

* * * * *

ACCOUNTABILITY, THE "IN" WORD

David Bennett

Teacher of Agriculture
Shelley, Idaho

Joseph G. Cvancara

Associate Professor
Department of Agricultural Education
University of Idaho

Information to determine where students are placed in jobs is becoming increasingly important in all areas of vocational education. This is a time when education at all levels and in all areas of specialization is being evaluated for its relevency, viability and general values in the current educational scene.

As the public depends more on education to solve its social and technical problems, the public also increases its expectations of the quality of the educated product which is to be produced. Today, there is an increasing emphasis on accountability. Apparently there is a demand for educational programs to be evaluated on a basis of what they produce and not on promises to produce. Agricultural education is not and should not be excluded from the greater public interest in accountability.

There is an ancient fable which states, "if you are not sure where you're going, you're liable to end up someplace else without knowing it." This could very well be the plight of agricultural education if continued evaluations of programs and needs of our students are not stressed and updated. Agricultural education programs are of the most value when former students are in jobs where their training has been beneficial.

A systematic and continuous evaluation of an agricultural education program requires the collection and analysis of various kinds of information. Data must be collected to determine the extent to which program objectives are being achieved. A follow-up study of graduates is one source of data that can be useful in evaluating a curriculum. This data may not provide immediate answers regarding the effectiveness of a program, but the data does yield information about the educational product that is essential for continuous evaluation.

A recent study of former male graduates of selected Idaho high schools during the period 1962-1970 was an attempt to identify what happens to Idaho agricultural education graduates.

The Study

The 1962 agricultural graduates were selected as the subject of this study because they have been out of high school long enough to have completed most of their formal education or military service and in most cases established themselves in an occupational field. The study covered a period of eight years after high school graduation to December 1970.

A letter was mailed to the State Office of Vocational Agricultural Education requesting a list of names of all 1962 vocational agriculture graduates from selected Idaho high schools who had completed four years of vocational agriculture.

The list of schools from which the sample was obtained was limited to those schools which offered agricultural education during the 1961-62 school year and have offered vocational agriculture since that time.

A letter was then mailed to the agricultural education instructor of the selected Idaho high schools containing the names of the agricultural graduates who had graduated from that particular high school in the year 1962. Twenty-four instructors responded with the present mailing addresses of the 1962 graduates. Questionnaires were then sent to 169 graduates, and 102 questionnaires were returned.

The questionnaire was designed to reveal the following: the occupational or educational status of graduates seven months after graduation (December 1962); the occupational status eight years later to December 1970; the formal educational experiences; the present geographic location of graduates; the influence of vocational agriculture on present occupation; the value of vocational training in career progress; and the influence of vocational agriculture on continuing education.

The Results and Findings

The occupational status of the graduates seven months after graduation revealed that about 47 percent of the 102 surveyed were engaged in agricultural occupations of which 38.2 percent were in production agriculture; 36.3 percent were students in various educational programs; 3.9 percent were employed in non-agricultural occupations and 12.8 percent were in the military service.

The occupational status of the graduates in 1970 showed that nearly 59 percent were engaged in an agricultural occupation of which 50 percent were in production agriculture, 32.4 percent were employed in non-agricultural occupations; 3.9 percent were in the military service and 4.9 percent were enrolled in college.

The formal education experience of former graduates indicated that 23.5 percent had some college training in agriculture and 24.5 percent had some college education of a non-agricultural nature. A total of 34.3 percent had taken additional training in the vocational and/or technical field and 17.7 percent had no formal training beyond high school.

The present geographic location of the former agricultural graduates revealed that 77.5 percent of the 102 surveyed were living in Idaho. About 43 percent of the graduates lived in the community in which they had graduated from high school, and 19.6 percent of the 1962 graduates had left the state. Three former students were in the military service.

The influence of vocational agriculture on present occupation showed that nearly 63 percent of the 102 students benefited from agricultural education training. Another 37 percent of the graduates stated that agricultural education had no influence on their occupational choice.

The value of vocational agriculture training in career progress was disclosed by about 96 percent of the 102 respondents who stated that agriculture education had been valuable in their career progress. This included 29 percent of the students surveyed who were in non-agriculture occupations. Only 3.9 percent stated that vocational agriculture had been of no value in their career progress.

The influence of vocational agriculture on continuing education was indicated by about 43 percent of the former students who stated that the agricultural education instructor had influenced them in their decision to further their education.

Conclusions

This study reveals that by excluding those former agricultural graduates enrolled in school or in the military service that a large number or more than 92 percent who were employed in December 1962, were engaged in agricultural occupations. This indicates that agricultural education training enables students to enter production agriculture and off-farm agricultural occupations upon graduation. This implies that we must inform school counselors of this information so they will be knowledgeable of the benefits of agricultural education programs.

In December 1970 the study showed that 60 or nearly 59 percent of the same 1962 agricultural graduates who were employed and not in school or in the military service were in agricultural occupations. One-half of these students were in production agriculture and the other one-half in agricultural-related jobs. This information shows that there is a continued need for agricultural education training in our public school systems and that agricultural education has an influence on many graduates in their occupational selection and career progress.

The level and nature of formal education beyond high school for the 1962 vocational agriculture graduates disclosed that 82.4 percent had additional formal training beyond high school. The emphasis that the high school agricultural graduates have placed on obtaining additional educational training seems to indicate that agricultural education equals other high school curriculums in preparing students for college. Another observation is that agricultural teachers do a very good job in counseling.

The type and quality of the educational program provided in a high school will be reflected in the occupational skills and qualities of the people living in the communities. The fact that 79 out of the 102 respondents were living in Idaho supports this statement. Since 44 of the group remained on the local community in which they graduated from high school, it becomes obvious that the training provided in the respective communities and the state is a very important responsibility of educators.

Recommendations

This study implies that agricultural education training continues to be an important part of the educational system in Idaho. This is evident by the number of graduates who entered agriculture occupations.

The trend throughout the country of larger farm operations creates fewer opportunities for agricultural graduates to enter production agriculture. However, many more agricultural opportunities are available each year in off-farm agricultural occupations. Therefore agricultural education curriculums must be revised to provide training for off-farm agricultural occupations as well as training in production agriculture.

* * * * *