

# THESIS

PERCEPTIONS OF AGRICULTURAL AND  
COMMUNITY LEADERS AS A BASIS FOR  
DEVELOPING PUBLIC RELATIONS  
STRATEGIES FOR AGRICULTURAL  
EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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PERCEPTIONS OF AGRICULTURAL AND COMMUNITY LEADERS  
AS A BASIS FOR DEVELOPING PUBLIC RELATIONS  
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## ABSTRACT

Public schools do not operate in a vacuum, they must communicate with the public they serve. Agricultural education shares this public relations responsibility, but with even more critical importance. The continuation of elective programs in agricultural education is based on public perceptions of their effectiveness in meeting community needs.

Purpose - The purpose of this study was to recommend several strategies for improving public relations in agricultural education based on information gathered from local agricultural and community leaders.

Method - A sample of 35 community and agricultural leaders from four different communities in Madison County, New York was interviewed. Leaders were asked their perceptions of the FFA and agricultural education, also the information sources they use to learn about local school activities and programs.

Findings - The agricultural and community leaders represent different publics that use different information sources to learn about school activities. However, one similarity of the groups was that they all were in contact with a greater amount of mass media than the average non-leader.

Results of the interviews showed that the FFA is a highly visible organization. Individuals closely associated the FFA and vocational agriculture, but generally were more familiar with the organization than what went on in the classroom. People were particularly familiar with FFA activities that were annual in nature or involved members of the community. Perceptions of the FFA and agricultural education did not appear to be influenced by the degree of familiarity with the organization.

The study showed the importance of the teacher of agriculture in forming perceptions. Most all leaders based their favorable impression of

the agriculture program on their impression of the teacher rather than having any real extensive knowledge of the effectiveness of the program.

A majority of the community leaders were unfamiliar with the skills being taught in agriculture or even the level of skills needed for most jobs related to agriculture. Emphasis on the intensive skill development in agriculture class and work experience appears to be one important area of agricultural education that should be demonstrated in public relations activities.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Richard Duane Jones was born December 27, 1947. He grew up on a dairy farm near Hamilton, New York. His aspiration to become a veterinarian led him to Cornell University after graduation from high school in 1965.

That ambition faded in the reality of anticipated years of intensive academic study. He turned his interest to the Future Farmers of America organization. Taking two consecutive leaves of absence from Cornell, he served as State President and National Vice President of the FFA.

After returning to Cornell in 1968, he continued his studies in agricultural education. He received his Bachelor of Science degree in 1971. Following graduation, he was employed as a teacher of agriculture at Vernon-Verona-Sherrill Central School, Verona, New York. In addition, he was also working at home on the dairy farm. Teaching became more interesting than farming and he moved to Holland Patent Central School, Holland Patent, New York. There he enjoyed teaching students as well as agriculture from 1972-75.

In 1974 he married Kathleen Sportelli of Syracuse, New York, probably the best decision of his career.

In 1975 he returned to Cornell University in Graduate School, eventually pursuing M.S. and Ph.D. degrees.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

"The venturer into the maze of human communication had best gird himself with humility and humor. The humility will protect him from thinking he has found the secret. And in case he ever does think so, the humor will help for laughing at himself when he gets lost."<sup>1/</sup>

With the preceding quote in mind, this study is begun, mindful of pitfalls and hopeful for understanding.

Public schools are a function of the local community. The founding principle of public education is that the public school can do a better job of educating students collectively than individual families educating their children. Over the years schools have grown larger, more specialized, more efficient, and unfortunately more distant from the community that must set policy and finance those schools. Because of this size and distance from the community an imperative responsibility of the local school is communicating with the community.

"...as knowledge and practice grow more complex, citizens have more difficulty understanding education and its relationships to other aspects of the changing world. Teachers and administrators find it equally difficult to keep well informed about the facts and opinions to which schooling must be related. Consequently, adequate interchange of information and views requires more effort on the part of both educators and laymen."<sup>2/</sup>

Administrators and teachers exercise great control over the day-to-day activities of local schools. Community members often appear content to let educators make decisions until some aspect of the school particularly irritates them. At this point the public can become extremely vocal and opinionated. Their opinions are based upon their knowledge at hand, sometimes extensive, but more often less than complete. Almost every school system

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<sup>1/</sup> Otto Lerbinger and Albert Sullivan, Information, Influence and Communication, 1964, p. 1.

<sup>2/</sup> Gordon McCloskey, Education and Public Understanding, 1967, p. 6.

has observed this phenomenon where out of a peaceful community arises a concerned, vocal and often hostile public.

Brickell, in his study of change in schools, noted this change from apparent apathy to extreme concern.

"Parents and citizens groups in most communities do not exert a direct influence on the adoption of new types of instructional programs, but their influence is decisive when exerted."<sup>1/</sup>

To avoid hostile and unproductive confrontations with the public, schools must accomplish two things: 1) inform the public about school activities and programs, and 2) keep educational programs in line with the needs of the community. In short, schools must have effective public relations programs.

"Educator's influence in improving education rests upon their ability to guide public opinion and to be guided by it in meeting society's needs."<sup>2/</sup>

A public school must not only tell its story to the public, it must listen with an objective view to the needs of the community. The public must have an open channel for information and ideas in the planning of school curriculum and activities. Only when this communication exists from both directions will the public school be effective.

#### Statement of the Problem

Occupational education in agriculture is an elective course of study primarily in secondary schools, offered to meet the needs of students preparing for careers in agriculture. Since it is an elective program, it can be eliminated at any time decision-makers perceive that there no

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<sup>1/</sup> Henry M. Brickell, Organizing New York State for Educational Change, 1961, p. 20.

<sup>2/</sup> S. M. Cutlip and A. H. Center, Effective Public Relations, 1964, p. 396.

longer exists a need or that the existing program does not meet the need. Therefore, public understanding of agricultural education is essential to its continuation.

"A community which is not aware of the services rendered by the vocational program will probably not grant it a full measure of financial support."<sup>1/</sup>

In addition, agricultural education has changed tremendously in the last fifteen years. No longer are students training for jobs exclusively in farming. Today's agricultural education program is diverse and geared to the many facets of agriculture and agribusiness. This change in programs also places a greater burden on public relations programs to inform the public of the up-to-date image of agricultural education.

Communicating with the public ultimately becomes the responsibility of the teacher of agriculture, rather than the administration. While the administration and even students may be channels for disseminating information, it is generally the teacher who determines what information is identified and forwarded to the community.

The second half of public relations is keeping in touch with the needs of the community. In the secondary school the teacher of agriculture is usually the only professional with an educational and technical agriculture background. Consequently, only the teacher is qualified to identify agricultural education needs. Therefore the teacher has an added responsibility to be in contact with the community.

An integral part of the agricultural education program is the FFA youth organization. The FFA serves many purposes for agricultural students, including recognition, motivation, and developing leadership and responsibility. FFA is also a means for publicizing agricultural education. The FFA is a

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<sup>1/</sup> American Vocational Association, Your Public Relation: A Guide For Vocational Education, 1954, p. 6.

highly visible aspect of agricultural education and many of its activities serve as a showplace for the agricultural department. As teachers publicize activities of the FFA, they need to measure the effectiveness of publicity efforts and determine if the public is receiving an accurate reflection of the training in agricultural education.

Teachers of agriculture are encouraged through pre-service teacher preparation and teacher professional organizations to plan and carry out public relations programs. Of the numerous suggested guidelines for public relations programs, which will be discussed in Chapter II, the teacher must identify the needs and interests of the community, decide what information to disseminate and what media to use.

These decisions become difficult because the teacher must first have an idea of the perceptions of the community toward agricultural education, and also what their interests are in education. In addition, information on what sources people use to find out about school activities would help determine the publicity plans. All of this is an added burden for the teacher when so much of their time is necessary for teaching and related activities.

To summarize the problem, the teacher of agriculture is faced with an important responsibility to develop effective public relations for an agriculture department. In view of their primary responsibility to teaching, they can devote little time to determining publics, their needs, perceptions, and which sources they use for information. Teachers should have sufficient information that would allow them to more efficiently use their time and efforts spent on public relations. This study hopefully will provide some of that information.

### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine possible strategies for agriculture departments to develop effective public relations programs primarily using the FFA organization.

### Objectives

The purpose of this study will be achieved by accomplishing the three following specific objectives:

1. Determine the perceptions of community leaders toward the FFA and agricultural education.
2. Identify the information sources used by community leaders.
3. Based on information collected and public relations principles, develop public relations strategies for agricultural education in secondary schools.

### Assumptions

Several assumptions were made in completing this study.

1. No analysis of the communications network was made for the selected area. It is assumed that the opinions of the community leaders reflect the opinions of the community. As will be discussed in Chapter II the leaders are assumed to play a large role in influencing the opinions of others in the community. Consequently, the opinions of leaders should reflect the entire community.
2. No attempt was made to determine the usefulness of the FFA organization. This study assumes the FFA to be an integral and essential part of the agricultural education program.
3. The agriculture programs in the area selected are assumed to be equal in the quality of training offered to students in agriculture. While there may be some minor differences, the area was selected because of the similarity of programs.

### Limitations

The limitations of this study are as follows:

1. A case study approach was used for analysis of community leader perceptions and information sources. Reasons for the selection of this method are outlined in Chapter III. Strategies developed from the information can only specifically be applied to the area selected. However, strategies developed can be applied to other communities to the degree that other areas reflect the make-up of the communities examined in this study.
2. Communities examined in this study were all traditional local school programs offering primarily agricultural production courses. Agricultural education in other specialized areas in area occupational centers may find different problems in publicizing local activities. Some generalizations might be made from this study to other types of programs, but they should be done with care.

### Definitions

For the purpose of this study, some operational definitions must be established.

Vocational Agriculture - An occupational or vocational curriculum primarily in secondary schools preparing students for any of the number of careers related to agriculture and farming.

FFA - The youth leadership organization that is an intracurricular part of vocational agriculture. Membership in the FFA is limited to vocational agriculture students and is a voluntary activity in which vocational agriculture students may participate.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND RELATED STUDIES

#### Responsibility of Schools to Communicate

"We are called upon to produce a far better system of education in this country than we presently have and to tell the story of education in a far more compelling and far more effective way.<sup>1/</sup>

Dr. Marland's statement points out a challenge to all educators.

Everyone involved in education needs to execute their responsibility more effectively and ensure that the public is aware and knowledgeable of their effectiveness. Not all of education nor the majority of teachers are deserving of recent criticism of education. There are numerous effective and successful educational programs. In fact, education's successes far outweigh its failures.

However, in order for the public to "sift the wheat from the chaff" and not criticize all local programs on national generalities, they must be familiar with their local school, its staff, curriculum and activities.

"It is essential that teachers and school administrators recognize that in an interdependent society, honest effort to obtain public understanding and support are normal and essential aspects of operating any public or private enterprise. Professional maturity requires that we recognize and accept that part of our responsibility."<sup>2/</sup>

Public relations must be recognized as a necessary and continual function of every public school system. If a school uses only sporadic news releases or explanations of issues only when they become controversial, very little confidence will be developed in that community which a public school serves. Public relations must be planned to meet the needs of the

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<sup>1/</sup> Sydney Marland, Commissioner, U.S. Office of Education, Presentation at the National School Public Relations Association, Washington, D.C., 1971.

<sup>2/</sup> Gordon McCloskey, Education and Public Understanding, 2nd ed. 1967, p. 16.



community.

### Communication Process and Structure

Decisions about public relations activities should be based on an understanding of the communication process. How do people get information? In what form do they receive it? What do they believe and what do they reject?

The basic concept of the communication process is one-way communication, outlined by Schramm.<sup>1/</sup> A message is first encoded by the source, transmitted, received, decoded and responded to by the receiver. The receiver's response depends upon background and experience. It is obvious that not all people respond to the same message in the same manner. Effective communicators recognize a receiver's set and consequently design messages that will relate to a receiver's present information and perceptions. One-way communication is typically the form used in mass media.

