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HOW SHALL WE EDUCATE THE FUTURE FARMER, IF WE WANT TO DO SO

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Abstract

The question is raised if agricultural education and training are important tools in preparing youngsters to become good farmers.

If the answer is yes, we have to describe the contents of agricultural education and training as a basis for an educational plan and for the practical working out of this plan.

The paper ends with a discussion about the desirable structure of agricultural education and training, knowing that the experts in the countries of Northern Europe have developed different educational systems. These systems have to be compared.

1. The necessity of agricultural education and training

Agricultural education and training are offered in many countries at different levels. We can divide the offered programs in programs at the degree-level, the manager-level, the technician-level, the craft-level. In this presentation the emphasis is on the education and training of the future entrepreneur in agriculture, so the manager-level.

Why must someone be educated and trained at college? The education- and training system in the Middle Ages, when a journeyman was trained by a master, had as a result for example the creation of work of a superb quality as you can see in masterpieces of art. Economists know the reason why this type of education and training is insufficient today. Society has undergone great changes.

To be master of professional skills is not enough to be a good entrepreneur.

2. The contents of agricultural education and training in Northern Europe.

The traditional way for a farmer to earn a living is to cultivate his fields or to milk his cows or to carry out another type of animal or crop production. But the way in which the rural area is used has changed. It is not only the production of foodstuffs that is essential. People living in urban areas sometimes have rather monotonous work and at any rate have more spare time.

As a result of a wish to recreate in a natural environment they visit the rural area. The farmer can offer his services by managing the rural and agricultural resources of his farm, but also by offering active recreational facilities and accomodation and thereby earning part of his living from the rural resources of his farm.

These developments have their influences on agricultural education and training. Other influences are the changes in the emphasis people lay on developments in the rural area.

Subjects such as environmental pollution, animal welfare, possibilities for ethnic groups to get a good education have their influence on agricultural education.

On the one hand the future farmer has to cope with the influence of these subjects on his branch of industry. On the other hand it is clear that the new developments create new types of jobs.

So we see a broad diversification in the jobs that are available for the qualified students and consequently a broad diversification in educational streams in a college.

3. The structure of agricultural education and training in Northern Europe

Regarding the situation of agricultural education in the most-developed countries in Europe we notice a very strange situation. The specialists in agricultural education in the different countries describe the targets of agricultural education and training in nearly the same way. But the structure of the educational system is quite different. Roughly two main streams can be identified. One stream is the stream with emphasis on practical training periods in industry: long periods of practical farming supported by shorter periods of education at college. We find this system e.g. in the Scandinavian countries and in Germany. The starting-point of the other system is education and training at college, supported by usually shorter alternating periods of practical farming. We can find these structures in e.g. the United Kingdom, the Netherlands.

These possibilities have to be compared in an effort to make a choice, independent of the history of education in one's home-country.

4. Working out the problem

To work out the problem we have to ask ourselves questions and to try to formulate answers.

- a. What will be the contents of education and training?
- b. How are we going to educate and train?
- c. How can we build a structure in which we can realize our targets?

Question a:

We have to educate and train a farmer so that he or she can earn a living and can function in a family and society for many, many years. For a lifetime.

Question b:

The method of education and training: The story told by the teacher in the classroom, telling in many words what you have to do, sometimes mixed with academic knowledge the students do not understand and is of no importance for them, has to be a method of the past.

Criteria for the education of today:

- * Individual learning
- * Groupwork
- * Focus on the future
- * A minimum of facts because facts age very soon.

Question c:

In what structure do we want to educate?

We already mentioned the amazing fact that solutions differ in various European countries. In a country like Denmark for example, we find in all courses that are offered a succession of theoretical periods and practical periods. The greater part of the time is spent on practical work. For example the course for the future technician / unit manager:

- * 8 months work experience
- * 6 months practical farming
- * 4 months farm management at school.

The other extreme situation is found in the Netherlands:

- * 4 years of education and training at college with every week a minimum of 1 day at a farm and apart from these single days practical periods with a length of a couple of weeks. It is only some years ago that the program had a length of 3 years: 2½ years of theory and a ½ year of practical training.

I like to give you some ideas about agricultural education and to become wiser by discussing with you about education.

I learnt in my life that growing older is not enough to become wiser.

My propositions are:

1. To educate a future-farmer the education and training have to pass through three stages:
 - a. To acquire the basic knowledge of the technical and economical aspects of farming.
 - b. To acquire insight into the farm as a whole and to investigate the possibilities to increase the output.
 - c. To estimate the possibilities and problems when one takes over a farm.
 - d. To learn how to respond to changes in knowledge, regulations and so on.

2. Training and practical skills are important, but they need a theoretical background to be of value for the future.

My questions for you are:

- * Do you think that agricultural education is good for the future farmer?
- * What is your experience regarding the result of agricultural education in the situation of your work?
- * Do you have any suggestions for the incorporation of management-aspects in the education of future farmers?

I like to give you some ideas about experimental education and its development. The first thing you should know is that it is not just about the content of the curriculum, but also about the way it is delivered. My propositions are:

1. To explore insight into the nature of a subject and to integrate the positions to become the output.
2. To estimate the positions and problems with the help of a form.
3. To have a way to report to change in quality of a position and to an.

Training and practical skills are important for the development of a person. It is not enough to have theoretical knowledge, but you also need to be able to apply it in real life. What is your experience regarding the quality of education in the situation of your world? Do you have any suggestions for the improvement of training in the situation of your world?

Education is not just about the content of the curriculum, but also about the way it is delivered. It is not enough to have theoretical knowledge, but you also need to be able to apply it in real life. It is important to have practical skills and to be able to use them in the real world. This is why it is important to have a good education that includes both theory and practice.