school graduation, high expectations for quality programs must rate a top priority.

Secondly, I see the need for greater articulation within the secondary and postsecondary programs in the agricultural business offerings. One level of education can no longer be expected to provide all of the training needed. Decision makers at both the secondary and postsecondary levels need to formulate policies and procedures for such articulation.

The recent advent of competency based education across our nation will become the foundation for making the most effective use of both human and material resources. Articulation models have been developed for the accomplishment of this task. Many of these existing models may be adopted with a few minor changes to meet local situations.

Thirdly, I believe that more of what is being taught in vocational agriculture programs should be adapted to shorter periods of time such as one semester courses. Many more students would be able to benefit from such instructions if courses shorter than the traditional ones were offered. I would expand this to other vocational courses, also. For instance, a one semester course in leadership development would attract students from all disciplines.

Agricultural students would also benefit from a one semester course in business communications which may be taught through the business education department of a high school. Such a change will require close coordination at the state and local levels. Leadership is needed from departments of education at the state level for the implementation of such changes.

Lastly, a higher quality of preservice training for agricultural education. This will present a challenge to instructors of agricultural education to develop quality programs.

The preservice training should have a viable supervised student teaching element. All that one needs to teach agricultural education will not be learned in four years, but a closely coordinated program between the university and the local school system will enhance the preparation.

There is much to be said about what goes into preparing a preservice program, but unless there is ample supervision from the teacher training institution much will be lost. I would strongly urge that more resources be put into the student teaching preparation for future excellence in agricultural education.

1984 Themes

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How would a person locate the vocational agriculture building when coming into a rural community? On the first day of teacher orientation in the fall, how would you recognize the vocational agriculture instructor? How does a student distinguish between the vocational agriculture instructor and the foreign language teacher? How does the spouse and family of a vocational agriculture instructor get the attention of that teacher when over 60 students are making demands on the teacher's time plus time spent being given to adults, young farmers, and the community.

All of these questions which deal with how others perceive us as vocational agriculture instructors within our communities. Many people are looking at the vocational agriculture instructor from different directions and with different needs and intentions. Our students and parents see us as an advisor and teacher. Other educators are viewing us in our approach to the philosophy of education, our techniques and discipline.

Agriculturalists are looking to us for our technical knowledge and the ability to relay that knowledge to others. The community is looking to us to provide leadership in the church, civic clubs, and community affairs.

And our families are looking to us to provide financial support, love, and attention. We, the vocational agriculture instructors, must realize the different perspectives from which others view our work; and we must strive to make their ideas of agricultural education and ourselves positive and exemplary.

Housekeeping

No matter what else is done and said, what others think of the vocational agriculture instructor and the department is how they look. That first viewed impression is lasting. The questions addressed in the opening paragraph: how do you find the vocational agriculture building and how do you recognize the vocational agriculture teacher are often negative perceptions others have.

Too often, the vocational agriculture building in a community can be located by finding the metal scrap, engines and machines in disrepair, all visible from the street. What appears to the teacher as parts for a weapon, a partially finished project, and a good buy on metal, appears to others as junk.

For agricultural education to have a positive image in the future, departments must be cleaned up, appearances must look progressive, professional, and as a safe and desirable place for learning.

The inside of the buildings, even though not seen by nearly so many, have as much importance as the outward appearance. With teaching some classes in laboratory, some in a greenhouse, and some in the classroom; housekeeping takes on a whole new meaning as compared to teaching a language class.

Appearance does not end with cleanliness and a picture postcard view, it also goes to the bookshelves where obsolete books are stored, to the tool panels where poorly fitted and sharpened tools are housed, and to the storeroom where improper containers store solvents and flammables.

The appearance of the vocational agriculture building from the street is the first perception that anyone has of the department and the teacher. It is the only perception that some ever have.
Looking Up To Vocational Agriculture

What are you doing, Billy? I asked the youngest eating lunch in the Warren Elementary School cafeteria.

"Tasting lunch?" replied Billy, grinning from ear to ear.

"And where did all this good food come from?" I continued.

"From the farm!" chorused Billy and several of his buddies who were eager to get into the conversation.

"Hey! I know you. I saw you out at Warren's farm when we went to the Ag Center," called a freckled-faced girl down the table.

"That's right. Tell me, what is your name?"

"Marcia Lou Niegam."

"Tell me Marcia, where did your roast beef sandwich come from?"

"It came from a cow and some wheat."

"Excellent . . . and your milk?" I continued.

"From cows! Her friend across the table barely beat her out as they answered nearly in unison.