Two-way communication is a process that involves two or more persons in a situation where the communicator can readily observe the response of the receiver to a particular message. The receiver's response, in whatever form of feedback, permits an effective communicator to use this feedback to revise or repeat the message to obtain the desired response.<sup>2/</sup> Two-way communication is a far more effective form of communication than the one-way process. The most typical forms of two-way communication are conversation and public speaking.

Unfortunately the communication process is not as simple as outlined here. There are many variables in the communication process that make each

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<sup>1/</sup> Wilbur Schramm and Donald F. Roberts, The Process and Effects of Communication, rev. ed., 1972 pp 3-12.

<sup>2/</sup> Gordon McCloskey, Education and Public Understanding, 2nd ed. 1967, p. 72.

situation unique and the process easily can be interrupted. The common pitfalls to communication can be classified into four areas: 1) vague information, 2) poor encoding, 3) failure to transmit properly, and 4) improper decoding.<sup>1/</sup> Any of these can completely block the communication process.

Effective communication, particularly in education, requires a knowledge of the communication structure. This structure includes the individuals, groups and the mass media that have evolved in our society. Individual communities vary somewhat in the actual make-up of their complex communication structure, however, there are two levels that make up most all communities. The first level is composed of people communicating directly with one another in actions or conversations. The second level utilizes mass media like radio, television and newspapers to express ideas indirectly.

The most important level of the communication structure is the first level of person-to-person communication. Today, in the age of electronic media, it is easy to overlook the impact of personal communication. McCloskey points out the importance of person-to-person communication.

"First this is the most widely used and effective form of communication. It is a two-way process which provides an abundance of feedback. 2) In the normal course of our work we encounter many face-to-face situations. 3) The impact of education on the daily lives of many people makes it a natural and inevitable subject of conversation."<sup>2/</sup>

The person-to-person level of communication involves two aspects, conversation and actions. Many of the conversations between individuals are between friends and there is usually a high degree of interest in what is being said. The second aspect of action is frequently referred to as "louder than words". Directly observing some activity is a personal form of communication that is significant in impact and lasting in impression.

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<sup>1/</sup> Ibid. pp. 73-74.

<sup>2/</sup> Ibid. p. 78.

Enhancing the person-to-person communication is the existence of what Katz and Lazarsfeld term "informal groups".<sup>1/</sup> As a result of their detailed analysis of several communities, they were able to identify social groups to which nearly every person belongs. These groups are a variety of types including work associates, bridge clubs, neighbors or any other social grouping where people come together regularly. Within these groups there emerges an opinion leader that influences the opinion of the group. Opinion leaders may not be that same individual on all topics, but usually one individual in the group will emerge as the leader for a particular topic. The opinion leader is generally more informed on the topic and usually derives his or her opinion from more "prestige leaders" or from any of the several forms of mass media.

"One theme running through recent sociological studies of social control in a stratified community or hierarchical institution is that communications directed from the top of an institution downwards will be most effective when they are funneled through the informal groups which emerge-we know now-on every level of the structure."<sup>2/</sup>

When considering education, opinion leaders often emerge when there exists an emotional tie with some aspect of education. Education affects many people personally, especially parents of students in public schools. When these emotional ties exist those individuals often become informal group opinion leaders.

One key to developing opinions in the community is to reach these opinion leaders. The opinion leaders tend to be better informed than the general public. They tend to read more about their area of influence and are more familiar with the opinions of others.

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<sup>1/</sup> Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld, Personal Influence, 1955, pp. 8-9.

<sup>2/</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

"With respect to education, a group of opinion leaders is likely to reiterate what he hears or reads about the opinions of a school board member or of a superintendent".<sup>1/</sup>

In addition to informal groups there exists in most communities a power structure that influences communication.<sup>2/</sup> Studies have shown that there are usually several overlapping hierarchical structures within a community. However, there exists a small group of individuals, who, because of their political or economic position, influence a great number of people. These individuals are another key to transmitting information through a community.

While the influence of this power group is great, it is not immune to changes in public opinion. Individuals at the top of the power structure are in constant contact with people. The opinion of a single individual is not likely to change the opinion of a powerful leader, however, the collective opinions of many individuals can influence them greatly.

McCloskey points out the importance of this power group:

"...the fact that existing power structures can be modified does not mean that their existence and influence can be overlooked or ignored. They do exist. Their modification is a difficult and slow task. They do exert immense influence. As they presently exist, they can be extremely helpful. In most communities educators should make every possible effort to get their support. This is one important means of informing other citizens and obtaining their support."<sup>3/</sup>

The role of the mass media in the communication process is in the second level of communication. Mass media is primarily a one-way process of communicating information to a large group of people. The process works something like this: messages are encoded into some form of media, received by well-informed people, (most of them opinion leaders),

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<sup>1/</sup> C. Marsh, "Structure of Community Power and Community Decision Making", Adult Leadership, Vol. 13, September, 1964, pp. 17-24.

<sup>2/</sup> Ralph B. Kimbrough, Political Power and Educational Decision-Making, 1964.

<sup>3/</sup> Gordon McCloskey, Education and Public Understanding, 1967, p. 90.

reencoded and transmitted to others through conversation. A message may be encoded several times from the original message. Therefore, all people receiving the message do not receive it in the same form and it is likely not to have all the same content.

In the local community, newspapers are the most common form of mass media. Radio functions as an information source on some topics and television only serves the largest cities covering primarily state and national news. In the United States, there are a total of 922 television stations, 8,253 radio stations, 1,761 daily newspapers, and 8,804 weekly newspapers.<sup>1/</sup> This gives some idea of the relative access to a media source in a local community. It is certainly easier to reach a weekly paper or a local radio station in a particular area.

Research has shown that approximately 80 percent of adults read newspapers and that weeklies are read more than daily papers.<sup>2/</sup>

### Principles of Public Relations

Public relations is not a subversive activity of propagandizing a public into accepting something they may not necessarily need or want. Effective public relations is a candid description of activities as they exist.

Another myth of public relations is that it is a one-way process, feeding the masses bits of information. On the contrary, public relations is a two-way process. Any organization, and particularly schools, should be in tune with the opinions, perceptions and needs of the community. If the school is to effectively serve the needs of the community, there must be an open line for input from the public.

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<sup>1/</sup> Adolph Unruh and Robert Willier, Public Relations for Schools, 1974, p. 58.

<sup>2/</sup> Gordon McCloskey, Education and Public Understanding, 2nd ed, 1967, p. 107.

Cutlip and Center state four steps in the public relations process:

1) Fact-Finding, 2) Planning, 3) Communicating, and 4) Evaluation.<sup>1/</sup>

The first step, fact-finding, is necessary to gather information for planning. Research must be done to determine what the public perceives about a specific activity. Research into public attitudes involves both listening to the needs of the community but also determining perceptions of current activities. The latter being an essential element to determining the content and form of communication messages. Part of the fact-finding step is the defining of the school publics. Who needs information; voters, businessmen, parents, students, teacher, etc.?

"Public relations activities, like good teaching, need to be thought out in advance and patterned in detail. Its a matter of knowing to whom you want to communicate, about what, where and why you want to communicate and details of how you want to go about it."<sup>2/</sup>

Planning is essential to effective public relations because it develops activities as preventative measures rather than remedial ones. Information gaps should be anticipated and avoided by involving and informing the public as activities take place.

The third step in public relations is communicating. Using the knowledge of the communication structure of the community and the information collected in the fact-finding step, those responsible for public relations should select and use effective media.

Finally, as in good teaching, there is the evaluation step. Efforts should be made to recontact members of the community to determine how much information the community has received and if attitudes have changed.

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<sup>1/</sup> S. M. Cutlip and A. H. Center, Effective Public Relations, 1964, pp. 108-109.

<sup>2/</sup> National School Public Relations Association, Public Relations Ideas - For Classroom Teachers, 1964, p. 7.

Evaluation may appear as an extra burden, particularly for teachers, considering their demands for teaching. However, teachers and administrators must be aware that without some form of evaluation, time spent on public relations activities could be completely wasted.

### Publicizing Agricultural Education

"There is no magic formula for winning public support and in the long run good public relations can only be achieved when it is based on sound administration and effective teaching."<sup>1/</sup>

Public relations is not a cure-all. Teachers of agriculture must first and most importantly dedicate themselves to quality education. Based on effective teaching they then must inform the public of the effectiveness and importance of agricultural education. And, as mentioned before, part of that communication with the public is being sure that the agricultural program meets the needs of the community.

Objectives of a public relations program outlined by Phipps are:

- "1. Develop understanding of the objectives of the program in vocational agriculture for farming and non-farm occupations requiring skills in agriculture.
2. Develop understanding of the objectives of the non-vocational phases of the schools program in vocational education.
3. Inform the public of the achievement of the program.
4. Create goodwill and desirable relationships.
5. Obtain cooperation and support of the public, including all agricultural organizations and other agencies interested in agricultural education.
6. Interest a large number of students in enrolling in high school and adult courses in agricultural education.
7. Develop a comprehensive program of agricultural education.

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<sup>1/</sup> American Vocational Association, Public Relation, A Guide for Vocational Educators, 1954, p. 3.

8. Create a feeling of need for the program of agricultural education.<sup>1/</sup>

Objective number 8 of Phipps should not be interpreted as meaning to create a need for an agricultural program where there really is no need. That, of course, is a misuse of public relations. The author feels that the objective should be interpreted to mean that a teacher should translate the stated needs of a community that can be solved by education, thereby making the community realize agricultural education as a solution to their needs.

All of the objectives stated by Phipps are lofty and a teacher could spend the majority of his or her time just meeting these public relations objectives. However, in light of the demands and responsibilities of teaching, a teacher can best achieve these by being fully aware of them and take advantage of public relations activities as time allows and opportunities arise.

Agricultural education has many publics with which to communicate. Phipps identifies several of these, Parents, Students, Potential students, Farmers, Agricultural businessmen and employees, Agricultural agencies, Cooperatives, School Administrators, Teachers, and State Vocational Organizations, among others.<sup>2/</sup>

One group not on the list that should be added, is the local taxpayer. While many of the groups mentioned are local taxpayers, each individual has special concerns as a taxpayer that may be different from other roles, namely that they want to see quality education programs at the lowest possible cost. Every public school owes a responsibility to the taxpayer to justify the existence of any course of study. This should be the case

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<sup>1/</sup> Lloyd J. Phipps, Handbook on Agricultural Education in Public Schools, rev., ed., 1972, p. 65.

<sup>2/</sup> Ibid., p. 66.



in agricultural education.

Part of the teacher's responsibility to publicize the agricultural education program can be carried out by the FFA youth organization. This point is emphasized in the FFA Advisor's Handbook:

"Vocational Agriculture instructors have a unique opportunity to communicate with school administration and the general public through activities of the FFA. The FFA chapter can give the high school vocational agricultural program great visibility in the community through its participation in community service and related activities. That visibility will occur only if there is a communications plan that includes key administrators and community news media.<sup>1/</sup>

The Advisor's Handbook goes on to list several public relations activities that should be conducted by an FFA chapter. The degree to which the FFA public relations activities build an image or understanding for the agricultural education program depends on how effectively those activities are selected, conducted and publicized.

#### Related Studies

Those studies published in agricultural education dealing with the perceptions or attitudes of various groups toward the FFA and agricultural education are limited. Several studies measuring perceptions of agricultural education seek to make recommendations regarding the purposes of agricultural education. In other words, what changes should be made in agricultural education in view of the needs and attitudes of the local community. Many of these studies have examined groups within the school systems like teachers, administrators, students and guidance counselors.<sup>2/</sup>

Glazier did a survey of teachers and agricultural business people

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<sup>1/</sup> Future Farmers of America, FFA Advisor's Handbook, 1975, p. 70.

