GLOBAL INSTRUCTION FOR RELEVANT AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

Global instruction in agricultural education is believed to be justified for five reasons: (1) Schools are changing with society, and agricultural education must also change if it is not to be left behind as other institutions and professions become more international in emphasis; (2) The economy of the United States and of American agriculture is dependent on international trade; (3) Students being prepared for the twenty-first century should be culturally-aware, and be able to relate to people of all ethnic backgrounds; (4) Some students will prepare for careers in international agriculture; and (5) Agricultural educators should care about the human suffering and be a part of the process of rectifying the situation. The time has arrived to internationalize the agricultural education curriculum.

Agricultural educators have worked internationally for many years. Under programs sponsored by the U.S. government, private foundations, other developed countries, and international organizations, educational programs in agriculture have become established in most countries of the world. As the world becomes smaller, because of improved and increased travel and communications, individuals working in the agricultural sector will need to think globally. There is an increasing interdependence in our modern world.

One of the things one learns from history is that every generation is always going through a period of painful and critical transition. The profession of agricultural education has been undergoing such a period of transition. One of the major challenges in the next decade will be how the profession addresses the issue of a growing international interdependence in the area of agriculture (Martin, 1989, p. 4). There is a general lack of knowledge about the world in general, and international agriculture in particular, among secondary students of agriculture. Should international agriculture be taught in agricultural education? If so, why? It is the belief of the author that the "should we" question should be answered with a "yes." Also, five reasons will be suggested to answer to the "why" question. First, high schools are changing. Agricultural education has been changing along with the rest of secondary education. Education is being updated to reflect the world as it exists rather than the way it was. A kind of agricultural education is needed that will be relevant in the twenty-first century. Agricultural education, as a profession, must do what it can to be on the cutting edge of change.

Second, the curriculum should be internationalized because of the interdependence of the world economy. Not only does the United States of America (USA) derive income from foreign countries for agricultural products, but the USA is also able to purchase automobiles more cheaply because of the increased competition in that industry caused by foreign imports.

Third, students need an international perspective if they are to be functional and vital citizens of the world. It is fairly well known among our trading partners that Americans tend to take a John Wayne approach (Martin, 1989) in dealing with other countries. Americans, in general, do not take the time to understand cultures and peoples. Trade negotiators indicate that Americans tend to lose more deals in the private sector than they win because of poor communications based on a lack of understanding about different cultures.
Americans want a deal. People from other cultures want meaningful relationships. Americans don’t often seem to relate the two perspectives. Not everyone thinks like Americans think (Martin, 1989, p. 4).

Fourth, there is a need for students and educators to be aware of internationally-oriented career opportunities. Many of these career opportunities relate to the marketing of agricultural products internationally. Other opportunities are available in working with rural people in developing societies to help improve agricultural production, marketing, and distribution.

Fifth, rural societies throughout the world need help in developing a higher standard of living. The past quarter century has been a period of unprecedented change and progress in the developing world. And yet despite this impressive record, millions of individuals continue to be trapped in absolute poverty: a condition of life so characterized by malnutrition, illiteracy, disease, squalid surroundings, high infant mortality, and low life expectancy as to be beneath any reasonable definition of human decency. There is an old English proverb that states, "What the eye does not see, the heart does not grieve about." Students in agricultural education must be made to see, to learn about, what much of the world is like.

Each of these five reasons for infusing international agriculture into the curriculum will be addressed in greater detail. The first reason was that schools are changing.

**Changes in Schools**

Schools are changing. Higher college entrance requirements and increased high school requirements for graduation have been put in place, in accord with the recommendations of the National Commission on Excellence in Education in *A Nation at Risk* (1983). The emphasis is upon English, mathematics, sciences, social studies, and foreign languages. Other subjects must compete within the declining space for electives. Agricultural education will need to be viewed as up-to-date and relevant to attract high-ability students. Recommendations from the study of agriculture in the schools completed by the National Research Council (1988) has suggested many changes in programs. Internationalizing the curriculum will assist in presenting a modern program image.

Students need to have an understanding of the major producing and importing countries of the world, for both agricultural products and products that impact agriculture, such as oil. They need to understand religions, cultures, and the world economic system sufficiently so that they will know why hog farming is not practiced in the Middle East, and why the effects of a stock market crash in New York are felt in Hong Kong. In response to the need for students to be prepared for a global agriculture, colleges of agriculture are now internationalizing their curricula. High school programs of agriculture should do the same.

If a goal of the schools is to help their students become global citizens, then students must participate in meaningful experiences to accomplish this end. Students should know that a dozen countries may be involved in the production of an automobile. They might study how acid rain influences the relationship between the United States and Canada. Schools could offer language immersion programs where students would be taught all subjects using a specific foreign language. The cultures of various countries might be studied, but care must be used to avoid stereotypes. Companies with international connections should be encouraged to provide resource persons and resource materials to assist the schools in accomplishing this goal of assisting students in becoming global citizens.

