New Louisiana Crop: Vets Who Learn Farming on Job

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Hathaway, La. — Louisiana is raising a new crop in this community—a crop of scientific farmers.

Not the type of scientific farmer who holds a degree in agriculture, to be sure, but farmers who are learning and practicing the scientific advances in agriculture under the watchful eye of the instructors and supervisors of the veterans' on-the-farm training program.

The program, just a year old this month, was conceived and written as a thesis for a master's degree by Allen LeBlanc, assistant head of the agricultural department at Southwestern Louisiana Institute, Lafayette.

Today, LeBlanc, A. Larrieviere, head of the department; Dr. T. J. Arceneaux, dean of the agriculture school, and Joel L. Fletcher, president, all of SLLI, are the driving forces behind a "community project" in the Hathaway area which has 52 veterans enrolled.

Hathaway has no corner on the idea, for about 6500 veterans enrolled in the program throughout the state. But Hathaway is considered by many as typical of the richest agricultural region within the borders of Louisiana.

One of the projects is the Hathaway High School, a comparatively small establishment as schools go, but an institution that is playing an increasingly important part in the lives of the community, under the supervision of Principal C. P. Groth.

NEED A PLOT

Top hand of the outfit is T. P. "Perkins" Clifford, with William T. Perkins and Nathan Avant as cooperating instructors.

The plan is simple. The farmers learn by doing; practicability is the keynote of the teaching system.

Once under the GI Bill of Rights, the chain of control is through the veterans' administration, the state department of education, parish school boards, individual schools and their supervisors and instructors.

Under the provisions of the law, veterans who desire the training may qualify by getting a certificate of eligibility, in addition to which they must own or have at least a one-year lease on a family-sized farm plot.

Once their application is approved by the parish agricultural committee, they are entitled to receive the same subsistence payment they would get were they enrolled in an accredited university.

"Our objective here is to emphasize the importance of the "live-at-home" program," Clifford explains. "We know that if we can impress that point, they'll just naturally be better all-around farmers."

SHOW DIFFERENCE

That's the reason that the standards set up by the parish require all trainees to raise everything possible for feeding their family and live stock; preserve a minimum of 107 cans of food per person every year; raise blood-tested chickens; inoculate their stock, and keep accurate records of their operations and transactions.

These records are the most important thing in the whole program." Clifford declares. "If we can instill into them the necessity for accurate records, they can soon see the difference in dollars and cents, and that emphasizes to them the importance of the whole program."

Under the setup as it operates at Hathaway, trainees attend a session a week at the school house where they go into the problems of the moment.

These class sessions, despite the tears of many, are turning out to be one of the most important features of the entire schedule.

As one trainee puts it: "We get together and that gives us a chance to help the other fellow work out his problems. Besides, it is kind of nice to meet the group once in a while and it adds a lot to the social aspect of farm life."

INSTRUCTOR VISITS

Timeliness is stressed at the class sessions.

"It doesn't do any good to try to teach them about pruning fruit trees when they should be planting sweet potatoes or worming their hens," Larrieviere says.

Therefore, we take up the items in seasonal sequence so we can demonstrate and show them what we mean.

Those demonstrations are the heart of the program. For a minimum of two hours a week, each farm is visited by an instructor.

That serves a dual purpose. It makes the services of the instructor available to the trainee; and it gives the instructor a chance to check on the progress being made on the farm.

The demonstrations are a cooperative venture. The instructor shows what should be done and the proper way to do it, but it doesn't stop there. The trainee must repeat the process until the instructor is satisfied that he can do it properly.

That's where the good spreads to the rest of the community. Several of the trainees, for instance, are already using their new acquired learning to assist their neighbors in inoculating live stock, a project which is spreading rapidly and credited with making a decided slash in the stock mortality rate.

Canning and preservation of food is another important phase of the community-wide project. Pressure cookers are a "must" in farm equipment, and plans are under way for a community canning center where a cooperative system can be worked out.

Already the trainees in the Hathaway area are saving hundreds of dollars by cooperative buying of their seeds, fertilizers, canning jars and other items.

Success of the program, officials believe, is the on-the-spot contacts made by the instructors.

"All the work must be planned in advance, so when we see that they keep abreast of their work schedules," Clifford explained, "And in the words of Dean Arceneaux, "If the program did
Typical of the families benefiting from the veterans' farm training program is that of Stafford Robert, near Arnaudville, La. He is shown with Mrs. Robert and their daughters, Patsy and Dianne.

Instructor Avant shows Lowell Litteral how to examine poultry for lice and other unwanted insects.

Cotton plants are inspected frequently on the Robert farm. Here Instructor Harold Hollier shows Robert what he's looking for.