<sup>2/</sup> See Bail (1958), Beeman (1967), Braker (1974), Hunsaker (1956), Schaal (1958), Shultz (1971), Sponaugle (1972) and Torrence (1972).

toward agricultural education.<sup>1/</sup> His study, using the case study approach, analyzed the attitudes of individuals in the communities surrounding two regional agricultural schools in Massachusetts. While the Glazier study did not examine how much public relations was involved in creating understanding of the program, he did make the following recommendation:

"An effort should be made to keep employers who operate agricultural businesses, parents of students and teachers informed of the activities and program offerings in vo-ag in an attempt to improve the current attitudes concerning vocational agriculture."<sup>2/</sup>

Studies of the perceptions of various publics towards agricultural education have implications to the design of agricultural curriculum, but care should be taken to ensure that those public perceptions are based on an adequate knowledge of the objectives and activities of agricultural education. Knowledge and understanding of agricultural education cannot be assumed. Nor can it be assumed that all public relations activities will be effective. Analysis of public perceptions in relation to their knowledge of the program and also how they developed those perceptions may lead to greater understanding of how to create a stronger support for agricultural education.

There have been several studies in communication that have used the approach of identifying information sources and perceptions of a particular program as a basis for developing public relations strategies.<sup>3/</sup>

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<sup>1/</sup> Donald G. Glazier, Jr., "Attitudes of Selected Clientele Toward Vocational Agriculture Programs of Two County Agricultural Schools in Massachusetts", Ph.D. Thesis, Ohio State University, 1975.

<sup>2/</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>3/</sup> See, Awa (1973), Marsh (1967), and Thomas (1975).

### Summary

Public relations is a responsibility of all public schools and the teacher of agriculture shares in that responsibility.

Communication theory emphasizes that the greatest flow of information is from person-to-person. Mass media apparently only supplements this process by providing information to community leaders in the power structure and to informal group opinion leaders.

Public relations, to be effective, must be planned and based on information researched from the community on individual perceptions and sources of information.

With basic communication theory and suggestions for public relations strategy in mind, this study attempts to examine the flow of information concerning agricultural education through community leaders since they should be the power structure of the community. In addition, another significant public of agricultural education is the agricultural community. Here the study will examine the perceptions and information flow of the leaders in the agricultural community.

Information collected and blended with communication theory should yield several suggestions that will enable the teacher of agriculture to more successfully execute his public relations responsibility.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the objectives of determining perceptions of the FFA and agricultural education, the logical research method would be to sample the opinions of community and agricultural leaders. The opinions of these groups, as outlined in Chapter II, should reflect the groups they represent.

Questions could also be asked of these individuals regarding information sources which would lead to some conclusions regarding the flow of information about agricultural education and particularly the FFA.

#### Case Study Approach

A great deal of thought was given to the possibility of attempting a statewide study of this particular research question. The survey would be accomplished by sending out a large number of questionnaires to a sample of people statewide. After considering the probability of a low response rate and the problems of identifying a sample, it was decided to abandon the statewide survey in favor of a case study of one particular area.

Selltiz points out several advantages of using a case study as a research method.<sup>1/</sup> A case study can be appropriate when: 1) the attitude of the researcher is one of receptivity rather than testing, 2) it is desirous to increase the intensity of the study--to go into greater detail, and 3) a study is intended to be integrative--to find bits of information and draw them together into a unified interpretation.

A case study does offer several advantages to this particular study. First, more in-depth analysis of one area can be accomplished by this

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<sup>1/</sup> Claire Selltiz, et. al., Research Methods in Social Relations, 3rd ed., 1976, p. 98.

method, surveying more than one or two leaders in a particular community. Second, interviews can be conducted which will likely result in more impressions and less misinterpretation of questions compared to a written questionnaire. Third, a statewide survey would give very little insight into the process of developing public perceptions because of the diversity in quality of programs and attention given to public relations. The case study does have a limitation in generalization to a larger area or additional programs, but the author feels a greater contribution can be made by this study by examining one area more intensely.

### Area Selected

The area selected for the study was Madison County, New York. It was selected for several reasons. First, the schools offering agriculture in the area are quite similar in nature and all are considered by the author to be effective programs. Because of the similarity, the communities could be combined into one survey sample and not be greatly influenced by one agriculture department that was a "shining star" or a "weak link." It was decided that more than one school district should be included in the study to avoid publicizing information that would reflect on one teacher or one school system. A second advantage of the area selected was the author's familiarity with the area which made the location of information and individuals easier. Third, it was anticipated that the local teachers and administrators would be willing to cooperate in the study.

Four schools districts offering agriculture in Madison county were selected for the study. They were Cazenovia, Hamilton, Madison and Stockbridge Valley (Munnsville). Oneida-Madison BOCES and Onondaga-Madison BOCES also serve the area and offer agricultural courses in Mechanics, Horticulture, Conservation and Horse Science.

Munnsville and Madison are primarily rural communities and have a small village population (435 and 386, respectively).<sup>1/</sup> The school districts have similar enrollments, (730 and 623). Hamilton is a slightly larger community (population 3,636), and is the home of Colgate University, which employs a large number of people. In addition, there are several small industries, a great deal of farming and related agricultural businesses in the school district. The size of the school system is 940. Cazenovia is similar to Hamilton in size (population 3,031). It also has a college and several small industries. Cazenovia is located twenty miles from Syracuse and consequently a large number of persons living in the Cazenovia area commute to Syracuse. The Cazenovia School District is relatively large and has a great deal of agriculture within it. Cazenovia Central School has a total enrollment of 2,810. A map of the four school districts is in Appendix A.

The agriculture programs of these four schools are quite similar. All are traditional local school programs, primarily offering farm production and management courses. A list of their courses and enrollments are in Table 1.

#### Identification of Leaders

A letter explaining the purpose of the study was sent to each of the four agriculture teachers asking for their cooperation. (Appendix B) They were asked to identify two groups of community leaders. One group to include community leaders regardless of occupation and the other group to include leaders in the agricultural community. All teachers agreed to cooperate in the study, and were helpful in supplying names.

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<sup>1/</sup> Census of the United States, Department of Commerce, 1970, Vol. 1, Part 34, pp. 34-27.

TABLE 1.                    AGRICULTURAL COURSES AND ENROLLMENTS  
                              IN FOUR SELECTED SCHOOLS, 1977

Course	School			
	Cazenovia	Hamilton	Madison	Stockbridge
Agriculture I				
Intro. to Agriculture	19	18	--	17
Agriculture II	26	18	14	19
Applied Science in Agriculture				
Farm Production & Management	20	7	16	10
Agricultural Mechanics	--	10	22	--
Agriculture 11 (elective)	--	--	--	10
Agriculture 8 (exploratory)	--	40	--	--
Conservation & Forestry	11	20	--	--

Additional contacts were made with the High School Principal or Supervising Principal in each school system to identify additional leaders primarily in the general community leader group. The local newspaper editors were also contacted in Cazenovia and Hamilton for additions to the list of leaders. The Cooperative Extension agent for Madison County also supplied the names of several agricultural leaders.

The criteria for selecting community leaders was that the individual be a local government official, an active member of one of the various civic and community groups or a business person who is in contact with a large number of people through their work.

The criteria for selecting the agricultural leader group were: first, that the individual be primarily in farming or closely related agribusiness; second, that they be active in the various farm or agricultural organizations or be businesspersons who are in contact with a large number of people,

particularly in the agricultural community.

Any individual employed by the school district or any person currently serving as a member of the Board of Education was eliminated from the sample. Since the purpose of the study was to examine the public relations activities of schools, it was felt that "outside" individuals would have a greater opportunity to observe activities. It was felt individuals connected with school would be a different public for a public relations program.

#### Identification of Sample

The resulting lists of agricultural leaders and community leaders were combined for the four school districts. The reason, as mentioned before, for combining the lists was to avoid publicizing information about one individual school system that would reflect on one teacher. The total population of leaders consisted of 64 agricultural leaders and 97 non-agricultural community leaders. It was decided to limit the sample to 25 individuals in each group. A table of random numbers was used to identify 25 members on each list. Some interviews could not be arranged because of scheduling, inability to find a convenient time, or weather problems. No individuals indicated that they were unwilling to participate in the survey. The final sample interviewed included 16 agricultural leaders and 19 community leaders. It was felt that the individuals not interviewed were selected out for natural reasons and were likely to be no different than the remaining part of the sample interviewed.

#### Development of the Instrument

The interview schedule structured the interviews in order to eliminate interviewer bias and insure consistency in responses. The interview schedule is exhibited in Appendix C.



The first objective was to determine perceptions and knowledge of agricultural education and the FFA. The second objectives of the interview was to obtain information on the individual's information sources.

Following the guidelines for interviewing techniques in Selltiz,<sup>1/</sup> it was decided to start the interview with relatively simple direct response questions and move to the more thoughtful questions as the interviewee became more at ease. Therefore the interview began with factual questions about information sources.

Prior to and during the interview as little as possible was said about the purpose of the study except that they had been identified as a leader and the study included a number of schools in Madison County. No indication was made that the author was familiar with or had any contact with the local school or the agriculture teacher.

A combination of open and closed questions were asked in the interview. The reason for this was to obtain a large amount of information through the use of open questions and still have some standard responses from closed questions that could be compared between individuals. Questions relating to information sources were selected from related theses in communication.<sup>2/</sup>

#### Interview Questions

Questions 1-4 were selected to determine how frequently the individual reads newspapers and their importance as information sources. No questions were asked about magazines because this study concerned local schools and it was felt that magazines would be of little importance. Question 4 was intended to obtain some idea of their interest in education.

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<sup>1/</sup> Ibid., p. 598.

<sup>2/</sup> See Awa (1973), Marsh (1967), and Thomas (1975).

Questions 5-7 asked about their exposure to television particularly how much they rely on television as a source of information and news. Questions 8+9 determined their exposure to radio and the importance of radio as a source of news and information.

An individual's contact with other people was measured by questions 10-12. This was measured by amount of time spent talking with friends and neighbors face-to-face and over the phone as well as the number of meetings they attend.

Questions 13-15 were an attempt to determine how many of the individuals selected were opinion leaders in education and if they had an influence over a relatively large number of people.

Question 16 attempted to get a rating of information sources that the individual uses for obtaining information about local school activities. Individuals were handed a card identifying these sources and asked to list the three most important sources of information about local schools. They were then asked in Question 17 to identify the source that they would have the most faith in for being accurate.

Question 18 was the first of the open-ended questions asking leaders generally if they felt the public receives enough information about local schools. The question was intentionally not directed at whether the individual thought they personally received enough information because this might put them on the defensive if the situation existed where they had not taken the initiative to read or ask questions.

The next questions related to agricultural education and the FFA. Questions 19-21 were open-ended questions to determine how much they know about the agriculture program in the local school. Question 22 not only determined knowledge but obtained insight into their perception of what students in agriculture are preparing for.

Questions 23-27 were closed response statements, to which the interviewees were asked to respond on a five point Likert Scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The midpoint of the range being No Opinion or Neutral. The statements were taken from a study by Glazier.<sup>1/</sup> Statements were selected that had the highest correlation to total response and that showed the greatest discrimination. In attempt to keep the interview as short as possible only 5 statements were selected. It was decided that these statements could adequately reflect total perception since they were selected from another study that measured public perceptions of agricultural education.

Questions 28-32 were open-ended questions to determine familiarity and impressions of the FFA youth organization.

Questions 33-37 were statements the interviewees were asked to respond to also on a five point Likert Scale with responses ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. These statements were developed from an original list of 50 statements about the FFA. This list was reduced to 15 by eliminating duplicates and attempting to get a range in degrees of favorability. This list of 15 statements was given to a sample of 30 teachers who were familiar with the FFA. The teachers were asked to respond to the statements on the same five point scale. The teachers were divided into three groups based on the author's judgement of their interest in the FFA. Five statements were selected from the list of 15 that discriminated the most between the groups and correlated with teacher interest.

