The "primacy of the individual" sounds good. Serving the needs of the individual is the human thing to do, but serving individuals in vocational programs for which there are no jobs is an inhumane thing to do. Furthermore, it is not an economical thing to do.

-McMillion

Today, socialization of our youth is a greater problem in the U.S. than is the economy. When large numbers of people left the farm . . . alienation of the young--and such related problems as deliquency, drug use, and staggeringly high unemployment--resulted.

-Iverson

THE ROLE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN AGRICULTURE -- SOCIALIZATION

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Socialization

The issue of this debate--whether the role of vocational education in agriculture should be socialization* or economic efficiency--is both timely and important. The debate comes during a period when education, including vocational education and agricultural education, is under virtual economic, social and political siege (Wallace, 1982). Cutbacks in Federal funds under the Reagan administration's "New Federalism," reduced tax revenues from an economy in recession, reluctance of state and local governments to pick up the deficit and perhaps further aggravate a taxpayer revolt and other evidence of reduced commitment to the schools by legislators and the public in general, have resulted in serious concerns among agricultural educators as to the future of the program. Given this situation, it is not surprising to see proposals emerging for placing greater emphasis on economic efficiency in vocational agriculture. However, in times of crises, it is especially important to keep in mind historical and philosophical precedent.

*Dewey (1916) described socialization as the process by which a nation reproduces its societal type. He argued that as a function of the school, socialization required an interrelating of technical and liberal studies in order to develop thinking individuals who could contribute to the quality of life in the American technological society.

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Historical Perspective

The issue is hardly a new one to the profession. At the turn of the century, prior to enactment of the Smith-Hughes Act, heated debates occurred over whether "culturists" or "vocationists" should prevail in designing vocational education programs. In a report to the NEA in 1910, Professor Frank Carlton described the differences of opinion about how the schools should respond to industrialization:

> Today one class of men who are insistently urging that the public school emphasize industrial and trade education, do so because they wish an increased supply of workers who are mere workers or human automatons. Many influential employers in the United States are demanding in no uncertain tones that the public schools be utilized to turn out narrowly trained industrial workers who may become passive links in the great industrial mechanism of the present age. Systematization and specialization are the favorite watchwords of this class. The application of factory methods to the school is demanded in the name of efficiency and economy. Standardization, not individual treatment, is the ideal of the business man.
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> There are other people though, who stand for the position that the public school system should train efficient workers who are also thinking men and women capable of enjoying art, literature, and leisure, and who will be able to intelligently consider the political and social problems which will inevitably arise in the twentieth century. They demand that a well-rounded development be given each child, and that each student be prepared for useful and efficient work in the community. The two views are almost diametrically opposed, but the difference is that the first group is agreed on its goals, while the second group remains divided on the proper scope of educational programs. (Law, 1975).

Ultimately, the narrow vocationist view prevailed. It was championed by such powerful leaders as David Snedden, the social efficiency theorist, and Charles Prosser, who believed vocational education was "training for useful employment, and nothing else" (Prosser and Quigley, 1950). As an author of the 1917 Act and later as Executive Director of the separate Federal Board for Vocational Education, Prosser controlled the development of vocational education for a number of years--but his policies were not without critics. John Dewey, pragmatic philosopher and leader of the progressive education movement, noted that, "if the system merely turns out efficient industrial

fodder . . . it is not helping solve the problem of building a distinctive American culture; it is only aggravating the problem" (Law, 1975).

From its inception, vocational agriculture did not totally conform to the philosophy of Prosser--innovative socializing aspects such as home visits and the FFA and junior high programs made vocational agriculture more than just narrow occupational training. The Vocational Education Act of 1963 gave impetus to the expanded role, which had evolved over the years. At last the vocational needs of all groups and the "development of the individual over the needs of the labor market" could be legally addressed (Law, 1975). Thus freed, agricultural educators expanded their programs to off-farm occupations. Subsequent legislation further broadened the concept under which the vocational agriculture program operated. Today, vocational agriculture consists of a comprehensive program designed to provide social development, occupational exploration and job preparation. It contributes heavily to career and general education. Phipps (1980) wrote that according to Monograph No. 21, Division of Vocational Education, U.S. Department of Education, general objectives in vocational agriculture are:

1. To develop the individual as completely as possible.

2. To promote personal-group relationships with emphasis upon home and family life as fundamental to the individual's growth and to the public welfare.

