

COOPERATIVE FARM MANAGEMENT -- A PROGRESS REPORT

GORDON FERGUSON

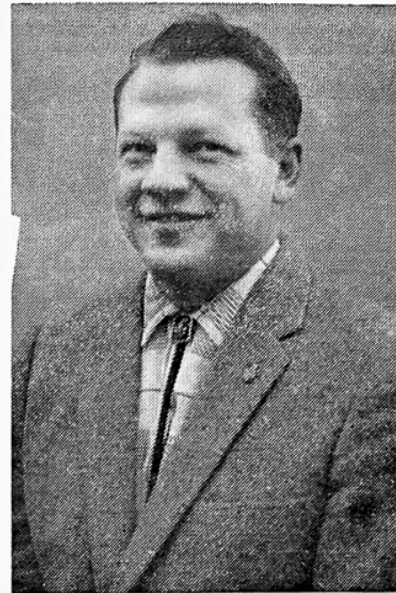
Farm Management Instructor, Area Vocational School, Winona, Minnesota

For success of long range programs an occasional backward look and evaluation is needed to base future plans upon. It is with this in mind that this article was written.

Since the area vocational schools took over the responsibility as analysis centers for the Vocational Agriculture Farm Management Program in 1955, there has been a steady increase in participation. Veterans on-farm-training records had made up the bulk of the vocational agriculture records being included in the analysis reports prepared by the University prior to the time the area schools took over the analysis. In the first year of analysis by area schools three centers functioned: Austin, Mankato and Thief River Falls. The total number of records analyzed at those three schools in 1955 was about 135.

In the third year after the area schools accepted the analysis center responsibilities there were 357 records analyzed at seven centers. It is estimated that there will be well over 450 records included in the 1958 reports. This, to some people has seemed like rather slow adoption of the program when the total number of potential cooperators is considered. However, farmers and (perhaps to a lesser degree) Ag. teachers are somewhat reluctant to jump into any program or activity without first being sure that it will be a real help to them. Both farmers and Ag. teachers are extremely busy most of the time and they justifiably feel that there are too many activities competing for their efforts and attention. This is especially true on farms operated by one man's family and in one-man agriculture departments, where there aren't enough hours in the day, or labor available, to get everything done that is recognized as being worthwhile and important. As time moves on, more teachers are realizing that their activities must change, just as farmers are realizing that their farming activities must be adjusted to keep pace with our dynamic society. As a result, each year more teachers and farmers decide that they can no longer ignore farm management problems which can only be solved by use of adequate farm records and comparisons thereof. Each year there are more schools represented by more farm records. For example, in 1955 there were only eight records analyzed from three schools in the southeastern area. In 1956 there were 23 records from six schools and in 1957 there were 36 records from ten schools included in the analysis at Winona. It is estimated that about seventy records from ten schools will be analyzed in 1958 in this southeastern area.

In a program based upon the comparisons of individual farm accounts with averages, volume is of tremendous importance. An average based upon a small number of records is very apt to be misleading. The greater the number of records included, the more valid the results will be. This is especially true where individual enterprises are to be analyzed. If only a few farms are included in an analysis, the total farm businesses can be compared but if they have different live-



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stock and crop combinations it is impossible to compare one business with other similar set-ups. For example, if one beef feeders' records are included in an area analysis with several dairy records, the analysis is less valuable to everyone concerned than if there were several beef feeding operations compared one with another and with the dairy farm accounts.

In the past there have been Ag teachers and farmers who have not entered the programs because of the lack of adequate numbers to make the information extremely valuable to them as individuals. Now that the pioneers have laid the groundwork and numbers have been increased, participation should become more and more valuable with each additional school and farm included in the total program. In our modern and rapidly changing agriculture, it is more important than ever before in history, that farmers have reliable facts to base decisions upon. To decide whether to enlarge the dairy enterprise and cut out the poultry; or go out of dairy and switch to a large scale hog multiple farrowing type of farm business is a drastic decision for a farmer to make. He can only make intelligent decisions if he has accurate, and adequate facts to base those decisions upon. Where or how can a farmer find the needed facts about his operation compared with others? If teachers of agriculture are to be in a position to advise on these management decisions they must have the information available. A very logical and economical source of this type of information is through participation in the Vo-Ag Cooperative farm management program. The assistance of the local agriculture teacher in interpretation of the information obtained can be a definite help to the farmers who have had little, if any, training in farm business management and agricultural economics. Under present and anticipated future conditions, this type

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of decision making by farmers will be the most important, yet most difficult, decisions for them to make. By reading beautifully illustrated articles in magazines, bulletins, etc., a farmer can learn many of the simpler and less complex skills and practices which have played a large roll in many Vo-Ag programs in the past. In the future, agriculture teachers can give more valuable assistance to farmers if more time is devoted to major management decisions and less time to individual details and skills involved in carrying out the daily routine of farming. Many teachers have expressed their opinion that they haven't the time to devote to management because of other activities. Perhaps an evaluation of the relative importance of types of activities conducted could result in the addition of two or three of the best students from each graduating Vo-Ag class to the group of cooperators in the farm management program.

If you are one of those who feel that this program is worthy of participation, plan now to get at least one farmer started for this year. Get the beginning inventories taken and start the feed records and other current records. Then as the year progresses, plan to attend the Farm Management Workshop which will be held in your area. The dates for these are as follows: July 16-17 at Rochester; July 23-24 at Morris; July 27-28 at Bemidji; July 30-31 at Waseca.