

SDA Agricultural Programs

Symbols of Corporate Guilt or Unlimited Opportunities?

By George R. Knight

Adventist conference, college, and academy administrators do not have to make sense—especially if they are following the counsels of Ellen White. Making sense, in fact, might be interpreted by some of their constituents as “sinful.” At the least it can be guilt inducing. That is especially true of the “problem” of Adventist agricultural programs and school farms.

As one might expect, Ellen White’s counsels (and how to relate to them) form the foundation of the agriculture issue. “This country,” she wrote of Australia in February 1894, “needs educated farmers.”¹ About that same time she wrote that “study in agricultural lines should be the A, B, and C of the education given in our schools.”²

Mrs. White set forth these sentiments in the context of the struggle to buy land and develop curriculum for what was to become the Avondale School for Christian Workers (now Avondale College). She called for a new type of Adventist education—an education that would be more practical and less bookish. Largely as a result of her insistence, the Australian school was established on 1500 acres near the rural village of Cooranbong, some 70 miles north of Sydney.³

The Pattern School

As it developed, the Avondale

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school emphasized agriculture and industries to balance the academic aspect of its offerings. This institution came to be seen by Ellen White as a “pattern school” or an “object lesson” of what Adventist schools could and should be like around the world.⁴

Subsequently a wave of reform swept through Adventist education in the late 1890s and the early 20th century. Established colleges, such as Battle Creek and Healdsburg, sold their campuses, reformed their curricula, and relocated in rural areas. They purchased large acreage so that they could involve their students in agriculture.

New schools established during that period—such as the Oakwood and Keene industrial academies, the Nashville Agricultural and Normal Institute (later Madison College), the Solusi school in Africa, and a host of others around the world—began their existence with large tracts of land and strong agricultural programs.

These developments constituted one of the most vigorous and universal responses to Ellen White’s counsels. She called for a practical

education, helped demonstrate how it could be accomplished in the Avondale experiment, and the denomination’s educators generally responded. As a result, many Seventh-day Adventist colleges and secondary schools in the 1980s find themselves in rural locations with school farms.

Modern Applications

A century after the counsel was given the real question that must be asked is, “How can these farms and their agricultural programs be used to fulfill the purpose for which they were created?” The answer is far from obvious. In fact, there may be more than one answer, depending on whether a person has a post-industrial or a preindustrial context in mind.

Those schools in preindustrial locations find themselves in a context quite similar to that in which Mrs. White was writing in the 1890s. They can usually see how her counsels apply to their own time and place in terms of both general principles and specific applications.

On the other hand, schools operating in postindustrial contexts generally feel great perplexity about their agricultural programs. In these situations many conference and educational administrators would probably like to sell their farms and invest the proceeds in some more “useful” and profitable enterprise.

However, they recognize that there is a conflict between those desires and Mrs. White’s pointed statements. As a result, they gener-

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academy she attended immediately called in a counselor to help her cope with this trauma. The counselor came to the school a number of times to assist the student.

School/Church Cooperation

Working together with the local church can serve not only to enhance counseling services, but also foster a spirit of cooperation and mutual concern for the young people of the church.

Joint church/school projects include (1) a combined home visitation program by counselor and pastor/Bible worker; (2) substance abuse hotlines managed by trained

volunteers from church colleges or local churches. Support services could be inexpensively provided by local elders, deacons, and deaconesses.

Today's schools are expected by society to take on many responsibilities that used to be handled by parents, church, and extended family. For most teachers, simply teaching the eight or so subjects required and grading papers takes most of their time.

School boards, administrators, and the church must recognize the necessity of providing extra help for children in our schools. Guidance and counseling is no "frill." For some students it may literally mean

the difference between life and death; for others, the difference between a minimal existence and achievement of their full potential as children of God.

