

Vo-Ag And FFA Are Shaping Tomorrow's Leaders

BY LISA RISSER LITITZ — Learning to do, doing to learn, earning to live, living to serve.

These are fine words that most anyone would want to live by. But they're not just for anybody; these are the words that countless youths live by. These are the words to the Future Farmers of America motto.

"The motto sums up FFA and vocational agriculture best," said William Erickson, executive secretary of the Pennsylvania Association of Future Farmers of America and head of Elizabethtown High School's vo-ag department. "Vo-ag and FFA are hands-on but not brains-off, which is what many people think vocational education is."

Organized in 1928, FFA is an extension of vocational agriculture/agribusiness departments in public schools. Much of what is taught in class is reinforced through active participation in the school's FFA chapter. Students also learn things not taught in class such as leadership and communications skills.

The FFA manual describes the organization's aim as "the development of agricultural leadership,

cooperation, and citizenship." Specific goals include: create and nurture a love of agricultural life; strengthen the confidence of students in themselves and their work; develop character, train for useful citizenship, and foster patriotism; participate in cooperative effort; and encourage members in developing individual occupational experience programs in agriculture.

FFA is organized on national, state, county, and local levels. The national organization is headed by a board of directors and six national officers who set operational policy based on recommendations of the National Convention Delegates. The national officers include a president, secretary, and four regional vice presidents all of whom are elected at the FFA's annual national convention.

According to the FFA manual, each state association is charged with the development of the FFA leadership program within the state, operating contests and awards programs at the state level, and issuing chapter charters. The number of state officers varies from state to state.

Local chapters consist of a pres-



FFA helps youths develop leadership and problem identification and solution skills. These young men have achieved success through the program. Left to right: Dave Vish, Blue Mountain, state FFA sentinel; Doug Musser, Elizabethtown, first-place individual in livestock judging in Springfield, Mass.; Mark Anderson, Dover, state FFA vice president; and Russel Redding, vocational student organization coordinator for FFA.

ident, vice president, secretary, treasurer, sentinel, and reporter.

When FFA was first established 58 years ago, agriculture meant farming. Farming is only the beginning now as agriculture encompasses a huge complex industry that has careers in fields such as engineering, communications, marketing, research, and computer technology.

"Vo-ag and FFA are more than cows and plows," stated Erickson. "That's just a small part now. At Elizabethtown it also includes greenhouse management, landscape design, floral design, para-veterinary medicine, equine science, welding, small gas engines, structures, and more."

This kind of variety gives students many areas in which to suc-

ceed. "Schools traditionally offer two areas for success: academics and sports," Erickson commented. "If a student wasn't good in either of these areas, then what? And a large percent of kids fall into this third area. That's where FFA comes in."

"FFA has a unique way of offering programs where they can succeed. And kids can excel further than they could hope to achieve in sport or academics. FFA members can achieve on state and national levels with skills such as public speaking, analysis, problem solving, and identification. These are the very areas the school system is weak on."

Participation is the key for success, according to Erickson. In addition to helping students win

awards in competitions, active participation allows them to earn FFA degrees.

Greenhand and Chapter Farmer Degrees are awarded by local chapters, while the State Farmer Degree is conferred by the state, and the American Farmer Degree is given by the national organization.

Other awards include achievement awards, proficiency awards, scholarships, and achievement in volunteerism awards.

Vo-ag and FFA are helping to prepare students to be tomorrow's leaders. They're encouraging youths to learn to do, do to learn, earn to live, and live to serve.



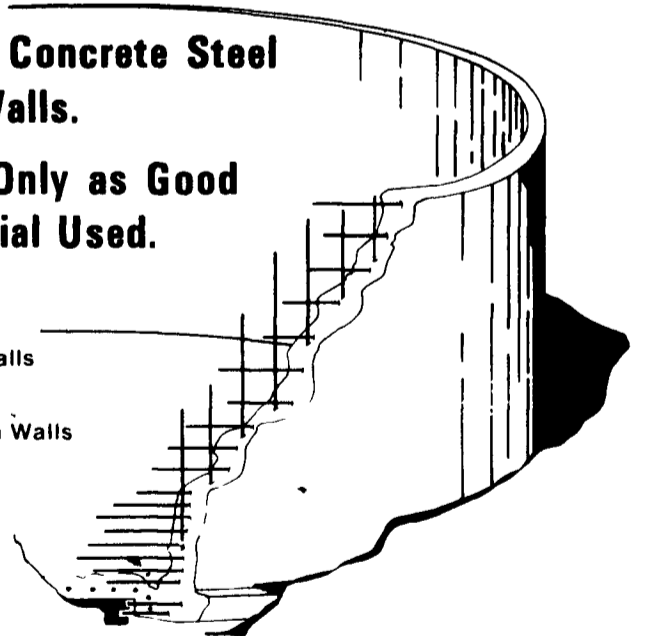
William Erickson, executive secretary for the state FFA organization, and Kristy Settle, Elizabethtown, student secretary discuss their program's business.

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