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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Agricultural Research Service

CONSUMER EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Talk by Rose Mary Bengel
Maryland State Department of Education
at the 1970 National Agricultural Outlook Conference
Washington, D.C., 2:45 P.M., Monday, February 16, 1970

The Vocational Education Amendments of 1968 charged home economics educators with one of the greatest challenges since the passage of the first vocational education legislation. Funds are allotted to the states for Consumer and Homemaking Programs. One-third of these funds have been designated for programs which will encourage consideration of social and cultural conditions and needs in economically depressed areas. Consumer education must be an integral part of these programs.

In today's complex society, consumer education is viewed as a universal need. Consumer education programs in the public schools can reach a majority of the population, and can therefore do much to meet this need. Consumer education programs in their many forms must help people to comprehend and cope with problems of consumption by equipping them with tools to make wise decisions and choices.

May I now briefly describe a few of the consumer education programs that are being planned and conducted in the public schools and that take new directions.

In the Philadelphia schools, a problem-solving type of consumer education program for twelfth graders evolved after an urban problems course was taught. Both parents and students were involved in that endeavor. Two other model programs are functioning now. The curriculum to be used for these programs was not written during the weekly workshops for the teachers involved. Teachers and students are developing the curriculum as they progress. The two goals they are striving toward are--the use of innovative teaching techniques and the integration of consumer problems with other subject areas such as English, math, social studies, industrial arts, and home economics. In English, for example, South Philadelphia High School worked out a unit on semantics in advertising and a drama unit in which students write and produce plays on consumer fraud. Students also produce a weekly television show on the school's closed circuit TV, entitled "Money Matters," which includes interviews, panel discussions, plays, etc.

Also interesting is the integration of consumer concepts into elementary education. In one elementary school, a mini-grocery store has been set up with

donated equipment from a food chain, which serves as a focal point for consumer education. With volunteer graduate students from Drexel aiding the program, the children produced a play on the difference between the use of money and bartering. They are now developing a thrift shop to service their school.

Prince George's County, Maryland, has in operation a pilot program involving all sixth graders from five schools. A consumer and homemaking consultant is attempting to help them deal more effectively with their environment. She is providing services to the community as well as teachers in a variety of ways. Improved self concepts and increased consumer knowledge are a pertinent part of every effort, whether in the community or the classroom.

Another project planned in Prince George's County is the development of video tapes by various teachers and the homemaking supervisory staff for use throughout the County. These will be available on loan to teachers. A Consumer Buying Series of mini lessons is in preparation. The series is to include mini lessons on (1) How to buy a used car; (2) How to buy young men's clothing; (3) Shopping for a teenager's wardrobe; (4) Buying furniture; and (5) Supermarket Shopping--meats, fruits and vegetables, and canned goods. As the project progresses other lessons will be added.

In an urban Pennsylvania school recently, student interviews to learn about consumer practices of homemakers in a Federal housing project were conducted. The results furnished information for the senior homemaking class involved. Some topics covered were impulse buying, resistance to door-to-door salesmen, cost and use of installment credit, consumer legal protection available, and planning in relation to spending and overspending.

In another high school, a team teaching approach was used. The business education teacher and the home economics teacher taught the class cooperatively as a seminar. The business teacher was primarily responsible for teaching about sources of money, loans, credit, installment buying, banking, insurance and so on. The home economics teacher and her senior girls supplemented the classes with symposiums, demonstrations, field trips, and illustrations on such topics as how to spend borrowed, saved, or earned money wisely; how to determine needs and set up priorities; how to shop by mail-order; when it pays for a married woman to work; and how to get consumer protection when needed.

A research project carried out in a rural Pennsylvania high school girls' home economics class recently was concerned with the question "Is it more economical to rent or buy a car?" The project attracted so much interest from the boys, who also became involved in gathering information, that the findings were reported in a junior-senior assembly. A panel consisting of a used care dealer, a car rental agency representative, and four students presented additional pertinent information.