Assisting in the development of a human being is a sacred responsibility with which parents and teachers are entrusted for only a little while. By offering a program that balances academic, spiritual, and emotional elements, Adventist schools can help children fulfill the promise of this statement by Ellen G. White: "Our first duty to God and our fellow beings is self-development. Every faculty with which the Creator has endowed us should be cultivated to the highest degree of perfection, that we may be able to do the greatest good of which we are capable."⁴ □

Benefits of a School Counseling Program

- Guidance and counseling can have a powerful effect on scholastic performance, school attendance, and drug and alcohol use.

- A professional counselor can serve as a link to the workforce, helping students explore potential careers and discover undetected talents and interests.

- Counselors can intervene in crisis situations to help young people cope with family problems, suicidal feelings, and failing grades.

- Counselors can test students with learning problems and help parents and teachers implement strategies for overcoming such difficulties.

- Counselors can keep track of young people considered "at risk," such as minorities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. They can encourage them to stay in school, provide a positive role model, and help such students plan their school program so that they can prepare for challenging careers. The economic and human implications of such support and guidance are inestimable.

- Counselors can identify gifted students, helping them choose academic work that will qualify them to enter fields where they can best serve God and their fellow human beings.

- Counselors can act as intermediaries between parents and

children to facilitate communication and help families work together to find solutions to their common problems.

- Counselors have special training to help them detect physical and sexual abuse, and offer support and assistance to the abused child. The counselor may be the only person who carries through in reporting and follow up with local authorities to resolve abuse situations.

- Research seems to indicate that students who receive counseling are more likely to delay becoming sexually active.

- The counselor can implement a home visitation program that promotes cooperation and better understanding between parents and teachers.

- The counselor can work with local officials and the media to raise public consciousness about issues of general concern, such as crisis hot lines, drug abuse, and the need for referral services for children with learning or behavioral problems.

- Counselors can assist other staff members by offering strategies for balancing family life and career, coping with burnout, and handling classroom management problems. They can also act as a confidant for teachers who feel uncomfortable about discussing their problems with the principal or superintendent.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ Mary Hatwood Futrell, in a National Educational Association advertisement in *Washington Post*, April 21, 1985.

² John F. Gallagher, "College Bound, Without a Map," *Time* (February 23, 1987), p. 74.

³ Information compiled from union conference listings of teachers, 1986-1987 and research by the NAD Board of Higher Education, and includes self-supporting schools.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publishing Assn., 1954), p. 164.

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ally keep the farms but fail to devote much imagination to their operation. Such farms struggle along, but rarely operate at their full potential. Thus the school farm and the agricultural program become symbols of corporate guilt rather than sources of unlimited opportunity.

Sell School Farms?

I heard recently that the administrator of one of our major educational institutions used the arguments I set forth in the last chapter of *Myths in Adventism*⁵ to justify selling the institution's extensive farm. I certainly never intended such conclusions when I penned that chapter on manual labor and agriculture. However, selling school farms might be the most sensible action if Adventists are going to operate them largely the same way as they were run in

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vice president, conceived the first such program in the nation between a hospital and a bank. Through this program, developed in cooperation with Sun Bank, credit card applications were mailed to more than 180,000 individuals associated with Florida Hospital. Because of the positive response, the hospital has helped extend the program to include Southern and Oakwood colleges.

The program is very simple. Each time the holder of the special MasterCard or VISA credit card uses the card, the institution receives a donation. Under the arrangement negotiated with Sun Bank, the colleges will receive 10 cents every time the card is used, regardless of the amount of the purchase. In addition, the colleges receive \$7 of the \$21 annual fee.

Church members can choose either a Southern College or an Oakwood College MasterCard or VISA card. The presidents of both colleges promise that the income from this program will be used for scholarships to directly benefit Adventist students.

To get an idea of the potential of this program, an

estimate of 10,000 cards in use an average of four to five times per month could generate \$60,000 per year. The \$7 donation fee from the annual membership fee would generate an additional \$70,000.

Benjamin Reaves, president of Oakwood College, calculates that the estimate of 10,000 potential users is realistic. He says, "If even one out of every three credit card users selects ours, we could generate \$130,000 annually to support Christian education."