Might agriculture be taught using a foreign language? The number of students enrolled in foreign language classes has been increasing at a rapid rate. The majority of students in the USA now study some foreign language. Specific international courses designed to develop in students a global awareness about agriculture would certainly be an option worth considering.
as a way to participate in the changes being made in schools.

**The Global Economy**

One need only wander through a supermarket or a department store to realize that, in the United States, sources of food and fiber are worldwide. With an agricultural surplus in the United States, it is easy to see why agricultural products must be marketed globally. Patterns of agricultural production and consumption are changing. For example, soybean oil from the United States must compete not only with soybean production in other countries but alternative products such as palm oil. Changes in quality and quantity of production in other countries will continue to influence the marketability of agricultural products from this country. Many nations that once were dependent on others for food now are food exporters, as well as cash customers for food products. Overlaying the natural market forces are such political decisions as import quotas, tariffs, and subsidies.

In 1993, agricultural exports from the United States totaled 42,609 million dollars (United States Department of Agriculture, 1994); the top exports in dollar value were: grains and feeds, animals and animal products; oilseeds and products, vegetables and vegetable products, and fruit and fruit products. Agricultural trade in the United States has continually provided a trade surplus in balance of payments, but the percentage contribution made by agriculture has been declining. Competitive imports in 1993 were 78% of total agricultural exports, a number which has been gradually rising since 1968 when it was at 60%. What countries have been importing United States agricultural products? In 1993 the top 10 importing countries in order, based on dollar value, were: Japan, Canada, Mexico, Taiwan, Korea, the former USSR, the Netherlands, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Hong Kong. The top 10 importing countries, based on metric tons purchased, were: Japan, the former USSR, Mexico, Taiwan, the Netherlands, Canada, Egypt, Spain, Korea, and Algeria.

Obviously, the agricultural sector in the U.S. is dependent on exports to foreign countries. Workers in the agricultural industry are an important part of the global economy.

**Cultural Understanding**

The world is getting smaller. Students can assume that they will have more opportunities to interact with people of other countries and cultures. Students of agriculture need to develop a willingness to both compete and cooperate internationally. This requires respect for political, social, and cultural differences and an understanding of the interdependencies of an interrelated world. Students who understand these international relationships will be able to function better in the many roles that have an international dimension.

People from different cultures tend to think differently. Students need to appreciate the strengths of differences among nations and peoples (McCracken & Magisos, 1989). In general, Americans believe that whether man is good or evil is changeable, that man can master nature, and that man should be future oriented, taking action (doing), and individualistic. Values of traditional cultures throughout the world are more likely to suggest that the good or evil of man is unchangeable, that man either must be in harmony with nature or be subjugated by it, and that man should be past oriented, with a stress on who one is (being), and subject to authority. Unless students learn to appreciate these differences, they will be frustrated in relating with peoples of other cultures (McCracken & Magisos, 1989, p. 10). Students need to understand the differences in approaches to buying, selling, and trading. Americans often fail to recognize that a refusal is only a temporary bargaining position or that a "yes" is sometimes a polite "no."

Every culture has its set of values. Consider the values inherent in the American culture? Americans, who came from a pioneering tradition, might be stereotyped by foreigners as (Kohls, 1979): outgoing, friendly, loud, rude, boastful, immature, hard working, extravagant, wasteful, confident, lacking in class-
consciousness, disrespectful of authority, racially prejudiced, ignorant of other countries, wealthy, generous, and always in a hurry. It is believed in many cultures that American women tend to be promiscuous. Americans usually consider the traits of pride, boldness, aggressiveness, achievement, frankness and familiarity to be assets. In many cultures, however, the virtues of humility, reserve, modesty and consensus are more greatly admired and respected (Kohls, 1979, pp. 6-7). Think about the American values reflected in the following proverbs: cleanliness is next to godliness; a penny saved is a penny earned; time is money; don't cry over spilt milk; waste not, want not; early to bed, early to rise, makes one healthy, wealthy, and wise; God helps those who help themselves; a man's home is his castle; no rest for the wicked; you've made your bed, now sleep in it; don't count your chickens before they're hatched; a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush; the squeaky wheel gets the grease; might makes right; there's more than one way to skin a cat; a stitch in time saves nine; all that glitters is not gold; clothes make the person; if at first you don't succeed, try, try again; take care of today and tomorrow will take care of itself; and laugh and the world laughs with you; weep and you weep alone (Kohls, 1979, pp. 30-31).

Americans who wish to succeed in other cultures should develop the following skills: tolerance for ambiguity, low goal/task orientation, open-mindedness, non-judge-mental, empathy, communicativeness, flexibility/adaptability, curiosity, sense of humor, warmth in human relationships, motivation, self-reliance, strong sense of self, tolerance for differences, perceptiveness, and the ability to fail (Kohls, 1979, p. 72).