3. To make individuals and groups responsive to the needs of other individuals and groups, of communities, of governments, and of other desirable social agencies.

Kahler (1980), speaking at the National Seminar, "Agricultural Education: Shaping the Future," indicated a fourfold continuing mission for the program in the future:

1. Reaffirm and reestablish our efforts to build instruction around the needs of students,

2. Prepare young men and women for employment in agricultural occupations,

3. Provide opportunities for avocational coursework so other students can take courses . . . of interest to them, and

4. Provide instruction on the significance of agriculture, food and production.

Thus, the vocational agriculture program has become a program deeply involved in the socialization process.

The Importance of Socialization

Today, socialization of our youth is a greater problem in the U.S. than is the economy. When large numbers of people left the farm, and when cottage industry gave way to major manufacturing firms, the involvement of youth in activities of adult society diminished sharply. The alienation of the young--and such related problems as delinquency, drug use, and staggeringly high unemployment--resulted. In their book, *Socialization and Schooling*, Smith and Orlasky (1975) asserted that "youth is the nation's indispensible resource, yet an ever larger proportion of the nation's youth is being squandered in idle dissipation while the adult community is engrossed by its own concerns and successes, leaving the care of youth largely to the street and the school."* The problem is even more acute when the lack of involvement by other institutions is considered. Evans and Herr (1978) indicated that, in the U.S., the school is the only social institution which has the increasing of individual options, i.e., socialization of individuals, as a major goal. The school has sought to accomplish this socialization process with programs under three major headings: 1) programs to develop character and civic conduct; 2) programs to improve the quality of community life; and 3) programs to prepare youth for work (Smith and Orlosky). Within the school, vocational education constitutes the primary means to prepare school-age youth for work. As a major component of vocational education in schools across the nation, vocational agriculture represents an important force in the socialization process.

Principles and Applications

The seven questions raised by Dr. McMillion can be answered best by examining current programs and practices of vocational education in agriculture, in light of certain guiding principles, and from the philosophical orientation of the broader program goal--socialization.

1. The needs of the individual student should be the dominant concern in vocational agriculture (over the needs of the economy or society).

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*Columnist Sidney Harris (1979) noted that the school cannot adequately compete with the urban street gang, because the gang offers more to the individual: protection, entertainment, comfort and recognition.

Where a vocational agriculture program adheres to this principle, a wide array of curricular areas are offered--regardless of the availability of jobs in those occupations in the local community. In effect, "community" is considered to be a broad area/region of the nation. The curriculum is designed to develop individualism, not conformity. Students have a major role in determining course content and sequence. Much of the instruction is individualized and selfpaced, in order to take them from "where they are." Students work in a variety of jobs, even though they are not available for full-time employment until after high school graduation. A portion of the curriculum is aimed at wise use of leisure time; therefore, some avocational activities are included. By being well planned and conducted, these "hobby" activities generate interest in other parts of the program and appreciably aid the recruitment of new students. The program is evaluated heavily on the satisfaction expressed by graduates.

2. General educational competencies should take precedence over more job-related competencies.

This principle is borne out, in the writer's experience, by returning graduates who most often expressed appreciation for such general competencies as speaking, parliamentary procedure and other organizational skills. Vocational agriculture programs devoted to socialization stress such lifelong skills in the FFA program, as well as those more job-oriented skills. Students in their developmental years may not be sure of their future occupation, but they can be assured of a need for leadership skills.

The vocational agriculture department stresses cooperation as more important than competition. The award system rewards cooperative activities to a greater extent than contests. Everyone who achieves is rewarded, along the lines of the olympic model (gold-silver-bronze awards). Parliamentary procedure and public speaking are heavy components of leadership skill development. For competitive events, every student receives some basic training; those interested can, through concentrated training, gain mastery to earn a place on the team. Through this system, every student has the opportunity to achieve to the limit of his/her ability.

