

Evening Schools for Adult Farmers

Paul Arndt

Marengo Community High School, Marengo, Illinois

Organized instruction for adult farmers in evening schools is a definite requirement of Vocational Agricultural Education according to the interpretation of the Smith Hughes Law. After teaching vocational agriculture in high school for nearly twenty years, I have concluded that the successful teacher needs this personal contact with adult farmers in his community to sense the demand for changing practices in various farm enterprises as they arise.

Adult classes for farmers increase the interest in the local agricultural department and thereby create demands for service. They have a tendency to encourage larger enrollment of agriculture students. Tax payers feel that they are getting value received in extra service from their school taxes. Good will toward the school is created. The leading farmers become pivot men in their respective neighborhoods by encouraging better methods and practices. During the past five years we have had some degree of success in our campaign for lime, legumes, and better pastures.

The time of the year for the evening school must be determined by the local community. Under our conditions, we have held meetings during November, December, January, and February. All meetings are held at the high school on Friday evenings, 8-9:30.

There are many ways to promote interest and publicity for these meetings. The best results are accomplished when the agriculture teacher makes calls on the farmers discussing the possible value of such a series. Newspaper stories should appear before the first meeting and a summary of the discussion should follow each meeting. A small classified ad will bring it to the attention of many farmers. Post cards should be sent weekly to all members of the class. By being a member of the local service club, which is composed of professional and businessmen, it is possible to sell them on the idea of the school. They, in turn, will encourage their rural patrons to enroll in the classes.

Following is a suggested procedure for organizing subject matter for an evening school:

1. Consult the key men or advisory council of farmers as to the nature of the course desired.
2. Ask the boys and their dads about their problems.
3. Determine what enterprise should be covered in the course.
4. Make a survey of the farms in your district to determine the various practices in your locality.
5. Enumerate the jobs which should be studied under the enterprise.
6. Compare the local practices with those recommended by successful farmers and Experiment Stations.
7. Set up objectives for each group of practices.
8. Collect and organize available data and work out a definite teaching program for each unit of approved practices.

9. Follow up with work in the field during the summer.

I should suggest the following lesson plan for teaching:

1. Situation.
2. Problems within the situation.
3. Objectives for discussion.
4. Devices—different cases of farm practices and experiences.
5. Poor practices.
6. Good practices.

Following are the topics discussed during our Sixth Annual Short course:

1. Causes for Variation in Butterfat Tests.
2. Causes and Control of Mastitis in Dairy Cows.
3. How to Cut Milk Production Costs.
4. Legume Hays and Pastures for Dairy Cows.
5. Providing Dairy Rations in Drought Years.
6. The Merits of Hybrid Corn for Local Dairy Farmers.
7. Soil Management and Fertilizers for Corn and Small Grain.
8. Farm Outlook for 1937.
9. Summary of Financial Reports of 60 Dairy Farms in Southern Wisconsin: Factors that Caused Profits and Losses.
10. Poultry as a Side Line on a Dairy Farm.

In our evening schools, I have used outside instructors mainly, many of whom came from the Extension Departments of the University of Illinois and of Wisconsin. A great deal of interest was shown by the farmers for the up to date information that is gained from the specialists who came from the Agriculture Experiment Stations. Some outstanding practical farmers and Farm Advisors were invited to lead discussions on certain evenings. Editors of *Hoards Dairymen* have offered splendid material which was presented in a practical way. One must be careful not to select instructors in whom the farmers have no confidence. All of the meetings have been of the discussion type and the members are given every opportunity to ask questions and give their experiences. By calling upon the members of the class during the summer, the teacher determines the extent to which the new material has been put into practice. It also gives him a chance to discuss further any questions that may have developed after the course.