

ADAPTING THE TEACHING OF AGRICULTURE TO THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

One of the primary needs of the community is to secure and apply information as soon as possible after it is known. I feel that in too many cases the gap between the time a thing is proven to be good and the time when it is put into practice is too great. All of the agencies which are experimenting and carrying on research for new and better practices are doing a fine job. They are also doing a fine job in placing the information they have in the hands of schools and extension agencies in the local communities. A way must be found, however, to shorten the gap between the time a thing is known and the time it is applied. I am reminded of the boy who in school was taught many phases of soil conservation. When he returned home to the farm after having been away for several years he found that the gully he had learned how to control when he was in school, had taken the school house and much of the surrounding land with it. While he was studying about soil conservation control the gully went right on taking its toll. He thought what he was learning was for some one else to apply. When he realized it was for him to apply much damage had been done which could never be repaired. The gap was too great between the time a thing was learned and the time it was applied. In this article four suggestions are made to help overcome this gap.

Find the Need by Community Surveys.—The first suggestion is to find the real needs of the community. This can best be done by means of surveys of the various areas of activity. Surveys of various kinds can be used, such as: questionnaires, conferences, tours, and personal

observation. From these surveys one with training should be able to arrive at the needs with accuracy.

Create Interest in Doing Something About the Needs.—One of the best means of creating enough interest to secure action in working toward the goal of meeting a need is to direct the attention of adults, school boys, and the youth toward the goal. Showing the results of the surveys of the community to all groups, and getting them all to work toward a certain goal is the first step. They may be made fully conscious of the needs by tours, discussion, pictures, and many other means. Once the people of a community see a need they will do something about it if they know what to do. Some means must be used which is effective, interesting and accurate to show them what and how to do.

Community Demonstrations Get Action.—Community demonstration is the third suggestion which I have to make to help get ideas into action and takes many forms. The boy's supervised practice programs are good examples. They do not touch enough of the problems of the farm however, so something more is needed. The community demonstration is a practice set up in the community so that people can see it often, and under home conditions. It is local so that it is talked about many times, and so its good and bad points brought up and discussed by all. If the demonstration is good, and it should be, people are in favor of the practice demonstrated, and that is just what we hope they will be.

As an illustration of the effectiveness of a community demonstration, let us consider one which we used effectively in

this community. It was one showing contour farming of corn, a practice which, in everyone's mind, was one which could never be used and would not be effective, would be a nuisance, would be laughed at. We established a small demonstration field on two sides of the community, along the road where people could see them. We visited them on tours and discussed them at meetings. The following year the same farmers increased their own contour acreage by 30 percent and several other farmers for the first time tried a field on the contour, proof enough of the effectiveness of the demonstration in getting action.

Other demonstrations which are being used are: terraces, windbreak planting, grove planting of hedge trees, forest plantings, sod flumes, diversion ditches, swine sanitation, grass waterways, and terrace outlets.

Show the Demonstration to People.— Good demonstrations should be visited by many people, and at times when they are interested, and when there is something

of interest to see. Visit terraces during a big rain, or visit a swine sanitation demonstration when the pigs are showing the results of clean raising. Tours are always good, as people see things and discuss them better when in a group. What one does not see another will. A picture record of the construction and results of the practice will be good to show to future groups. Once people see a thing they are much more in a mood to attempt it, if it is something they can use profitably.

By following the steps outlined above, a program in agricultural education can be made to result in action, which is the desired end of such education. The four steps outlined above followed out with any practice will do much to shorten the gap between the time it is known and the time it is applied on the farms. Overcoming this lag is the greatest need our communities have. We must adapt our teaching to meet this need, or our communities will find some other way to accomplish it.
