



Efficiency in vocational agricultural instruction in Montana
by Eugene A Egan

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:

Placement in farming of those boys having one year or more of vocational agriculture has in the past been attributed to a number of factors.

This study intends to discover and verify the important factors and suggest a plan of improvement for increasing the efficiency of the vocational agriculture departments in Montana with respect to placement.

Although many factors have contributed to the actual placement of young men in farming, a relatively small number have been discovered to exert any real influence. The type of agricultural program, the supervised practice program, the instructor and the follow-up program have, in the past, had the greatest influence on placement of young men in farming. However, there are factors in addition to these already mentioned over which the agricultural instructor has less control which seem to have even more influence upon occupational selection. The background, occupational experience, and opportunity of an individual have all seemed to play more important parts.

Of those who are farming at the present time, tenure of parents, ownership in the home place, opportunity for getting control of a farm have all been very influential in placement. Results indicate that young men from vocational agriculture departments in Montana have been using the "farm ladder" route in getting into farming. Problems encountered by those men in the majority of cases were either problems of financing their entrance into farming or finding employment in the case of times entering other occupations, and achieving security in the case of both groups.

Conclusions drawn and recommendations suggested were based on the results of summarization of placement records in 30 departments in this state and on a study of 149 individuals who have had one or more years of vocational agriculture in high school. Recommendations suggested for the improvement of the program of vocational agriculture in Montana include: careful selection of teachers of vocational agriculture; careful selection of students for training in vocational agriculture; concentration on improvements in methods of teaching, selection of subject matter and teaching activities; improvement of the supervised practice program; development of a more effective follow-up program with former students; the development of more thorough and accurate records on former students, and extension of the research program.

Influential factors that are not subject to direction by the agricultural instructor could best be given consideration by careful selection of the students. Recommendations have been general, in most cases, with illustration of possibilities for improvement by example or reference. The extent of improvement will be decided by careful planning for existing conditions and successful execution of accurate plans.

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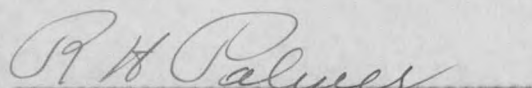
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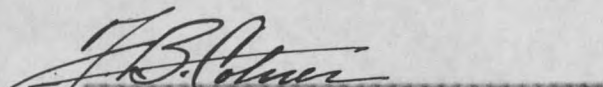
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In Charge of Major Work


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"If the American farmer is to prove an exception to the history of the world and remain the independent, thinking, reading, progressive individual he has this far been instead of becoming a peasant, as he has before in all history, it is necessary that he be given the broadest possible training and be educated most thoroughly in the fundamental principles underlying his profession."

--Henry Jackson Waters -- 1909

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PART I. INTRODUCTION

Historical Background

Teaching of vocational agriculture to farm boys throughout our nation, the territories of Hawaii, and Alaska, the Island of Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia has been made possible through a series of legislative acts and supplementary acts. Prominent among these were the Smith-Hughes Acts of 1917 and 1924,^{1/} the George-Reed Act of 1929,^{2/} the George-Elsey Act of 1934,^{3/} and the George-Deen Act of 1936.^{4/} Under these acts, federal policies have given the courses in vocational agriculture throughout the United States and its territories a common background and a similar framework. These courses have some definite characteristics that distinguish them from the other subjects in high school. More time is devoted to the study of agriculture than to the academic subjects. In addition to regular class work, a boy is required to carry on a program of supervised farm practice. This program, often referred to as a "project", provides a proving ground for much of the information presented in the class room; provides for experience in farming; and is a start toward acquiring ownership in an entire farm. Although we have placed the greatest emphasis on the all-day program dealing with high school boys, the original bill stressed adult and out-of-school youth education

^{1/} Public. No. 347, Sixty-fourth Congress, S. 703; Public. No. 64, Sixty-fifth Congress, H. R. 5949; Public. No. 36, Sixty-eighth Congress, H. R. 4131.

^{2/} Public. No. 702, Seventieth Congress, S. 1731.

^{3/} Public. No. 245, Seventy-second Congress, H. R. 7059.

^{4/} Public. No. 673, Seventy-fourth Congress, H. R. 12120.

just as strongly as it did the high school program. 5/ Many schools in the southern section of the United States and a few in the central states have developed further in adult education than the rest of the country.

In Montana, the first courses in agriculture in the secondary schools were taught in high schools at Billings and Dillon in 1908, and in the Flathead County High School in 1912. 6/ The passage of the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 resulted in the establishment of 9 vocational agriculture departments in the schools of Montana in 1917 and 1918. 7/ This number increased to 20 in 1920; 24 in 1925; 26 in 1930; 40 in 1935; and 56 in 1939. The total number of departments started in Montana since 1917 is 76, which means that 20 have discontinued teaching agriculture to date. There were 15 departments in the state 15 years of age or older and 25 departments that have been in existence 10 years or longer.

Much thought and effort have been spent during this period in improvements in type and content of instruction; in developing suitable size, scope, and continuation qualities of the supervised practice program; in education for a democracy through a Future Farmer program; and in enlarging a follow-up program of part-time and evening schools.

During the first years following the acts that made federal funds available for the teaching of vocational agriculture in high schools, directors,

5/ Public. No. 347, Sixty-fourth Congress, S. 703; Public. No. 64, Sixty-fifth Congress, H. R. 5945; Public. No. 35, Sixty-eighth Congress, H. R. 4121.

6/ Harnon, W. E., Montana Superintendent of Public Instruction Report 1904-16, Independent Publishing Co., Helena, Montana, 1916.

7/ Truiper, May, Fifteenth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of Montana, Independent Publishing Co., Helena, Montana, 1916.

supervisors, and instructors concentrated on developing skills in production. They firmly believed their duty to be teaching young men to "grow two blades of grass where but one grew before". This belief was common at that time among many leaders interested in improvement in agriculture. On the whole, agricultural teachers concentrated on presentation of abstract subject matter and development of production skills and often neglected to develop practices that would encourage more application and carry over to the home farms. Although the primary objective of a course in vocational agriculture has always been "to train present and prospective farmers in proficiency in farming", ^{8/} methods used in achieving this end have undergone many changes. In most cases it was assumed that those interested and qualified for farming would place themselves by the "farm ladder" route without further assistance. Naturally no data were available these first years on placement in farming of graduates from departments of vocational agriculture.

The Advisory Committee's report on vocational education to the President in February, 1939, revealed assumptions similar to the above when it said, "For the most part teaching in vocational agriculture has been of high quality. A new and enriched curriculum is slowly emerging and the emphasis is being shifted from the manipulative skills and problems of production to problems of an economic and managerial nature". ^{9/} The members of this committee based their criticisms on type of teaching in practice and subject matter content. Other reviewers of the progress of courses in vocational agriculture criticize

^{8/} Myers, C. E., "Effectiveness of Vocational Education in Agriculture", Agric. Series No. 13, Bul. No. 82, Federal Department of Education, 1937.

^{9/} Russel, John Dale, "Advisory Committee Report on Vocational Education to the President", Study No. 8, Washington, D. C., 1938.

