

The Importance of Selected Activities Affecting
the Role of Vocational Agriculture Instructors
as Perceived by Vocational Agriculture Instructors,
Principals, and Superintendents in Idaho

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Teacher educators are constantly faced with helping prospective teachers determine the priorities that should be placed on various activities in which a teacher of vocational agriculture could be involved. Since vocational agriculture is a local program, school district administrators also play an important role in determining what a vocational agriculture program will emphasize. Therefore, it is imperative that teacher educators, vocational agriculture teachers, and high school administrators come to agreement on which activities are of importance and which can be de-emphasized.

Knowing how agriculture teachers and their administrators perceive the various activities should help teacher educators better prepare new teachers by pointing out areas of disagreement and indicating activities which both groups consider important and not important. Teacher educators also need to know the priorities teachers and administrators have in order to evaluate whether those activities are the ones which should exist in vocational agriculture.

Numerous studies have indicated the need for greater mutual understanding between vocational agriculture teachers and their administrators. Mattox (1974) indicated that personal conflict with administrators was one of three major factors causing teachers to leave the profession. Moore and Camp (1979) found administrators may not be totally aware of what the vocational agriculture teacher does. Dowell (1980) found principals did not have favorable attitudes toward vocational education. Cole (1977) concluded a need exists to educate administrators about vocational agriculture and activities in which vocational agriculture teachers are involved. It is evident that a mutual understanding on the part of agriculture teachers, principals, and superintendents about the importance and appropriateness of the activities in which the vocational agriculture teachers are or could be involved would help to enhance better cooperation and working relationships.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study (Rush, 1982) was to evaluate differences in how vocational agriculture instructors and their

administrators viewed the importance of selected activities of vocational agriculture instructors. Views of principals and superintendents regarding the importance of the duties and responsibilities of the vocational agriculture instructor were also compared.

Specific objectives of the study were:

- 1) To identify the differences between vocational agriculture instructors and administrators in their perceptions of the importance of selected activities of vocational agriculture instructors.
- 2) To identify the amount of time vocational agriculture instructors and administrators believe the vocational agriculture teacher should spend carrying out responsibilities of the job.
- 3) To identify the amount of general satisfaction with and support for the vocational agriculture program by administrators.

Procedure

The population selected for this study included 82 agriculture teachers, 66 principals, 68 superintendents from all secondary schools in Idaho offering vocational agriculture. Due to the limited number of departments in Idaho, the entire population was used in this study.

Superintendents' attitudes were deemed important to the study since superintendents are traditionally responsible for overall control of budgetary matters and directly responsible for carrying out school district policy. Principals' attitudes were deemed important since principals are traditionally responsible for day-to-day management of high school instruction and curriculum. Previous studies have disagreed about whether views of principals and superintendents are different (Scott, 1980).

Data were collected via a mailed questionnaire. Two additional follow-up letters were sent to those not returning initial questionnaires. Overall response rate for the study was 88.4%. Because of the exceptionally high response rate, a follow-up of non-respondents was not deemed necessary.

The instrument used was originally developed by Cole (1977) for a study conducted with vocational agriculture teachers and principals in Iowa and Utah. The instrument was revised to fit Idaho and the specific purposes of this study.

Sixty-six activities commonly considered as responsibilities of vocational agriculture instructors were rated as to their importance by each respondent group. The 1 to 99 scale used by Cole was adopted with 1 being "not important," 50 being "somewhat important," and 99 being "very important." Respondents were urged to choose any number on the scale which best represented their opinions about the importance of the activity.

Differences among the respondent groups' importance ratings of the 66 activities were analyzed by comparing mean ratings. Inferential statistical treatment was deemed inappropriate since the entire population was included in the study.

Findings

Findings from this study indicated that teachers and administrators did differ in how they perceived the importance of about one-third of the 66 activities addressed in the survey. Principals and superintendents were found to be in very close agreement on all but four items.

Safety was perceived by teachers, principals, and superintendents as highly important with each of the groups rating activities related to safety over 90 on a 99 point scale. Having the classroom and shop in compliance with safety regulations was rated as highest in importance of all activities surveyed. FFA related activities were rated very high in importance by all groups. Supervising and conducting contests, which often require extra time and travel, received strong support from all respondent groups. Maintaining an active FFA chapter received higher importance ratings than teaching agricultural classes.

Administrative activities in vocational agriculture were rated near the top by all groups. One notable exception was completing district and state reports. While administrators rated these activities in the top 10 by rank, teachers considered completing reports as being much less important (ranks of 33 and 40 respectively).

As indicated by Table 1, administrators rated summer activities of shop reorganization and ordering supplies, and visiting potential students lower than did teachers. All three respondent groups rated teaching special classes or teaching adults during the summer as being of little importance. The summer activity rated highest by teachers was reorganizing the shop and ordering supplies. The summer activity rated highest by administrators was student project visitation.

