

RURAL WAR PRODUCTION TRAINING PROGRAM

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In one respect I believe we will all agree—and that is we all deplore this or any other war in which our country is involved. However much this may be true, the fact remains that great technological and educational advancements usually develop from wars. Just as the Land Grant College movement was precipitated by the Civil War, and the Smith-Hughes law came about during World War I, so has our present Rural War Production Training Program, commonly referred to as O.S.Y.A. (Out-of-School Youth Administration) been expedited by our present conflict.

Our country is now launched upon the greatest food-production program in the history of the world. In an effort to help farmers solve their food production problems, the 77th Congress of the United States called upon the public high schools for assistance. Public law No. 647 was passed by Congress which provided for certain vocational courses of less than college grade for out-of-school rural people. The law states that the purposes of these courses are as follows:

1. To acquaint farmers with the methods of achieving production goals of those farm commodities designated by the Secretary of Agriculture.
2. To better qualify persons to serve agriculture as it becomes increasingly mechanized.
3. To aid farmers in the repair, operation, and construction of farm machinery and equipment.

Twenty different courses have now been set up and authorized by the Secretary of Agriculture as follows:

1. The operation, care, and repair of tractors, trucks, and automobiles.
2. Metalwork, including welding, tempering, drilling, shaping, and farm machinery repair.
3. Farm woodworking—not including cabinet work, model or furniture making.
4. Elementary electricity, including operation, care, and repair of electrical equipment, and wiring for light and power.

5. The repair, operation, and construction of farm machinery and equipment.

6-20. Increasing production of milk, poultry, eggs, pork, beef, mutton, lamb, wool, soybeans, peanuts, commercial vegetables, fruit, hemp; the production, conservation, and processing of food for farm families; and the training of farm labor.

Courses 1-4 above are now being offered for the third consecutive year—the first two years as courses available for out-of-school youth from ages 17-25. The other courses are new this year and have been made available for any out-of-school person over 17 years of age.

This year the quota for Illinois was set at 2000 different courses. All of the 385 departments of vocational agriculture throughout the State were urged to sponsor six or seven of them. At first this figure seemed inconceivable to everyone but they have succeeded admirably and the latest figures show close to three-fourths of the goal achieved with almost two months until the final date for applications July 1st.

The federal law placed the responsibility of administering the program in Illinois upon the division of the State Board of Vocational Education. The administration of the program in local communities has been the responsibility of the local high school administrators with the help of vocational agriculture teachers. In spite of their greatly increased duties in other war activities these men gladly accepted the added responsibilities. A new concept of the possibilities of vocational agriculture is entering the consciousness of school and government officials as a result of the success which has attended the efforts of teachers of vocational agriculture. The law provided however that courses could also be set up in schools not having agriculture departments.

The interest of farmers throughout the State has been most surprising to school men, in fact many cases are on

record in which the number of farmers desiring to enter the courses has far exceeded the local facilities. The success of this program in large part has been due to the desire on the part of farmers to accomplish all they can to supply the great demand for food, and they are taking advantage of the opportunities which this program offers for the repair of their farm machinery, to repair or build equipment needed for their expanded program of livestock production, and to study and learn all they can about methods of food production so that they may achieve maximum results.

The task of realizing all of the expectations of the Secretary of Agriculture in this phase of the "Food for Freedom" program was placed squarely up to the teachers of agriculture. In a letter to the Commissioner of Education Mr. Wicard said:

"It is my hope that the 9000 teachers of vocational agriculture will include the *Food For Freedom* program in their plan of work for this year."

The teachers to whom the Secretary referred I believe have universally accepted and are gladly meeting this challenge.

Using the program offered locally by Jacksonville High School as more or less a typical example of what is being done by hundreds of schools throughout the State and nation, it is of interest to note that the program was begun November 3, 1942, with a course in gas engine repair and one in farm woodworking. December saw the start of a discussion group on soybean production in a rural grade school followed by another in January on pork production held in the vocational agriculture classroom of the high school. Each discussion group was preceded by the establishment of an advisory council who chose the topics and determined the policies throughout the courses. A group of six or seven farmers seems to be about the correct number. The teacher of agriculture gave instruction in both courses but additional courses of the same type would have had to be taught by someone else. In January began a second woodworking course taught by the manual arts teacher and also two farm machinery repair courses handled by mechanics. Another very popular course held during January and February was the course in welding, given in one of the local machine

shops. Just now a course in preservation of food for farm families is being offered in the home economics department by the local teachers of home economics, and this will be followed by two canning courses later in the summer making a total of 11 for the year. An approximate expected enrollment of 225 persons will have been enrolled with a federal cost of approximately \$12.00 per capita.

Following the federal requirements the gas engine, woodworking, and welding courses met three hours per night, five nights per week for a period of eight weeks or a total of 120 hours each, while the farm machinery courses met on five consecutive days, putting in a total of 36 hours for the week. Discussion groups including the food preservation courses met two hours per night one night per week for 10 consecutive weeks or a total of 20 hours. The canning courses will meet four hours each morning for five consecutive days.

The entire program has been characterized by a fine spirit of cooperation on the part of the Board of Education in offering the facilities of the school plant, the garages, machine shops, the farm machinery dealers, the instructors other than the agriculture teacher, the school administrators, the Farm Bureau, the Farm Adviser, other agricultural extension representatives, local veterinarians, janitors, high school office secretary as clerk, local merchants who obtained needed supplies, and many others who were involved in various ways. Local newspapers, radio station, and county war board gave adequate publicity, and the program could not have been other than successful with all of these willing agencies.

As to the future of the program it will undoubtedly continue, with minor changes, for the duration of the war. It is well within the realm of possibility that it may even assume permanent proportions afterwards. I should like to point out a few possibilities which could accrue from the start which has been made. First, opportunities for the study of agriculture will, before many years, become nearly universal. Second, the communities which now have departments of vocational agriculture but which have confined their services to a few farm boys of high school age, will make them available to people generally.

Third, since the Federal Government has taken the initiative in providing agricultural education for the "masses" through the medium of public schools, we can expect that our example will be imitated more widely in other countries after the war. May this influence and leadership be of the best quality. Fourth, the future program will probably provide for education along agricultural lines other than farming. Fifth, it will undoubtedly provide more guidance regarding agricultural occupations as well as the training of adults toward that end. Sixth, it is predicted that enrollments will be large, frequently requiring the services of more than one teacher. Seventh, the enrollment in vocational agriculture may be largely adult. There are ten times more adults to be reached than high school boys. Eighth, there will be much more attention to objectives and to evaluation of courses in terms of objectives. Ninth, programs will be more

carefully planned with the assistance of advisory councils representative of the community. Tenth, and last, public school education in agriculture will be more closely correlated with other related agencies such as the agricultural extension service, with the schools usually taking the initiative in bringing about this coordination.

There is no good reason why agricultural education should not share in the planning of the post-war world as it can make an important contribution to the "freedom from want" philosophy. The responsible leaders of farm people will have much to do with the attitude farmers take toward world problems. Our American farmers may make or break any effective arrangement for world organization which is proposed. Such may well be the immediate and eventual results of our present Rural War Production Training Program.
