

IMAGES AFFECT TEACHER EDUCATION

G. F. Ekstrom, University of Missouri

An official of an agricultural agency spoke rather disparagingly of vocational agriculture at a recent convocation for students in our College of Agriculture. He gave the impression that enrollments in high school classes are being diluted with town boys, many of whom choose vocational agriculture in preference to science and mathematics. At approximately the same time, one of the larger newspapers in the state carried a feature article regarding a popular program of general agriculture in a high school where vocational agriculture had been discontinued.

The foregoing illustrations are indicative of situations which create false impressions regarding programs of agricultural education. Should we be surprised therefore that some teachers of vocational agriculture are becoming concerned with their professional welfare and that there is a shortage of capable students interested in entering the profession.

Obviously the basic problems affecting vocational education in agriculture stem from the changing economy in which all educational programs in agriculture are involved. It would appear that the basis for the dilemma as related to vocational agriculture is two-fold -- first, an unrealistic appraisal of the situation, and second, a lack of common purposes.

To imply that all graduates from vocational agriculture can farm on an adequate income basis just isn't so. To attempt the justification of vocational agriculture, solely on the basis of annual turnover of persons classified by the census as being engaged in farming, represents quite elementary thinking. Furthermore, inheritance and partnerships within families are major factors in establishment as applied to all groups of rural young people and are not peculiar to former students of vocational agriculture.

The impression which the public has of vocational education in agriculture can be attributed in part to the personnel engaged in the program. Agriculture has changed to the extent that the number of persons engaged in non-farming occupations -- input and output -- far exceeds those engaged in farming. It is logical that questions should be raised as to the role of vocational agriculture in the changing economy. Objectives can and must be changed.

Implications for Teacher Education

There are many implications as to the role of teacher education in this period of change.

1. The program of teacher education should be evaluated in the light of changing purposes and objectives.
2. Teacher trainers should provide necessary data and cooperate with administrators and teachers in the development of state and local programs.
3. Curriculum offerings should be revised with increased emphasis on economics and on management phases of agriculture.
4. In-service training programs, including non-credit workshops and graduate programs, should be stressed.

Current developments in education and in agriculture provide training needs and educational opportunities heretofore unrealized. The basic policy of government is favorable to vocational education. Adjustments in patterns of federally-aided programs will no doubt be made in line with recommendations coming from national study committees. The broadening of agriculture and changing concepts of farming represent opportunities rather than liabilities for persons concerned with the future of rural America.