"Do you know what kind of cow?" I asked.

"Black and white dairy cows. I think they're called whole steins."

No more of that McDonald's, the milkman or the grocery store stuff! Two thousand and first and fourth graders in Bowl, Warren Central in Kentucky, I know where their food comes from! They have learned about agriculture and vocational agriculture at the grass-roots level. And they learned it well thanks to visits from Warren Central and Warren East FFA Chapters and Western Kentucky University's FFA. In their agriculture classes, they have been taught the basics of food production by Future Farmers in their classrooms. They have experienced agricultural production at Western Kentucky University's farm.

The idea for the experiment was in 1981 when the Chairman of Western Kentucky University's Agriculture Department, Dr. L.D. Brown, asked for help in coordinating the many requests from schools wanting to visit Western's farm. He wanted to facilitate these requests, yet the classes did not always want to come to the most convenient time.

It was suggested that all schools in the area come to the farm on a given date, that a special program be instituted for them, and that the National FFA's 'Food for America' program be used in conjunction with visits to the school's farm. The FFA Alumni agreed to coordinate the event.

Planning

The Alumni began by contacting the Warren Central and Warren East FFA Chapters. They agreed to organize and teach the in-school phase of the program in the elementary schools that fed into each of their respective schools as well as a share of the Bowling Green city schools. Bowling Green schools do not offer vocational agriculture. Back on campus, the Alumni set up committees for coordination with Warren Central FFA, Warren East FFA, public information services, commercial sponsors, and with persons serving as tour guides, conducting hayrides and coordinating traffic flow.

Group meetings were used to get people acquainted and familiar with the program. Purposes and suggested procedures were presented at principal's meetings of both the city and county school systems. The principals went back to their respective schools to work with the first and fourth grades to see which ones would want to participate.

The plan was for a one hour, in-class presentation by a team of local Future Farmers, followed by a two-to-three hour field trip to the University farm. The teachers had the option of participation in either both or phases of the program.

Bus transportation was to be furnished by the school districts. In most cases, either the principal or one of the teachers from the school called the coordinator to express their interest and to select the best time to arrive at the farm for their tour.

Follow-up telephone calls were made to check those schools not responding on schedule. All but one school participated in one or both phases at least one of the two years the program has been presented. Kindergarten classes also will be included to be permitted to come on the tour portion of the program.

Future Farmer teams from Warren Central and Warren East Chapters met on campus with the FFA Alumni for program orientation. They learned what would be presented at the farm and opportunities for their in-class presentations. Selected exercises from each of the "Food for America" activity books were duplicated by Western's Agriculture Department; although in most cases, the FFA chapters selected and duplicated their own materials.

Chamber of Commerce representatives helped promote the program.

Promoting vocational agriculture and the FFA is slowly accomplished by members of the FFA. FFA Week is commenced with the signing of a local proclamation by the mayor.
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told of the cost of an implement, cost to fill the fuel tank, or expenditures for the enormous tires on the implements.
Animal science worked with the animal exhibits which have included a sow and baby pigs, chickens, dairy goats, sheep, beef cattle, a duck slide and horses. Dairy helped animal science by contributing dairy cows which the youngsters enjoyed trying to hand-milk. Dairy also arranged with Dairyman, Inc. to have a truckload of free milk samples for the students.
Horticulture has a production greenhouse adjacent to the Expo Center which provided a tour stop. Agronomy prepared crop displays along with exhibits of related products processed from those crops. Education coordinated showing of the movie "Food From Farm To You" and coordinating the displays for all the students.
Agricultural Economics provided information about the farm for the hayrides and this year added a lively group participation microcomputer demonstration in the sales area. Students tried to guess the food item the microphone was thinking about through the "Raise the Flags" game. They learned that microcomputers are used on farms and throughout agriculture.
Imagine six hundred guests arriving at your front door within a fifteen minute time period. Action springs to life at Western's Agriculture Exhibition Center about 4:45 a.m. on the days of farm tours.
The first group headed into the classroom area for the movies and presentation. The second group went to the sales arena for a quick welcome and then out the back door to wagons waiting to take them on a tour of the farm. The third group started in the animal holding area just outside the big arena where the fourth group was examining the machinery display.

