

Is Your Farm Management Program Growing?

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During the summer of 1963, the University of Minnesota was host to a nationwide short course on the Vocational Agriculture Farm Management Instructional Program. State supervisors, teacher trainers and Vo-Ag instructors from approximately one-half of the states were in attendance to see and hear how our Minnesota program functioned. Our entire program, including the course of study, account book, summary forms and classroom and on-the-farm instruction methods were reviewed for our visitors. After two weeks of work on all phases of the program, committee reports were analyzed and presented to the group. Only a few minor changes in the course of study, account book and summary were recommended for the Minnesota plan. I'm sure the majority of Minnesota people in attendance were convinced that our out-of-state friends went home with the idea that the Minnesota Vo-Ag Farm Management Plan was the best in the nation.

"Just how successful is our Farm Management Program?" This is the question each of us involved in such a program should be asking ourselves. Now is the time to evaluate our present program and set new goals for service and progress.

We have seen a steady increase in the number of multiple man Vo-Ag departments in Minnesota school systems the last few years. This expansion has been based on the need for more help in adult education for farm families, with emphasis on Farm and Home management. Here are some facts of interest, if the criteria for progress is based on the number of farm records completed for analysis by area vocational schools. In 1959, approximately 311 records were summarized by the six area vocational schools and the Morris School of Agriculture, and by 1963, approximately 604 records were summarized by the same centers. This isn't the most accurate picture of the progress being made, because several instructors are summarizing their cooperative records. But, I don't believe this increase is as commendable as it could be.

This past summer I completed a study where the Farm Cooperators from several schools in Southern

Minnesota were asked to evaluate our Farm Management program. Some of the results from this study, may give us some ideas for improvement and expansion. Participation in the program, tended to be limited to farm families that had been farming for several years. The younger, beginning farm family and the older established farm family was not participating in the program. The enrollment in the advanced Farm Management classes was much larger than the enrollment in beginning management classes. There is evidence, where the instructor may be burdened with advanced members and is ignoring the need for service for potential beginning farm families and older families. The majority of these cooperators had been involved with the Veterans-on-the-farm training program and were familiar with our accounting system and summary. This could indicate a need for better communication between the instructor and the un-informed, potential cooperator.

The instructional program was evaluated by the participating cooperators. They found classroom instruction of some value, but felt after the first year little new or useful material was being offered. Better preparation of instructional materials would be most beneficial. Much more work can be accomplished with a group rather than trying to present it to each member individually. The majority of the farm cooperators found on-the-farm instruction very valuable. They stressed the need for more frequent and planned visits.

We must constantly revise our thinking if we are to give the farm families in our school system the maximum service. There are several ways this can be accomplished. We should consider starting a new class in management at least every other year. If our school district is large enough to warrant a two or three-man department, it has enough farm families to have a beginning class this often. The instructor should personally contact the younger farm families about starting class because they are in need of help to cope with the complexities of farming. One way to keep these people involved in the program for the first year, and prevent the high drop-out percentage, is to collect the summary fee at the beginning of the year.

The number of families an instructor can handle is completely dependent upon a number of factors. One way of increasing the number is by letting the area school summarize your records. Why be burdened with this job, when your time could be spent more profitably with others in your district. Another way to handle more families in your program, is to request additional part-time help for the record close-out season. In most areas there is an ex-veterans instructor who is familiar with the account book and would work by the hour during this busy period.

During farm visits the instructor must be prepared to offer services to the cooperator. Most of the real concentrated work will be accomplished toward the end of the first year of record keeping. Now there are facts to work with. Such factors as, the securing and use of credit should be covered carefully. A running

account of cash flow may have to be kept by families that use budgeted credit. The more we work with the individual the more involved we will get with income tax management. The narrow farm profits dictate the wise use of depreciation, capital gains, etc.

We must grow to meet the needs of the farming community. The first step is to evaluate our present program to find areas of strength and weakness. With

these facts in mind, you will have to set new goals for numbers enrolled and services rendered. I hope a few of the ideas expressed will be helpful in the expanding growth of your Vo-Ag Farm Management program. Remember the farm operator is intelligent enough to participate in the management service that gives him the most service for the least cost and takes the least amount of his time.