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NONFARM AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYMENT IN LOUISIANA WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPING TRAINING PROGRAMS

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The march of technology and science in a modern and progressive society emphasizes more than ever, and for an everincreasing proportion of the population, the need for development of more salable vocational skills. Workers without competence in keeping with the demands of progress are at a growing disadvantage and will eventually find that they have been written out of the employment market.

Research just completed in Louisiana (cooperative research project OE 5-85-040) emphasizes the tremendous shifts that have taken place in the agricultural industry in recent years. A broad complex of nonfarm agricultural businesses and services has evolved to facilitate the work of the farmer. It is a complex involving hundreds of professional, technical, and skilled occupations requiring extensive knowledge and highly developed skills for successful performance. Trends indicate that agriculture will continue to respond to the demands of technology and, with the increase in population, will become even more intricate and specialized in the future. Therefore, individuals aspiring to enter agricultural occupations should become knowledgeable concerning the types of jobs available and their characteristics.

This study was a continuation of a project began in November 1963 under a grant awarded by the State Board of Liquidation of the State Debt, State of Louisiana. A survey of the seven metropolitan areas of the state --Alexandria, Baton Rouge, Lafayette, Lake Charles, New Orleans, Monroe and Shreveport was financed by this allotment. As this project neared completion, application was made to the U. S. Office of Education for a grant under terms of section 4(c) of the Morse-Perkins Act for funds to carry the study into the smaller towns and cities. The project was funded under contract number OE 5-85-040 and began June 15, 1965. This report combines the results of the seven metropolitan centers study and the findings of the survey of 90 semi-urban and rural towns, providing a comprehensive state summary of nonfarm agricultural jobs.

This research set as its major task the accumulation of facts concerning nonfarm agricultural occupations within Louisiana, and the informing of educators, employers, parents, and high school youth of the abundance of agricultural opportunities existing in this state -- for those who prepare themselves.

A summary of the more important findings is as follows:

There were 2,430 businesses and agencies surveyed, representing the vast agricultural complex of Louisiana. These organizations employed 51,719 workers -- of which 20,025

were required to have competencies in agriculture. Within a five-year period the number of workers with skills and knowledge in agricultural subjects is expected to rise to 21,999. Workers were found under 1,699 job titles. Five years hence it is expected that the number of job titles will increase to 1,862, an increase of 9.5 per cent.

A definite pattern was apparent in all firms relative to salary schedules. Employees were paid in relation to their background of education, training, experience and responsibility, beginning with low pay for the unskilled followed by substantial increases for the skilled and continuing upward through the management and professional levels. As a rule, employers felt that a well trained employee was the best investment their business could make, and they were ready to pay higher salaries for well trained individuals. Significant salary advances were given with tenure, with the exception of the semiskilled categories where pay remained at low levels.

Generally, a high school education was a prerequisite for entry into nonfarm agricultural occupations. Only 10.6 per cent of the jobs would be filled with applicants who were not high school graduates. Taking into account all families and all levels of employment, one in four prospective employees was expected to have a college degree or some college training.

The degree of competency in agricultural subjects required of employees varied according to the work performed in each job title and each occupational family. However, certain similarities existed: (1) generally, a rather broad coverage of subject matter was required of all workers above the semiskilled and unskilled levels; (2) employees at the management and supervisory levels in addition to having specialized knowledge in relation to a particular business, were expected to be widely knowledgeable in agricultural subjects; (3) employees at the professional level were expected to have some training in all agricultural areas, but at the same time they must have intensive training in their area of specialization (4) the coverage of agricultural subject matter for technical workers varied, depending on the family, but in all cases intensive training was required in the subject matter content pertinent to job performance; (5) skilled level workers possessed knowledge and skill in a particular area or one making up an area.

Education and training for job entry were the restrictions placed on the majority of job titles. Some of the agencies had job titles requiring civil service ratings, while only a slight percentage were under contract with labor. Most jobs at the professional level required a college degree and in some instances a professional degree. A small number of jobs at the technical and skilled levels required licenses.

Considerable growth in terms of job titles and number of employees was reported by all businesses and agencies particularly those supplying farmers with the items necessary for production, followed by those processing and marketing farm produced commodities.

Employers expressed a need for a supply of trained workers, emphasizing the value of education, training and skill. Of special significance was the emphasis placed upon occupational training obtained prior to job entry.

This study of the nonfarm complex of the state depicts rather vividly the creation of new fields of employment as a result of the combining of science and technology. The host of jobs once available to youth have been eliminated from farm work, but at the same time the application of research findings and automation have resulted in new occupational fields where the number of job opportunities exceed those formerly supplied on the farm.

Significantly, the jobs lost because of advancing technology comprise those in which many untrained rural youth formerly found employment. Jobs emerging in off-farm agriculture demand an ever rising level of education, training and skill -- thus, to a large extent, eliminating the untrained.

Farm youth, because of experiences gained at home, have a "head start" toward gainful employment in any segment of the nonfarm agricultural complex providing they have the interest and are willing to work, and if the necessary educational and training opportunities are made available and they utilize them.

Evidence assembled in this study "points up" the many employment opportunities for individuals trained in agriculture. How to make rural youth employable by education and training prior to job entry poses a very real problem to educators.

Evidence also indicates areas where employment opportunities exist. If vocational agriculture is going to make a worthy contribution to occupational training, then efforts must be made to gear instruction to the needs of areas defined.

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