

IS AGRICULTURE A PART OF OUR AMERICAN HERITAGE?

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Is agriculture a part of our American heritage? In response to such a question, those of us represented by the American Association of Teacher Educators in Agriculture rear back and defensively proclaim a boisterous, "Yes, of course it is!" But, on the other hand, what are we doing to see that agriculture remains a part of our American heritage?

In the last issue of this Journal my attention was directed to an article written by J. D. McComas entitled, "A Neophyte Looks at Agricultural Education." Dr. McComas did an excellent job of representing my thinking and what I have found to be the thoughts expressed by most of our colleagues in supervision and teacher education in agriculture. Recognizing, as Dr. McComas pointed out, that some state and local leaders in agricultural education are pessimistic; still the majority are convinced that ours is a program so essential and worthwhile to the nation that it will endure the challenge of the day. Our nation was born on the premises of free enterprise, individual freedom and a strong agricultural economy. No world power has long maintained its prestige unless it could provide the bulk of its food and fiber. Even with the misrepresentation of facts so prevalent in the charges and accusations being hurled at vocational education in general and at agricultural education specifically, there must be some justification to these affronts. A lack of understanding? Incomplete factual information? A desire to make headlines or sell newspapers? Yes, perhaps on occasion each of these have played a part in stimulating the concept of inadequacy being reflected by our program. However, ours is a country where freedom of speech and freedom of the press are considered a part of the American heritage. We would not in any way wish to suppress these freedoms. At times we hide behind the alibi that our program has been and is being hampered by outmoded legislation. If this is an argument based on fact, why is it so? Whose fault is it? What have we as agricultural educators, from teacher trainers down to the beginning teacher, done to correct and keep legislation up-to-date? How often have we complained about the cost of dues to our professional organizations? And then, after paying our dues, how often have we decided that someone else can give their time and their effort to seeing that our interests are represented through these organizations? Or worse yet, have we sometimes failed to even pay our dues to professional organizations from which we expect representation?

As a neophyte with a decade's less experience than Dr. McComas, I would assert that the responsibility for this short sightedness of the past and its projection into the present must be shouldered by state leaders in agriculture. What have we as teacher educators done to stimulate interest in these organizations? In the past we have been so occupied with "lecturing" the advantages of the problem-solving techniques, of pointing out the need to keep our local programs abreast of the changes in the farming community, and of adhering rigidly to the Smith-Hughes legislation, that we have lost sight of the problems developing around us. Others have apparently not been so obsessed.

As a result, we as agricultural educators are gradually awakening to find ourselves in the position that our nation faced following "Sputnik." We have

much catching up to do. The people who feel that our nation can not maintain the American heritage and again rise to the fore in technical knowledge and competence in the field of space are in the minority. Why then, should we as teacher educators not demonstrate our belief that we, too, can catch up?

Agriculture, from the day of the early pioneer, has always been a strong part of the American heritage. The independent attitude and way of life are prominent in our thinking. There is strong evidence that it shall continue to be a necessity for generations to come, unless we shed such habits as eating, wearing clothes, and seeking shelter from the elements. As long as this type of need exists, people must be trained to do the work. Many of us have therefore been demonstrating not a lack of belief in the need of a strong program of agricultural education, but a lack of faith in agriculture itself.

Tradition is hard to break. At one time there was a clear cut need to have a department of agriculture in every rural community to prepare "present and prospective farmers for proficiency in farming." Today this need still exists in many rural communities. However, other needs have developed. Nearly a hundred investigations of the merits of vocational agriculture training as preparation for college level study in agriculture attest to its value in this area. Few such trained men will go back to the farm. The unsatisfied demand for trained workers in the fields of service, production and processing attest to the need for training at the high school level. Another indication of the need for training in agriculture is borne out by the increasing requests for assistance with landscaping and horticultural problems. This list could be expanded, but if we establish programs which will meet these demands alone, we must have many modifications and changes. Can we meet the needs or will we fall back into the depths of "The Saber Toothed Curriculum?"

R. E. Naugher, Assistant Director of Agricultural Education in Washington recently stated, "We must take a new look at where we are going and what tools we need to get the job done." Dr. Naugher made this statement while discussing the implications of the "Perkin's Bill." Assuming that at last federal legislation is being established not only to provide additional funds for vocational training but to also broaden the scope of agricultural education, what guarantee do we have that agricultural education will receive a fair share of these funds? What are we as agricultural educators doing to help state administrators of the new and existing funds recognize the need to continue the support of agricultural education? Now is the time for all good teacher educators to come to the aid of their program. New programs must be outlined, planned, tried and adjusted to meet the changing demand for agriculture that is not merely farming, but an agriculture that is a part of the American heritage.