

IDENTIFICATION OF FACTORS
INFLUENCING VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE TEACHERS
TO LEAVE TEACHING

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A method used by some educators to identify reasons why teachers quit is to followup those persons who have left the teaching profession. The use of questionnaires and personal contact has often been made in an effort to determine the motivating forces influencing the person to *not* continue in teaching.

Studies by Fenton (1970), Froehlich and Bundy (1966), Harrison (1970), Mattox (1974), and Wallace (1966) are examples of previous research procedures which were developed before the data were gathered. This structure tended to limit the opportunity for differentiated "open ended" input; and, if the research was conducted directly by an agricultural education staff member, the question has been raised concerning whether respondents might have withheld some of their reasons for fear of "losing face" with university staff. In an effort to obtain as objective data as possible in a nonthreatening response situation, this study was undertaken.

The Problem

The specific problem was to identify the factors which influenced Agricultural Education graduates of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) to leave teaching during the five year period, 1969-1974.

The Procedure

During the five year period (1969-1974), 124 Nebraska vocational agriculture teachers left the teaching field. Of these, a total of 32 were UNL Agricultural Education graduates who had signed first-year contracts to teach. Of the 32 teachers who quit, six moved to other states and 26 continued to reside in Nebraska. Of the 26 who remained in Nebraska, 11 quit after one year or less, 10 after two years, 3 after three years, and 2 after four years.

A list of 69 different factors which might influence a teacher to quit was identified after a thorough search of

previous studies on this topic. A list of general questions was developed which could be asked to stimulate conversation during interviews.

The list of factors and questions was reviewed by a panel of Agricultural Education staff, and several revisions were made in an effort to improve the reliability and validity of the procedure.

All 26 former UNL graduates who resided in Nebraska were contacted by telephone and asked if they would be willing to be interviewed concerning why they quit. If they agreed, a date, place, and time were arranged. All 26 or 100 percent of the former teachers consented to the interview. The interviewer, a graduate in biological science from another university, with a farm background, and not a certified vocational teacher, was trained by the author on procedures to use in conducting the interviews.

Personal interviews were conducted with all 26 former teachers, with discussions lasting from less than one hour to nearly three hours. Most interviews lasted about one hour. In all cases, the interviewer asked the same lead questions to stimulate discussion. At no time did the interviewee see the list of possible factors. Instead, the interviewer made brief notes during the discussion on key reasons given and asked the interviewee for his ranking of the reasons. Most respondents were interviewed at their home or place of work.

Following each interview, the interviewer prepared a written report. From the interview notes and written report, the interviewer recorded all the factors which had been identified.

The Findings

The present jobs of the 26 UNL graduates who started and left teaching between 1969 and 1974 were identified. The data show that 17 were in farming or ranching, five were in agribusiness, three were in advanced teaching positions in post-secondary schools, and one was with the State Department of Agriculture.

Sixteen factors were given by the 26 respondents as the number one reason for quitting teaching. Table 1 shows the distribution of these reasons by years of teaching experience. The factors can be grouped depending on years of experience. Only six factors were given as the number one reason by more than one group. Eighteen factors were listed in their top five reasons for quitting by the 26 teachers. Table 2 shows the

Table 1

FACTORS RANKED AS NUMBER ONE REASON FOR QUITTING TEACHING
BY 26 TEACHERS WHO STARTED AND LEFT VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE
TEACHING IN NEBRASKA FROM 1969-1974, BY YEARS
OF EXPERIENCE

Factors	Less than 1 yr.	1 yr.	2 yrs.	3 yrs.	4 yrs.
Long hours		2			
Availability of farming opportunity		2			
Too much preparation required for class- room teaching	1	1	1		
Students lacked interest		1	1		
Summer vacation too short		1			
Need to take over family farm		1		1	
Desire to be on land and work around nature		1			1
Salaries in compet- ing fields		1	1		
Personality conflict with school administration			2		
School discontinued vo-ag on full-time basis			1		
Time required for FFA activites			1		
Inadequate knowledge of subject matter			1		
Availability of an advanced position			1		
Opportunity to join family farm business			1	1	
Lack of advancement opportunities				1	
Wife not happy with vo-ag profession					1
Total	1	10	10	3	2

distribution of these reasons among the groups, years of teaching experience. Nine of the factors did not appear as a number one reason. Again, the factors tended to group by years of experience, with eight factors given by more than one group. The factors relating to the opportunity to begin farming and ranching accounted for the majority of the factors given.

Several of the 69 possible influencing factors on the interviewer's list were never given as reasons by the former teachers for quitting. These were: community responsibilities, size of the community, ethnic and religious factors, lack of variety in job, desire for adventure, people-oriented values level, fringe benefits of competing fields, and left teaching only temporarily.

For some respondents salary was an important consideration, and for others it made no difference. Some even took less pay when they left teaching for a job they liked better.

Summary

This study was undertaken in an effort to obtain objective data in as nonthreatening a manner as possible concerning the reasons why teachers quit. The 26 former teachers interviewed openly discussed why they chose another occupation, and were willing to rank their reasons. The reasons given and their ranking generally support the present job held by the respondents, as three of the top five factors listed most often related to farming and ranching. Seventeen of the 25 respondents were in farming and ranching.

This study, as well as other studies reviewed, points toward the need for continual followup of graduates. This effort can improve existing teacher education programs by identifying pre-service experiences and course content which may need to be revised and strengthened, as well as make teacher educators aware of the occupational areas into which their graduates may move.

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Table 2

FACTORS RANKED AS TOP FIVE REASONS FOR QUITTING
BY 26 TEACHERS WHO STARTED AND LEFT VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE
TEACHING

Factors	Less than 1 yr. (N = 1)	1 yr. (N = 10)	2 yrs. (N = 10)	3 yrs. (N = 10)	4 yrs. (N = 3)
Long hours	X	X	X	X	
Availability of farming opportunity		X	X		
Desire to be on land and work around nature		X			X
Previous farm business to return to		X		X	
Opportunity to join family farm business	X	X	X	X	
Lack of administrative support and backing			X		
Too many evening responsibilities			X		
Lack of cooperation from UNL Ag. Ed. Dept.			X	X	X
Too much preparation required for classroom teaching	X	X	X	X	X
Discipline problems			X		
Little or no supervision from superiors				X	
Required to teach subject other than vo-ag				X	
Time required for FFA activities	X		X	X	X
Students lacked interest	X	X	X	X	
Desire to be own boss				X	
Parents occupation				X	
Need to take over family farm		X		X	
Wife not happy with vo-ag profession					X

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In summary, the lecture approach did serve as a somewhat less effective means of accomplishing the general instructional objectives. The laboratory exercises provided the necessary skill development to allow students in the laboratory group to operate the equipment in a proper and efficient manner.
