

AG EDUCATORS STUDY EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING NEEDS

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Agribusiness, the firms that serve North Dakota's farmers and transport, market and process farm products, employs thousands of workers in North Dakota, providing a large segment of the state's economy. A major portion of the state, federal and local funds expended in North Dakota is spent on education. Put these two facts together and it's apparent that both employing firms and educational institutions need information concerning employment needs of agribusiness and the training needs of people that can fill those jobs.

Dr. D. W. Priebe, chairman of the Department of Agricultural Education, reports that research is being done by his department to provide information on agricultural manpower needs in North Dakota. The overall project has several objectives, including development of methodology for obtaining and interpreting manpower needs information, determining the extent of agricultural employment, identifying emerging trends and changes in employment needs, and examining training needs for projected agricultural employment in North Dakota.

Priebe points out that preparation for agricultural employment, along with upgrading and retraining of agricultural workers, is of major importance in the state's educational programs. Reliable information concerning agricultural employment is a key decision-making tool for planning vocational education programs for secondary students, post-secondary students and adults in the state's schools. Such information also has implications for higher education, including North Dakota State University. Realistic information about employment opportunities and trends is also valuable for career counseling and vocational guidance.

The first element of the project was to examine some of the existing sources of employment data and develop a means of projecting employment needs of North Dakota businesses. The sources studied were the Na-

tional Manpower Study of 1970 and the County Business Patterns publications prepared from census data. The method was to determine the percentage of employees within a given industry with agricultural training or experience, based on the National Manpower Study. Employment data from the County Business Patterns were used to calculate projected total employment for an industry, then the percentage figure was used to estimate the number of agricultural workers that would be needed.

Employment data were also obtained from managers of agribusiness firms in North Dakota. The agribusiness industries that have been surveyed include implement dealers, grain handling, horticulture, dairy products, meat processing, veterinary services, agricultural finance and livestock marketing.

For example, a survey of North Dakota implement dealers showed an estimated 3,787 employees in 1978. The dealers projected employment to increase to 4,390 by 1982. (Priebe cautions that some of the projected figures may be overstated because of economic conditions.) The largest employee category in the implement business is mechanic/service technician. Other major categories include management, parts, sales, set-up, bookkeeping or some combination.

Many of the occupations identified in the various industries do require agricultural competence or some degree of training. Some require post-secondary vocational training; others, especially at the management level, require college training.

An area the department wishes to investigate next, Priebe says, is training needs for existing workers in the agribusiness job force and how these needs might be met by adult education.