The credit cards also have some personal benefits for the cardholders. Various national, regional, and local vendors offer cardholder discounts for services and products. For example, one chain offers a savings on eyeglasses, and more than 60 pharmacies in central Florida give discounts on prescription drugs if the card is used.

The special credit cards will be honored worldwide anywhere regular MasterCard or VISA is recognized. Those who qualify for the MasterCard or VISA credit card also receive travel accident insurance, instant cash 24 hours a day at automatic teller machines, accidental death credit insurance, and free convenience checks. But the real advantage of this program is its potential to fund scholarship programs for Adventist colleges.—From an article by Kent Seltman in the October 1987 *Southern Tidings*. □

the 19th century.

New Ideas Needed

Adventism desperately needs fresh ideas about the purpose of agricultural education and the role of the school farm if these entities are to be meaningful in the 1980s. Otherwise such programs will remain in the stagnant backwaters of Adventist education. They will contribute little to either the functioning of the schools or the mission of the church. If this happens, perhaps not much will be lost if schools sell their farms.

How can we solve this corporate guilt/unlimited opportunity dilemma? A closer look at the context of Mrs. White's counsel may offer some insight.

When Ellen White penned her counsel on agriculture in the curriculum she was largely seeking to make Adventist education practical. She desired that every graduate would have adequate means of self-support after leaving school, even if that support might only be used as an emergency measure for times of crisis.⁶ She was quite correct when she wrote in 1894 that "this country [Australia] needs educated farmers."⁷ The same could have been said about the United States and many other de-

veloping nations in the 1890s.

Agriculture in the 1890s

At that time agricultural education was relevant and useful for almost everyone. In many places land was almost free, and all a person needed to begin was a horse and plow. Success resulted from putting as much land under cultivation as possible.

As a result of Mrs. White's counsel, Adventist colleges and secondary schools settled on large

tracts of land where they established dairy herds and cultivated extensive acreage—often in single crops such as corn or wheat—for a cash market. In doing this they prepared young people both to establish themselves in their own country and to enter primitive mission fields as largely self-supporting missionaries who could teach their low-technology agriculture techniques to the indigenous peoples.

In other words, Adventist agricultural programs in the late 19th and early 20th century were inherently practical. Since these procedures fulfilled their objectives and harmonized with Mrs. White's counsels, Adventist schools have often felt obliged to continue the same programs into the last quarter of the 20th century.

Avoiding a Slavish Faithfulness

I believe that this slavish faithfulness to Adventist agricultural tradition is a serious problem. Many SDA agricultural programs are no longer as functional in preparing students either for the practical world of work or in furthering the mission of the church. As a result, many educational and conference administrators rightly question the value of such programs. But what can they do? After

TAXPAYERS with dependents

HERE'S A TAX TIP:

Beginning with your 1987 income tax return that you will file in 1988, you generally must list social security numbers for dependents who are at least five years old by the end of 1987. If any of your dependents do not have this number, get an application form today from the Social Security office in your area.



all, "Mrs. White has said. . . ."

However, the circumstances that made 19th-century models of agriculture functional in Adventist education have changed. In the industrialized nations, traditional agriculture (except for gardening to supply family needs) is now an expensive business requiring a major financial investment for both land and equipment.

Agriculture an Expensive Business

Unless a person has inherited land or has a large cash base, farming is hardly a practical trade to fall back on in difficult times. Rather, it is a capital-intensive enterprise. Complicating the picture for schools is the fact that advances in technology make it possible for a half-dozen workers to farm the same amount of land that occupied several hundred students using traditional equipment. In effect, this means that it would take vast amounts of land and a large outlay for equipment to employ the young people in a small college. As a result, agricultural programs in Adventist schools get shuffled to the sidelines, employing only a few students and making little impact on most aspects of the school's program.