Question 38 was included to see if the interview had triggered any interest in the FFA or agricultural education and the individual might like

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<sup>1/</sup> Donald G. Glazier, Jr. "Attitudes of Selected Clientele Toward Vocational Agriculture Programs of two County Agricultural Schools in Massachusetts", Ph.D. Thesis. Ohio State University, 1975.

to obtain more information about the program.

Biographical information about the leader was obtained in Questions 39-45. This was used to see if there were any differences in response compared on any of these variables.

Question 46 is a final question to obtain information about their general attitude toward education and the local school. At this point in the interview, the individual should feel comfortable enough to relate some of their opinions. Responses to this question could be useful in establishing the current attitudes of leaders and the things that concern them most about education. As was stated in Chapter II public relations programs need to take advantage of the concerns of the public and relate to the aspects of education that interest an individual.

Interviews were trial tested on five individuals similar to the population but not in the sample. The purpose of the trial was to determine question clarity and determine the length of time necessary to complete the interview. Several minor wording changes were made in the interview as a result of this trial testing.

### Interviews

Individuals identified in the sample were contacted by telephone to arrange an interview. Introduction and explanation of the study is included in Appendix D. Appointments were made at the interviewee's convenience. All interviews were made in the person's home or place of work. All interviews were conducted by the author between December 15, 1976 and January 15, 1977.

CHAPTER IV  
FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Characteristics of the Sample

A total of thirty-five leaders were interviewed in the study. In the total sample, sixteen were in the agricultural leader group and nineteen were in the nonagricultural or community leader group. In the agricultural sample thirteen individuals were male and three were female. The community leader sample consisted of fourteen males and five females. Even though the number of females in the sample is far below the proportionate number of women in the total population, it is felt that the sample accurately reflects the proportion of women in the community leadership. Even though women have made great strides in increasing their responsibilities and visibility as leaders, there still exists a male dominated hierarchy of community leadership.

Table 2.       SEX OF AGRICULTURAL AND COMMUNITY LEADERS  
                  IN INTERVIEW SAMPLE

Sex	Agricultural Leaders	Community Leaders
Male	13	14
Female	<u>3</u>	<u>5</u>
Total Sample	16	19

Age of the leaders was recorded in groupings. The median age for the entire sample was 45 years. However, the median age was significantly different between groups. The median age of the agricultural leader sample was 35 compared to 59 for the community leader group.

Table 3. AGE OF AGRICULTURAL AND COMMUNITY LEADERS  
IN INTERVIEW SAMPLE

Age	Agricultural Leaders		Community Leaders	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
26-35 years	1	6	1	5
36-45 years	7	44	1	5
46-55 years	3	19	5	26
56-65 years	3	19	11	58
66 years or older	<u>2</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>5</u>
total	16	100%*	19	100%*
median age	35 years		59 years	

\*Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding error.

As a group the community leaders had more formal education than the agricultural group. Thirty-seven percent of the community leaders had some post graduate training either in graduate work or a professional degree. The agricultural leaders had less advanced degrees but still were well educated with 69 percent having attended college, most had attended two year technical college programs in agriculture.

Table 4. EDUCATION OF AGRICULTURAL AND COMMUNITY LEADERS  
IN INTERVIEW SAMPLE

Education (Highest level completed)	Agricultural Leaders		Community Leaders	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Less than High School	1	6	0	0
High School	4	25	7	37
College, less than 4 yrs.	9	57	0	0
College, 4 yrs.	1	6	5	26
Post graduate study	<u>1</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>37</u>
total	<u>16</u>	<u>100%*</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>100%*</u>

\*Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding error.

The agricultural leaders sample, as expected, had more personal experience with agricultural education. Thirty-eight percent had taken agriculture in high school. One member of the community leader sample had taken agriculture. One surprising statistic was the number of leaders who had children that had taken agriculture. Several of the agricultural leaders had children attend high school but did not enroll in agriculture, while four of the community leaders had children who did take agriculture.

Table 5. EXPERIENCE IN AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION  
BY AGRICULTURAL AND COMMODITY LEADERS

	Agricultural Leaders		Community Leaders	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Took Agricultural education in High School	6	38	1	5
Was a member of FFA	6	38	1	5
Had children attend High School	11	69	16	84
Children took Agricultural Education in High School	7	44	4	21

The leader samples represented a wide variety of occupations. More than half of the agriculture leader sample were farmers, as was expected, but the rest of the individuals were distributed among a number of occupations. Occupations for all leaders interviewed in the sample are included in Appendix E.

#### Perceptions of Agricultural Education

The first objective of the study was to determine perceptions of agricultural education and the FFA. Questions relating to perceptions were asked in the latter parts of the interview but will be discussed first,

relating to the initial objective.

Individuals were first asked to identify those schools offering agriculture in Madison County. All persons in the sample were able to identify that the local school offered agriculture. A couple of individuals were a little unsure but they thought there was an agriculture program. Some were able to identify other schools in the area. It is interesting to note that only five persons in the entire sample identified the Area Occupational Center at BOCES as offering agriculture.

The next question asked the name of the local teacher of agriculture. All persons in the sample were able to correctly name the teacher in the local school. It came out numerous times during many interviews that these leaders were acquainted with the teacher of agriculture. Many of the individuals made reference to the agriculture program in light of their perception of the performance of the teacher of agriculture.

Leaders were asked the number of students enrolled in the agriculture program. Answers to this question varied greatly. More than half of the community leader sample either overestimated or underestimated the number by more than 50 percent.

The leaders were then asked to identify the jobs that they thought students in agriculture were preparing for. Most identified farming and some elaborated on farm related jobs. While this is a very narrow definition of agricultural occupations it does reflect the types of jobs that students were preparing for in the communities sampled. The total responses to this question are included in Appendix F.

All of the responses to questions relating to knowledge of agricultural education were subjectively analyzed by the author to determine an individual's knowledge of agricultural education. Each person was given a score of one through five based on their familiarity with the program based on responses



to questions asked. A value of five was the equivalent of not being familiar with the program and one was the equivalent of maximum knowledge of the program. The mean rating for the community leader group was 2.89. The agricultural leader sample had a mean rating of 2.00. As might be anticipated, because of their closer involvement in agricultural education, the agricultural leaders appeared to have a greater knowledge of the program.

Responses to the five statements regarding agricultural education were on a five point scale with one being strongly agree and five, strongly disagree. Statement 25 was considered a negative statement and values were reversed for that statement. Responses to the five statements were totaled to obtain a total perception value. A lower value should indicate a more favorable perception of agricultural education. The results of comparing the two sample groups were interesting. The community leaders had a mean total score of 11.42 and the mean total score for the agricultural leaders was 11.88. Although the difference is not significant statistically, it was surprising that the result came out so close. Supposedly the agricultural leaders have a significantly greater knowledge of agricultural education yet their attitude toward the organization was no different than the community leader group. This result raises the possibility that the questions asked do not really measure what was intended.

A closer examination of individual statements might give some insight into these unexpected results. Table 6 includes the five statements on agricultural education and the mean responses of the two sample groups. Significance levels are also indicated for the difference between the means. A "t" distribution test was used to determine significance.<sup>1/</sup> An alpha level of less than .10 was considered statistically significant.

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<sup>1/</sup> Gene V. Glass and Julian C. Stanley, Statistical Methods in Education and Psychology, 1970, pp 293-296.

Table 6. MEAN RESPONSES OF AGRICULTURAL AND COMMUNITY LEADERS  
TO STATEMENTS ON AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

Statement	Mean Score		Significance Level
	Agricultural Leader	Community Leader	
Students interested in agriculture should enroll in high school courses in agriculture.	2.63	1.74	< .01
More students should be encouraged to enroll in agriculture classes.	3.06	2.63	< .10
Agriculture classes should be offered primarily to students with limited abilities. (Negative statement)	1.69	1.84	NS
Agriculture programs do an adequate job of training students for careers in agriculture.	2.38	2.68	NS
Agriculture should be offered in more schools.	<u>2.13</u>	<u>2.53</u>	<u>&lt; .01</u>
Total	11.89	11.42	NS

The first statement refers to whether students interested in agriculture should take agriculture courses. A statistically significant difference in values indicates more agreement with the statement in the community group. There are probably a number of underlying reasons for the differences in response. Several of the agricultural leaders hinted that if a student were interested in professional careers in agriculture they could better spend their time taking college preparation courses than enrolling in agriculture. The nonagriculture community apparently feels that exposure to agriculture in high school will benefit all who plan to enter agriculturally related fields. There appears to be some disagreement, especially in the agricultural community, as to whether students preparing

for careers like veterinary medicine, agricultural scientist, etc., should take high school agriculture programs with students preparing for labor jobs in farming and related fields. A couple of responses from parents in the agricultural sample indicated that while an agricultural education would be beneficial to their college bound child, it would be socially undesirable for them to associate with students who were not of the same academic ability. If this is the case in a number of situations, it could explain why those close to and familiar with agricultural education feel it may not be a course for all interested in agriculture. Their reasons appear to be based more on social reasons than academic ones.

The next statement is, "More students should be encouraged to enroll in agriculture." Again some of the attitudes that influenced responses to the previous question could influence this one. The results showed that the community leader group had a more favorable attitude than the agricultural leaders. Several of the agricultural leaders disagreed with this statement with qualifications such, "students should not be forced into the program", "only if they are interested", or "only if there is a quality program."

Responses to these two statements account for a large portion of the difference between the community and agricultural leaders, giving the community leaders slightly more favorable perception.

The statement that agricultural education should be offered primarily to students with limited abilities was considered a negative statement. Most all of the sample disagreed with the statement as indicated by the values in Table 6. Several members of the sample did follow the response of disagreeing with a comment similar to, "but that is the case in many instances."

Agriculture teachers have often been faced with the situation of educating students of lower academic ability. There are a number of reasons

for this: 1) teachers have been effective in working with students of lower academic ability, 2) some guidance counselors use an agriculture course as "dumping ground" to find a place for unwanted students, and 3) traditionally, agriculture has been one of the few occupational programs in many schools, so there were few places for these students to get hands-on experience. Agriculture teachers face a challenge of working with these students without obtaining the image of a special education program.

Agricultural education is not a program specifically for disadvantaged students. Many students in agriculture go on to pursue professional careers in agriculture appreciative of the sound base in agricultural skills learned in high school vocational agriculture. The fact that agriculture can be for all students of all abilities seems to be one area that needs attention from public relations.

Agricultural leaders had a slightly more favorable response toward the statement that agricultural education does an adequate job of training students for agricultural careers. A number of the nonagricultural group did indicate that they felt they could not make a judgement on the quality of instruction. However, they did add that they knew the teacher of agriculture and they were sure he was doing a good job. The community leaders seemed to have faith in the instructor and the program even though they were not really close to what was going on.

Comments like the following illustrate this:

"I'm in no position to judge how effective ag courses are, but I'm sure \_\_\_\_\_ is doing an outstanding job as a teacher.

"I don't really know (the effectiveness of the program) but I do see \_\_\_\_\_ and his students doing a lot of different things....."

"\_\_\_\_\_ is a fine man, I'm sure he does a good job teaching those kids about the latest in

farming techniques."

"We need more teachers like \_\_\_\_\_. He gets so much work out of those kids. They sure have a lot of respect for him."

The final statement was that more schools should offer agriculture. The agricultural leader group had a more favorable response to this statement. Some of the community leaders responded that agriculture should be offered in all rural areas or where there was a need. Most were surprised to learn that agriculture was not offered in all schools in Madison County. In addition, very few of the individuals responded to this statement with a reference to horticulture programs, that are more likely in an urban program. They essentially connected agriculture programs with farming areas. Several did add the comment that more students should be exposed to conservation programs similar to courses offered in a couple of the schools in the survey.

