

Kutztown Preserves Vo-Ag But Slashes Half Position

KUTZTOWN (Berks Co.) — The Kutztown Area School Board agreed to retain agricultural education but cut the program to one full time teaching position, Monday night. The district had previously had 1 and 1/2 positions. That number was reduced when full-time teacher Donald Reinert took a sabbatical at the beginning of the school year.

Seventy members of the agricultural community attended the board's regularly scheduled meeting. Before the board made its decision, Robert Tercha, president of the Kutztown Young Farmers and member of the advisory council, announced that the council had met to evaluate the current ag curriculum. He told the board that two full-time teachers were recommended for vo-ag. He read portions of the council meeting minutes and reminded board members that they had been given a copy. Tercha then introduced Phoebe Bitler, advisory council secretary. Bitler was preparing to share the council's recommendations for an up-dated course of agriculture study, when a school director called the question.

All discussion on the subject could have ended there. The vote was 4 to 4 and the motion was defeated. Then Bitler was allowed to talk. Speaking briefly, Bitler outlined a number of possibilities including intro to ag. science in 9th grade; agri-science designed to fill a science credit for 10th graders, advanced ag science in 11th grade; and ag business or biotechnology in 12th grade. The recommendations also included a number of electives for secondary students, an ag literacy program, the FFA and a 1000 hours of Young farmer Work.

Dr. Jerry Cal, Kutztown vo-ag instructor, announced that there is no way to reach the goal of an improved, more science oriented department with only one teacher. Cal who had taught agricultural as a half-time teacher for the last two years, is presently teaching full time while Reinert is on sabbatical. "With only one teacher, ag will be alive for one more year," Cal said.

Cal added that he will seek legal advice on where he stands with the abolishment of the half-time position.

In response, Dr. Richard Karr, told the audience that the present

position is actually more than one teacher. "There are eight periods more a week than a one person position because Harold Schaffer is teaching some of the mechanical course work," Karr said.

According to Karr, Schaffer, an industrial arts teacher, became involved because Cal didn't have much shop experience.

Donald Reinert warned the board that this could create problems. "Schaffer has no vo-ag certification. This could jeopardize the department's vo-ag certification," Reinert said.

Karr said that he wanted to incorporate ag into more parts of the curriculum. "I see ag business possibly offered by the business department and ag science perhaps being part of the science department. Schaffer has an industrial arts certification and these courses can in fact come under an industrial arts certification," Karr said.

According to Larry Redding, program specialist for Pennsylvania agriculture education, it could be a real problem. "Vocational agriculture shop courses

have got to be taught by a certified ag instructor," Redding said.

While Redding doesn't foresee revoking the FFA charter at this point he said it could affect the school's vocational funding.

Redding stressed that vocational numbers are not reported until the end of the school year. School districts received additional funds for each vocational student they have. The formula is complicated and results in different amounts of funding for different schools. Karr reported that there are 23 vocational students in the Kutztown program at last Monday's special meeting.

Before the board voted, Karr reiterated the district's support for the FFA. "While we may be using teachers in other areas we will be maintaining the FFA. No one wants to lose it," Karr said.

"We also want to maintain some sort of assistance for the Young Farmers," he added.

According to Redding this could be difficult to do. "In order to have an approved program there must be 240 hours of ag available for ninth grade students,

360 hours of ag in 10th grade; 360 hours in 11th grade and 360 hours in 12th grade. Each year 120 hours can be in related areas such as SOE's (Supervised Occupational Experience) All of the courses must be taught by certified vo-ag instructors," Redding said.

"In order to have an FFA you must have an approved program," he added.

Requirements for Young Farmer programs are much more relaxed. "We have programs with 50 hours and others with 2050 hours. In order to receive federal funding there must be at least 500 hours of instruction. Funding of \$4000 or \$5000 doesn't seem like much when you consider the budget of the entire school district," Redding said.

According to Redding, Kutztown did contract for 1000 hours of Young Farmer time to be used this year.

"I understand that there is a letter coming from the district explaining that they can't meet that obligation. They didn't apply for funds for next year but we are going to see if they can still access

those funds," he explained.

Redding said there is no penalty for not meeting that contract.

As part of the vote, the school board empowered Karr to set up a committee to interview candidates in case of a vacancy and examine the department's curriculum. Five members of the ag community are on the committee including: Robert Tercha, Phoebe Bitler, Bill Hughes, Larry Schwader, and Dr. Sam Yoder. Also on the committee are: Dr. Karr; Alan Machamer, Margaret Fenstermacher, Timothy Haas and Monte Schroeder. After some discussion Karr made clear that should there be a need to interview a candidate the ag. community would have input. The final decision however would be made by the administration and school board.

Reaction to the vote was varied. One of the most even handed responses came from Monte Schroeder, school board president and crop farmer from Kutztown R.D.3. "There were two objectives here. The first was the continuation of the ag program at

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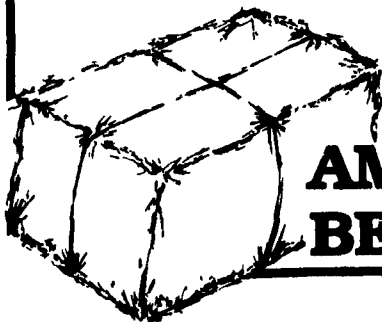
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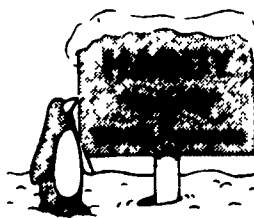
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