Agriculture does help those students who will later work in capital-intensive farming and related fields. However, we must ask, "Are there models of agricultural education that could be more useful to a larger number of individuals in industrialized nations as well as to the mission of the church in developing countries?" The capital-intensive methods of agriculture taught in the schools in industrialized nations are not relevant to the plight of the average villager in the world's underdeveloped areas. Such people have neither large tracts of fertile land or the means to buy expensive equipment.

The answer to our dilemma is neither to sell school farms nor to inefficiently maintain them as symbols of collective guilt. The church should not discard valid principles from its past such as (1) agricultural training for the practical world of work for a reasonable number of its graduates, or (2) agri-

cultural training that is intimately related to the denomination's mission outreach.

Finding the Principles

Rather than "faithfully" and unthinkingly standing by past methods, Adventist leaders need to extract the timeless principles from inspired guidance. They should creatively seek to develop methodologies that will apply the intent of these counsels in current contexts. This could transform Adventist approaches to agricultural education and make such pro-

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grams a meaningful part of the church's worldwide mission.

Perhaps the most fruitful approach for Adventist schools in industrialized countries is to cease viewing agriculture from the 19th century model. They need to move from machine- and land-intensive (i.e., capital intensive) models to labor-intensive systems.

Since the schools have a large pool of laborers and a short supply of cash, they might be wise to move away from expensive programs such as dairy farming and single crops that utilize vast acreage. Instead, they can adopt such ventures as truck farming, hydroponic tomato production, or growing plants and shrubs for florists and nurseries.

These activities offer more potential profit with less investment by the school, as well as more employment for students. They also provide more carryover options for students who would like to establish their own businesses after graduation.

Programs with carryover options enable students to become self-sufficient without having to go into

debt. This certainly corresponds well with Ellen White's advice.

Some Adventist schools have begun to capitalize on labor-intensive agriculture alternatives. Weimar Institute, for example, harvests an average of 1000 pounds of vine-ripened tomatoes each week, year round. These, along with a large variety of other produce, are sold to local stores and restaurants.⁸ One has only to recall the price of vine-ripened tomatoes in January to realize the possibilities of this and similar programs.

Such projects are not being carried out only in sunny California. Several years ago I toured the year-round tomato greenhouse of the Black Hills Missionary College in South Dakota. They had a similar program, which found a ready market in nearby Rapid City. If such feats can be carried off in South Dakota, they can be accomplished anywhere; not only by schools, but also by the graduates of those institutions, who can duplicate such businesses with minimal funds.

Perhaps one of the most innovative agriculture programs among Adventist schools is that of Champion Academy in Colorado. Jerry Ellquist, the school's horticulturist, informs me that they currently have 20,000 square feet under plastic in a year-round greenhouse operation. In spring and summer they market ornamental plants to retailers throughout the Denver metropolitan area.

Campion's most innovative market, however, is in the winter. Throughout the ski season the school supplies fresh herbs and such exotics as sunflower shoots and edible flowers (for garnishing main dishes) to Colorado's many resorts. Beyond these markets, this year the school is raising 6000 poinsettias for the holiday season.

With the excellent potential of \$15 per square foot per year, the growing Champion greenhouse operation is an exciting venture. Not only is it aiding the school, but those student employees who have an entrepreneurial bent can purchase the products wholesale and market them at retail. Thus they have opportunities to develop both business and horticultural skills in

the same program.

Other Possibilities

A little ingenuity could develop other viable labor-intensive programs. These programs could include instruction in marketing techniques and the operation of small businesses, as well as agricultural technology. While such programs would not affect all or even most students in a large school, they would certainly fulfill the educational goals of Adventist agriculture more effectively than do present endeavors.

These enterprises could provide a necessary boost for Adventist agriculture. They would give more educated Adventists the ability to move to rural areas instead of to the big cities where most modern work is located. That opportunity, in turn, could help revitalize some of the rural churches that usually lose young people to urban areas. Adventist schools could thereby have a role in widening the options of those who were not born into a "landed family." Other students might use their training to develop family gardens or part-time businesses.