The vocational agriculture program also emphasizes values and reasoning or problem solving skills. Individualized, competency-based curriculum materials are used as a cost-effective means to teach skills for specific agricultural jobs. The supervised occupational experience program is coordinated with the award program to give recognition for job/enterprise effectiveness.

3. Career choice should carry equal weight with career preparation.

In imagining a vocational agriculture department designed for socialization, expenditures for career choice are in the same proportion to funds for career preparation. Career choice and development is evident in the curriculum. The career education concept--orientation, exploration and preparation--is actively implemented. Teachers and students frequently involve elementary students in orientation activities--at the elementary school, in the vocational agriculture facility and at other sites. The vocational agriculture land laboratory is heavily utilized for orientation and exploration by elementary, middle school and junior high students, as well as skill development for advanced students. In addition, exploration courses are provided for middle school and junior high students. All students in grades six through nine are rotated through an intensive agricultural exploration experience--most often a semester in length. Preparation for jobs in agriculture, advanced training, or related work are the emphasis in grades eleven and twelve--but ample opportunities for changes in job choice are provided. The decision is not rushed. A variety of "phases" can be chosen by the students to accomplish their occupational development plans. The school provides ample teachers, supplies and facilities to accommodate the student load. The department has strong ties to the local junior/community/technical college--including exchanges, field trips, and shared equipment and materials. Many of the students, upon graduation, go to the local college to prepare for a technical job or for courses they can transfer to a four-year college professional degree.

4. Vocational agriculture should serve a broad clientele.

A vocational agriculture program dedicated to socialization attempts to serve all persons who desire instruction--including those youngsters who may not immediately enter agriculture* and older students who are part-timers in agriculture. The teachers and administrators are satisfied with the just under one-half who do enter agricultural occupations. In addition to the

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*The difficulty of predicting occupational outcomes of high school students was made clear to the author who returned after ten years to the town in North Dakota where he taught for seven years. Invariably, he had guessed wrong about the future occupations of students: the son of the highway worker is farming part-time; the son of the large farmer, is a lawyer in an Eastern state; the son of an established farmer is in a farm chemicals job; the state officer who wanted to be a veterinarian is an electrician; and the list goes on . . .!

females enrolled (about one-half), the racial mix is approximately that of the community, but the number of handicapped and disadvantaged is higher than the proportion in the school population. The vocational agriculture teachers believe their program does more to help disadvantaged and handicapped students than any other program in the school, and they involve all enrollees in working with these "special" students. Through utilization of a competency-based individualized curriculum, every student can be helped to reach their maximum potential. Advanced students serve as teacher aides to help the slower students. Through this program, the unequal have an equal chance to achieve. The teachers take pride in the program's fail-safe feature of recycling any student who fails a learning module, until she/he can successfully perform the task.

In the adult/community programs, the teachers concentrate on the 80 percent of farmers who produce only 20 percent of the products. "There are plenty of people to work with the upper 20 percent," the teachers say, "but we are one of the few to work with the lower group. They need our help the most!" Programs also are provided to avocational and consumer groups having agricultural interests. Efforts are made to serve the agricultural needs of the entire community, in the belief that if vocational agriculture is for the privileged few, perhaps it is not worthy of community support!

5. Human resource development* should take precedence over other resource development.

Our imaginary vocational agriculture department takes a cue from local industry and places greater emphasis on the human resources available than on financial or material resource considerations. The first consideration is "what are the human needs?" Then, financial and physical resources are secured to accomplish the job. The entire community is often used to provide needed programs. Non-school facilities and aid from business and industry, local organizations and citizens are regularly used. The teachers are in a primary role to secure necessary resources and have the support of local and state school officials and an active advisory group.

