

# MAJOR PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN ADMINISTRATING VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE AS PERCEIVED BY STATE VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE SUPERVISORS IN THE UNITED STATES

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President Woodrow Wilson signed into law the National Vocational Education (Smith-Hughes) Act of 1917 on February 23, 1917. This legislation was, "An act to provide for the promotion of vocational education; to provide for cooperation with the States in the promotion of such education in agriculture and the trades and industries . . ." (Federal Board for Vocational Education, 1917, p.49). Under terms of the Act, a Federal Board for Vocational Education, regional supervisors, a designated state board, state supervisors, teacher trainers, and local teachers began a cooperative effort to deliver vocational education.

Supervisors were primarily responsible for assuring program quality and compliance. Supervisors and teacher educators shared inservice conferences and supervisory tasks. Divisions were organized by occupational areas including agriculture, home economics, distribution, trades and industry, and business and office education. As a result of provisions of the Vocational Education Act of 1963, its subsequent amendments, and other federal legislation concerning elementary and secondary education, major changes occurred in a number of the country's state departments of education. Numerous divisions of vocational education were reorganized according to levels of programs such as secondary, post-secondary, and adult education and by functions such as special needs and career development. According to Barrick (1980), the emphasis in many state departments of education has shifted from supervision of instruction to providing services. Consequences of this shift were documented by Lelle and Kotrlik (1987) who found that while teachers of vocational agriculture rated working relationships between state supervisors and teachers highly, they were somewhat critical of supervisors' efforts to help teachers improve their teaching.

The administration of educational programs in agriculture from the state level has become a growing concern of agricultural educators. The trend away from specialist supervisors for vocational agriculture within state departments of education and toward supervision by generalists has been a major worry. Diminished status for vocational agriculture within state education agencies has resulted (Barrick & Warmbrod, 1981). Maintaining adequate State level supervisory staff and leadership were identified as major concerns of teacher educators, state supervisors and presidents of state vocational agriculture teacher associations by Lawrence and Mallilo (1981). To determine difficulties currently being confronted, this study was designed to identify major problems in State level administration as perceived by state supervisors of vocational agriculture.

## Purpose and Objectives

The purpose was to provide information which might be useful to state supervisors of vocational agriculture and other administrators at the state level in identifying and alleviating problems which supervisory personnel are experiencing in program administration and supervision. Specific objectives of the study were:

1. To identify major problems state supervisors of vocational agriculture are currently encountering in administrating state programs of vocational agriculture.
2. To rank identified problems as to their perceived importance.
3. To determine the influence of selected demographics on problems identified.

## Method

The descriptive method of research was used in this study. In order to develop a valid survey instrument, a letter of introduction and explanation was mailed to each state supervisor of vocational agriculture ( $N = 50$ ) in the United States along with a request that each supervisor identify the five most critical problems facing him/her in performing the supervisory function. Thirty-eight state supervisors responded to the request. When responses had been received, a committee, composed

of two graduate students and two faculty members, then reviewed, sorted, and combined statements received and, whenever necessary, edited statements without changing intended meanings. The edited statements were compiled to form the second survey instrument. Methodology employed to identify problems ensured that each statement included in the questionnaire was considered by at least one respondent as a major problem in administrating vocational agriculture at the state level. The second survey instrument, consisting of 92 statements, was administered to the same population. State supervisors were asked to rate each item according to a likert-type scale: 1 = not a problem, 2 = a slight problem, 3 = a moderate problem, and 4 = a severe problem.

The original mailing and two followup letters resulted in the return of 40 questionnaires, an 80% response rate. Study participants were dichotomized as early and late respondents. Goldhor (1972) found that late respondents are similar to nonrespondents; therefore, one way to estimate the nature of nonrespondents is through late respondents. A  $t$ -test analysis found no significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) in ratings of categories of importance between early and late respondents. Thus, the assumption was made that results could be generalized to the entire population. Post hoc tests using Cronbach's alpha estimated instrument reliability to be  $r = .98$ .

Overall means and standard deviations were determined for each statement. The analysis of variance statistical test was utilized to measure significant differences existing in the expressed level of importance of each statement according to NASAE region. Correlational analysis ( $r$  - value) was used to determine the relationships between ratings of items in the problem categories and selected demographics. An alpha level of .05 was established a priori. The population was assumed to be a sample of state supervisors at a point in time, thus permitting the use of inferential statistics.

### Findings

Of the 92 statements rated by study participants, 13 received overall mean ratings of 3.00 or above, indicating moderate or severe problems (Table 1). Rated as the most severe problem, with an overall mean of 3.38, was the lack of employment data in agriculture and agribusiness. A standard deviation of .93, however, indicates an element of disagreement among participants.

Six of the top 13 statements are related to the major problems supervisors have in dealing with increased high school graduation and college entrance requirements, and program problems on the local level. The image of agriculture and vocational education were considered major problems, in that four statements in the top 13 were concerned with image and understanding of agriculture and the vocational agriculture program by the public and by school administrators. Lack of the adult education component in local programs was also viewed as a major problem. A decrease in state and federal dollars causing reduced local funding support for vocational programs was the only funding category statement to be rated above 3.00.

