

WHO PROVIDES AGRICULTURAL CAREER INFORMATION?

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Many states across the nation are faced with a shortage of vocational agriculture teachers. This is partially due to the fact that agricultural industries and governmental agencies take their toll each year of graduates who have completed a course of study to become vocational agriculture teachers. However, this action is traditional; the real problem involves the low number of enrollees in teacher preparation programs in agriculture.

The problem may be in the local vocational agriculture departments. However, the real cause may be found in agricultural teacher preparation programs. The task of providing career information to students is an immense one which should be the responsibility of the entire school staff. However, most of this responsibility is normally delegated to the guidance counselor. Vocational agriculture teachers must provide assistance to guidance personnel if students are to be adequately informed about agricultural occupations. In what areas and to what extent is this necessary? To provide information on this subject, a study was designed to analyze the awareness of secondary guidance counselors regarding career opportunities in agricultural education. The study involved counselors throughout Mississippi employed at the secondary public school level.

Objectives

Some of the objectives were:

1. To determine if, and how often, Mississippi secondary school guidance counselors consult vocational agriculture teachers concerning career opportunities in agriculture education.
2. To determine the approximate number of students referred to vocational agriculture teachers by guidance counselors during the school year for the purpose of obtaining career information concerning agricultural education.

3. To determine the courses from which Mississippi secondary school guidance counselors receive information concerning career opportunities in agricultural education and the type media felt to be most effective in vocational guidance.
4. To determine if Mississippi secondary school guidance counselors would like to receive more information concerning career opportunities in agricultural education and, if so, the source of such information.
5. To assess the knowledge of Mississippi secondary school guidance counselors concerning the objectives and opportunities in agricultural education.
6. To assess the opinions of Mississippi secondary school guidance counselors on issues pertaining to supply and demand of agricultural education personnel.
7. To assess the opinions of Mississippi secondary school guidance counselors on issues pertaining to vocational agriculture programs, agricultural education, and instructors in the State of Mississippi.

Methodology

The first phase of the research was to develop an instrument to use to collect data from guidance counselors in public secondary schools in the State of Mississippi. The data collection instrument was developed as a mail-out questionnaire consisting of thirty-five questions.

Participants in the study consisted of a sample of Mississippi public school secondary guidance counselors taken from a directory of *Mississippi Public School Counselors*. The random sample method of selection was used in securing the respondents of the study from the high school counselor population, while a total sample of guidance counselors from area vocational schools was selected. A total of two hundred and fifty counselors were involved. Of this number, forty-three were employed in area vocational schools and two hundred and seven in public secondary schools. Eighty-nine percent of these individuals returned the questionnaire. Of these, eighty-four percent were deemed usable.

Findings

With the idea that a team approach is necessary to effectively provide information, it was important to determine the opinions held by counselors concerning vocational agriculture. They were asked, first of all, whether or not there was a program of vocational agriculture in their schools. Fifty-five percent indicated that there was. Of those employed in schools without vocational agriculture programs, nineteen percent felt that such programs should be added. However, one-fourth of the counselors felt that vocational agriculture programs were not needed in the schools in which they were employed.

Counselors in schools with vocational agriculture programs were asked if they felt that the programs were meeting the needs of students. Sixty-three percent felt that students' needs were being met in vocational agriculture. Even though a majority felt that students' needs were being met, one-fourth of the counselors said that the teacher failed to project an image to the students which would encourage them to consider a career as a teacher of vocational agriculture.

Since guidance counselors cannot be experts in every occupational field, it would be expected that a number of sources would be relied upon. A summary of responses pertaining to the use of sources of agricultural career information revealed the following sources and percentages of counselors who use each: County Agent or 4-H Youth Agent, 39%; Mississippi State University, Agricultural and Extension Education Department, 53%; Alcorn State University, Agricultural Education Department, 21%; Vocational Agriculture Teacher, 31%; College Catalogs, 60%; *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, 75%; and others, 21%. The striking fact revealed here is that very few guidance counselors reported that they consulted the teacher and referred students to the teacher for information less than five times during the school year. It is also important that a large number of counselors indicated a dependence on teacher preparation departments for career information.

In spite of the above, sixty-eight percent of the counselors indicated that they did not receive adequate information pertaining to careers in agricultural education and that they would like to receive more. This information was desired from the same sources from which they were already receiving it. However, only twenty-nine percent of the counselors wanted information from the vocational agriculture teachers.

Even though the respondents reported that they needed more agricultural career information, they were quite knowledgeable of the objectives of vocational agriculture. The one weak area

concerning objectives was that nearly one-half of the counselors failed to recognize "developing competencies in agribusiness occupations" as an objective of vocational agriculture.

When the counselors were questioned regarding occupational opportunities in agricultural education, over seventy percent indicated that they believed the opportunities were good. However, only thirty-two percent realized that there was a shortage of vocational agriculture teachers in Mississippi. Forty-nine percent, though, did predict an increase in the demand for teachers of vocational agriculture. Even with this fairly positive attitude about opportunities in agricultural education, eighty-two percent of the respondents reported that they believed students overlooked agricultural education because they were not aware of the opportunities.

Major Conclusions

1. Mississippi public secondary school guidance counselors, in general, need and want more career information about agricultural education, but they do not recognize teachers of vocational agriculture as good sources.
2. A majority of these counselors believe that career opportunities in agricultural education are good, many feel that the opportunities will get even better; however, a large majority believe that students overlook agricultural education because they are not aware of the opportunities.

Summary

Providing career information to students is a task that must be performed by a team of individuals. A beneficial and necessary member of such a team is the teacher of vocational agriculture. It is good that secondary school guidance counselors have a positive attitude about occupational opportunities in agricultural education. It is sad, however, that a majority fail to recognize vocational agriculture teachers as sources of agricultural career information. It is even more sad that a large majority feel that students overlook agricultural education because they are unaware of the opportunities.

Teachers of vocational agriculture have the responsibility of providing assistance in the solution of this problem.

Teacher educators should make sure that they have the ability. As prospective teachers are developing a philosophy of vocational education in agriculture, teacher educators should provide an opportunity for the inclusion of career development theory and practice. All teachers of vocational agriculture should believe that they are a necessary part of the guidance team; that it is necessary to assist students in becoming aware of and exploring careers as well as preparing them for career entry. Teacher education programs should provide learning experiences to develop these beliefs and the ability to implement them.

For the benefit of students and vocational agriculture, each teacher should be taught to consider the following suggestions in determining his/her role as a member of the career information team:

1. Make the guidance counselor(s) aware of his/her willingness to help.
2. Provide the counselor(s) with career information in the form of brochures, slides, visits and other means.
3. Speak to groups of students to provide career information.
4. Make the counselor(s) aware of opportunities in agricultural education.
5. Include career information pertaining to agricultural education in his/her teaching plans.
6. Assist the counselor(s) in organizing Career Days.
7. Include career information activities in the FFA program of work.

There are other specific activities in which teachers of vocational agriculture might become involved. However, the overall factor in the success of such a program is the willingness and desire to be a part of the guidance team. Do not allow anyone to say that students in vocational agriculture overlook agricultural education because they are unaware of the opportunities in the field.

This article was based on the following:

Rufus Wayne Johnson. *An Analysis of the Awareness of Mississippi Secondary Guidance Counselors Concerning Career Opportunities in Agricultural Education*. Master's thesis, Mississippi State University, Mississippi State, MS 39762, August 1975.