New features are added annually. Two years ago the Kentucky Department of Agriculture's meat exhibit and a cheese processing company which distributed free samples of ham, sausage, pepperoni pizza, salami and many other flavors of processed cheese. Free milk samples were distributed as students arrived back from the wagon tours of the farm. Chocolate milk won the popularity contest three-to-one. Most student groups spent just over two hours at the comprehensive and fast-moving tour day.
The payoff for the entire program provided by the Future Farmers and Western Kentucky will take years to assess. Of immediate interest are the thank you letters and attached handmade pictures sent by many of the first and following tour groups. More lasting are the impressions and attitudes held, perhaps for a lifetime, by the participating students.
Here is a list of what we believe to be some of the benefits of our activity:

- encourages elementary teachers to work with vocational农业
- provides a visible activity for public media coverage
- ties together elementary, secondary and higher education
- gets agriculture students interested in teaching opportunities
- tells us which administrators are cooperative
- ties agriculture and FFA together in the minds of elementary students
- teaches local chapters to cooperate rather than compete on activity
- reaches parents through activity of their children
- builds local support for vocational agriculture
- gets agriculture professors involved in elementary education
- gives agriculture students an opportunity to tell their story to greater numbers of people.

Alaska's Hidden Industry

What does the average Alaskan citizen think about vocational agriculture? Nothing! Why? Because agriculture, the precursor to vocational agriculture, is Alaska's hidden industry.

Alaska produces 375 million acres. According to the Soil Conservation Service, 20.5 million acres has agricultural potential, of which 2.2 million acres has been allocated for the State for agricultural production. To date, however, less than 2 million acres is in production although the state goal is to have .5 million acres in production by 1990. Obviously, finding agriculture in Alaska is like "hunting a needle in a haystack".

Agriculture in Alaska is hidden from a physical perspective. That is, one does not find agricultural enterprises lining the Alaska highways. In fact, Delta Junction and the Matanuska Valley are the only agricultural looking areas of the state.

Agriculture is also hidden from an economic perspective. The dollar value of agricultural contributions to the state economy are micropale compared to petroleum development, tourism and fishing receipts. Although visibility and scope are major determinants to the unveiling of Alaska agriculture, the most critical factor perpetuating the misconception is public ignorance. In short, the average Alaskan understands neither the meaning nor the significance of agriculture.

Lack of Public Awareness

The public's lack of awareness regarding agriculture is not unique to Alaska. As a society, Americans are becoming further and further removed from direct participation in and, general knowledge of, modern agricultural practices. The latest statistics lend credence to this trend; less than two percent of the American population is involved in agricultural production. These producers supply food and fiber for themselves and 78 other Americans and, in addition, support a valuable export market. The balance of Americans, approximately 98 percent, are the consumers.

On the other hand, current literature is replete with facts and figures extolling agriculture as the largest industry in the United States. For example, agricultural assets account for 85 percent of the capital assets of all manufacturing corporations in America, and one in five Americans is employed in some phase of the industry, thus making agriculture the largest employer.

Having been confronted with apparently conflicting facts, it is little wonder that the public makes inaccurate inferences (i.e., 2 percent of the population comprising the largest workforce?) and is bewildered. Why does such confusion exist? Semantics. Some Alaskan scenarios demonstrate the magnitude of the problem.

An instructional activity used in an introductory course required for natural resources majors at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks illustrates the point. During the first lecture students are asked to write a definition of agriculture on an index card. Prior to the next class meeting, definit

THEME

By Carla Kirts
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A Western Kentucky University student shows first graders her milk goats at the Food for America program.

Fourth grade students view the machinery exhibit at Western Kentucky University Exhibit Hall.

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Alaska's Hidden Industry

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The concept of agriculture being more than food production needs to be emphasized through a multifaceted approach. (Photograph courtesy of Lindsey Keene, vocational agriculture instructor, Southeast Lualualei Attendance Center, Meridian, Mississippi 39301.)

All this leads up to my first line. I shouldn't have to see my child upset by these cruel people who seem to enjoy chopping off birds' heads, shooting cows and pigs, and subject [sic] other animals to horrors. Laws should be enacted to stop these "cowboys and farmers." They should go back where the other hay seeds are.

They should no longer allow these people there, and if they do, then the humane group should oversee everything. Most of all, the Bureau should step these people from fencing the land which is against the law and destroying the natural beauty of the land in the rural areas. They should also make it against the law to kill these unfortunate animals where others can see or hear them.

Shocking, isn't it? Such a letter would not have been published in Iowa, California, Texas or some other agriculturally oriented state. The second assignment for students in the course is to write a response to this letter.

What is the significance of such a letter? First, it plays on the reader's emotions; second, it sounds convincing, especially to readers who are not and have not been involved in production agriculture. Thus, via such tactics, negative attitudes and misconceptions are fostered and perpetuated. Even though the writer's idealistic philosophy is unrealistic and a number of statements are pure conjecture, a misinformed reader is likely to be persuaded to sympathize and agree.