Gamesmanship is being used increasingly in teaching consumer concepts. The Consumer Game, developed by Johns Hopkins University, is being used effectively in many schools. A teacher in Prince George's County developed a game she calls "shop in," which she used in a foods unit. Each girl is assigned for several weeks to bring in the mid-week food section from a

newspaper. Using these as a guide, the teacher makes up a grocery list of twenty items. The class is divided into teams and each girl is given a list from which to shop. Each team tries to complete their grocery list by buying the items at the advertised price, listing the brand names. The first team to complete the list is the winner. The team that spends the least amount is the second winner. A grand winner is a team that completes their list first with the least amount spent.

The use of television to communicate consumer concepts was well received when Baltimore City presented a sequence of 12 lessons on consumer education aimed at teenagers' needs. A similar series aimed at problems of young homemakers is being aired now.

Another approach to consumer education was introduced at the American Home Economics Association post-conference on "Innovations in Consumer Education" in Boston in 1969. Participants worked in small groups to develop home economics learning packages (HELP). These packages contain components for learner self instruction and for teacher use. A learning package is a unit in which one basic concept or idea to be learned is broken into several components or lessons. The teacher constructs the three-to-five-lesson package so that the learner may proceed at his own pace and learn in his own style by selecting from suggested alternate resource materials and activities. Built in is a pretest designed to diagnose the learner's status in relation to the concept and to help the student select materials and experiences in the area of greatest need with reference to the objective sought. The Home Economics Education Department at Pennsylvania State University has in operation on a trial basis a beginning library of HELP packages developed by graduate students, teachers, and other interested home economists. Each package has been evaluated and adapted to meet criteria suggested by subject matter and education specialists. To gain access to these packages, an individual must develop and have a package accepted into the library. The individual then becomes a member and receives five packages of his choice from a list of available packages that have been developed by others. Extension workers might want to consider developing packages aimed at the needs of individuals and groups they reach. For further information about the development of learning packages, write to:

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Relevance in consumer education means leading individuals to gain knowledge and skill needed by today's consumer and helping them to understand how their attitude and values affect their consumer decisions. The approaches and ideas mentioned above are but a few of the many being used to attain this relevance.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Economic Research Service

CHANGING AGRICULTURE AND THE CHANGING OUTLOOK CONFERENCE

Talk by J. Phil Campbell
Under Secretary of Agriculture
at the 1970 National Agricultural Outlook Conference
Washington, D.C., 9:30 A.M., Monday, February 16, 1970

I would like first of all to welcome all of you to the Outlook Conference. The National Agricultural Outlook Conference has been a regular event at the Department of Agriculture for nearly 50 years, and I personally feel that its importance has continued to grow throughout that time.

I look back at the year 1923, when the first outlook conference was held, and I marvel at how much the agriculture we serve has changed. The Outlook Conference itself has helped produce some of the changes.

Before World War I, a farmer was relatively self-sufficient. He saved his own seed, raised his own draft animals, used manure and diversified his crops instead of buying fertilizer. He raised a lot of his own food right on the farm, because it was hard to get into town regularly.

But all in all, the early decades of the century were prosperous ones for farmers.

Then came World War I. I don't think anyone realized at first how profoundly it was to affect agriculture.

The first effect was to drain off thousands and thousands of farm workers. And at the same time farm product prices soared as industries geared up to meet wartime demands.

Suddenly, the old ways of doing things would no longer work. Farmers had to look for ways to save labor and boost their output per man-hour. They needed new techniques to increase yields. And there was a commercial market ready to pay cash for whatever farm products they could produce.

The full effects of mechanization and commercialization began to be felt after the war, when the demand for farm products dropped back to peacetime levels. There was a disastrous slump in 1919 and 1920 that cut farmers' prices almost in half.

The leadership of agriculture began to realize more and more the effects of economic forces outside agriculture on farm product supply, demand and prices.

