



The supervised practice program in vocational agriculture in Montana
by Hubert E Rodeberg

A THESIS Submitted to the Graduate Committee in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Agricultural Education.

Montana State University

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Abstract:

This study of supervised practice in agriculture was conducted in order to discover the factors which lead to better farm practice programs. A survey of thirty-three vocational agriculture departments within the State was made, using data contributed by the instructors and the reports on file in the State department of Vocational Agricultural Education. These thirty-three departments were rated as superior, average, or poor according to the efficiency of their supervised farm practice program.

The study reveals the characteristic of the vocational agriculture program, the results of supervised farming, the instructor's philosophy toward vocational agriculture* the procedures used by instructors in launching boys in practice programs, and the purpose and aim of supervision. Comparisons were made between the superior and poor groups of instructors as to practices and policies employed in launching their programs* Poor practices were used by both groups* The superior group used a number of procedures which are believed to account in part for the superior results* Some methods for improving the supervised practice program are recommended. These include a more careful selection of instructors* assistance from State authorities in drawing up a course of study for the particular locality, and more constructive supervision of the entire program. A form has been devised for evaluating the supervised practice program based on results attained over a long-time period* The use of such reports as are now available would provide valuable material for further research in supervised farming as well as in other phases of agricultural education.

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AGRICULTURE IN MONTANA

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A THESIS

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FOREWORD

"Agriculture is an art which will enrich those who diligently practice it, provided they understand it; but if they do not understand it, it matters not how hard they may labor at it, it leaves them in poverty."

--Xenophon

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ABSTRACT

This study of supervised practice in agriculture was conducted in order to discover the factors which lead to better farm practice programs.

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The study reveals the characteristics of the vocational agriculture program, the results of supervised farming, the instructor's philosophy toward vocational agriculture, the procedures used by instructors in launching boys in practice programs, and the purpose and aim of supervision. Comparisons were made between the superior and poor groups of instructors as to practices and policies employed in launching their programs. Poor practices were used by both groups. The superior group used a number of procedures which are believed to account in part for the superior results.

Some methods for improving the supervised practice program are recommended. These include a more careful selection of instructors, assistance from State authorities in drawing up a course of study for the particular locality, and more constructive supervision of the entire program. A form has been devised for evaluating the supervised practice program based on results attained over a long-time period.

The use of such reports as are now available would provide valuable material for further research in supervised farming as well as in other phases of agricultural education.

PART I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to discover specific teacher procedures which are effective in getting vocational agriculture students started in an adequate program of supervised practice. In this study the characteristics of supervised practice programs will be analyzed, a method of evaluating them will be developed, and recommendations made for future improvements.

The aim of vocational agriculture is "to train present and prospective farmers for proficiency in farming." ^{1/} The first specific objective in the attainment of this aim is to make a beginning and to advance in farming. Training is given in the production of plants and animals, in the use of machinery and mechanical devices, in the activities involved in marketing, in the procedures of farm management and finance, and in the conservation of soil and other natural resources.

Supervised farm practice is an important phase of this program, since it is the chief means by which the training is brought to the doing level in a real-life occupational setting.

Supervised farm practice has been employed for many years in schools giving farmer training. In Massachusetts, at the beginning of the century, a program including "home projects" was developed with rural high school students of agriculture mainly under the leadership of Rufus J. Stimson of the Massachusetts State Board of Education. With the spread of courses in general agriculture throughout the country, many efforts were made to get

^{1/} "Educational Objectives in Vocational Agriculture", Bulletin No. 21, 1940 U.S. Office of Education, Washington, D. C.

students to carry the instruction of the classroom into practice with a small farm enterprise of their own--a pig, a few chickens a calf, a berry patch, etc. This was the beginning of the program now termed supervised farm practice in the United States. There were numerous county agricultural high schools in many states of the Union, notably Minnesota, Wisconsin, North Dakota, which had some facilities for farm practice under direction of the teachers in the school. Some time around 1910, these high schools flourished at their height, and about this time the students were encouraged to carry on some sort of farm practice at their homes during the summers. Often these farm practices were in the nature of general improvements rather than home projects owned and managed by the student. This development has also contributed to the present program of supervised farm practice.