What impact does public perception have in the agriculture industry anyway? Consider the development of agricultural policy, particularly at the state level. Who has ultimate authority over policy development? Elected officials. Who elects the officials? The public. The impact of the problem is obvious.

A Multifaceted Approach

The most plausible solution to the problem is education. A multifaceted approach to educational agriculture is most appropriate for Alaska.

Because agriculture is Alaska's hidden industry and because it is often perceived as agricultural development from a negative standpoint, Alaskan agricultural educators must continuously endeavor to communicate with the public regarding the agriculture industry. Every opportunity to discuss basic concepts, trends, and issues must be utilized. Only through such efforts will citizens and elected officials acquire a more realistic (not necessarily pre-developed) understanding of the value of and support mechanisms for the production, processing and distribution of food and fiber commodities in Alaska. Over the long term, support for the industry transforms into support for secondary vocational agriculture and other forms of agricultural education.

The development of Alaskan-based curriculum materials is another essential function of agricultural educators in Alaska. Although funding for such projects is difficult to obtain because of the exorbitant cost per student, it is imperative that vocational agriculture students be exposed to concepts pertinent to, and often unique to, Alaska agriculture. Even without outside funding, some curriculum materials will be developed, however, at a much slower pace.

Materials available from local Cooperative Extension Service offices are currently providing the technical foundation for both informal public education programs and vocational agriculture classes.

Post secondary instruction in agriculture is also receiving some attention. A two-year program is underway in a community college and an option in general agriculture is a new course offering. The Cooperative Extension Service offers the University of Alaska Fairbanks. If the option proves successful, as current statistics indicate, a full B.S. degree in agriculture may be feasible and become a reality in the near future. In the meantime, a teacher education program may also become feasible.

As the agricultural industry in Alaska expands, the value of agricultural growth in educational agriculture cannot be overemphasized. Agriculture is basic to human survival and once stabilized will prove to be a valuable asset to the state's economy. It goes without saying that instruction at all levels is basic to agricultural development. Adults are the current decision-makers regarding agricultural policy and they are the ones who hire workers in the labor force, voters, consumers and leaders of tomorrow.

For the first time an opportunity to prepare Alaska's first generation of Alaskan agriculturists has unfolded. It is an opportunity not to be underestimated. Historically, agricultural education has rendered a remarkable influence on the development of agriculture as a national institution; agricultural education can produce the same effects in Alaska.
**ARTICLE**

Updating the Leadership

By Herbert Schumann

"I wish he would have taught the kind of kids we have today." "Things have changed since he was in the classroom." "He ought to get out of the agency office and back into the classroom and find out what it's really like." "Those theories that she talks about just don't work in the classroom." Comments such as these are often uttered by teachers of vocational agricultural education, or by those besieged by suggestions, pressures, and demands from persons in leadership positions in agricultural education. Many teachers regard these comments in teacher education, administration, and state supervision as being completely out of contact with the reality of today's classrooms.

Keeping current is a problem for all in education; however, it may be particularly acute for those in teacher education, administration, and supervision. These groups must give careful consideration to the merits of these criticisms.

Keeping Current

There are numerous ways to keep abreast of the realities of the contemporary vocational agriculture classroom. Teacher educators in agriculture generally have much closer contact with teachers since they are directly involved with inservice activities than their contemporaries in general education. Some of the more obvious aspects of the vocational agriculture program and consequently have frequent interaction with teachers.

Administrators have the opportunity to visit classrooms often and maintain close contact with the reality of the program and classroom. Participation in state and national conferences provide persons in leadership positions in agricultural education the opportunity to exchange ideas with other agricultural educators.

All of these activities do assist those in keeping up-to-date; however, actual classroom experience, involving all of its frustrations, probabilities, and opportunities, is often lacking. It is true that many of those in leadership positions have not had experience in vocational agriculture classrooms in recent years. New groups such as females, disadvantaged, and handicapped students are receiving considerable emphasis in today's programs of vocational agriculture. Vocational agriculture classes are likely to be comprised of a greater percentage of non-farm youth than existed in the previous era.

Teacher educators, whose teaching backgrounds were obtained when these groups were generally excluded from the program, may lack the experiential base to prepare teachers to successfully work with these students. State staff and vocational administrators may likewise lack relevant experiences in working with these groups.