Statements were analyzed by NASAE region to determine regional influences on problem ratings. Only six significant differences of opinion were detected. Southern region participants rated significantly higher than did others problems associated with the large number of disadvantaged and handicapped students mainstreamed into vocational agriculture programs, the loss of control to local systems, and recruiting, employing and retaining well-qualified state staff. State supervisors from the Western region considered three problems significantly less serious than did others, the decline in student population; the lack of quality teachers; and expansion of Agriculture in the Classroom to all elementary schools.

The Pearson product-moment coefficient of correlation was utilized to determine if relationships exist between rating of statements in each problem category and supervisors' ages, years on staff, years of vocational agriculture teaching experience, number of vocational agriculture departments in the state, number of teachers in the state, and number of state personnel. Results are found in Table 2. A statistically significant correlation was observed between the problem category of staffing and the state supervisor's years of vocational

agriculture teaching experience. A significant negative correlation was observed between the image of agriculture category and two demographic characteristics, number of vocational agriculture departments in the state and number of vocational agriculture teachers in the state. Based on the scale delineated by Davis (1971), coefficients found in Table 2 indicate a moderate relationship ( $r = .33$ ) between staffing and years of vocational agriculture teaching experience. All other coefficients are considered low or negligible relationships.

Table 1

Major Problems in Administrating/Supervising State Programs of Vocational Agriculture as Perceived by State Supervisors with Mean Ratings of 3.00 and Above

Statements	Mean (N = 40)	SD
Lack of accurate employment data in agriculture and agribusiness.	3.38	0.93
Increased graduation requirements are preventing students from enrolling in vocational agriculture.	3.35	0.77
Creating a viable program that allows students to also meet college entrance and high school graduation requirements.	3.33	0.86
Public misunderstanding regarding scope/breadth of "agriculture".	3.28	0.76
Society's negative image of agriculture as a career.	3.18	0.93
Attracting more capable students to enter careers in agriculture, particularly agricultural education.	3.10	0.84
Decline in the student population.	3.08	0.97
More stringent college and university entrance requirements are causing a reduction in Vo Ag/FFA enrollment.	3.08	0.94
Lack of adult education in local programs.	3.08	0.80
Increasing Future Farmers of America membership	3.05	0.84
School administrative officials not recognizing the unique characteristics of Vo Ag, such as SOEP and FFA, as important components of the instructional program.	3.03	0.92
Reduced local vocational program funding support from state and federal dollars to provide incentives to local school districts.	3.03	0.83
	3.00	0.96

Note. Rating Scale: 1 = Not a problem; 2 = A slight problem; 3 = A moderate problem; 4 = A severe problem.

Table 2

Correlation of Problem Category Ratings with Demographic Characteristics

Problem Category	Age	Yrs. on State Staff	Yrs. of Vo-Ag Exp.	No. Vo-Ag Depts. in State	No. Vo-Ag Teachers in State	No. State Personnel
Funding	.24	.09	.10	.12	.13	.01
H.S. Requirements and Program	.16	.10	-.03	-.08	-.07	-.14
Lack of support	.15	-.02	.06	.07	.07	-.07
Erosion of Authority	.07	-.09	.08	.11	.11	-.07
Staffing	.23	.03	.33*	.13	.14	-.23
Teacher Attributes	.08	.05	-.04	-.13	-.13	-.17
Image of Agriculture	.09	.05	-.09	-.26*	-.26*	-.21
General Problems	.15	.07	.03	.02	.03	-.09

\* $p < .05$ .

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

Lack of accurate employment data in agriculture and agribusiness is considered the most serious problem state supervisors face in administrating vocational agriculture programs. State supervisors should explore avenues of cooperation with State Labor Departments to develop methods to obtain accurate employment data on jobs related to agriculture and agribusiness in their states.

Increased high school graduation and college entrance requirements are viewed as major problems by state supervisors. Efforts should be coordinated with State Boards of Education to find ways to

allow students enrolled in vocational programs to more easily meet high school graduation and college entrance requirements.

Public misunderstanding regarding the scope and breadth of "agriculture" as well as society's negative image of agriculture and vocational education are major problems for state supervisors. In addition, supervisors are concerned with attracting more capable students to enter careers in agriculture and in increasing FFA membership in the face of a declining student population. A cooperative undertaking with involvement of state supervisors, agriculture teachers, teacher educators, agricultural college faculty and administrators, extension personnel, and state department of agriculture personnel is needed to inform prospective students and the public of the importance and value of agriculture and the careers available in the field.

4. Lack of adult education as a component of local programs is a concern of state supervisors. Special efforts must be made by state staff and teacher educators to encourage vocational agriculture teachers to offer agricultural education for adults in their communities.

5. Failure of school administrators to recognize the unique characteristics of vocational agriculture, such as experience programs and FFA, as important components of the instructional program is a problem for supervisors. State supervisors and teacher educators should develop information that could be used by vocational agriculture teachers to inform local school officials of the scope and the importance of the various components of the vocational agriculture program.

### References

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