

FARM MANAGEMENT AND THE AREA COORDINATOR

(A brief history and explanation by Charles M. Painter)

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The vocational agriculture area coordinator position actually came into being as the result of a new concept in agricultural education. While our present program is the product of many contributing factors, none has had quite as much impact as the Institutional on-the-farm training that followed World War II. The present farm analysis program can not be fully understood without examining it in light of its reference to Veteran's Agriculture.

No one would deny that in certain instances the G. I. program developed a few weaknesses. I doubt though that anyone would deny that, except for Veteran's Agriculture, Minnesota agriculture would today be something far less vital and efficient. Many farmers between ages 35 and 55 years are able to farm today only because of this program. It is also because of this training that they were able to attain a level of proficiency needed to assure their economic survival.

Equal in effect to the training itself upon trainee was his contact with the farming community. His communication with fathers, brothers, and neighbors spread knowledge more rapidly than had ever taken place in the past, and contributed to the establishment of a pattern of farming completely revolutionary to the past. Also established were new concepts in agricultural education that were in sharp contrast to the past.

Agricultural education deleted nothing that was valuable from its past experience but it added some dimensions that were necessary to meet the implications of an automated economy. Approved practices once the basis for sound vocational agriculture instruction were not abandoned. They were rather appraised as to how they related to a total farm business.

High yields, and high production per animal are no less important today than thirty years ago. Their importance, however, assumes significance only as they relate to costs and returns. The farm business has come to be studied as a whole rather than each enterprise as an entity in itself. Production has been put to the test, for the farm operator is now interested primarily in profit, which simply stated is return over cost.

The returned G.I. faced the urgent problem of making a living. The time he might have spent in exploratory business ventures had for the most part been absorbed in military activity. His farming operation had to provide him a living which represented the minimum he and his family were willing to accept. Otherwise he had to seek a livelihood elsewhere.

We should not assume that management would have been ignored except for the G.I. program. We must assume that to the veteran in training it was of primary consideration. He was not engaging in contests to see how much corn he could produce per acre, or how much butterfat per cow. These were important only in so far as they contributed to his financial success. He soon learned that such factors as; size of business, return over feed costs, the economical use of buildings and equipment, labor efficiency, and use of credit were basic to his survival as a farmer.

Farm management proficiencies cannot be measured except by maintaining a complete and accurate system of farm accounts. These records must be designed primarily for finding answers to management problems. The reporting of income tax is important and necessary, but must be given secondary consideration in selecting a record keeping system.

The analysis of a farm business through farm records is not new. The University of Minnesota Farm Management Division has been doing it systematically since 1928. The concept of analysis for helping the farmer make management decisions flourished and developed with the analysis of some of the veterans farm records. The transition of the farm management approach from the G.I. program to all phases of agricultural education was practically inevitable. This was the new image of vocational agriculture that was to be accepted by these veterans and eventually by their neighbors. As they have grown older they have expected certain standards for their children as they go through high school and perhaps into farming. They demand a vocational agriculture that meets today's problems.

The background I have given reveals the unique position of vocational agriculture in Minnesota. As an educational program, vocational agriculture faced the problem common to all education since 1945 - to keep up with the technical advancements that are taking place in the world. None of us would dare presume that any segment in education has kept pace with post war science and all of its implications to society. Our program did, how-

ever, have a distinct advantage. It became a part of both the technological advancement and the adjustment. Today we are in the unique position of having a better appreciation of, and more experience with, the farmer's management problems than other group. We should never forget that as Vocational Agriculture instructors we are the professional educators in the science and art of applied agriculture. Neither should we forget the magnitude of our responsibilities.

Our experience since 1945 has convinced us that today's farmer needs to thoroughly understand his business. A thorough understanding of his business would seem difficult if not impossible without carefully kept records that could be studied and analyzed. Whether it be with high school farm boys, unestablished out-of-school farm youth, or established farmers, business problems can be solved only through a study of the business itself.

The farm management approach at first incorporated into the veterans agriculture program gradually expanded to include other adult agriculture programs and finally to the high school curriculum. Farm accounts from veterans class were first analyzed by the University of Minnesota Farm Management Division in 1947 (1946 records) under the direction of Dr. Truman Nodland.

By the time Veteran's Agriculture had begun to taper off, many non-veterans were also becoming interested in farm analysis. In 1953 a cooperative program was set up to include Vocational Agriculture, Agricultural Extension, and the University of Minnesota. This program provided supervision and instruction for farmers by instructors and agricultural agents, and the analysis of records by the Farm Management Division of the University. Dr. Milo Peterson, Head of the Agricultural Education Division of the University of Minnesota came up with a vital contribution when, through his efforts, he obtained both personnel and funds to promote the venture. Lauren Granger was placed on the University staff to correlate the program. Much of his activity was financed by the Hill Family Foundation. The project became known as the Cooperative Farm Management Program.