Each leader in the sample was given a subjective value of their knowledge of agricultural education and also given a value of their perception toward the program based on responses to the five statements. A correlation was made to determine the degree of relationship between knowledge and perception. The results showed very little relationship because of the low correlation between these two measures. The correlation between knowledge and perception for the agricultural group was  $-.17$  and for the community leader group equals  $+.28$ . These low correlations were not anticipated. The slightly negative correlation for agricultural leaders may reflect on the view of some leaders that not all students should take agriculture. The low correlation for community leaders reflects the phenomenon that some individuals felt the program was good and they knew very little about it.

### Perceptions of the FFA

The next section of the interview attempted to measure the individual's knowledge of the FFA youth organization. The first question asked their perceptions of the purposes of the FFA. Responses to this question are included in Appendix F. Many of the responses mentioned cooperation, leadership and learning more about agriculture as some of the main purposes. In the individual comments about the purposes of the FFA, many individuals indicated that the experiences gained in the FFA were extremely valuable. Even when an individual was not very familiar with all aspects of the FFA they seemed impressed with what they were familiar with.

The next question asked what activities of the local FFA chapter they were familiar with. This gave an impression of how knowledgeable of the FFA activities they were and also which activities of the FFA were most visible.

FFA activities are natural publicity for agriculture departments. They usually involve other people and they are accomplishments that lend themselves to news stories and conversations. The type of activities of which the leaders were most aware forms the basis for the image that an individual will hold of the organization. In addition, because these FFA members are agriculture students, the image formed by FFA activities will also represent the agriculture program. The variety and frequency of all responses to the question on FFA activities is included in Appendix F.

There were no great differences between the two groups as to the types of activities identified. Agricultural leaders usually listed more activities, but the types of things listed were very similar to the community leaders. The most frequently mentioned activities were cattle show, crop demonstration and conservation activities. One characteristic of the activities most often mentioned were that they were activities conducted

annually. It is obvious that activities that happen more frequently are the things that are remembered. However, the comments of the sample made this clear. Activities that are annual activities will be the ones that will represent the organization.

Leadership contests, trips to State and National activities were frequently mentioned. Community service activities were only mentioned by a few. However, those that did mention community service went on to elaborate how impressed they were with the FFA's effort in this area. This was also the case in the conservation activities. Apparently a few people who are interested in things like community service or conservation efforts are very impressed by the efforts of organizations like the FFA.

Fund-raising activities were mentioned frequently, but not as often as anticipated by the author. Frequently the major problem facing a youth organization is fund-raising and too often this becomes the organization's greatest effort. They frequently expend so much energy on fund-raising that little else can be accomplished. In addition, many times the only contact the public has with a youth group is their request for money. This was apparently not the case with the FFA.

The next question asked for a general impression of the FFA. All individuals in the sample expressed favorable opinions with responses ranging from "quite favorable" to "damn good organization".

Knowledge of the FFA and its activities varied greatly among the sample. However, all that were interviewed were impressed with the activities with which they were familiar. Leaders in the sample mentioned the importance of community service activities, providing students with new experiences, learning to cooperate, developing leadership and learning to speak before a group and express themselves. Often in response to this question the individual made reference to the teacher of agriculture.

Many seemed to have the perception of the teacher devoting extra time to work with students. When pressed to explain this further, they cited, observing students on field trips, reading about going on trips or to camp, or working on a crop demonstration after school. Many of the group, particularly the community leaders, were impressed with this dedication and extra effort that they perceived on behalf of the teacher.

When asked from what sources an individual had learned about the FFA, nearly every member of the sample identified two or three sources. The most frequent responses were: 1) local newspapers, 2) students, 3) friends, 4) the local teacher of agriculture, and 5) observing activities first hand. There is apparently no one most important source that all persons rely on for information on the FFA. Each source tends to reinforce or supplement others.

The responses of each leader in regard to their knowledge of the FFA were subjectively analyzed by the author and each leader was given a value for knowledge of the FFA. Values ranged from one to five with one the equivalent of very familiar with the FFA and five equivalent to very little knowledge of the organization. All values were assigned by examining responses to questions about the FFA. In order to avoid any bias by the author, the interviews were mixed and the author was unaware of which interview individual responses were from.

The mean values of each sample group were significantly different. The mean of the agricultural group was 1.81 and the mean of the community leaders was 3.37. Apparently from this data, the agricultural leaders were significantly ( $< .005$ ) more familiar with the FFA.

An attempt was made to measure a leader's perception of the FFA by responses to five statements about the FFA. These were scored similar to the statements about agricultural education using a five point scale. One was equivalent to most agreement and five was least agreement. Statements



number 33 and 35 were considered negative and response values for these were reversed. Values for all five statements were totaled to obtain a total perception value. The mean total score for the agricultural leader sample was 10.56 and the mean for the community leaders was 12.05. This was significant at the .01 level.

Table 7 includes mean response values for both groups on each of the five statements. There was very little difference between the agricultural and community leader groups, with only one statement showing a significant difference. Four individuals in the community leader sample chose not to respond to the statements because they felt they were not familiar enough with the organization. Each of these persons was scored a total of 15 or the equivalent of a neutral response to each statement. If the data for these four individuals is removed from the total the mean of the community leader group drops to 11.26 which is not significantly different from the agricultural leader group.

A statistical correlation was made to determine the degree of relationship between knowledge of the FFA and perception toward the organization. The resulting correlation for the agricultural leader group was -.09. The correlation for the community leader group was +.57. The agricultural leader group showed very little relationship between their knowledge of the FFA and perception toward the FFA. The author feels the explanation for this was the fact that all members of the agricultural group were very familiar with the FFA and there was very little difference between the scores assigned to their knowledge of the FFA.

For the community leader group, that did have a greater variability in knowledge of the FFA, there was a stronger degree of relationship. While all leaders in the sample appeared to have a favorable perception of the FFA,

those with a greater knowledge of the FFA tended to have a more favorable perception.

Table 7. MEAN RESPONSES OF AGRICULTURAL AND COMMUNITY LEADERS TO STATEMENTS ON THE FFA

Statement	Mean Score		Significance Level
	Agricultural Leader	Community Leader	
The FFA is not essential to developing an outstanding agricultural education program (negative statement).	2.37	2.68	NS
Taking class time for FFA activities is worthwhile.	2.13	2.22	NS
Agricultural education would be just as effective without the FFA (negative statement).	2.00	2.37	<.05
All agricultural students can benefit from being FFA members.	2.06	2.32	NS
The leadership skills developed as an FFA member can be more important than the technical skills in agriculture class.	2.00	2.42	NS
Total	10.56	12.05	<.05

Another relationship measured was between the perceptions of agricultural education and the FFA. Results here showed a small degree of relationship. The correlation for the agricultural leaders between perception of agricultural education and perception of the FFA was +.25. The same correlation for the community leaders was +.35.

There is some relationship between these variables and those that have a favorable perception of the FFA also tend to have a favorable perception of agricultural education based on the questions asked. The fact that all of the group had favorable perceptions of the programs made statistical analysis difficult because there was very little difference within the

leaders sampled.

One final relationship measured was the correlation between perception of the FFA and whether the leader had children that had been members of the FFA. The calculated value was +.26. There was a small amount of relationship that those who had children in the FFA had a more favorable perception. There is no assumption made as to which might be the cause of the other, only the observation is made.

### Information Sources

The first information source examined was newspapers. All individuals in the sample read some newspapers. Of the entire sample 91 percent read a daily paper every day. Because there are no daily papers located in the area examined, those daily papers that are read are from nearby cities. A total of 77 percent indicated that they read the local weekly paper. This figure may be a little lower than the actual amount because a number of people did not recall until further on in the interview that they read a weekly. Some may have forgotten to mention it altogether. Twenty percent of the sample read a national daily paper like the New York Times.

There were some differences in reading habits between the agricultural leader group and the community leader group. In the agricultural leader sample only 81 percent read newspapers daily compared to 100 percent in the community leader sample. In regard to weekly papers, 63 percent of the agricultural leaders read them regularly compared to 89 percent of the community leaders. In general the community leaders do more newspaper reading than the agricultural leaders.

Table 8 shows the average amount of time members of each sample devoted to reading newspapers. The median amount of time for the agricultural leaders was between 15 to 30 minutes, compared to 30 to 45 minutes for the community leaders.

Table 8. AVERAGE AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT PER DAY  
READING NEWSPAPERS FOR AGRICULTURAL AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

Sample	Minutes per day				
	<15	15-30	31-45	46-60	>60
	Percent of sample				
Agricultural	38	44	13	0	6
Community	0	42	16	21	21
Total	17	43	14	11	14

In response to the question of how often they read about local news, 57 percent indicated everyday. There was some difference between the two groups as 50 percent of the agricultural group and 63 percent of the community group indicated daily reading of local news. Daily papers from neighboring cities did carry some local news of the area selected.

Responses to the question as to whether they would read an article on education were quite favorable. Of the entire sample 86 percent indicated they would most likely read an education article. Nine percent said it would depend on what the article was about and only 6 percent said they would most likely pass it over. There were no significant differences between groups.

The responses to the questions regarding television indicate members of the sample watch less television than the average population. Sixty percent of the sample watches less than two hours per day on the average and no one in the sample watches more than four hours. Most individuals in the sample apparently watch television primarily for news and information. The percentage of each sample viewing television during various time periods is shown in Table 9.

The agricultural sample has a lower percentage of individuals viewing television during the 4-7 p.m. time period. A number of individuals in the agricultural group, particularly farmers, indicated that their

working hours conflicted with news programs and they were unable to watch them. It is also apparent that compared to the community leader group, a larger percentage of the agricultural group rely on television for entertainment. This is indicated in Table 9 which shows a high percentage of the agricultural leaders watching television during the "prime time" viewing hours of 7-10 p.m.

Table 9. TELEVISION VIEWING PATTERNS DURING A TYPICAL DAY  
FOR AGRICULTURAL AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

Sample	Time Period					
	7-10 a.m.	10-1 p.m.	1-4 p.m.	4-7 p.m.	7-10 p.m.	10-1 a.m.
	percent of sample					
Agricultural	13	6	0	38	81	6
Community	21	11	0	53	58	0
Total	17	9	0	46	69	3

This finding is substantiated by Bagdikian. He found that individuals with higher education levels read more and watch television less than those with lower education levels.<sup>1/</sup>

Leaders were asked the amount of time spent listening to radio and the degree to which they rely on it for news and information. The agricultural leaders listen to the radio more than the community leaders. Sixty percent of the agricultural leaders listen to radio more than two hours per day, while only 37 percent of the community leaders listen to radio that much.

The degree to which they rely on radio as a source of information is shown in Table 10. It shows that radio is a more important information source to the agricultural community.

<sup>1/</sup> Ben H. Bagdikian, The Information Machines, Their Impact on Men and the Media, 1971, p. 64-66.

Table 10. IMPORTANCE OF RADIO AS A SOURCE OF NEWS AND INFORMATION FOR AGRICULTURAL AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

Sample	Importance of Radio as News Source				
	None	Very Little	Some Importance	Great Importance	Nearly Exclusive
	percent of sample				
Agricultural	6	25	25	38	6
Community	5	58	26	11	0
Total	6	43	26	23	3

To summarize the information on media sources each leader was subjectively assigned a number on a five point scale to indicate the importance of each media source to that person. Five was the equivalent of very little exposure to that media and a one was the equivalent of a great deal of exposure to that media. The mean scores for the agricultural leader group were: newspapers 4.12, television 3.69, and radio 2.87. The values for the community leader group were: newspapers 2.63, television 2.47 and radio 3.58.

The agricultural group has less exposure to the media as a source of news and information. Even though members in the agricultural group view television a great deal they do not view much news and information. One other conclusion is that radio is more important to the agricultural community. No comparison between media can be made from these data because the assignment of values are not on the same criteria for each media. For example, it is difficult to equate the time spent reading newspapers to the time spent viewing television news programs.