In a very real sense, the first outlook conference was a recognition of the increasing involvement of agriculture in the non-farm economy. To make intelligent and effective adjustments, farmers would have to see prospective demands and then adjust individual production to meet the national demand.

It was an era when the American farmer was just beginning the tremendous technological changes that have revamped the face of farming. The lightweight gasoline tractor was just coming into its own. Seedsmen were working on a practical corn hybrid and the broiler chicken hadn't yet been invented. The average farm had 150 acres. It took 87 man-hours of work to produce 100 bushels of wheat.

The early outlook conferences were centered principally around the price outlook for individual commodities. This marked the first time that farmers had this type of information, and it helped greatly to put them in a competitive bargaining position with buyers and sellers.

Of course, farming in this country has changed remarkably since the year 1923.

In the years since then, output per man-hour in farming has increased 600 percent. That's amazing. The man-hours needed to produce 100 bushels of wheat have been cut from 87 to 10. The number of man-hours we invest in 100 bushels of corn have dropped from 113 to 7. We produce 100 pounds of live chickens today with about half an hour's work -- and we turn out 9 billion pounds of tender, plump broilers per year. You can get them here in our cafeteria this week, if you're interested. And while you're eating, remember that in 1923 stewing chicken was the order of the day -- and that was usually saved for Sunday dinner.

We produce 3 times as much beef now as we did then.

And we produce about a billion bushels of soybeans today, too. The soybean outlook didn't get much attention at that first Outlook Conference. We didn't produce any soybeans to speak of in 1923.

The average farm today is double the size of the farms then, and the little gasoline tractor that pulled two small plow bottoms has been replaced by machines suited to the size and type of farms, ranging up to a 100-horsepower engineering marvel with an automatic transmission that pulls 7 big plow bottoms at twice the speed.

On many farms today, machines carry water, feed the stock, clean the barn, pick fruit, herd cattle, gather the eggs and do literally thousands of other jobs. We have herbicides to weed our fields and selective pesticides to protect them from insects and diseases. Computers help us make management decisions more effectively and irrigation systems offset dry spells.

The outlook conference, too, has had to change to keep up with our technological revolution.

Outlook information is no longer released just once a year. We can collect data faster now, and farmers need more frequent reports. Now we issue Situation Reports at least quarterly on most major commodities, and statistical releases come much more frequently.

Formal reporting is only part of the outlook program, of course. Outlook information is a fundamental input to the decision-making process of government and industry as well as agriculture. Few days pass that Department outlook specialists are not called on for expert judgment by the Secretary's Office, the White House and Capitol Hill.

Agricultural organizations and agribusiness are also heavy users of this information. In fact, we've noted increasing attendance by private industry representatives at the conference in recent years.

We're happy to have you here with us today, along with your colleagues from universities and government.

The Outlook Conference program before us takes in the whole broad scope of factors that are going to have an impact on agriculture and agricultural policy in 1970 -- the economy, the international situation, rural economic development, the quality of family life, nutrition, and the quality of our environment.

With such a broad scope to the program, and the calibre of speakers and participants we have here, I think this might turn out to be one of the most significant Outlook Conferences ever.

Participants in this year's Outlook Conference illustrate the value of trained, technical people to American agriculture. From the first conference in 1923 until today we have seen vast, revolutionary changes in agriculture which have been discussed and quite often forecast at the annual conference.

We will see equally as much change in agriculture in the years ahead.

Trained professional agriculture workers in research, education, teaching, and in private enterprise have been responsible for the development of the highly efficient agriculture industry existent in America today upon which the great industrial might of this nation has been built. And American farmers have thirsted for the knowledge developed and taken to them and they are thirsting for more information and guidance today. Without today's efficient agriculture the affluency of American society would not exist as illustrated by home appliances, TVs, centrally heated and air-conditioned homes -- and automobiles, boats, and generally the high standard of living.

To you professional people at this conference, your predecessors, to your colleagues across America, and to their predecessors American society owes a great, great deal.

I welcome all of you to this conference, and I can only say that I'm happy to be able to take part in it myself.