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Agricultural
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Clubs

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Agricultural Economics Clubs--Observations and Suggestions*

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Agricultural Economics Library

Introduction

Several mechanisms are available to Agricultural Economics students to enhance their professional and career goals outside of the classroom. One such opportunity is through participation in an Agricultural Economics Club. A club of this nature provides an excellent environment to exchange ideas, become better acquainted with fellow students and faculty, and expose undergraduates to occupational opportunities. However, several problems may arise which substantially limit the effectiveness of an Agricultural Economics Club.

The current study was undertaken in an attempt to identify selected problems and to generate ideas which may be beneficial to club leaders. Two objectives are considered. The first is to obtain general enrollment data relating to Agricultural Colleges, Agricultural Economics Departments, and to degree options available within Agricultural Economics. This will provide information as to the desires and needs of the Agricultural Economics students. The second objective is to derive information about Agricultural Economics Clubs and to determine which types of activities have been most successful. This material can be utilized by club presidents and advisors in establishing or readjusting goals and activities of clubs.

Methodology

A questionnaire was sent on March 4, 1977, to a total of 65 universities (51 land grant universities, 5 Canadian universities, and 9 non-land grant

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universities with Agricultural Economics Departments). A follow-up questionnaire was then sent to the universities which had not responded after a period of four weeks. The questionnaire dealt with six basic areas of concern. These included: 1) general college and department enrollment information, 2) club background information, 3) club membership, 4) club activities, 5) national participation, and 6) job placement activities. Forty-seven of the 65 universities (72.3%) responded to the survey. Of these, 37 were land grant universities, 4 were Canadian universities, and 6 were non-land grant universities with Agricultural Economics Departments. It should be noted that some of the questionnaires were not fully completed, so the total responses to selected questions may not match the total number of questionnaires which were returned.

Results and Analysis

Enrollment and Options

Agriculture appears to be a vital part of most of the universities surveyed (Table 1).

Table 1. Agricultural College Enrollment as a Percent of Total University Enrollment, 1976-77.

<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number of Universities</u>
0-5	7
5-10	16
10-15	9
15-20	6
20-25	3
25-35	1

Enrollment in Colleges of Agriculture was reported to have increased at 32 universities, and a decrease was reported at 3 during the last decade. Additionally, with one exception, Agricultural Economics majors are increasing in numbers at all universities. Breakdowns of the percentages and numbers are listed in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2. Agricultural Economics Enrollment as a Percent of Agricultural College Enrollment, 1976-77.

<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number of Universities</u>
0-5	11
5-10	9
10-15	11
15-20	5
20-25	3
25-50	1

Table 3. Number of Agricultural Economics Majors, 1976-77.

<u>Number of Students</u>	<u>Number of Universities</u>
5-10	1
11-25	2
26-35	1
36-50	1
51-75	4
76-100	5
101-150	10
151-200	5
201-300	4
301-400	2
401-500	2
>500	2

When Agricultural Economics majors are categorized by options, there appears to be substantial growth in the number of students enrolled in Agricultural Business and Agricultural Marketing. Other options which were listed include: Rural Sociology and Development, Forestry Economics, Farm and Ranch Management, Agricultural Finance, Production Economics, Professional Agricultural Economics, Real Estate, Agricultural Education, Agricultural Research, International Agriculture, Agricultural Communications, Agricultural Statistics, Recreation, Agricultural Policy, Quantitative Methods, and Resource Economics.

Number of Clubs

Thirty of the universities responding to the survey have an Agricultural Economics Club. Fourteen universities reported past failures with a club. Six

of these have been reactivated. The most common reasons given for a failure were lack of effective leadership and a dwindling interest of the entire student membership.

Membership and Meetings

Generally, less than 35 percent of the Agricultural Economics majors are members of their respective clubs (Table 4).

Table 4. Percent of Agricultural Economics Majors in the Club, 1976-77.

<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number of Universities</u>
5-10	3
10-15	4
15-20	3
20-25	4
25-35	8
35-50	3
50-75	1
75-100	2

Most of the clubs surveyed meet once a month during the academic year. Seven clubs meet more often than this, and only two clubs meet less than once a month. For the most part, graduate students are not active in the clubs and some universities have a separate graduate student organization. Faculty members actively participate in 13 of the clubs, although almost all the clubs have at least one faculty member serving as an advisor.

Participation

Twenty-three of the 30 clubs consider member apathy to be a problem. There are several projects which have been undertaken in an attempt to alleviate this shortcoming. Most of these have been directed toward advertisement of meetings and activities. Some of the methods by which this is done include personal invitations, announcing the events during class periods, establishment of a telephone committee or club bulletin board, and newsletters which list upcoming activities. Additional attempts to reduce member apathy include such things as

providing scholarships and awards to outstanding club members and hosting a social hour following the meetings. Perhaps the most important, however, is the selection of club leaders. One club stressed the success it has had with a rigorous nomination procedure involving past officers, a faculty committee, and a committee made up of administrative officials within the Agricultural College.

Activities

Twenty-two of the clubs sponsor special events at their meetings. This is an additional method to confront member apathy although it appears most clubs view it as an opportunity for professional enhancement. The most common programs are film presentations and guest speakers. The topics vary widely but are usually associated with jobs and job opportunities within the agricultural industry.

