

From Local Ag Teachers:



Thoughts in Passing



The article this week was prepared by Robert D. Herr, agriculture department chairman at Eastern Lancaster County School District.

A New Direction For Agriculture

When reflecting on a few recent statistics related to agriculture, it is interesting to learn that modern farming is the nation's single largest industry employing 4.6 million workers and that three out of every 10 jobs in private employment are related to agriculture. There are many additional facts and figures one could cite to demonstrate the impact and magnitude of agriculture as an industry and illustrate its importance to the economy of our country. In an area such as Lancaster County it is difficult not to be aware of the importance of agriculture and related agri-businesses.

Perhaps the famed independence of the farmer and agriculture is to blame but it seems as though agriculture—

both modern farming and the agri-business industry — could use a good public relations effort. Since public relations is little more than a high pressured educational program, a logical place to start might be in the public schools.

Here in the Eastern Lancaster County School District we do have one program which includes all children on a grade level involved in an agricultural program, that being the Elementary Agriculture program. But all too often agricultural programs are developed and offered to a small percentage of students who are already highly oriented toward agriculture and have some appreciations of the scope and importance of it as an industry. The large body of students who are future employees and consumers are neglected.

Many of the problems faced in agriculture today arise because the general public as consumers have no appreciation or un-



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derstanding about agri-business and modern farming. There is a serious communications gap between the farmer and the consumer. This fact is being highlighted in the recent political picture both on the state and national level.

Another area of misunderstanding is the number and type of jobs directly related to agriculture that have developed in recent years. This career potential is often overlooked by students as they map out their future, mainly because they don't

even know it's there. With the tight employment situation in many occupational areas, the employment picture in agriculturally related fields is very bright.

Perhaps programs should be developed for kindergarten through 12th grade for all pupils to develop appreciations, attitudes, understandings, and knowledge about agriculture in all its phases. This program could include many areas. In our own school district the sixth grade Elementary Agriculture Program includes the areas of safety (conservation of our human resources), sanitation (the quality of our environment), conservation (conservation of our natural resources), and an orientation to career education.

Safety includes the areas of safety around the farm and home, safety at school, safety around animals; bicycle safety, fire prevention; power mower safety; and other related areas. Sanitation includes such things as rodents and rodent control, safe use of pesticides on the farm and in the home, water purity and its testing, and the elementary planning of home and farm sites to eliminate sanitation problems. The conservation phase includes soil, water, wildlife, air, and forest conservation. Problems of current environmental and ecological interest are emphasized in all the areas of study. Career orientation is composed of exposing the children to the variety of jobs that are available in each of the areas studied. An effort is made to acquaint the students with as many jobs as possible since most have very limited notions about what kinds of jobs they can get when they grow up.

A recent research study of the Elementary Agriculture program showed that the program did significantly improve attitudes and increase knowledge in the areas studied. So it can be said that a program of this type is valuable and can help students develop better understandings.

The public that has an understanding of the agricultural industry would certainly be more cognizant of agricultures needs and operation and agri-business would benefit from having a reservoir of potential employees with an appreciation of the nature of United States agriculture and some knowledge about it in all its phases. The job-seekers would have many more avenues open to them and could make more meaningful career choices. As consumers, an informed public could buy with more wisdom and understanding concerning products and pricing. It seems that everyone would benefit from such a program.

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