

SUMMER AGRICULTURAL PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Michael K. Swan, Associate Professor
North Dakota State University

Education in the United States today has often been solely knowledge-based. It has emphasized reading and discussion of topics such as reasons for conflict and “show-and-tell” about science, social science, and math. However, knowledge acquisition and skill development are not synonymous. In occupational preparation, skill development may become as important as knowledge acquisition, or knowledge acquisition may become dependent upon skill development in order for knowledge acquisition to be achieved. In vocational education, where preparation for employment is a prime consideration, one must consider both knowledge acquisition and skill development through “doing” experiences.

The philosophy of agricultural education supports Morton’s (1978) claim that “learning by doing” is considered essential to learning. In agricultural education, summer is one of the best times to involve students in agricultural skill activities. Heavily accelerated production efforts as well as increased activity in associated service and supply businesses during the summer months provide timely opportunities for education and skill development.

Agricultural education knowledge and skill development, therefore, should not be restricted to the standard nine-month school year; both should continue throughout the entire year, including summer months (Camp, 1986). Many activities in the agricultural industry occur during the time of year when public schools are not in formal session. In order to prepare people with occupational skills in the agricultural industry, the agricultural teachers must have students placed and working in the agricultural industry year-round (Lee, 1982). Summer instructional programs have been the topic of many discussions/articles throughout the past

years in agricultural education. Research findings have supported the value of summer instructional programs in agricultural education and their importance to the local and national economies in the past (Camp, 1986, **Brannon**, 1989). Current economic conditions and resulting pressure from these conditions on schools, coupled with the educational reform movement and corresponding static or declining enrollments, have forced school administrators to look for ways to economize within the school operating budgets.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to ascertain philosophically the ideal agricultural education summer program of activities as perceived by teacher educators and state supervisors nationwide. The following objectives were investigated as part of this study:

1. Identify the perceived ideal agricultural education summer program activities in times of economic constraint and emphasis on academic versus vocational achievement.
2. Determine the number days study participants would assign to the eight major summer program of activity categories during this time of economic constraint and academic emphasis.

Methods

Instrumentation

A questionnaire was developed using “A Vocational Agriculture Teacher’s Guide To Planning Summer Programs” (Kotrlik, 1985; Camp, 1986) and the “Policies and Procedures Handbook

for Oregon Vocational Agriculture Programs” (Oades & Deeds, 1978).

Selection of Scale

A seven-point **summated** rating scale was utilized to provide an index for placing each of the summer program activities in rank order by mean score. The responses indicated the level of importance respondents attached to each of the activities. Descriptors were attached to each of the points on the scale (from no importance to high importance), thus ensuring similar interpretations of the scale by all respondents. Ideal summer program of activity quality indicators were determined by those indicators receiving combined mean scores of 5.5 and above.

Testing: of Items

The questionnaire included the following eight major categories of agricultural education summer program activities: (a) agricultural organizations and associations, (b) departmental administration, (c) FFA, (d) instructional improvement, (e) professional growth, (f) resource improvement, (g) supervised agricultural experience (SAE), and (h) teaching/ recruitment. Thirty-eight specific summer program activities within the eight major categories were identified and were included in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was field tested using a panel of experts.

The reliability coefficient (Cronbach Coefficient Alpha) was used to determine reliability of the total instrument; internal consistency was $r = .94$. Individual parts of the instrument had the following reliability coefficients: a) agricultural organizations and associations $r = .93$, (b) departmental administration $r = .92$, (c) FFA $r = .96$, (d) instructional improvement $r = .94$, (e) professional growth $r = .94$, (f) resource improvement $r = .95$, (g) supervised agricultural experience (SAE) $r = .93$, and (h) teaching/ recruitment $r = .95$.

Selection of Sample

A panel of current teacher educators used the directory of AAAE to identify all agricultural educators whose major responsibilities were teaching agricultural education courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels. These individuals became the population for this component of the study ($N=123$). State supervisors were identified for participation in the study using a directory of state supervisors as published by the U.S. Department of Education ($N=54$). Both populations excluded members who had not completed one full year in their current positions and those who had already been used to validate the study instrument. Individual response rates of each group included: teacher educators $113/123=91.9\%$, state supervisors $48/54=88.9\%$, total composite response rate of $161/177=90.9\%$ was achieved.