The next section of the assessment of information sources looked at the contacts with other people. The community leaders are more gregarious than the agricultural leaders. This was as expected. Table 11 shows the amount of time spent per week visiting with friends and neighbors in a

face-to-face situation. All members of the sample, except one, seem to have a lot of contact with people. This information adds to these leader's credibility that they are in fact leaders and do exert opinions in the community. It is through these contacts that the leaders are also familiar with the opinions of others.

Table 11. AMOUNT OF CONTACT WITH FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS  
IN A FACE-TO-FACE SITUATION  
FOR AGRICULTURAL AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

Sample	Hours per week					
	None	<2	2-3	4-5	6-7	>7
	percent of sample					
Agricultural	0	38	25	6	19	13
Community	5	5	47	11	11	21
Total	3	20	37	9	14	17

Members of the community leader group spend more time visiting with friends or neighbors than members of the agricultural leader group.

Members of the sample spend very little time talking with friends or neighbors on the telephone. None of the agricultural group spends any significant amount of time on the telephone. Most people acknowledge that they may use the telephone for business but they would rather talk to people face-to-face. The entire group could be characterized as non-telephone users for personal contacts. Table 12 shows the amount of time spent on the telephone talking with friends and neighbors.

Another measure of these individual's leader status was the number of meetings they attend per month. The entire sample appeared to be active in a number of organizations and groups. The community leader group was especially active with nearly half of the group attending more than 6 meetings per month. Table 13 shows the number of meetings attended by the various samples.

Table 12. AMOUNT OF CONTACT WITH FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS  
USING THE TELEPHONE FOR AGRICULTURAL AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

		Hours Per Day				
Sample	None	<2	2-3	4-5	6-7	>7
		percent of sample				
Agricultural	63	31	0	6	0	0
Community	26	42	26	0	5	0
Total	43	37	14	3	3	0

Table 13. NUMBER OF MEETINGS ATTENDED PER MONTH  
FOR AGRICULTURAL AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

	Number of meetings per month					
Sample	None	<1	1-2	3-4	5-6	>6
	percent of sample					
Agricultural	0	6	13	69	13	0
Community	5	5	5	21	26	37
Total	3	6	9	43	20	20

In response to the question, "Were they frequently asked their opinion about education?", the majority indicated that they did both, give and ask opinions. Twenty percent indicated that they usually were asked their opinions on education, while 14 percent stated that they more often ask the opinions of others. This response could be interpreted to indicate that a relatively large part of the community leaders are informed about education activities and issues. After viewing the responses to this question, the author felt that this type of question does not adequately assess the status of opinion leaders on a topic like education where a large number of people are interested and informed about different aspects of education.

In response to the question as to whether they had the opportunity to influence fifty other adults, 54 percent replied yes. Most of these individuals, as was expected, were in the community leader group.



Sixty-eight percent of the community leaders and only 38 percent of the agricultural leaders indicated they might possibly be able to influence fifty other adults during a month. While a number of those sampled said they did not have an opportunity to influence fifty others, they did add that the number was somewhat lower than that. This bit of information also strengthens the image that these individuals are leaders of opinions.

Personal contacts for the leader samples were summarized by assigning a numerical value to each of the aspects measured; face-to-face contacts, phone conversations, and meetings. Values were placed on a five point scale with one equivalent to a great deal of exposure to people and a five meaning very little exposure. The community leaders compared to the agricultural had more exposure in all areas. The values for the agricultural leaders were: face-to-face contacts, 2.82, phone contacts, 4.37, and meetings, 3.00. The values for the community leaders were: face-to-face contacts, 2.21, telephone contacts, 4.11, and meetings, 2.06.

While the entire sample seemed interested in and knowledgeable about education, most (66 percent) had never served on any school board or educational advisory board. Present members of school boards were eliminated from the sample, but none had served on a school board previously. One member of the sample had a brother on a School Board and one leader was married to a School Board member. This information was learned during the interview. Thirty-one percent of the sample had served on an educational advisory board. More than half of these were in the agricultural sample and these individuals had served on the local Agricultural Advisory Board.

The leaders were also asked the importance of various sources of information in learning about school activities. This question provided a direct means to determine what sources are most important in communicating school facts and activities. This information could be used to plan school

public relations programs. As pointed out earlier there is no one most important information source. In the community leader sample four different sources emerged as the primary information sources. All four were rated as the number one source by four different persons. They were School Officials and Teachers, Newspapers, Personal observation and Students. School Officials and Teachers and Newspapers were ranked by the greatest number of community leaders as the more important information sources. Those of lesser importance, in order were, Friends, Parents, Radio and Television.

The agricultural leader sample showed several differences. The number one information source was Newspapers, closely followed by Students. School Officials and Teachers ranked third. Parents were fourth, followed by Friends, Personal Observation, Radio and Television.

As a result of this data, it is apparent that School Officials are an important information source. This includes administrators, school board members and teachers. Members of the sample cited different persons connected with the school, from whom they relied on for information. Many cited teachers as an information source. Overall Newspapers are the second most important information source, closely followed by Students. Students may not be informed of all aspects of a school yet they are relied on quite a bit for information. It is important to recognize that students are significant school spokesmen.

Students were possibly less important in the community leader group because of the age of the members of the sample. The younger agricultural sample probably has more contact with students currently in school. Another observation was that a greater number of the community sample used personal observation as a means of obtaining information about schools.

When asked which information source they would rely on for being the most accurate, nearly one half of the sample indicated School Officials and

Teachers. Obviously the leaders in the communities selected have a great deal of confidence in the school administrators and teachers. There was almost complete agreement between the two groups that they would have the most faith in information from school personnel. Other responses in order were Newspapers, Personal Observation, Students and Parents.

When asked if they felt the public receives enough information about local school activities, 57 percent replied no. There was significant differences between the two samples on this point. Sixty-nine percent of the agricultural leaders replied no and only 47 percent of the community leaders replied no. It was interesting to note that the agricultural leaders felt that not enough information was available and they also rely heavily on newspapers and students for information. On the other hand the community leaders use personal observation and school officials more and feel that more information is available. In addition to the yes or no response most individuals added a comment to this question. Only a few members of the sample felt that the school keeps information from the public. Most people indicated that the information was available if people would take the time to get involved or ask questions. The entire list of responses to this question are included in Appendix F.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Conclusions

As was anticipated in the beginning of the study, the publics of agricultural education are varied. In particular, this study looked at the differences between the community in general and the agricultural public. Differences were found in their perceptions of agricultural education and also in the information sources they use to learn about education.

Perceptions held by the public are very general. Few are familiar with the skills being taught in agriculture class nor do they have any idea of the demand for those skills. Many apparently base their opinions on a notion that agriculture is important and it is beneficial to train students in the ways of agriculture. Most want to see an agriculture program develop progressive agriculturalists but really have no specific observation if agricultural education is effective. The exception to this are those individuals who know students or have children of their own in the program. But this is not enough; agricultural education needs to tell the story of what skills are being taught and what students are doing with those skills.

Leaders rely on no one single information source, nor do they rely on all sources. Each individual usually has access to three or four sources and draws information from each of these sources in order to form opinions about education. Newspapers are the primary media source for community leaders to learn about local activities. Agricultural leaders also rely on newspapers, but they also listen to radio a great deal. Both groups are active in a large number of organizations. These organizations, particularly service clubs and agricultural groups, can be an excellent

platform for relating the skills learned in agriculture and the FFA. Even those groups that do not have opportunities for formal presentations can be contacted by cooperating with them on a particular project or requesting their assistance in conducting an activity.

In addition, all leaders listen a great deal to school administrators, teachers and students. These "in house" groups then become another public for agricultural education to inform about the program. They each are information sources and the more information they have, the better spokesmen they will be for agricultural education.

One important conclusion that stood out in nearly every interview conducted was the importance of the teacher of agriculture. Educators have frequently stressed the importance of a teacher to the success of a program. This is largely based on the need for effective teaching, enthusiasm for the program and a dedication to student participation and learning. These are important and essential to establishing an effective program, but it also appears that the teacher is personally a key to achieving public understanding and confidence in a program. In this study, the majority of the sample had very favorable perceptions of the agriculture program and the FFA. However, their familiarity with the program varied greatly. All leaders were acquainted personally with the teacher of agriculture and had confidence in that program largely based on their confidence in that individual.

It is probably not the most sound situation to base the evaluation of a program on one individual but it appears to be a natural tendency, especially when the agriculture department is a one teacher department. A potential hazard is that the community may lose confidence in a program with a change in teachers, until a new teacher has established himself. This reaction of the public must be kept in mind for teachers to use in

developing personal contacts to improve the image of their program. In addition teachers must strive to provide the public with enough information to be able to evaluate a program on more than just the image of the teacher.

It is important for teachers to recognize that this public evaluation takes place. Whether it is good or bad makes little difference, many of the public will continue to judge a program on their experiences with an individual teacher on a personal basis. An agricultural teacher represents his or her program twenty-four hours a day and in every activity in which they participate.

The FFA is essential to public relations. The critical aspect of the FFA is the typical FFA activities which are extremely effective in publicizing the agriculture program. Activities such as community service, leadership, cooperation and supervised agricultural experience are all activities that bring the agriculture program and the public closer together. Having an active FFA chapter leads a group of students into these activities and increases the visibility of agriculture students and what they are doing.

Community service activities especially increase public awareness of the FFA. Most community leaders were aware of community activities like stream improvement, building tables for the park, planting trees, etc., that the FFA chapters in this study had carried out. These activities in addition to making a contribution to the community give the chapter an initial recognition and the public often looks beyond to see and learn more about the organization. Also, once the FFA establishes an identity in the community, it can relate additional information to the public.

The FFA organization in the area surveyed does have a favorable image. The reasons cited by the leaders were not always the same, but the consensus was that the FFA was an excellent organization. Many comments were especially favorable from parents whose children had been members of the FFA.

One impression from the activities listed by the leaders as major FFA activities, was that there is not enough recognition of the "why" of FFA activities. The public reads or hears about trips and conferences, but not enough is done to demonstrate why these activities exist and what the students get out of these activities. In addition, leaders have vague perceptions of the skills these students were acquiring and what jobs they were preparing for. Care must be taken in planning public relations activities to ensure that the FFA accurately reflects the occupational education program in agriculture.

Few leaders had specific knowledge of how much training was necessary for agricultural jobs and if the secondary program in agriculture developed competence for those jobs. The term agriculturalist is a broad term that covers everyone from a hand laborer picking fruit to the plant scientist breeding new plant varieties. If the public is to effectively evaluate and support agricultural education, they must understand the level of skills being developed and the jobs for which students are preparing.

The active FFA chapters in the area have effectively displayed the leadership skills developed by FFA members, however, there needs to be more demonstration of the technical agricultural skills learned. The FFA through its activities should also display agricultural skills. Another aspect that the leaders sampled were unfamiliar with was the size of the program. Approximately one half of the community leader sample either overestimated or underestimated size by fifty percent. People may read or hear about the accomplishments of a few individuals in the agriculture program, but this gives little indication of the size of the course. While it is natural that we should publicize the successes of a program or the most outstanding students, we should also publicize how many individuals

are benefitting from agricultural education. Compared to brighter classmates, students of limited and average ability benefit as much if not more from the FFA and their training in agriculture. All of these students should be publicized in some way.

#### Recommendations for Future Studies

This research effort is only a beginning. Further work needs to be done to determine the effectiveness of the FFA and how to up-date the image of agricultural education. Understanding how leaders in a particular area perceive the FFA and Agricultural Education is the first step.

An area that needs to be examined is the area occupational center. It was obvious from this study that the public does not associate agricultural education with the area occupational programs, and if they are even familiar with the area vocational efforts. A specific study of the perceptions of area center programs could aid in the planning of public relation efforts for those educational programs.