Traditionally, the top teachers of vocational agriculture have been selected for teacher education, state staff, and administrative positions; however, even the best educator loses touch with the situation after several years away from the classroom. Many teacher educators have focused essentially on theoretical and academic approaches to teaching vocational agriculture to the exclusion of the pragmatic problems faced by today's teachers. Many critics charge that teacher preparation programs are irrelevant. They also assert that administrators and supervisory staff often lack recent teaching experience.

Texas Standards

Recently, statewide hearings were held in Texas regarding the proposed revision of certification standards for the teaching profession. All components of the educational community presented recommendations regarding the proposed standards. One of the major concerns expressed by teachers throughout the state was the lack of relevant classroom teaching experience by persons in leadership roles in education.

An exchange program may offer the unique potential for teacher educators and vocational agriculture teachers to reverse roles for a period of time. This could be a positive experience for both parties. The university students could benefit from the vast reservoir of teaching skills of the teacher educator. The high school students could gain from the fresh viewpoint of their teacher educators. This exchange would improve liaison between those who espouse recommended pedagogical skills and those who must practice them.

The proposed plan for vocational agriculture classroom experience does have some limitations. Some of the areas of concern may be:

1. Many of those in teacher education, state supervisory staff, and administration may feel insecure in the classroom. It is less threatening to be a teacher than one who must put these theories into practice.

2. Classroom teaching is only one component of the myriad of responsibilities faced by the teacher educator, and is frequently exceeded by a number of other responsibilities.

3. School systems may be reluctant to permit the regular teacher to engage in an exchange program. They may also be reluctant to demand the same expectations of the visiting teacher as they would of their regular teachers.

4. Administrators and supervisory staff often lack recent teaching experience.

By Richard M. Foster

Parent involvement has been a primary goal of education for decades. While most academic disciplines work hard to develop ways for involving parents, vocational agriculture instructors can easily stimulate the natural participation of parents in all areas of a comprehensive vocational agriculture program and reap tremendous benefits.

Parent involvement is essential in a well organized vocational agriculture department. Parent involvement constitutes an important aspect of the program and its impact on the community. It is easy to see that students would be better equipped if important groups contributing to the success and/or failure of a program. It is in the best interest of the department to actively involve parents in any manner possible.

Benefits

Parents still have the greatest impact on their son's and daughter's participation in the vocational agriculture program. Encouragement and support from parents can mean the difference in a student being able to attend a field trip, a leadership conference, or participate in the monthly FFA meeting.

Parents will ultimately make the decision about whether the activity is of great enough value to offset having their child miss school. It is obvious that clearly becomes imperative that parents have a good knowledge of the program and the potential benefits of student participation so such decisions can be made fairly and consistently.

Rawls (1981) reported that parents provide significant assistance in helping students develop and conduct SOE programs. Parents have a greater impact on the success of student SOE programs than any other adult. A basic knowledge of the interrelatedness of SOE, FFA and the classroom will enable parents to understand why SOE has been referred to as "The foundation on which vocational agriculture is built" (Crawford, 1983). Parental knowledge and understanding of SOE and vocational agriculture will strengthen SOE and provide a higher quality experience for students.

Vested Interest

Parents, as taxpayers and school district patrons, generally have the ear of school administrators, school board members, and advisory committee members. Parents have an interest in school operating procedures. They visit with each other and with the public, and with civic leaders and organizations.

This community involvement allows ample opportunity for parents to be a strong, vocal advocate for the vocational agriculture department. The public relations and community goodwill that will be enhanced through the actions of parents is immeasurable.

Parents can be an immediate resource in the instructional program as well as in an advisory capacity. They have a keen interest in the program, because their sons and daughters are enrolled. It is only reasonable that they be a part of a high quality program and be willing to assist the teacher in providing the resources to make that possible.

Parent assistance can take the form of hosting field trips and judging clinics or serving as a guest speaker for a classroom topic. They may help in chaperoning students at FFA activities. Parents can serve on advisory committees or on special committees. Parents are knowledgeable and readily available resources to the teacher and the curriculum.

Cultivating Interest

We, as agricultural educators, need to cultivate parent involvement in secondary programs. Unfortunately, parents are not cognizant of agricultural education, and the potential contributions of parents is not recognized.

Get to know parents -- SOE instructional visits should not be geared only to students. It is just as important to talk with parents and inform them of the vocational agricultural program. Such information may be essential on their part, but it is equally important to maintain lines of communication on a continuous basis. Parents should know the instructor, the program, and the educational benefits for their child.