A variety of topics are included in club activities (Table 5). One of the most common events is a field trip, enabling students to view various production and marketing facilities on a first-hand basis. Although most field trips are made to firms in the general proximity of the university, some clubs take several days and visit numerous sites further from campus.

Table 5. Club Activities.

<u>Professional</u>	<u>Social</u>
Club publications	Intramural sports teams
Essay awards	Pizza parties
FFA contests	Roller skating parties
Field trips	Student-faculty picnics
Graduate brochure	Summer softball teams
Open house displays	
Papers for SS-AAEA ¹	
Seminars	
Test files	

¹Student Section-American Agricultural Economics Association

Financial Sources

Like the club activities, the financial sources are quite diverse (Table 6). Almost all clubs receive some financial assistance through the assessment of dues, although the cost to each individual member is rather small. Most clubs charge dues of less than \$5.00 per annum and at least eight clubs fall below the \$3.00 mark. Other sources of income which appear to be popular include slave auctions and the operation of concessions at sports events.

Table 6. Financial Sources.

Boxing smokers	Fertilizer sales
Cap sales	Investments
Carnivals	Mascot pin sales
Celebration booths	Raffles
Concessions	Slave auctions
Donations	Student government
Donkey basketball	Tractor pulls
Dues	Turkey shoots

Job Placement

Fourteen clubs publish a graduate brochure. These are sent to prospective employers, agricultural economics departments, agricultural extension agents, and/or given to students to distribute at their own discretion. The brochures are financed by the departments, participants, and/or student government (Table 7). Only 7 of the 14 clubs felt the brochure was helpful in job placement. Two clubs did not consider the purpose of the brochure to be an aid in job placement.

Table 7. Financing of Graduate Brochures.

<u>Sources of Revenue</u>	<u>Number</u>
Departments	8
Participants	4
Student government	1
Joint sources	1

National Participation and Correspondence

Twenty of the 30 clubs are affiliated with the Student Section of the American Agricultural Economics Association (SS-AAEA). However, members from only six of the clubs attend meetings on a regular basis. Five clubs reported that occasionally some of their members will attend, but without consistency. Only four clubs carry on correspondence with others, and even so the topics are very limited.

Summary and Suggestions

Many clubs throughout the country are performing a very useful and viable service to students. Yet there are no clear-cut procedures to establish a successful Agricultural Economics Club. To arrive at possible solutions, the activities of thriving clubs should be carefully examined. From these clubs, basic considerations can be drawn which may be applicable in promoting the growth and welfare of other clubs. Additionally, changes in the structure of the SS-AAEA could possibly be useful in assisting in increased communication between the clubs and also generate more member interest.

The survey indicates that past failures resulted primarily from a lack of interest on the part of the students. To confront this problem, student interests need to be enhanced with club activities reflecting those particular interests. Guest speakers should be carefully chosen in order to provide a link between the speakers' topics or background and the students' interests. Field trips should be planned in a similar fashion, so students are able to derive benefits through participation in club programs and activities.

A secondary reason listed for club failures relates to a lack of effective leadership. Although this is difficult to deal with, one club has had good success with a screening procedure for the nominees. Three separate committees

are established to review the officer nominees and then make recommendations to the club membership. A review process such as this generally yields the best leaders rather than the most popular students who may not necessarily be outstanding leaders. The club that adopted this procedure reported a substantial improvement in the effectiveness of the leaders.

One aspect which can be correlated to the more successful clubs is that of a strong financial base. The opportunities to generate revenue vary throughout the country; consequently, some clubs suffer since the resources simply may not be available. The most successful method to obtain funds appears to be through concession sales at university football games. However, results of the survey indicate other methods which can be used to generate revenue.

More and better communication might be helpful to enhance success of Agricultural Economics Clubs. Very few of the clubs send representatives to the national meetings, so the exchange of ideas is limited. Additionally, correspondence between other clubs and club members is not common. The thriving and successful member organizations of the SS-AAEA, therefore, are not adequately exposed to the newly established clubs or those which may be having difficulty.

In this study, very few questions related to the National Association, as the primary emphasis was placed on individual clubs. The results of the survey did indicate, however, that participation by member clubs on the national level is minimal. To obtain an insight into this problem, the national officers may want to conduct a survey of all Agricultural Economics Departments to determine reasons for a lack of national participation. Perhaps then the objectives of the SS-AAEA could be altered in an attempt to increase the involvement by all member clubs.

One possible change in the national structure might be to establish student sections in the Regional Agricultural Economics Associations. This would reduce

traveling expenses and increase the probabilities of student attendance. Officers, then, from each Student Regional Association would be able to relay concerns to the national officers. The net result could be an increase in communications between the clubs. Through such communications, each club would be able to determine successes of other clubs and possibly adopt similar measures within their own organizations.

Several clubs throughout the country are quite successful in meeting the needs of the students. Still, each club seems to be encased in its own surroundings and does not have a relationship with any of its member clubs. Programs, contests, etc., which will generate interest on a national and/or regional scale need to be established. Involvement should then increase and make it much easier to promote interchange of ideas among student sections. Until this is done, the SS-AAEA and its member clubs will not reach their full potential.