These forms of supervised practice were given further emphasis after the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act in 1917. This Congressional act appropriating money to stimulate the teaching of vocational subjects specified that training in agriculture must be supplemented by "at least six months of directed or supervised farm practice". The home farm improvement program was stimulated somewhat by regulations sponsored by the Federal Board for Vocational Education in which the farm student kept a complete and detailed record of all transactions taking place in the home farm business. These records were often made the basis for the instruction given in the school. The home project was not directly sponsored nor even readily approved by the Federal Board for Vocational Education in its early years. However, the movement toward home projects

gained considerable headway among certain supervisors and teacher trainers, notably in the States of Illinois and Massachusetts, and among many able teachers who recognized it as a valuable teaching device. By 1922, the home project was recognized as the most desirable form of farm practice, while home farm improvement received little emphasis from leaders in the field and little application by instructors or students generally. By 1930, the Federal Board had approved four types of supervised practice: (1) placement for farm experience, (2) a program of supplementary farm skills, (3) improvement projects or home farm improvement programs, and (4) the ownership project or "home project".

During the next ten years, leaders in the field--local teachers, supervisors, and specialists in the Office of Education--began to realize that a suitable combination of several of these forms of supervised practice was most desirable for the majority of farm students. An individual farming program under ideal conditions would include several ownership projects planned over a period of years, a program of improvement projects for the home farm, farm skills, and occasional placement for farm experience. Such a program would give a boy considerable investment in livestock, seed, machinery and equipment, and some cash by the time he had finished a four-year all-day course. It would give him managerial and manipulative experience needed in the occupation and shorten the period during which he must work as a farm hand or an unrecognized partner in the business of the home farm.

In more recent years, improved methods of farm practice have been developed by many able teachers in various parts of the country. In

recent years, there has been a revival of the school farm and of group productive enterprises carried on directly under the supervision of the instructor, similar to the program of the early county agricultural high schools. Home farm mechanics and farm engineering projects as an essential phase of the farmer training program have been recent developments.

A survey of state plans and regulations from various states indicates that there is still a lack of unified thinking as to the nature of these programs in supervised practice and greater variance still in the teacher procedures recommended for carrying them out. The States of New Hampshire, Minnesota, Oregon, Iowa, Texas, and other states have attempted to pioneer in certain procedures which would place emphasis upon one or more of these forms of supervised practice. The State of Texas once had a supervisor's regulation that each boy must carry three home projects, which promptly broke down because it was not feasible. A former state supervisor in the State of Montana recommended a program of home farm improvement which was based on poor psychology and resulted in considerable confusion and negligible results. It had become evident by 1940 that certain objectives were desirable but there was no evidence that the procedures for handling groups were efficient. The extent to which emphasis should be placed on various phases of the program has not been determined. Such a weakness was pointed out in the report of the President's Advisory Committee (the so-called Reeves Committee) ^{2/} which held that methods of evaluating results had not been developed.

Partly as a result of the report of the Reeves Committee and because there was a previously recognized need for evaluation studies, a Committee

^{2/} Advisory Committee on Education -- Report of the Committee, February, 1938, Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D. C.

of the American Vocational Association, assisted by specialists from the Office of Education, attempted a research project in evaluation which would cover ten per cent of the vocational agriculture departments in the United States. This evaluation attempted to measure results both by factual data as to outcomes, and by determining procedures and practices used by teachers in various phases of the farmer training program. Since publication of early results of this research study (which is not yet complete), the form for evaluation has been severely criticized as to method by many leaders in the field. It is questionable whether this first study will give a sound means of evaluation of results or justification for certain specific procedures commonly used. This holds true for supervised practice.

Methods of evaluation of farm practice programs for local school departments and for specific individuals in training have not been worked out satisfactorily. They are needed by instructors, supervisors, and teacher trainers.

Very little study has been made of practices and procedures used by instructors in launching and supervising the home farm project program for boys. Since more definite objectives have gradually evolved, authorities believe that our next step in investigation in agricultural education is in the evaluation of results and perfection of techniques for obtaining desirable ends.

Definitions of Terms Used

The definition of the types of supervised practice will be those used by the State Department of Agricultural Education in Montana.

Productive Enterprise. A business venture for profit usually limited to a production cycle in a farm enterprise.

