

A PRIMER FOR ORGANIZING AND OPERATING POST-SECONDARY AG STUDENT CLUBS

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All of us have a real need to belong, to be a part of something we feel is worthwhile. Whether it be a church, an athletic event, a class or a social club — the desire to participate is a normal human response.

The focus of this article is on agricultural student clubs at community colleges, junior colleges, technical institutes and other institutions offering post-high school, but less-than-Bachelor degree programs. It is an outgrowth of a national study¹ undertaken to learn more about such clubs and to devise a list of suggestions for developing such groups in other schools.

During the study it was learned that more than two-thirds of all such institutions had existing student agricultural clubs. Although widely varied in many respects, a basic pattern was seen which has application to other locales. The contents of this article are based upon conclusions drawn from these facts. The major guidelines from which this article was written were approved by a representative panel of directors of agricultural programs at institutions having post-secondary agricultural clubs. The following ideas and experiences are aimed at benefiting those who may have already initiated or are considering starting such a group in their post-secondary program.

The Guidelines

DECIDING THE ROLE OF YOUR CLUB.

In deciding just what place your club should have in the school, you must examine the total picture. Schools goals and past experiences with clubs, plus the attitudes of teachers, administrators, students, and members of the community, all have a bearing on your organization.

Seek a unique function for your group — one no other club is accomplishing. Make the club of, by and for students, extra-curricula (operating mostly outside of school time), but recognized and regulated by institutional policies. Try to build in flexibility so that you can change the club as students or programs change. One way to insure this flexibility is to continuously plan and evaluate the function of the group.

HOW TO ORGANIZE YOUR GROUP

Industry usually has a "feasibility" study made to determine alternatives before a project is started. You can do the same by involving all interested parties — students, instructors, administrators, and community members. Deliberations by this group might include:

- Experiences of similar student clubs in high schools and/or other colleges;
- Projected enrollment for the department and school (stability or moderate growth is desirable);
- Expressed need and willingness of students to support the club (a nucleus of 10 students, with a commitment to join from 80 per cent of those who are enrolled, will help insure success);
- Approval and willingness of agricultural faculty and the department chairman to assist the group;
- Suitability of the group's purpose to the institution's program or policies governing student clubs;
- Potential competition with existing groups;
- Financial constraints.

Once the decision to organize has been made, set up a temporary, interim council to lay the groundwork for the group. They can do much work in tentatively developing aspects of the constitution (name, objectives, membership requirements, officers, affiliation) and such details as securing a sponsor and finances and developing an activities list, and a schedule for meetings. Items should be finalized by the members after securing inputs from the original feasibility study group. Normally, this procedure will guarantee formal recognition from the institution. Such operational aspects as by-laws, club literature, codes of ethics or ideals, committees, ceremonies (if any), provision for officer election and training, and securing supplies, equipment

and insignia can be determined during the course of the first year's operation.

DEVELOPING OBJECTIVES FOR YOUR CLUB

Organizations often run into trouble with objectives, thus it is important to carefully decide what the real purposes of the group should be, and then to list these objectives in realistic, clearly-stated, performance terms. The objectives should be reviewed and refined annually by the total membership. The major, over-all goal should be to serve the needs of the student-members; however, many clubs will indicate a number of purposes, including:

- To develop leadership.
- To provide social and recreational activities.
- To aid in orienting students to the school and agricultural program.
- To secure recognition for students and programs.
- To supplement and reinforce the objectives of the educational program.
- To motivate student learning and achievement.
- To foster community service.
- To encourage students to participate in industry-related groups.
- To serve as a liaison between students and the administration.

WHAT ABOUT THE CLUB'S NAME?

Names have a habit of sticking, and moreover, of conjuring up images in the minds of listeners. You should, therefore, select a name which reflects: member characteristics (these are young adults!), club purpose(s), nature of the agricultural program, and the collegiate level of education. If possible, try to choose a name which will cover future changes in these areas. (You will note the problem the FFA has in reconciling its image to the new off-farm, agribusiness emphasis in vocational agriculture.) Some names used by clubs around the United States are as follows:

Agriculture Club (or Society)
Agri-Business Club (or Association or Corporation)
Agriculture Transfer Club
Ag. Equip. Technology (Alpha Epsilon Tau)
Agricultural Marketing Society (Alpha Mu Sigma)
Agricultural Production Club
Ag. Banking Club
Collegiate Agricultural Leaders (or Association)
Cattle Club (Collegiate FFA)
Desert Ranchers (Conservation Club)
Farm and Ranch Management Club
Forest Technology Club (or Forestry Club)
Horse Club
Landscape Tech. Club of _____
Ornamental Horticulture Society of _____
Plant Science Society
Pollution Abatement Club
Rodeo and Riding Club
Student Technicians of Veterinary Medicine
Student Marine Fisheries Association
Young Farmers and Ranchers Educational Association
Young Agriculturalists of Tomorrow
Greek letter names (standing for the initials of the ag program, etc.)

You will note "agriculture" was a part of most names; however, if the total membership has the final decision in determining the name, you won't go wrong.

SECURING MEMBERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION

Every student enrolled in agriculture should have the opportunity to join an organization, regardless of sex, race, religion or creed. This does not preclude establishment of specific membership requirements in an ag club, but it does provide a basis for determining the criteria for membership. Some common criteria you might adopt in order to secure full participation of students are as follows: let joining and participation be voluntary; stress improvement of members, not selection of the elite; provide for immediate entry of new members into active status in the group; keep scholastic or other restrictions on participation to a minimum; determine responsibilities of membership by a vote of the group, and emphasize these responsibilities when recruiting new students; guarantee members' rights and freedom by making provisions for due process in the club's policies.