This study did not conclusively show what caused favorable perception of the FFA. A greater number of questions and a larger sample might have been able to show if there is any relationship between what someone knows about the FFA and what their perception is toward the organization. That conclusion could not be made from this study.

Also, attitudes of parents is an interesting area. Many parents were very impressed with the FFA. It would be interesting to study to see if those attitudes changed from the time their child started in an agriculture program.

Another study could look at the image of programs where there is an active FFA chapter compared to those without the FFA. This might give some conclusions as to the effectiveness of the FFA as a means of publicizing



and complimenting agricultural education.

#### Recommendations for Agricultural Education Public Relations

Based on the conclusions and findings in this study, the author makes the following recommendations for improving or strengthening public relations efforts of agricultural education programs.

1. Teachers should become active in the local community and make personal contacts among community and agricultural leaders.

2. FFA activities should be conducted that reflect the agricultural specialization of the program, e.g. crop demonstration, sale of flower arrangements, reforestations, machinery safety demonstrations, etc.

In many cases when these activities are conducted they do not receive the public attention as some other FFA activities such as conventions or community projects. More publicity should be given to skill development through the FFA.

3. Attentions should be given in publicity to the different types of students benefiting from the FFA and agricultural education. College-bound professionals develop in the FFA as well as low ability students. Both should be publicized.

4. The agricultural community should be especially informed of the importance of additional training in agricultural education. The agricultural community should be informed of specifics in leadership training and broadening skills in agriculture, which are benefits of studying agriculture in high schools.

5. FFA activities should include a number of community activities.

6. FFA activities should be designed in a manner to involve other community organizations in the planning and conducting of activities.

7. Technical and leadership skills learned in agriculture should be

demonstrated to the entire school system.

8. Technical and leadership skills learned in agriculture should be demonstrated to the community through programs at service clubs and agricultural organizations.

9. Agricultural programs should be evaluated frequently to determine student placement and skills learned. This information should be presented to the community, particularly the agricultural community.

10. A constant flow of information should be maintained. FFA chapters should particularly use newspapers and local radio stations to inform the public about their activities.

11. All activities should, of course, be planned but particular attention should be given to annual activities for these will be the ones to represent the FFA and agricultural education to the public that is not extremely close to the program.

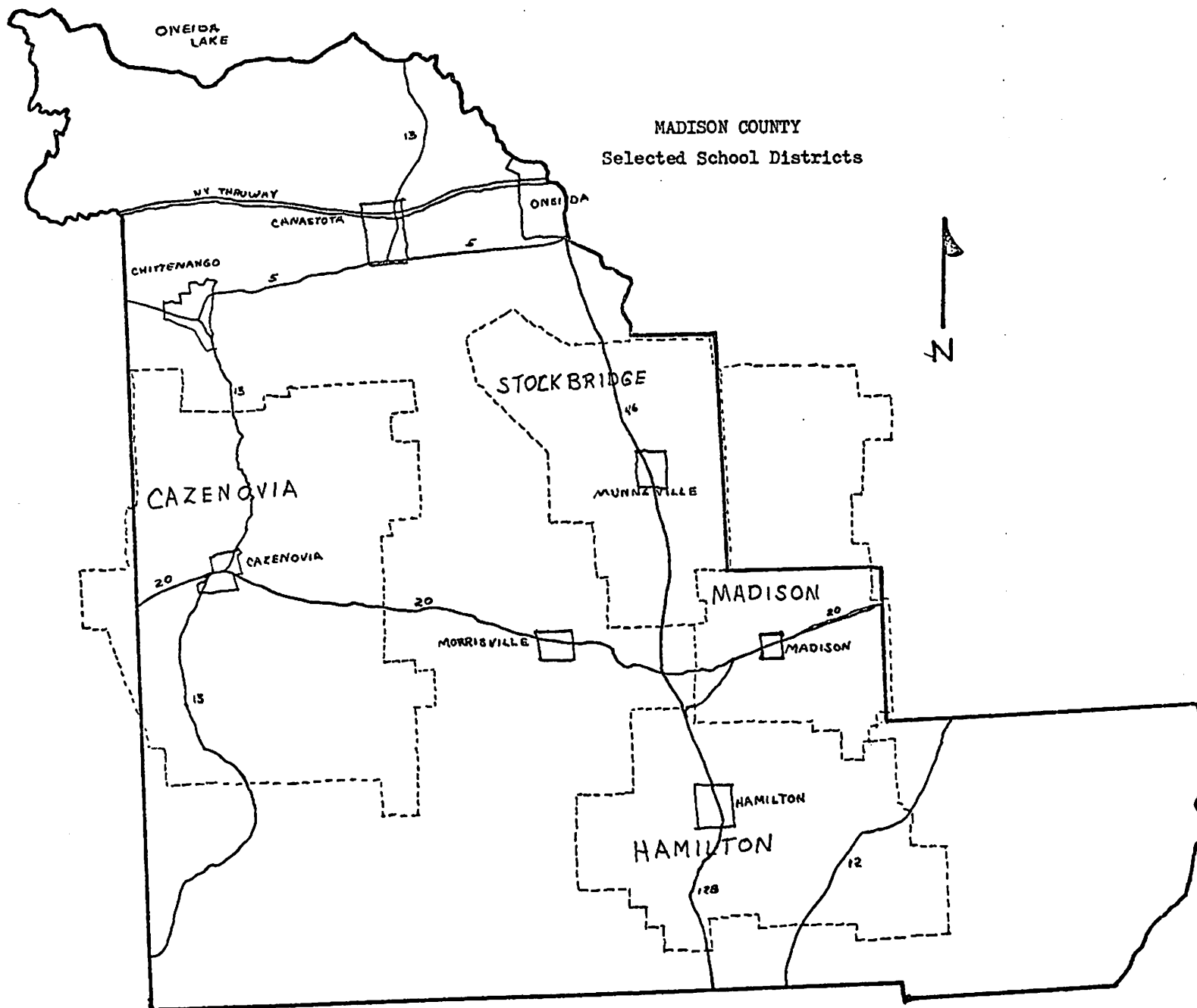
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APPENDIX A  
MAP OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS



**APPENDIX B**  
**LETTER TO TEACHERS**



November 3, 1976

As part of my graduate studies, I plan to assess public perceptions of an educational activity like the FFA. I plan to use the case study approach and examine two areas to ascertain perceptions of the FFA. I will be examining a selected group of agricultural and non-agricultural community leaders. I have selected Madison County as the area I will survey.

My plan is to first identify the community and agricultural leaders in the area and interview them regarding their perceptions of the agriculture departments and the FFA. In order to accomplish this I will need the support of your department and your local school system.

I specifically need help in identifying the leaders. Also I would like to obtain information on any public relations activities you have completed in the last several months.

The results of this study will not publically identify your department or your local school system, nor will any of the individual leaders be named in the report of the research. Any results or information of total responses will be made available to you for your use.

I will assume that you are willing to cooperate unless you contact me in the near future with any questions or concerns. I will be contacting you in about one week to follow up on obtaining names of community and agricultural leaders in your area. In the meantime, it would be helpful if you could list on the attached sheet the names of groups or individuals that would fall into this community and agricultural leader category.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Richard D. Jones

205 Stone Hall  
Cornell University  
Ithaca, NY 14853

APPENDIX C  
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Name \_\_\_\_\_

School District \_\_\_\_\_

Agriculture leader \_\_\_\_\_ Community Leader \_\_\_\_\_

I. Information Sources

A. Newspapers

1. What newspapers do you read regularly?

2. How long do you spend on the average reading newspapers each day?

\_\_\_\_\_ <15 min.      \_\_\_\_\_ 31-45 min.      \_\_\_\_\_ >60 min.

\_\_\_\_\_ 15-30 min.      \_\_\_\_\_ 46-60 min.

3. How often do you read about local news in newspapers?

\_\_\_\_\_ everyday      \_\_\_\_\_ occasionally

\_\_\_\_\_ once a week      \_\_\_\_\_ never

4. If you see an article about the local school, are you more likely to read it or pass it over?

\_\_\_\_\_ read it      \_\_\_\_\_ pass it over      \_\_\_\_\_ depends, not sure

B. Television

5. How much time do you spend each day watching television?

\_\_\_\_\_ <2 hr.      \_\_\_\_\_ 4-6 hr.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2-4 hr.      \_\_\_\_\_ more than 6 hr.

6. During what hours do you usually watch television?

\_\_\_\_\_ 7-10 a.m.      \_\_\_\_\_ 1-4 p.m.      \_\_\_\_\_ 7-10 p.m.

\_\_\_\_\_ 10-1 p.m.      \_\_\_\_\_ 4-7 p.m.      \_\_\_\_\_ 10-1 a.m.

7. Approximately what percentage of your television viewing time is for entertainment and what percentage is for news and information?

\_\_\_\_\_ % entertainment

\_\_\_\_\_ % news and information

C. Radio

8. How much time do you, on the average, spend listening to radio.

\_\_\_ 2 hr./day                      4-6 hr./day

\_\_\_ 2-4 hr./day                      6 hr./day

9. Do you rely on the radio very much for news and information?

\_\_\_ exclusively                      \_\_\_ some                      \_\_\_ none

\_\_\_ great deal                      \_\_\_ very little

II. Personal Contacts

10. How much time (hours per week) do you spend visiting with friends or neighbors in a face-to-face situation?

\_\_\_ none    \_\_\_ <2 hr.    \_\_\_ 2-3 hr.    \_\_\_ 4-5 hr.    \_\_\_ 6-7 hr.    \_\_\_ >7

11. How much time do you usually spend visiting with friends on the phone?

\_\_\_ none    \_\_\_ <2 hr.    \_\_\_ 2-3 hr.    \_\_\_ 4-5 hr.    \_\_\_ 6-7 hr.    \_\_\_ >7

12. How many meetings a month do you attend for organizations or groups that you belong to?

\_\_\_ none    \_\_\_ <1    \_\_\_ 1-2    \_\_\_ 3-4    \_\_\_ 5-6    \_\_\_ 6 or more

III. Opinion Leader Status

13. When talking with friends and the topic of education comes up, which occurs more frequently?

\_\_\_ you are asked for an opinion    \_\_\_ you ask others for opinion

\_\_\_ no difference

14. Do you have the opportunity during a month to influence at least 50 other adults?

\_\_\_ yes    \_\_\_ no

15. Have you ever served on the School Board, or any Educational Advisory Boards?

\_\_\_ yes

\_\_\_ no

#### IV. Rating of Media

16. Take a look at this list of sources of information. Which of these do you receive more of your information about schools and education. Please rank the 3 or 4 most important.

___ Newspapers	___ Opinions of Friends (non parents)
___ radio	___ Opinions of Parents
___ Television	___ Students (including your children)
___ Personal Contact	___ School Officials or Teachers
___ others	_____

17. Which of these sources do you have the most faith in being accurate sources of information?

___ Newspapers	___ Opinions of Friends (non parents)
___ Radio	___ Opinions of Parents
___ Television	___ Students (including your children)
___ Personal Contact	___ School Officials or Teachers
___ Others	_____

18. Do you think that the public receives enough information about local school activities?

#### V. Agricultural Education and the FFA

19. Several local schools in Madison County offer agricultural education as part of their curriculum.  
What schools or BOCES do you know that offer agriculture in this area?

20. Do you know the name of the local teacher of agriculture?

21. How large is the agriculture course (number of students)?

22. What are some of the jobs for which students in agriculture are preparing?

23.-27. Please respond by Strongly Agree, Agree, No Opinion, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree to the following statements.