The point is that every culture has its own proverbs that reflect its values. Values in the United States culture.

The Malays have two other proverbs that are very similar to one that we use. "Banyak udang banyak garam, banyak orang banyak ragam" (Many shrimp, many condiments, many men, many temperaments)! "Masuk kandang kambing mengembik, masuk kandang kerbau menguak" (Bleat when you are in a goat-fold; bellow when you are in a buffalo-pen). We in the USA would say, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do."

A particular culture may be described by its: manners, customs, beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, laws (written & unwritten), ideas and thought patterns, language, arts and artifacts, tools, social institutions, religious beliefs, myths and legends, knowledge, values, concepts of self, morals, ideals, and accepted ways of behaving (Kohls, 1979, p. 17). Items necessary to maintain a culture are: food, clothing, shelter, family organization, social organization, government, defense, arts/crafts, knowledge/science and religion (Kohls, 1979, p. 19).

Students should be made aware of the fact that people of different cultures have differing values. Cultural values are important to know so as to prevent committing a faux pas as people from one culture interact with people from another (Chambers, 1988, p. vi). The knowledge and understanding of students needs to be expanded so they can act as ambassadors of good will in relating to those having differing backgrounds.

Career Opportunities

Not all careers in world affairs entail living abroad. In fact, an understanding of global agriculture may be very important for many jobs in the U.S. Foreign currency traders at financial institutions, marketers of agricultural products, translators, American representatives for international clients, and employees of companies based overseas are but a few examples. Opportunities to live and work abroad are limited and the competition is keen. Most international jobs are available only to people with special expertise in an area or language, who have worked as interns or employees of an
internationally oriented organization, or who have advanced academic credentials. For the graduate of the nineties, proficiency in a foreign language may be expected or essential if the goal is to pursue a career in international agriculture. But of equal or greater importance is an excellent command of English.

U.S. Government agencies hire persons with backgrounds in agricultural or food sciences. The Peace Corps offers opportunities to work in other lands and cultures and to expand one's education. This is a grass roots way for young people to live in a different culture while developing technical skills and learning to communicate in a foreign language. The other government agency which has employed large numbers of people in international agriculture is the Agency for International Development (USAID).

Educational institutions, consulting firms, private foundations, international organizations, and multi-national business corporations all employ international agricultural workers. Entry into these organizations usually requires higher education and international experience.

Volunteer, religious and missionary organizations provide opportunities for entry-level workers to gain experience internationally. Some United States graduate students in agricultural education have entered with a background of experience in church work in a foreign country. Many of these students, after advancing their education, have obtained jobs in international agriculture.

**Rural Development**

Agricultural students should be made aware of the problem of poverty in many third-world countries. As citizens of the world, they need to develop an empathy for those who have not achieved the standard of living Americans have grown to expect.

Many countries have an agricultural system that has resulted in farmers who are in poverty, in isolation, powerless, vulnerable, and physically weak. Poverty has been a strong determinant of other problems. Physical weakness has been an observable symptom resulting from the other problems. Solutions to these problems are not always politically acceptable in the countries where they have occurred. In many cases, the farmers in these societies have had an understanding of what needs to be done to improve their situation, but have lacked the resources to accomplish the task.

Increasing population pressure and rapid deterioration of natural resources will create more problems for the future development of agriculture in the developing world. Since agriculture is location-specific and may even be farmer-specific, to develop and transfer appropriate technology the people involved must take into account the effects on the ecosystem so that agriculture will not only be productive but also be stable, sustainable, and equitable. It will be a challenge to the capabilities of institutions in agriculture to produce the high-quality manpower needed to develop and maintain an agriculture that is economically and ecologically sound.

**Summary**

Instruction about international agriculture is believed to be justified in agricultural education for five reasons. Schools are changing with society. Agricultural education must also change if it is not to be left behind as other institutions in society become more international in emphasis.

The economy of the United States and of American agriculture is dependent on international trade. Much of what Americans purchase is affordable because of the competition brought about by foreign trade.

Students being prepared for the twenty-first century should be culturally-aware. They should be able to relate to people of all ethnic backgrounds. Improved transportation and communications in the future will result in the ability to interact with other countries the way people now interact across state lines.
Some students will prepare for careers in international agriculture. Such careers may be in the USA or in foreign countries. It might the encouraging of a student by an agricultural educator that will bring about his or her choice of a rewarding career.

Agricultural educators should care about the human suffering in the world. Students should be helped to develop an empathy for those who have been deprived.

It would be easier to continue to teach as has always been done. However, agricultural educators need the courage to break away from what has always been. The time has arrived to internationalize the agricultural education curriculum.

Reference