2. Invite parents to special functions -- It is customary for parents to attend annual FFA banquets. They attend for a variety of reasons, mostly because they have a son or daughter who is expected to be there. However, there are

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Involving Parents

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many opportunities throughout the year whose parents can be made to feel a part of the program. These include a summer family picnic and recreation meeting; an orientation meeting for students, parents, and administrators; initiation ceremonies; special recogni-
tion events; meetings with topics of in-
terest to parents; etc. Make an effort to include parents in all types of activi-
ties.

3. Utilize parents in the program — Ask for assistance in carrying out de-
partmental activities. Vocational agri-
culture classes and FFA events are natural for involving others, especially those with demonstrated interests. Serving as educators, chaperones, and advisory committee members may enhance parental acceptance and support. People like to help! Parents want to help!

4. Seek advice — A teacher cannot know all the technical information or keep up with new innovations in all areas. However, agribusiness owners and farmers do keep current in their areas of specialization. Seek out information from parents. The simple fact that their opinion is being re-
guested indicates they are important to the program; they are making a con-
tribution; and that the teacher has the ini-
tiative to seek supplemental informa-
tion.

5. Acknowledge parental help — It is not enough to acknowledge com-
munity support only at the annual ban-
quett, although it is certainly proper. A verbal expression of gratitude or even a short note of appreciation is appro-
rate at any time. Parental support needs to be recognized with both the informal handshake and the public recog-
nition.

Conclusion

Generating community support, en-
hancing public relations, and working with administrators are all important. However, to have the greatest and longest lasting impact on any vocational education program, put a major ef-
fort into improving the involvement and support of the parents. The per-
ception they have of vocational agri-
culture can and does have a definite impact on our program as well as on the success of individual students. In-
volvement of parents is a critical link-
that agricultural educators must con-
tinue to cultivate. This is one group of clientel that makes a critical differ-
cence in our program. Their perception of vocational agriculture has to be posi-
tive.

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Women Are In Agricultural Education to Stay

Federal legislation, prompted by so-
cial changes in the profession, has em-
powered and challenged vocational educators to provide sex equity in their programs. Of all the tra-
tional activities, female agricultural education has made the greatest progress toward removing sex stereotypes.

Evidence to support this progress can be obtained from many sources in-
cluding secondary, post secondary and adult program enrollment, the number of female agricultural teachers and teaching positions, and female FFA membership and officers.

Enrollment Trends

Female enrollment in all levels of ag-
cultural education has increased. The increase in the number of women has been larger than any other vocational service area's increase in attracting oppo-
site-sex students. According to the mid-1970's, agriculture was de-
scribed as the most male intensive
teaching field in the country with less than 10 percent of the teachers being fe-
males.

By the late seventies, the number has increased to almost 2 percent. The last decade of the eighties has seen an even larger percentage of women complet-

about 128,000 altogether, and a much larger group are co-managed by men and women. With this many farms be-
ing managed by women, certainly more should be enrolled in adult agri-
cultural education classes. Co-man-
aging of farms by a husband-wife team (especially where the wife keeps the records) also indicates a need to teach both sexes in adult programs.

With the increased participation by female students in the total agricultural education program, successful role models are needed. These role models will both influence current students and help recruit future students. One of the best and most influential role models for students is their teacher.

The successful woman teacher would greatly enhance the image of female educators in agriculture education courses and courses belonging to the FFA. A woman teacher will balance traditional models for male students, in order to help them participate more fully in agri-
culture, to see a female role model in an agricultural occupation. Such a worker may be more likely to emphasize the opportunities available to females in the field.

Agricultural education professionals can take pride in the progress they have made while maintaining bal-
ance in enrollment, student officers, teachers, and teacher educators in agri-
cultural education can be cited as evi-
dence of a movement toward sex-
equality: there are other factors to con-
sider. For example, analysis of vari-
as indicates that females are entering only a limited number of agricultural areas, most often horticulture and animal-

science, while males continue to select these as well as all other agri-
cultural areas.

Female teachers also usually prefer to teach only selected agricultural areas. Some studies suggest that once 
educated within an area (such as second-
ary, post secondary or college), women are more likely to remain in the same or very similar positions in agriculture related work.

Also, the FFA has some interesting areas of involvement. While almost half of the chapter officers in California are female, most are cha-
ters, tending to look down on the secre-
tary and reporter while males fulfill the

role of president, vice president, treasurer, and sentinel.

It is not reasonable to expect enroll-
ment or employment in agricultural 
education to soon reach a perfect sex-
equality.

