

PROGRESS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL AGRICULTURE IN ILLINOIS

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Agricultural teaching in the secondary schools of Illinois has not spread so rapidly as it has in many other states, but the growth of this phase of vocational education in the state has been sane and progressive. Two years ago there were thirty-two high schools in the state giving instruction in agriculture; the number has probably been doubled by this time.

The length of term given to agriculture in most cases is one year, many schools are offering two years by alternating courses and giving only one course each year. Only three schools to my knowledge are offering four-year courses in agriculture. Four or five schools offer special short courses during the winter for boys and girls who cannot attend school regularly.

The year of agriculture is usually given in the first year of high school and made elective to students in other classes. Warren's Elements of Agriculture is the text generally used.

When agriculture is given in the first year the students of course have very little knowledge of science to which they can relate their agriculture; on the other hand, the agriculture may furnish a motive for further study and better appreciation and understanding of the sciences which follow later. The first year agriculture often takes the place of a general science, since it invades freely into the field of botany, zoology, chemistry, physics and other pure sciences.

It may be of interest to note that at the last meeting of the State High School Conference at the University last fall, the Agricultural section recommended that a year of general science be given before, or in connection with, the study of agriculture. It was the opinion of the Section that agriculture should be taught as a vocational subject and leave the related scientific subject-matter of the various sciences to their respective fields. For example, in agriculture we should teach in regard to alfalfa, less of its botanical relationships and facts and more of its economic value and how to grow it and use it.

As the schools are now manned and equipped, more of the science of agriculture can be taught than the art. The principles governing the application of the biological and physical sciences to the art of agriculture are as well taught, and have as much educational value as the so-called pure sciences, which have been taught for a much longer period of time. The graduates from our colleges of agriculture are usually well prepared in the sciences as well as in practical agriculture, and they are therefore better prepared to teach the sciences with agriculture, than are the science men to teach the agriculture with the sciences.

Those of us who believe in agricultural education must see to it, however, that the teaching be on a sound basis and that high standards of scholarship be maintained. I do not believe there is any more danger here than there is in the teaching of other sciences. If the pure sciences are made "too pure" for high school, the fault is just as grievous as it would be were the applied sciences made merely recipes for action. The applied sciences, it seems to me, have this additional value over the pure sciences for educational purposes—in that there is opportunity in the application of the science to useful ends, to understand and appreciate the pure science as well.

As to whether the teaching of agriculture in the state at this time is well organized in relation to existing courses in the curriculum, or whether it is on the right basis, I am not able to say with any degree of correctness. The whole matter is

in a changing condition, and no one seems to know what is right. Because the pure sciences had to be taught by laboratory equipment and experimental methods, may not be a reason why agriculture should be taught in this way within four walls, especially. Because one science should logically precede another, is no reason why agriculture should fit into a scheme of precedence. The danger is that our pure science men are trying to fit agriculture into a hide-bound system of textbooks, laboratories and other academic methods. Agriculture is the application of nearly all sciences, and it is out-of-doors. These facts should govern our policies and methods in teaching the subject.

Larger and better things are coming for agricultural education in our state. It may not be long until legislature fiat will place agriculture into all the schools. Many men and women are at work trying to find the best way by which agriculture in the public schools will not only contribute to the educational growth of the boys and girls of the school, but be a constructive factor in the economic and permanent growth of the state.

At the meeting of the High School Conference referred to above, the Agricultural Section adopted courses of study in general science and agriculture, and made recommendations as to books, equipment, and methods. These proceedings are being published and may be obtained soon from the writer.