Collection of Data

Questionnaires and cover letters were mailed to each participant. A second questionnaire and letter was mailed to non-respondents three weeks after the first mailing. A random selection of 20% of non-respondents received telephone contact three weeks after the second mailing.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to describe the perceptions of summer program activities in the eight categories. Differences in perceptions between the groups were determined by using Multifactor Analysis of Variance, Least Significant Difference (LSD) and Scheffe, at the .05 alpha level.

Results

Objective 1

According to teacher educators and state supervisors those agricultural education summer program of activity components to be used as the

ideal quality indicators were identified by a mean score of 5.5 and above are reported in Table 1. Attending annual summer update conferences and supervising agricultural students' home projects (SAE) tied in their ranking. Teacher educators and state supervisors appeared to observe agricultural education summer program activities as similar in importance to one another.

Vacation/Family Time is not part of the extended contract for teachers of agriculture but appears here because study participants felt it was important for teachers to plan vacations with their families around their extended contract activities. Supervision of agricultural students' home projects (SAE) was not statistically different among the study groups. Maintaining communication between and among school administration was identified as an important aspect by both the study groups.

Table 1. Rank Order of Importance, as Perceived by Teacher Educators (TE) and State Supervisors (SS), for Ideal Summer Program of Activities

| Importance | Rank | Mean* | SD | TE N=113 | SS N=48 |
|--|------|-------|-----|-------------|------------|
| Attend annual summer update conference | 1.5 | 6.2 | 1.3 | 90.3 | 87.5 |
| Supervise agricultural students' home projects (SAE) | 1.5 | 6.2 | 1.4 | 89.4 | 91.7 |
| Visit prospective agricultural students and parents | 3.5 | 6.0 | 1.4 | 79.6 | 85.4 |
| Supervise agricultural cooperative work experience (CWE) | 3.5 | 6.0 | 1.5 | 86.7 | 85.5 |
| Provide individualized instruction to students | 5.0 | 5.9 | 1.4 | 79.6 | 70.8 |
| Vacation/Family Time | 6.0 | 5.8 | 1.5 | 78.7 | 77.1 |
| Maintain communications with school administration | 8.0 | 5.7 | 1.4 | 73.5 | 66.7 |
| Develop future SAE/CWE sources | 8.0 | 5.7 | 1.4 | 72.6 | 75.0 |
| Supervise land lab/greenhouse used by students | 9.0 | 5.7 | 1.5 | 76.0 | 83.3 |
| Plan & supervise FFA activities | 10.0 | 5.6 | 1.3 | 65.5 | 75.1 |

*Note: Means were calculated on a scale of one to seven. SD = Standard Deviation

Objective 2

The number of days perceived by study participants to be allocated to the current summer activities program ranged from 37.0 days to 40.3 days found in Table 2.

The number of days currently being allocated, as identified by the teacher educators' and state supervisors' composite scores, was found to be 39.0. Perceptions of the number of days currently being allocated to SAE were found to have the most variation among the eight categories as identified in the comparison of current and ideal days.

As identified by teacher educators and state supervisors nationwide, the ideal number of days that should be allocated to the summer program activities was 50.1. Perceptions of the number of days currently being allocated to department administration was found to have the most variation among the eight categories. Perceptions of the number of days which should ideally be allocated to professional growth were found to have the most variation among the eight categories. Both groups indicated increases from current allocation to ideal allocation of days for summer program of activities.

Conclusions/Recommendations

The primary purpose for extending the contract of the agricultural education teacher is the supervision and/or instruction of students, therefore it is important for agricultural education teachers to maximize the time spent with students and the time spent on activities that are unique to the summer program of activities. If this is done, the agricultural education teacher should be able to justify summer program of activities. No other reasons alone justify a summer program, unless the entire school operates in that manner.

