

LEST WE GO OVERBOARD

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Early in our voyage on a small troop transport as non paying guests of the government during World War II, the passengers were given safety instructions. Rafts, life preservers, etc. were all pointed out and their uses were described. Toward the end of the session it was emphasized that even though these devices were on board for use in emergencies, the personnel should take necessary precautions to insure that they would not go overboard. The practical approach to remaining safe and dry was one of foresight and discretion.

Possibly we in agricultural education should take the steps necessary also to insure that the prospects of a safe journey through troubled and turbulent seas will be enhanced. It seems that we have a responsibility to utilize the means at our disposal to keep the program in education on an even keel and reduce the probabilities of going overboard or off on a tangent. This calls for a large measure of foresight and discretion. Patience and persistence may have to be exercised extensively also.

For several years we have been hearing from various parties who should know better that agriculture is going out of business and that it is a thing of the past. Likewise we see on all sides efforts of various types being exerted with the view of going all out in building comprehensive programs in the area of off-farm agriculture, agribusiness, non-farm agriculture or by one of a variety of other terms, but in the same general area.

The first of these, the statement that agriculture is going out of business, can be dismissed without too much difficulty. Sheer numbers alone will prevent this happening. The 197,000,000 Americans love to eat and this number is increasing at a rate in excess of 8,000 additional persons per day. It is true that many patterns of farming are passing from the rural scene. However, these are being replaced by others which seem to more nearly meet the needs of modern agriculture. The pattern of farming is changing, but the importance of agriculture is still paramount. For a nation to be great, it must be capable of feeding itself.

It seems that farming and ranching will continue to be important occupations in this country. As farming becomes more technical through mechanization; the use of herbicides, insecticides, and other chemicals; and the involvement of large sums of money for appropriate financing, the level of preparation of the farmer must of necessity be raised considerably. The numbers entering farming may be limited, but these persons must be highly qualified, competent individuals.

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There may be some concern which is legitimate, however, with reference to the concentrated effort being expended in the field of agribusiness. Let me hasten to say that I see nothing wrong per se with the drive to broaden the base of education in vocational agriculture. My concern is that we do not toss out the "baby" along with the wash water. The seeming neglect for production agriculture -- farming in its many aspects, is disturbing. Is it necessary that we largely forget farming in our educational endeavor?

Quite a challenge is presented to the teacher trainer. At the time we are required to revamp the pre service curriculum to meet changing conditions in farming, we must also discover means for preparing the same trainee to cope effectively with the broad spectrum of teaching for employment in agriculture.

At some point in the scheme of things there should be a balance between training for farming and for nonfarm agriculture. The young child should not receive all of the attention because it is new and popular at the moment. It would be well to remember that the total field of agriculture is predicated upon the production of food, fiber, and shelter. All the many other activities are supportive elements. A similar situation exists within the armed forces of our country. I am told that for every man engaged in combat it requires ten or more individuals to supply and service him. The objective of the ten is to keep the fighting man properly cared for.

There should be a program of long-range planning which will be utilized as a basis for establishing priorities and for the establishment and maintenance of the total educational venture in agriculture. Grandma Moses, the renowned American painter is reported to have said that before she starts painting she gets a frame and then saws the masonite to fit the frame. (She says that she thought it a good idea to build the sty before getting the pig.)

There may be a message for us in the philosophy of this famous lady. Rather than being blown by the winds of opportunity and popularity we should have a firm basis for whatever we attempt to do. In our haste to jump upon the bandwagon of nonfarm agriculture we may have overlooked a part of the broad purpose of our educational program.

It seems that we have a need for comprehensive long-range planning in which the objective will be to set some goals indicating the things it is deemed desirable to accomplish. Then short-range or intermediate programming can be devised in the light of overall goals. The likelihood of the pendulum of activity swinging from one extreme to another would be considerably lessened. Emphasis could be placed upon various aspects of the program based upon need and the part each plays in meeting the major purposes of the educational venture.

Long-range plans updated periodically may be one means of helping us keep in proper perspective the numerous suggestions and pressures encountered. Guidelines are needed to keep us headed in the right direction. In some instances proper planning will indicate that nonfarm

agriculture should receive the lion's share of time, effort and physical means. However, it seems reasonable to assume that farming and preparation for farming should be the dominant feature of the educational program.

The thesis of the author is that regardless of the areas of instruction concentrated upon, the local educational program will be on firmer ground and a more solid footing when it pursues a program of long-range planning which is accompanied by appropriate implementation.

Long-range plans will cause the group to project its vision for the educational program over a period of years. Efforts will be expended to determine exactly what should be the overall aims of vocational agriculture in this state. This would be followed up, of course, with an outline of ways and means for the fulfillment of the major goals. Intermediate steps would be programmed also so that one could more easily visualize the progress being made toward the objective.

It will be easier to "sell" the educational program to various groups within the state once we have it properly outlined in detail. This is quite important at the present time since agriculture has come under some fire from a variety of critics. It will facilitate the comprehension by others of the changes which are being incorporated into the program. New things are often suspect until they are understood. Nonfarm agricultural training, its need, purposes, and methods are not traditional and a portion of our population needs enlightenment in this area.

Appropriate planning will not solve all problems in vocational agriculture, but it will make it possible for us to face them with a reasonable degree of confidence.

CORRECTION

In Volume VII, No. 2, November 1966, of the Journal there is an omission of one word in the last sentence of the third paragraph on Page 16 of the article by Dr. George Wieggers titled "Certification of Teachers of Vocational Agriculture."

The sentence should read:
"The point has not been reached where certification equals competent teaching".