Improvement Project. A project intended to increase appreciably the real estate value of the farm, or to improve the efficiency of the farming business. It is usually of greater scope than either a "job" or an "improved practice", for example, improving the swine enterprise, beautifying the farmstead, or keeping a set of farm records.

Supplementary Farm Practice. Practice which has as its purpose the development of ability in certain jobs and practices carefully selected by the teacher in conference with the student. These jobs or practices are more restricted in scope than improvement projects, for example, culling the poultry flock, treating wheat for smut, or dipping sheep.

Placement for Farm Experience. Placement on a farm of a student who is lacking in farm experience, or transfer of a student who has too limited facilities on his home farm to a suitable farm. The placement of such students on farms and the follow-up of their programs on these farms is one responsibility of the teacher of agriculture.

Class Project. That project conducted by the entire class in vocational agriculture for developing managerial and financial responsibility as well as production.

Group Project. That project conducted cooperatively by two or more boys. They may arrange to share expenses and then to divide the profits.

PART II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Much of the literature of vocational agriculture has been devoted to supervised farm practice. This section reviews briefly the policies of federal and state agencies, the legislative provisions, the opinions of authorities, and the results of pertinent investigations of supervised farming programs. The major objectives of vocational education in agriculture as drawn up by a committee from the American Vocational Association and the Federal Board for Vocational Education in September, 1929, are:

1. Making a beginning and advancing in farming.
2. Produce farm commodities efficiently.
3. Market farm products advantageously.
4. Manage a farm business.
5. Conserve soil and other natural resources.
6. Maintain a favorable environment.

In agricultural education programs, the development of abilities depends upon individuals having real situations on the farm in order to develop sound judgment and clear cut modes of action. The attainment of the objectives requires that there be a definite relationship between the course of study and the supervised farming program of individuals. The individual supervised farming program is recognized as the best method for training the students in the practices and procedures of the many farm jobs related to the specific farm enterprise.

Federal authorities in charge of the administration of vocational education in agriculture have listed some additional principles underlying effective supervision for boys enrolled in vocational agriculture classes. 3/

1. There must be a definite coordination of the supervised practice and the instruction in the classroom.
2. The supervised practice should be of such a nature as will allow it to be coordinated with the supervised practice of succeeding years.
3. The supervised practice should be of such a nature as will open a field for the study of new problems.
4. The supervised practice should be of such a scope and nature as will enable the pupil to secure experience in management, marketing, financing, farm bookkeeping, and manipulative skills.
5. The supervised practice should offer good prospects for financial return.
6. The supervised practice should be selected for the first year on such a basis as will permit its being continued throughout the entire vocational experience of the pupil. This does not mean the pupil should not start anything new the second year or in succeeding years, but that the work started each year should be continued in the succeeding years. This applies particularly to ownership projects.
7. The supervised practice should be so conducted that at the conclusion of the school work, the ex-pupil will continue from the level of accomplishment which was reached as a vocational agriculture pupil.

3/ Supervised Farm Practice Planning, Bulletin 163, U.S. Office of Education, Washington, D. C., June, 1932.

8. The supervised practice should include work with one or more of the major enterprises in the farming occupation which the pupil expects to enter.

Legislation

The National Vocational Education (Smith-Hughes) Act was passed and approved February 23, 1917. 4/ It provided federal funds to be used for the betterment and advancement of training in agriculture in secondary schools, and provided that schools meeting certain standards and qualifications for work should be reimbursed for part of the instructor's salary. Its purpose was to educate youth for useful employment. The education should be less than college grade, and it should be designed to meet the needs of persons over fourteen years of age who have entered or who are preparing to enter farming. It was designed especially to provide practical education for the students who want agricultural training in addition to their academic courses.

Supplementary to the Smith-Hughes Act was the George-Reed Act, 5/ covering a period of five years, 1929 to 1934, which provided for the further development of vocational education in the states and territories by increasing the appropriation for agricultural education.

The George-Ellsey Act, 6/ which was also a supplementary law, covered a period of three years from 1934 to 1937, and furthered the development of vocational education in the states and territories.