Agriculture and the Church's Mission

New approaches to agriculture could also have a significant impact on the denomination's worldwide mission. To prepare missionaries schools could offer courses covering the principles of agriculture and methodologies for applying this information in poverty-stricken nations. Students would learn about labor-intensive methods of farming, the mores and culture of third-world nations, marketing techniques appropriate to such societies, as well as instructional methods and principles of nutrition. In addition, they would be taught the technical-scientific knowledges and skills that are supplied to farmers by the county agent in the United States.

"High-tech" agricultural missionaries may have little to contribute in many localities, but "low-tech" experts could make a real difference in the lives of many individuals and the functioning of the church throughout the world.

Ken Flemmer of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) says that some of these ideas are already being carried out in Africa and other places through the training of lay agricultural missionaries.

Improving the Quality of Life

Flemmer points out, for example, that most Africans—including SDAs—live in rural areas and gain their livelihood from the land. Many members are "little more than subsistence farmers, producing barely enough to feed their own families." Such people can hardly be expected to support a rapidly growing church.

Flemmer calls for the training of lay agricultural teachers who can live in a village and teach improved methods. This not only provides a cash base for the support of the local church, but also serves as an arm of evangelistic outreach. Beyond that, it has obvious nutritional implications. "What," queries Flemmer, "would happen if each village had a self-supporting missionary?" He closes his article with an appeal to the Adventist Church to make a positive investment in village agriculture.⁹

For several years I have had concerns similar to Flemmer's. Unfortunately, Adventist schools in developed nations have done little to assist such agricultural endeavors as those sponsored by ADRA. If we were to seize this vision, we could generate research and develop innovative techniques that would substantially enhance the lives of people in preindustrial nations. We could also train agriculturalists to instruct Flemmer's indigenous lay missionaries in their homelands.

Developing such programs could help Adventist agricultural education to again contribute in a major way to the worldwide mission of the church in both industrial and developing nations.

The denomination's agricultural programs and school farms do not have to be symbols of guilt, when in fact they can be transformed into unlimited opportunities. Such a transformation, however, will take thought, the willingness to change, and a dedication to fulfilling the

true mission of the denomination. □

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publishing Assn., 1923), p. 319.

² _____, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1948), vol. 6, p. 179.

³ For more on the role of Avondale in the development of Adventist education see George R. Knight, "A System in Search of Identity," *The Journal of Adventist Education*, 48:4 (April-May 1986), p. 15; and Milton Hook, "The Avondale School and Adventist Educational Goals, 1894-1900," Ed.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1978.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1943), p. 349; _____, *Life Sketches* (Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1915), p. 374; _____, Ms. 92, 1900.

⁵ George R. Knight, *Myths in Adventism: An Interpretive Study of Ellen White, Education, and Related Issues* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1985), pp. 235-250.

⁶ *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 307.

⁷ *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 319.

⁸ "Farm and Greenhouse Operation," *Weimar Institute Bulletin*, special edition (October 1987), p. 11.

⁹ Phone interview with Jerry Ellquist, Nov. 13, 1987.

¹⁰ Ken Flemmer, "The Challenge of Village Agriculture," *Adventist Review* (May 21, 1987), pp. 8-11.

CAREER GUIDANCE AND SABBATH OBSERVANCE

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experiencing problems have been bank tellers. This part of the economy more frequently adheres to a traditional five-day week, and employs a higher percentage of white-collar and professional employees.

Employee Attitude Problems

A final factor that causes difficulty in a large number of cases is employee attitude and/or personality clash. An employee cannot control a supervisor who denies scheduling changes as a way of maintaining authority. But that employee can—and must—demonstrate a positive attitude toward his or her work. A productive and highly valued employee will have less difficulty resolving Sabbath conflicts.

Students rightly look to SDA schools for career guidance. Aptitude assessment and job training are not enough. Teachers and counselors must also help students choose occupations where they can avoid conflict between employment and Sabbathkeeping. □