1. It is important for agricultural educators to maximize the time spent on activities that are

unique to the agricultural education summer program of activities.

2. A **summer** program of activities should be developed to include those ideal activities identified by teacher educators and state supervisors nationwide.
3. An ideal summer agricultural program should consist of 50 days and emphasize closely the summer program of activities identified by teacher educators and state supervisors.
4. An emphasis on communication between agricultural educators and school administration may need to occur if agricultural programs are to develop a highly effective summer program for the future.
5. Agricultural educators need to develop a comprehensive program of visiting prospective agricultural students and parents to ensure enrollments in the future.

References

Brannon, T. (1989). Impact of vocational agriculture/FFA on community leadership. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 30(3), 37-45.

Camp, S. S. (1986). **Summer** time allocation in vocational agriculture programs in the United States. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 86-25,327.(University Microfilms No.286327).

Cohen, J. (1969). *Statistical power analysis for behavioral sciences*. New York: Academic Press, Inc.

Kotrlík, J. W. (1985). Activities that should be and are included in **summer** programs of vocational agriculture in the United States. *Journal of the American Association of Teacher Educators in Agriculture*, 26(4), 9-15.

Table 2. Mean Number of Days Currently being Allocated and Mean Number of Days Which Ideally Should be Allocated to the Eight Major Categories of Agricultural Education Summer Program of Activities

| | Grand Mean | TE Mean | TE SD | ss Mean | ss SD |
|---|---------------|------------|----------|------------|----------|
| Agricultural Organizations and Associations | | | | | |
| Current | 2.8 | 3.1 | 3.0 | 2.4 | 2.1 |
| Ideal | 3.5 | 3.6 | 4.1 | 3.3 | 2.2 |
| Department Administration | | | | | |
| Current | 4.8 | 5.5 | 7.0 | 3.8 | 3.3 |
| Ideal | 4.8 | 4.9 | 3.5 | 4.5 | 3.8 |
| FFA | | | | | |
| Current | 7.2 | 7.1 | 5.3 | 7.4 | 5.5 |
| Ideal | 7.1 | 6.7 | 3.4 | 8.1 | 5.1 |
| Instructional Improvement | | | | | |
| Current | 4.5 | 4.6 | 5.3 | 4.4 | 5.1 |
| Ideal | 4.8 | 4.8 | 3.9 | 4.9 | 4.7 |
| Professional Growth | | | | | |
| Current | 4.3 | 4.4 | 3.6 | 4.1 | 3.8 |
| Ideal | 5.9 | 6.5 | 5.6 | 4.4 | 2.8 |
| Resource Improvement | | | | | |
| Current | 3.4 | 3.8 | 6.7 | 2.4 | 2.5 |
| Ideal | 4.2 | 4.3 | 4.3 | 4.0 | 4.4 |
| SAE | | | | | |
| Current | 8.7 | 8.7 | 7.5 | 8.6 | 7.7 |
| Ideal | 13.0 | 13.0 | 7.3 | 12.9 | 8.2 |
| Teaching/Recruitment | | | | | |
| Current | 3.3 | 3.1 | 2.7 | 3.9 | 4.6 |
| Ideal | 6.8 | 6.7 | 6.0 | 7.0 | 5.6 |
| Totals | | | | | |
| Current | 39.0 | 40.3 | | 37.0 | |
| Ideal | 50.1 | 50.5 | | 49.1 | |

Lee, J. S. (1982). Year-Round Programs. *The Agricultural Education Magazine*, 52(12), 3-4.

Morton, R. H. (1978). The relationship between the quality of Supervised Occupational Experience Programs and achievement of students in vocational agriculture. Paper Presented at the National Agricultural Education Research Meeting, Dallas, TX: December 1978.

Oades, J. D. & Deeds, J. P. (1978). Policies and procedures handbook for Oregon vocational agriculture programs. Salem, Oregon: Oregon Department of Education, Oregon State *University*, Division of Vocational-Technical Education, Career and Vocational Education Section, and Department of Agricultural Education.