Because of the clerical costs involved in record book analysis, cooperators are charged a fee. In an effort to encourage farmers to enroll, Farmers Union Central Cooper-

ative Association covered a portion of the fees for the first two years. As the program grew, it became difficult for the University of Minnesota to justify its service in analyzing farm records as an addition to its own research groups involving more than three hundred farmers.

During this period, the area vocational program was becoming established in the state. S. K. Wick, State Director of Vocational Agriculture believed that in Minnesota, where agriculture was the leading industry, vocational agriculture should be identified with the area schools. Adult Vocational Agriculture instructors in the area schools did assume the responsibility for the farm analysis at Thief River Falls, Mankato and Austin in 1956. Ralph Smith at the Morris Experiment Station had done an analysis for the vocational department in western Minnesota the previous year. Other area schools began analysis programs the following year.

For several years the analysis, the aids to instructors, workshops, and tours were simply added responsibilities to the adult instructor's regular activities (in the area schools). Mr. Wick assigned a member of his staff, William Knaak, to work with vocational agriculture supervisory staff and the area schools to explore the need for establishing a vocational agriculture coordinator position. Mr. Knaak and G. R. Cochran, State Supervisor of Vocational Agriculture, after a detailed study, recommended that the area coordinator position be established. The plan became operative for the year 1960-1961 on a half time basis. Some positions went to full time for the year 1962-1963.

The Vocational Agriculture Area Coordinator is hired by the local district and is under the administration of the local school system. He is reimbursed 100% from state and federal funds for that portion of his time spent on Area Coordinator activities. Six area schools are now doing a record book analysis. About ten weeks of the coordinator's time is spent supervising the analysis activity, and preparing the report. Analysis interpretation meetings and interviews involve another two weeks. Spring Future Farmer activities involve about three days. Workshops, tours and assistance with University of Minnesota summer school activities have been a part of the June and July activity schedule.

Schools in the area that offer vocational agriculture are visited - the number in my small area is thirty-one with forty-four instructors. Those schools heavily involved

in farm management activities get special attention proportionate with their requests. Curriculum material is prepared and pilot programs are set up with cooperating schools. All Coordinators work as a group with various University of Minnesota departments, State Department of Vocational Agriculture, and the Agricultural Education Division of the University. Some coordinators have specific programs for their area, such as; the organization of courses under the Man Power Development Act; organizing and conducting farm mechanics workshops; young farmer placement committee activity, student placement in farm-related occupations, and post high school instruction in agriculture and agricultural related subjects.

Vocational Agriculture Coordinators assume neither administrative or supervisory functions. Their first responsibility is to provide service and assistance to vocational agriculture instructors. They also have a liason function between Vocational Agriculture and organizations and institutions with which vo. ag. is concerned. A third function and closely related to the liason activities is public relations. Less tangible is the function of helping vocational agriculture shape its program to meet the educational needs of our changing agriculture.

Typical of the activities of the coordinator is my own program. In 1962, I spent three weeks assisting in the summer school program of the Agricultural Education department of the University. This was shortly followed by the summer work shop. Assistance was given in setting up a Young Farmer Placement Committee. Visits were made to schools where known instructor changes were taking place. Instructional materials and helps were provided in the monthly newsletters consisting of from 4 to 10 pages. I assisted with a special analysis problem, and prepared forms for expanding analysis procedures.

The coordinators in a two day meeting prepared recommendations for a revision of the Minnesota Farm Account Book. We meet monthly with Mr. Cochran and members of his supervisory staff. All of the coordinators attended the three day Income Tax Short Course this fall. During the months of September and October, I visited most of the departments in the area and surveyed each as to enrollment, activities, and special problems. There are many demands for information from the area centers. We are frequently contacted for assistance with University surveys. Farm account books

closing meetings, income tax meetings, visits to farmers, assistance with curriculum materials, and account book closing activities must be completed before the farm analysis activities are organized in January.

This year (1967) more than 1500 farm families are keeping farm records under the supervision of vo. ag. instructors. Most of these records will be analyzed. A fee of \$20 to \$25 is charged to cover clerical costs and data processing charges. Young women trained in the use of business equipment will tabulate totals. They will check all books for accuracy, add all farm purchases and sales, make all necessary preliminary calculations.