4/ Public No. 347 Sixty-fourth Congress S. 703

5/ Public No. 702 Seventieth Congress S. 173

6/ Public No. 245 Seventy-second Congress H.R. 7059

Due to the increasing demand felt for vocational agricultural training in the United States and her Territories, the George-Deen Act of June 8, 1936,^{7/} provided for the further development of vocational education in the several states and territories and also provided for the appropriation of the sum of 12 million dollars for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 1937, and the same amount annually thereafter; it provided that the several states and territories shall be required to match from state or local funds or both 50 per cent of this appropriation, and match an additional 10 per cent of this amount each year until June 30, 1946, and annually thereafter 100 per cent.

Because of its comparative newness, the program in vocational agriculture is not generally well understood except in communities where the work has been carried on successfully for several years. One phase of the vocational agricultural program which is little understood by the people is the supervised farming practice. The aim of this farm program is to put into practice fundamental farming principles. The Smith-Hughes Act made definite provisions for this part of the program. Section 10 of the act reads, ".... that such schools shall provide for directed or supervised practice in agriculture either on a farm provided for by the school or other farm, for at least six months per year." Therefore, in order to meet the requirements of the Act, each student must carry on supervised practice upon a farm, covering a period of at least six months of each year.

The Montana plan for Vocational Agricultural Education states ^{8/} . . .

^{7/} Public No. 673 Seventy-fourth Congress, H.R. 12120

^{8/} "Vocational Education Manual for Montana--State Plans for Vocational Education." Department of Public Instruction, Helena, Montana, 1937-1942, p.34.

"that the most satisfactory supervised farming activities are those which are conducted on the home farm." These activities will offer experience in the occupation, under the conditions of the occupation, and will be on a constantly expanding basis, which points definitely toward establishment in farming at the conclusion of the systematic instruction in vocational agriculture.

Authorities and Investigations

Present concepts of the authorities and investigators on complete supervised farming programs show the necessity for relationship between the programs and subsequent placement. Investigations of supervised farming have been made in several states and have dealt primarily with the relationship between the supervised farming programs and placement in farming.

H. M. Hamlin pointed out in 1934 that supervised farming had generally been confined to one project per boy. ^{9/} The supervised farming program is gradually being broadened to include training and experience in many enterprises. It is now considered by many as a period when the boy progresses by experience and accumulation of capital stock through the steps that lead into the farming occupation.

Lattig and Bingham believe that the vocational agriculture instructors who fail to make use of project records are missing a great opportunity for fulfilling one of the major vocational agriculture objectives. ^{10/} Records offer opportunities for the comparison of results from similar projects and help to stimulate the discussions and study of many of the related problems

^{9/} H. M. Hamlin -- "A Philosophy of Supervised Practice," Agricultural Education Magazine, No. 6, 1934, p. 104.

^{10/} H. E. Lattig and Bingham, "Utilizing project records to Stimulate Interest and Provide Problems for Class Work", Agricultural Education Magazine, No. 4, 1931, p. 44.

growing out of the project records.

In a series of conferences held in Wisconsin in 1940 by Ivan Fay, it was agreed that: (1) present programs of supervised farming leave much to be desired, (2) one objective that appeals to the boy is the probability of making money, (3) each boy should carry out at least four activities that could be called improvement or supplementary projects, and (4) in the final analysis the success of the supervised practice program depends more on the teacher than on the boy. 11/

Another development in recent years has been the long-time program. A. M. Field has recommended a long-time farm planning program in Minnesota which has been adopted by other states. 12/ It is a combination of ownership projects and improvement projects planned and carried out over a period of five years or more. It is desirable for students who take more than one year of vocational agriculture. The long-time plan offers possibilities for influencing many enterprises on the farm which require a long time for effective completion. ¹⁰ Field believes that the project becomes a part of the long-time program. He also believes that there are certain essential features of the long-time plan. They are: (1) several enterprises involved, (2) no time limit set for completion, (3) the entire farm becomes the basis of study so that better learning and farming activities are possible. Many states now have similar objectives toward the supervised farming program in its eventual establishment of the boy.

11/ Ivan Fay, "It Depends on the Teacher", Agricultural Education Magazine, No. 5, 1940, p. 90.

12/ A. M. Field, "The Long-time Plan for Farm Practice", Agricultural Education Magazine, No. 4, 1932, p. 181.