23. Students interested in agriculture should enroll in high school courses in agriculture.

24. More students should be encouraged to enroll in agriculture classes.
25. Agriculture classes should be offered primarily to students with limited abilities.
26. Agriculture programs do an adequate job of training students for careers in agriculture.
27. Agriculture should be offered in more schools.
28. What are the purposes of the FFA youth organization?
29. What are some of the local FFA activities?
30. What are your general impressions of the FFA and its activities?
31. From which sources have you learned the most about FFA activities in the local high school?
32. Have you ever donated any time or money to the FFA.
- 33-37. Please respond by Strongly Agree, Agree, No Opinion, Disagree or Strongly Disagree to the following statements about the FFA.
33. The FFA is not essential to developing an outstanding ag. ed. program.
34. Taking class time for FFA activities is worthwhile.
35. Agriculture education would be just as effective without the FFA.
36. All agriculture students can benefit from being FFA members.
37. The leadership skills developed as an FFA member can be more important than the technical skills learned in agriculture class.
38. What additional information would you like to know about agricultural education or the FFA?

## VI. Personal Data

39. How much education have you completed?

\_\_\_\_ < H.S.      \_\_\_\_ H.S.      \_\_\_\_ Some college (< 4 yrs.)      \_\_\_\_ College B.S.

           post graduate

40. How old are you?

       16-25           26-35           36-45           46-55           56-65           65+

41. What is your occupation? \_\_\_\_\_

42. Have you had any children attend high school? \_\_\_\_\_

43. Have any of your children taken agriculture? \_\_\_\_\_

44. Did you take agriculture in high school? \_\_\_\_\_

45. Were you an FFA member? \_\_\_\_\_

46. What are the things that concern you the most about local schools and education?

APPENDIX D  
TELEPHONE INTRODUCTION



TELEPHONE INTRODUCTION

Good evening. My name is Richard Jones; I am a graduate student at Cornell University. As part of my studies at Cornell, I am doing a survey of the opinions of several community and agricultural leaders in the \_\_\_\_\_ area. I would like to make an appointment to interview you and include your opinions in my study. The survey is in regard to education and the different information sources you use. The interview should take approximately 20-25 minutes.

APPENDIX E  
OCCUPATIONS OF LEADERS IN SAMPLE

OCCUPATIONS OF LEADERS IN THE SAMPLE

Community Leaders

Village Clerk  
Owner-Hardware Store  
Housewife (2)  
Owner-Auto Parts Dist.  
Mechanical Engineer  
Mailman  
Retired-College Administrator  
Lawyer  
Bank Manager  
Owner-Fuel Oil Company  
Retired-Geologist  
Plant Security Superintendent  
Real Estate Broker  
Landscape Architect-Housewife  
Beauty Products Salesperson-Mayor  
Retired-Mechanical Engineer  
Auctioneer  
Mobile Home Park-Owner, Manager

Agricultural Leaders

Farmer (9)  
Farmer-Housewife (2)  
Insurance Salesman  
(Farm Family Ins.)  
Farm Electrical and Refrig.  
Contractor  
Owner-Feed Store  
Technical Service Representative  
Agrichemicals  
Farmer-Equipment Dealer

APPENDIX F  
SELECTED RESPONSES

18. Do you think the public receives enough information about local schools?

Agricultural Leaders Responses

Yes - 13%

No - 69%

Not Sure 19%

Comments

-No, It is there if they want it.

-No, There's a lot that goes on we don't know about.

-No, Schools tell you what they want you to know.

-Probably adequate; The information is available, it depends on how actively you seek it.

-From public information, no; But people have no one to blame; if they want more they could get it.

-No, That they do receive is inaccurate.

-No, People don't care until something comes up. It's partly the school's fault, so much depends on the school officials.

-Locally it seems to be good. There is a lot of information in the local paper.

-You hear the most when something goes wrong. Yes, I'd say we hear enough.

-No, I don't know how to change it. It is not necessarily the fault of the schools. People probably don't get involved in it enough.

-Yes and No, Some things are better not known. People can investigate when there is a difficulty. I think we know too much with no real purpose.

-No, A lot of people could care less, the information is there.

-No, The information goes out but they don't read it. They don't know the general philosophy of the schools or what the school's responsibility is. Parents don't get involved.

-No, If the school has a problem, they beat around the bush. They should come right out with the facts.

-I think no, Sometimes they do about critical issues but they don't usually take the time to read and decipher the information.

-I don't know, Most people don't pay much attention unless they're parents or the costs get real high.

Community Leader Responses

Yes - 47%

No - 37%

Not Sure - 16%

Comments

- No, not enough specific information of the budget.
- No, We could receive more. Budgets should be more publicized.
- No, It's their own fault. They won't go to meetings. They need to ask questions to get first hand information.
- No, everything is hush, hush. Too many board executive sessions. Everything should be out in the open.
- Now, yes. The PTG and League (of Women Voters) have representatives at meetings, more information is disseminated.
- Not sure, they get the right information. Although the local paper does a good job.
- There is a lot of information available. It has increased in recent years.
- A lot of information is vague comments. It should go into more detail.
- There is not enough good information. You need information on where money is spent and the school should admit mistakes.
- Yes, through the paper, particularly sports.
- It's available, but little attention is given to it.
- Probably yes, because this is a small community.
- Yes, pretty good through the school board reports.
- No, There is pretty weak public relations. They must identify educational needs. There is very little response of the school to needs. There is nothing to generate attitudes.
- No, When people discuss it they don't have all of the information and they state opinions based on rumor.
- Parents might, Do you ever have enough information? The school could do a better job.

22. What are some of the jobs for which students in agriculture are preparing?

Responses of Agricultural Leaders

- farming is the main one and other jobs associated with farming
- farming, agribusiness and farm related
- That's a broad statement. They go into everything. Some will be in farming, some extension or teaching, some into other jobs or shops.
- farming, some teaching, feed and seed companies, ag. representatives, possibly companies like banks
- agribusiness related to dairy farming in the community. A few will move beyond that
- working on farms, working with farm machinery, milk testing, some go to college
- less than half into farming, as to the related fields, some do, some don't
- I am a little concerned about the kids taking agriculture as an easy way through. You should get kids out to get practical experience. It is a waste of time if they try and learn things out of a book.
- from farming to construction welding, some general handiwork, handling equipment, or animals, record keeping
- majority would be off farm. You should be careful because there aren't many chances to go directly into farming. There are really a lot of jobs in related fields.
- There are a lot of agricultural jobs, machinery manufacturing to machinery sales, conservation and forestry.
- Animal husbandry, more really into mechanics; I'd like to see more go into farming. Most are agriculturally oriented but not strictly milking cows.
- Well, going back to the farm, some will never learn anything, others will be getting into ag. related, food processing, environmental, probably a small number into teaching.
- fairly high percentage are preparing for farm or related jobs like Agway or something similar
- the whole of agriculture, farm mechanics, dairy, poultry, forestry, and so on

Responses of Community Leaders

- actual farming, work that also get into mechanical aspects. It's a good class, all around, for someone who wants to get into technical work
- too many for agribusiness; This aspect of agriculture can be a big rip-off,

with too much fertilizer and pesticides, too much energy usage. Most should go back to family farms.

-hopefully farmers

-any jobs related to agriculture, selling equipment, agricultural industries and related areas

-their own farm, with their families, probably 75 percent of them, another 25 percent will go to college or related fields

-veterinarian, food production jobs, caring for crops and cattle

-I hope, obviously, for some to go back on agriculture with a better preparation. This of course is developed through a practical experience program. Increasing numbers go on to further training and education. Agriculture develops them for leadership roles in agriculture.

-dairy farming predominately, some into forestry and conservation management

-Some will go into business on the home farm, others working on farms. Some are concerned with marketing equipment and products for agriculture; designing equipment. There certainly are a lot of agricultural jobs.

-They learn to finance and run a farm operation and finance it successfully, from there they learn almost everything

-conservation, animal husbandry, land use and planning, farm equipment business and repair, electricity and welding

-mechanics, farming, ASCS, Extension, conservation, doesn't do a kid any harm just to learn about hard work

-farming, mechanics, related sales, Agway, farm workers

-The small farmer can no longer exist. Students must go into the scientific aspects of agriculture. Soil conservation workers, become a big dairy farmer. Like the field of engineering, you need to get scientific.

-Let me first say that agriculture is a catalyst for a variety of students in the lowest track in school. It enables one to plant crops and care for cattle, but it is less helpful in developing a student to run an overall farm operation.

-driving tractors is all I see them doing, run a farm I presume

-I hope running local farms. Farming is a good and useful life but it doesn't need technology or big business. There are also jobs in landscaping and it's a good background for forestry and agriculture.

-general farming, most will go into it one way or another

-Good students stay home on the farm. Some go into other trades or to BOCES.



28. What do you feel are the purposes of the FFA youth organization?

Responses of Agricultural Leaders

- teach them how an organization runs, its an opportunity to hold an office, for speaking, it's valuable for citizenship
- primarily educational purpose. It is certainly there to foster enthusiasm for agriculture, to form "esprit de corps" and I'd say to instill a sense of pride.
- just getting a bunch together; something to belong to
- leadership, learning how to talk, too many students can't get up in front of a group these days
- It's the same as any service group, stimulate interest.
- mostly leadership ability, it gives kids, especially farm kids a chance to contests and competitions
- same as any organization, develop somebody how to handle an organization, also you can meet with other kids and share thoughts
- like any organization, it is beneficial to the kids, working together exchanging ideas. It has a local, state and national group which gives the kids some identity
- leadership
- mainly to get them to know others and interest them in doing things
- give students a chance to develop leadership and take responsibility on things and learn to work together towards common goals and share experiences
- exposure pretty much, getting kids out and competing, to see things new to them outside of school
- parliamentary procedure, public speaking, good to have an organization in school
- cooperate and share experiences, learn more about agriculture
- promote leadership, have to get up in front of people, learn how an organization works
- building future agricultural leaders

Responses of Community Leaders

- for club work as an organization, it is a good source of information on how to conduct meetings and so on
  - gives students an opportunity to understand activities outside of school
- I'm not familiar with it.

-good training in meetings, get a lot of experience out of it, I really don't know a lot about it.

-I'm not very knowledgeable about it, I guess it is a little like 4-H.

-bunch of fellows and girls--get a lot of the FFA--lot probably due to \_\_\_\_\_ (teacher), dedicated FFA man in all aspects, it's a broadening experience for the kids.

-I don't know a lot about it but I think the kids get a lot out of it.

-provides an opportunity for competition, meeting peers, recognition, and encouragement

-gets kids interested in agriculture, prizes, motivation

-promotes and encourages farming and understanding farming

-organization for farm related people, I don't know much about it.

-improvement of farming methods upgrading of agriculture

-help school plan program of instruction, advises school in curriculum, responds to the needs of the community, training in group dynamics and local development, broadening horizons.

-kids get together and learn more about agriculture

-It has a lot of purposes, helps some to go on in agriculture. It helps kids do a better job in agriculture, really the experiences in the FFA are good on any job.

-group study, working together on jobs going over what they have learned, The FFA speakers are wonderful. They also can put into practice the things they have learned.

-like any organization, it brings people together with similar interests and increases interest in agriculture. It also can open students eyes and realize it is a national scope in the organization

-getting boys and girls to do things on their own, a good learning experience

-sharing common goals, kids get a chance to go on trips

29. What are some of the FFA activities with which you are familiar?

Activities Mentioned	Frequency	
	Agricultural Leaders	Community Leaders
Cattle Show	7	5
Crop Demonstration	5	5
Conservation Activities-tree planting, woodlot improvement, etc.	5	4
Leadership Contests-speaking, forum, meeting contest	5	3
Trips-National Convention, State meetings, Cornell	4	4
Fund raising-citrus sales, Christman tree sales, etc.	7	3
Construction projects-pole barn, bridges, individual projects	2	4
Community Service projects	3	3
Service to Farmers-soil testing, milk testing	1	1
Judging contests	2	2
Awards-proficiency, degrees, etc.	2	1
Banquet	2	3
Sports Night	1	0
Exchange program	0	1
FFA camp	2	0