Yet, there is room for more efforts to seek equity. Futurists, when consider-
ing agriculture as well as other occupa-
tional areas, vary in their predictions of things to come. But one thing they are in agreement on is the equal and equal involvement of both sexes in occu-
pational careers. This involvement calls for agricultural programs that prepare females as well as males in all agricultural roles and areas. Even to-

day, there is a large clientele whose needs could more effectively be met.

Teachers of agriculture can seek as-

sistance from school guidance coun-
ters in the recruitment and retention of female students. Counselors play a major role in students' curriculum selec-
tion and career choices, but many are not aware of the progress females have made in agricultural education to date.

Guidance counselors may not be as aware of opportunities in agriculture as agri-
cultural education teachers. Conse-
these teachers need to inform coun-
ters at their schools with both fact and examples of females involvement in the field of agriculture.

Another opportunity to increase in-
volvement of women in agricultural education is in the composition of ad-
visory councils. Women residing in the community as well as females in ag-
cultural occupations can be of great amassence in the appointment of secre-
taries in the agricultural education de-
partment. Members selected for de-
partmental advisory councils should be reflective of community interests, hav-
ing both men and women on the ad-
visory council will make the council more representative.

Room for Improvement

Agricultural education has done much to open its membership to female 
males. For example, progress can be noted at the secondary level, in the FFA, with classroom teachers, and with students enrolled in adult educa-
tion program. While a great deal of accomplishment has been made, there is still room for more involvement of females in the total program.

Teachers, counselors, supervisors, and teachers select all of their teach-

ers on the success stories of previous female participants in agricultural education and use them as examples to encourage greater female participation. Women are in agricultural education and they are here to stay.

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The National FFA Organization has been and continues to be served with distinction by its female members. (Photographs courtesy of John Hillman.)
Physically Impaired Farmers: Can We Help Them?

By Roger Torneck

A complex question that has been raised recently is whether or not efforts should be made to assist physically impaired farmers, such as Bill, remain active in their farm operations following a crippling accident or illness. As a vocational agriculture instructor you will probably encounter, in your community, physically impaired farmers who need help to continue to farm. Recent focus on the need for the handicapped, partially due to the International Year of the Handicapped, has indicated that there are a substantial number of farmers suffering from physical impairments. To help shed some light on this area, the Agriculture Engineering Department at Purdue University conducted a survey to determine the nature and proportion of physical impairments among Indiana's farm operators.

Impairments

Hearing impairments affected 25.0 percent of the farm operators (Table 1). Approximately twenty-five percent, or 194 percent, of the farm operators indicated that they were hard of hearing. Though not a serious impairment, the operation of a farm, hearing loss can complicate some activities such as adjusting certain types of equipment and also create serious safety hazards. Twenty-four percent of the farm operators were severely enough to prevent the farm operator from performing essential farm-related tasks. Some physical impairments were so minor that they did not provide a significant degree of hindrance to the farm operators during the performance of essential farm-related tasks. On the other hand, physical impairments that hinder the performance of some farm-related tasks. The physical impairments suffered by 17.3 percent of the farm operators were so severe that the performance of certain essential farm-related jobs was completely prevented. Ninety-five percent of the farm tasks that farm operators indicated that they could no longer perform because of a physical impairment were:

- combining (too dusty)
- quiting hogs because of dust in lungs
- using chemicals
- heavy lifting
- scooping and shoveling
- limit some climbing
- milking (too high humidity)

Some of the farm operators, in an effort to make the performance of essential farm-related tasks easier, have modified their farm tractors, implements and/or buildings. Modifications cited by the 43.6 percent of the farm operators who have made modifications included:

- added more steps to tractors and combine
- air conditioned cabs on tractors and combines
- additional pit ventilation in hog buildings
- bought tractor with cab to avoid sunlight
- added power steering to loader
- lowered oversteps
- Changed controls to fit impairment

Eliminating Causes

Before we attempt to help physically impaired farm operators, maybe we should work to identify the causes of these physical impairments and then eliminate or reduce these causes. The farm operators who were physically impaired, 92 percent indicated that their physical impairment was the result of a farm accident.

To a degree, agricultural educators have control over farm accidents in that they can stress farm safety in vocational agriculture classes. However, it is impossible to eliminate all farm accidents. Thus, there will always be some farm operators who, because of a farm accident, are physically impaired.

Another cause of physical impairments, in addition to farm accidents, is age. The physically impaired farm operators averaged 53.6 years of age while the physically non-impaired farm operators averaged only 49.5 years of age.