With voluntary membership, recruitment of new members

becomes an important task. This can be best accomplished by present members and officers, rather than the teachers or administrators. Of course, the cooperation of all school officials is needed in order for recruiting efforts to reach all new students.

Many organizations provide the opportunity for continued membership and/or affiliation by persons not enrolled in the agriculture curriculum. Non-voting associate, alumni and honorary membership classifications can accomplish this.

WHO SHOULD LEAD THE CLUB?

A look at the club's objectives would indicate that students, acting as officers and committee chairmen (with assistance from a qualified advisor), should provide leadership to the organization. Some procedures utilized by successful clubs are as follows: elect a standard set of officers (president, vice president, secretary, treasurer) annually and provide training for the job; for continuity, elect assistant officers; utilize standard and special committees to carry out various club functions; hold regular executive meetings to plan the program; and select an advisor who is interested and qualified to serve. Normally, a member of the agriculture faculty who is sincerely interested in the organization is the best person to serve as advisor. Ideally, the institution will compensate this person through released time or extra pay (or a combination of the two) so that he can become "geared up" as advisor and provide the kind of supportive, yet non-directive assistance needed by the members of the club. Members should protect the advisor from excess legal liability when planning group functions.

DETERMINING ORGANIZATIONAL LEVELS

A wide variation exists in local organizational patterns of clubs for post-secondary agriculture students. In determining your local design, consideration should be given the following types: the department-wide organization; the club associated with a specific program within the department; the special interest sub-group within a larger club unit (e.g., agrichemicals club within an agri-business club), and the club based in agriculture but including students from outside the department (e.g., riding club, rodeo club, nature-study group, etc.). There are advantages to decentralized as well as centralized groups, locally. The pattern adopted should be decided on the basis of mutual interests of participants. The same can be said for state and national organizations; when sufficient growth and interest has occurred locally, representatives should meet in conferences to determine the feasibility of coordinated effort through a statewide and/or national organization. The confederation model, assuring local autonomy, appears to be the pattern accepted by those states organizing such groups.

COORDINATION WITH OTHER GROUPS

Much can be gained through cooperation with other agencies and organizations in agriculture. A post-secondary agricultural student club should initiate and encourage relations with other youth groups and adult organizations — including those from business, industry and government — while retaining its independent status. Formal affiliation with other groups should be restricted to similar agricultural student clubs at other post-secondary institutions. The club should also seek representation

in local student government.

DETERMINING THE CLUB'S ACTIVITIES

An organization's activities should reflect the needs, characteristics and objectives of the group served. At the post-secondary level, there is a great need for experience in cooperation. Your club can meet this need by planning an annual schedule of activities including cooperative as well as competitive functions for members. Numbers and types of activities should be geared to the desires and experiences of your members, and the actual planning and execution of activities should be done by the members. Some activities carried out by successful clubs are: regular meetings dealing with relevant problems; meetings conducted according to parliamentary law with limited ritual except as needed to give dignity to special occasions and add recognition to members and/or club functions; state conferences emphasizing new experiences, idea exchanges, contacts with potential employers, recognition banquets; and tours aimed at increasing member knowledge of an aspect of agriculture.

FINANCING THE CLUB

Adequate finances are necessary for the success of any group. Strive to give your club a broadly based income from: 1) a professional-level dues structure (perhaps up to \$5 per month), 2) educationally sound fund-raising activities, 3) support from the school (many clubs receive money from the student activity fee charged by the institution), and 4) gifts from supporters. All money taken in must be accounted for; therefore, a record system based on accepted accounting standards should be adopted. Sufficient income should be secured to support the objectives of the group with adequate reserves to cover any emergencies. A large portion of any club's expenditures should directly and visibly benefit its members. Lunches, transportation, and housing on tours, insignia for jackets, awards and scholarships are examples of such direct benefits.

Conclusions

The above recommended practices may not necessarily guarantee success, but their consideration will certainly provide clubs with a basis for achievement.

In order to secure widespread application, leadership must be provided by agricultural personnel at local, state and national levels to assist post-secondary students in the development of desirable organizations. Publications and conferences are needed to explore means and techniques for organizing and operating effective student clubs. The national seminar for agricultural leaders in post-secondary institutions, scheduled for October 1-4, 1973, in Minneapolis, is a step in the right direction.

Student organizations in post-secondary agriculture are a reality. Let's use our experience with organizations at other levels to help students organize clubs which serve this special need. The potential exists to create innovative and truly functional organizations — will we grasp the opportunity?

¹ Maynard J. Iverson. "Guidelines for the Development of Student Organizations Associated with Two-Year, Post-Secondary Educational Programs in Agriculture in the United States." Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation. Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University, 1971.

College Student Employment

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It was my recent opportunity to visit Agricultural University Wageningen in Wageningen, Holland. This institution has a wide range of courses involving such divergent areas as food technology, biochemistry, toxicology, physics,

chemistry, surveying, hydraulics, textiles, housing ecology, town and country planning, meteorology, psychology, philosophy, nature conservation, marketing, and so forth. Undergraduate and graduate degrees are offered in the