Activities generating the most disagreement between administrators and teachers dealt with participation in non-vocational school activities (note Table 1). Administrators rated the importance of these activities much higher than did agriculture teachers. It was observed that teachers regarded attending general educational professional meetings as being of much less importance (rating of 58.0) than did principals (rating of 71.8). Superintendents regarded participation in the local education association as being of much less importance (rating of 38.3) than did teachers (57.2) or principals (56.2). Teachers considered activities such as taking tickets, supervising after-school functions, supervising lunchrooms, and serving as a class advisor as being of much less than average importance (all

Table 1

Vocational Agriculture Activities With the Greatest Disagreement in Importance Ratings Among Agriculture Instructors, Principals, and Superintendents

Activities	Mean Rating Score		
	Teachers	Principals	Superintendents
Use part of summer time to clean, order supplies and refurbish shop	87.2	77.0	74.7
Supervise an FFA chapter banquet	85.7	77.8	77.0
Enroll in in-service training classes related to technical agriculture	83.7	78.5	74.0
Participate in school open-house and/or parent/teacher conferences	83.2	90.5	87.9
Participate in agricultural professional organizations	81.9	76.9	71.7
Visit potential agriculture students during the summer months	78.4	71.6	69.9
Complete local school reports/records	77.4	90.4	88.8
Publish articles regularly in local paper	74.4	60.7	54.2
Complete state reports	72.7	90.7	89.7
Teach adult classes during the school year	62.4	49.3	48.9
Subscribe to professional magazines and journals	59.5	71.3	65.6
Attend general ed professional meetings	58.0	71.8	62.2
Participate in the local education association, IEA and NEA	57.5	56.2	38.3
Take tickets at athletic or other school events	40.0	60.4	58.1
Supervise after-school activities (non-ag)	39.9	71.2	66.5
Supervise lunchroom, hall, study hall, etc.	39.3	62.4	63.7
Serve as class advisor or sponsor	36.1	64.7	64.7

ratings of 40 and below), while both administrator groups regarded such activities as being above average in importance with (ratings of 60.4 or above). Superintendents believed teachers should make more visits than did teachers (5.7 visits to 3.2 visits).

Table 2 describes differences in perception between teachers and their administrators on factors dealing with the amount of time vocational agriculture teachers should spend on the job. Teachers believed they should spend more time on the job, while administrators expected them to work less total hours. It was further observed that administrators suggested an average work week of only 35 hours during the summer as compared to the teachers' suggested average of 42 hours.

Table 2

Group Means for Average Weekly Work Hours Vocational Agriculture Teachers Should Work as Perceived by Teachers, Principals, and Superintendents

Average weekly work hours	Teachers	Principals	Superintendents
Average weekly work hours teacher should work during school year	45.6	39.1	42.6
Average weekly work hours teacher should work during summer	42.4	34.4	35.5

Analysis of factors such as predicting the school district's reaction towards support of the agriculture program if state funds were cut, comparing the agriculture program to other vocational programs, and rating whether the program was meeting the needs of the community is presented in Table 3. The data indicate a favorable amount of support for the vocational agriculture program on the part of administrators.

Major Findings

1) Activities relating to safety in vocational agriculture facilities were considered most important, receiving importance ratings above 90.0 from all groups.

2) Maintaining an active FFA chapter received high importance ratings from all groups, rating even higher than teaching agricultural classes by teachers and superintendents.

Table 3

Frequencies for Factors Showing Support for the Vocational Agriculture Program in General as Perceived by Teachers, Principals, and Superintendents

Factors showing support	Teachers	Principals	Superintendents
District reaction if state funding were cut			
Increase support	40.0	60.3	35.7
Reduce support	52.9	32.8	53.6
Eliminate program	7.1	6.9	10.7
Agriculture program in comparison with other vocational programs			
More effective support	64.3	30.5	32.1
About the same support	34.3	61.0	57.1
Less effective support	1.4	8.5	10.7
Is the vocational ag program meeting the needs of the community?			
Yes	85.5	89.8	85.7
No	14.5	10.2	14.3

3) Although administrators and teachers showed strong support for requiring and visiting supervised occupational experience programs, administrators and teachers were not definitive in identifying specific time to make SOE visits.

5) Vocational agriculture teachers and administrators placed greater importance on inservice education in technical agriculture than on inservice training in professional education.

6) Teachers rated public relations activities conducted in vocational agriculture/FFA higher than administrators rated public relations activities in vocational agriculture/FFA.

7) Administrators rated the importance of using the summer for shop reorganization, for ordering supplies, and for visiting potential students lower than teachers rated such activities.

8) Instructing adults during the academic year was considered less important by administrators than by teachers.

9) Conducting non-vocational activities was considered of more importance by administrators than by agriculture teachers. Teacher's means for such activities were 40 or less.

10) Teachers placed much lower importance on completing district and state reports than did administrators.

11) Administrators believed vocational agriculture was at least as effective as other vocational programs in their school district. They also believed vocational agriculture was meeting the needs of the community.

Vocational agriculture teachers expected to work longer hours during the school year and during the summer than administrators expected them to work.

Recommendations

1) Because of the great importance placed on safety, teachers and administrators should periodically review vocational agriculture facilities and determine if appropriate safety precautions are being followed to provide a safe environment for students.

2) Administrators and teachers should review the FFA and its relationship to the goals of the total vocational agriculture program to determine if current emphasis on activities within the FFA are in agreement with overall program goals.

3) Administrators and teachers should evaluate SOE project visitation and determine the number of visits students should receive during the year. They should then agree on possible times such visits could be made.

4) District and state reports should be reviewed and only those necessary for maintaining or improving the quality of the vocational agriculture program should be continued. Teachers should be made aware of the purpose of such reports.

5) Teachers should carefully review their priorities for the summer program in light of making the best use of their time for meeting the educational needs of the agriculture community. Administrators and teachers should work cooperatively to develop guidelines for the summer program.

6) Administrators and teachers should work together to provide administrators with a better understanding of the responsibilities, activities, and time commitments of the vocational agriculture teacher; and to give teachers a better understanding of how vocational agriculture fits into the total school program. Specific attention should be given to non-vocational, extra-curricular assignments and their impact on time commitment of the vocational agriculture teacher.

7) Because of the importance given to developing good working relationships between teachers and administrators, specific steps should be taken to improve communication and interaction between these groups.

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