6. Equality should be the byword in vocational agriculture.

If socialization is to occur, vocational agriculture programs must place greater emphasis on equal treatment for all than on

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*A term used extensively in industry to designate training programs. It has been estimated that American industry annually invests over $100 billion in training (Corrigan, 1980).

opportunity for the elite. Our example program does this by mainstreaming all enrollees, just as the general populace is made up of individuals of all ability levels and talents. The entire program is open to all students; through individualized instruction, lower ability students are brought up to average level and higher ability students contract for advanced work--often the tutoring of those less able. Thus, the American tradition of neighborliness is fostered and top students are challenged to "over learn" so as to be able to teach. Talented students are also used as shop assistants, office helpers and assistant instructors to supplement the teachers' efforts. The four parts of vocational agriculture--classroom science, laboratory, FFA and SOE--provide an opportunity for all students and particularly "special" students to do well in some aspect of the program.

7. Vocational agriculture should promote social pluralism.

The socialization process implies the development of each individual so as to be a contributing member of society. However, in a pluralistic society, this means that the individual can and should develop according to his/her own interests and abilities. Since graduates of vocational agriculture are unlikely to go into the same job or enterprise, our example department encourages individuals to develop in their own way as their abilities allow. Materials and resource people from business and industry are used to orient students to the values, customs, and requirements of various employers, but students are helped to develop their own values and decisions in preparing for their occupation. Individual initiative is praised; blind conformity is discouraged. Students are taught to work for quality and balance in their lives. The teachers encourage this endeavor through formal instruction and example--both of which were passed on by the teacher education and state supervisory programs.

Conclusion

Socialization must be a prominent role in the vocational agriculture program because, first of all, vocational agriculture is education, a social or people program. It is part of the uniquely American commitment of free education for all, not just the efficient or affluent. Teaching students, not just subject matter, should be our common goal.

Vocational agriculture has avoided the narrow vocationist view in program design and operation, admittedly with some sacrifice in economic impact, but this has been counterbalanced with a solid record of achievement in human resource development.

The program focuses on and complements the industry of agriculture. Agriculture has been and will continue to be the vehicle for individual development in vocational agriculture--but the vehicle should not assume more importance than the passengers!

There are problems involved in the emphasis on socialization. Cost is a major difficulty. Under almost any circumstance, vocational agriculture is not an inexpensive program, especially in comparison to English, math or other classroom studies. Moreover, any attempt to serve all students in a local school undoubtedly increases the costs. We must consider, however, the benefits and values to those served and to the community.

Another penalty for this philosophy is the danger of teacher burnout due to the heavy demand on the teacher's time. Ways must be found to lend assistance to dedicated teachers. Community and student involvement are necessary ingredients for this assistance. Risk of failure is a third cost to be considered. Efficiency is affected by trying to serve all in the school. Placement rates of graduates will not be high when persons of all abilities and interest levels are enrolled. Program leaders must relate these facts to state and local adminstrators and to the public so that evaluation of the program is not overly harsh. It is also likely that some individuals will resist being helped and thus fail, in spite of all that is done for them. But we are a rich and generous nation, committed to universal public education. Vocational agriculture has a tradition of service for nearly three-quarters of a century, so we must try.

What should be the focus of vocational agriculture--efficiency or socialization? In the end, it is likely that a compromise will prevail. Undoubtedly, some of both views will remain in agricultural education. Thus, the question becomes not whether socialization or economic efficiency will be the goal of vocational education in agriculture in the foreseeable future, but rather in what proportion the dual goals will be found in the program. However, because of its critical importance to our society, socialization must remain the dominant role in our high school vocational agriculture programs. Leaders in agricultural education must avoid the notion that all things can be measured in economic terms. Certainly the human spirit and individual development are important exceptions. The elitist trends in today's society must likewise be countered and the broader concept of socialization must be supported by agricultural educators with all the vigor and resources at our disposal. To do less would be to betray our students and those who came before us, who worked so diligently to develop and nurture the vocational agriculture program. The issue of

socialization versus efficiency is basically one of philosophy. The difficulty of the times should prompt all agricultural educators to reexamine their philosophical bases* and to reinterpret the policies and practices under which they operate.

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*Both Charles Law (1975) and Carl Dolce (1977) indicate that vocational education has no clearly delineated philosophy and that conceptualization of a philosophy is of top priority if the profession is to mature and prosper.