Another reason for physical impairments that appeared from the study was being overexertion. Physically impaired farm operators were more likely to be overexerted than their counterparts. For instance, respiratory problems affected 21.9 percent of the farm operators, and cardiovascular impairments affected 24.0 percent. Physically impaired farmers need our help if they are to have the opportunity to remain active in their farm operations. If we are to help, we must continue to:

1. Identify the physical impairment that causes farmers to experience difficulty in performing essential farm-related tasks.
2. Identify the essential farm-related tasks that are difficult or impossible for physically impaired farm operators to perform.
3. Identify what is being done by physically impaired farmers to overcome these barriers.
4. Modify farm equipment and buildings such that physically impaired farmers can work with and around them.

Summary

A resource center must be established so that physically impaired farmers, who need assistance, have somewhere to turn for help. Since not all of the physically impaired farmers would be able to come in to the resource center, workshops should be held throughout the United States. The workshops would not only benefit the physically impaired farmers, but a recreational therapist and others who work with physically handicapped people would benefit also.

Reference

Since making farming accessible for the physically handicapped has just begun; thus, the potential in this area is unknown at this time. At present, the only factor preventing handicapped people from farming society's attitude; the technology needed is available.
Small Farm Operations: An Opportunity For Vocational Agriculture?

Small Farm Definitions
Many definitions of a small farm exist. Each has advantages and disadvantages. One definition is a farm with total acres less than some specified acreage, for example 10, 25, 50 or 100 acres. The 1978 Census of Agriculture defined small farms as those with 50 acres or less. This definition allowed acreage to be added by the farmer. As a result, many farms that would not qualify as small under a 50 acre definition would qualify as small under the 100 acre definition. The 1978 Census of Agriculture also redefined what it means to be a small farm. A small farm is defined as one in which the operator is less than 100 acres. This definition allows for a more accurate comparison of small farms to large farms. However, it is important to note that the definition of a small farm is not uniform across all sources.

Characteristics of Small Farm Operators
Several states, including Maine, Virginia, Tennessee, and Delaware, have conducted studies of small farm operations. These studies have identified several characteristics of small farm operators. These characteristics include:

- Small farm operators are generally older than the average farmer. The average age of small farm operators is 60 years old.
- Small farm operators are more likely to be married than the average farmer.
- Small farm operators are more likely to be male than female.
- Small farm operators are more likely to be urban than rural.
- Small farm operators are more likely to be high school graduates than college graduates.

Small farm operators are generally less efficient than large farm operators. This is because they have less land to work with and less capital to invest. However, small farm operators are more likely to be innovative and creative. This is because they have to be in order to succeed in a competitive market.

To make every part of their land productive, small farmers use a variety of techniques. They often use a combination of traditional and modern methods. For example, they may use hand tools to plant crops and use machines to harvest them. They may also use cover crops to improve soil quality and reduce erosion.

To succeed in a competitive market, small farmers must be able to market their products effectively. They must be able to sell their crops to processors and to retailers. They must also be able to sell their crops to consumers directly. Small farmers often use a variety of marketing techniques to sell their products. These techniques include:

- Door-to-door sales
- Farmers markets
- Cooperatives
- Direct mail
- Retail sales

Small farmers must also be able to manage their finances effectively. They must be able to develop a budget and stick to it. They must also be able to manage their cash flow. Small farmers must be able to plan for the future and to save for the future. They must also be able to take out loans and to pay off their debts.

To succeed in a competitive market, small farmers must be able to manage their time effectively. They must be able to plan and to schedule their work. They must also be able to delegate tasks to others. Small farmers must be able to balance their work and their family life. They must also be able to balance their work and their personal life.

Small farmers must also be able to manage their risk effectively. They must be able to plan for the future and to deal with the unexpected. They must also be able to manage their debt and to manage their cash flow. Small farmers must be able to plan for the future and to save for the future. They must also be able to take out loans and to pay off their debts.

A small farm operator must be able to make every part of their land productive. This is because they have less land to work with and less capital to invest. They must also be able to market their products effectively. They must be able to sell their crops to processors and to retailers. They must also be able to sell their crops to consumers directly. Small farmers often use a variety of marketing techniques to sell their products. These techniques include:

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Conclusion
Small farm operations offer an opportunity for vocational agriculture. By providing education and training, vocational agriculture can help small farmers succeed in a competitive market.

References
How Others Perceive Us Is Affected By:

Television  
Radio  
Newspapers  
Electronic Newsletters  
Quality of Students  
Personal Contacts

(Photographs courtesy of Lindsey Keene, Vocational Agriculture Instructor, Southeast Lauderdale Attendance Center, Meridian, Mississippi 39301.)