

DISSEMINATING RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

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One of the frustrations of teacher educators is that of seeing important research reports gathering dust in their library, while at the same time there is a compelling need for improvement in programs which these research findings could

implement. To meet this problem, a standing committee of the Central Regional Conference have spent two years in considering ways and means of putting research to work in Agricultural Education. At the close of last year's Research Conference, which was held in August at Purdue University, a set of guiding principles were identified and two studies were selected as trials of these principles of research dissemination. This year the committee again met at the Regional Research Conference at Iowa State University, and redrafted the principles which they had set forth in terms of their experience during the previous year. The following represent some of the principles which the committee proposed.

Research should be planned with its potential use in mind. It is as important that research be designed to provide specific information as it is for the manufacturer to know the product he desires before he processes his materials. The committee recognized that much of the research in Agricultural Education is done by graduate students under the direction of staff members, and that as a consequence various studies within a state are likely to be unrelated to each other. They also criticized the preponderance of status studies which have characterized research in Agricultural Education.

Coordinated and continued involvement of individuals and groups must be secured if research findings are to be used. The committee believed that not only must teachers of vocational agriculture, supervisors, and teacher educators be involved in research studies from start to finish, but that school administrators, principals, guidance directors in general education, must often be included and that an effort should be made to make more effective use of experiment station personnel and funds in designing and conducting and evaluating research programs, and in the dissemination of their results.

There should be administrative provision for the systematic distribution of research findings. The committee believed that most states should have a research committee which meets regularly and which accepts the responsibility for dissemination of research results. Such a research committee might include representatives from the supervisory staff, teacher educators, school administrators, teachers, and others. It was believed that time should be regularly allocated to present current research findings at staff meetings and that a budget should provide for the necessary cost of clerical help, publication and dissemination of research findings.

Research reports in Agricultural Education should be written in a form which will communicate with the audience it should reach. The committee believed that the first step in presenting the research to be that of the preparation of a formal report such as a library copy, but that even though the value of such reports cannot be minimized, that further publication of a different nature is often required. It was recommended that summaries and reports of research findings be disseminated to various groups through departmental newsletters, through asking graduate students to publish summaries of their studies in professional publications, and that where appropriate representatives of newspapers and farm magazines be given an opportunity to disseminate research information. The committee believed that teacher educators must assume the responsibility for preparing usable summaries of completed studies and that they should be made available for other researchers both on and off campus. They recommended that such summaries be specific and complete enough to be usable by graduate students in making reviews of studies.

Research findings should be packaged in as attractive a manner as possible in terms of their intended audience. In many cases when an important research study is to be widely utilized, the results may be presented by several persons in addition to the person who conducted the study. This situation suggests the need for a set of materials which may be used in presenting the research report. These materials may include not only the usual mimeographed summary but also charts, transparencies, slides, and other audio-visual means of securing the maximum understanding of the information on the part of the audience to be reached.

Plans for utilization of research findings should include sufficient follow-up of activities to bring about adoption and evaluation. The committee criticized the single research presentation as generally insufficient for widespread acceptance and indicated that exposure over a period of years is usually necessary before teachers adopt a new practice. It was also pointed out that the adoption of new practices among teachers follows a similar pattern to the adoption of the new practices by farmers. In other words, there are teachers who are "innovators" and "early adopters" and others who are "late adopters" and "laggards."

At next year's research conference at Michigan State University, the committee plans to complete its consideration and recommendations regarding the dissemination of Agricultural Education research. Emphasis next year will be placed upon the packaging of research information. Dr. Raymond Clark plans to select a study which will be used to become a basis for a demonstration of preparation of various materials for presenting its findings to an appropriate audience.

Members of the committee who worked on this year's recommendations included Elmer Dooley of Missouri, Chalmers Cromer of Nebraska, Clarence Bundy of Iowa, Raymond Clark of Michigan, Huber Eldridge of Iowa, and the writer.