

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT AGRICULTURAL SCHOOLS LAND-GRANTS AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL

Cathy M. Sutphin
John Hillison
Virginia Tech

Abstract

Congressional district agricultural schools were established in Alabama (1889), Georgia (1906), and Virginia (1908). This study used historical research methodology to determine the precedents established by the Congressional district agricultural schools for the cooperative extension service, teaching agriculture, and the conduct of research at experiment stations and farms. Numerous extension activities associated with the schools occurred prior to the passage of the Smith-Lever Act in 1914. The study documents how the schools had courses of study taught for agricultural education before passage of the Smith-Hughes Act in 1917. Typically, the agriculture teacher would teach during the school year and conduct demonstration work during the summer. Faculty members at the schools also worked with youth activities. In addition, with an experiment station or farm on the campus, research was conducted by both the faculty and students. An additional educational service achieved at the schools was that of teacher preparation.

The Congressional district agricultural schools activities of extension, teaching, research, and teacher preparation showed a great deal in common with traditional Land-grant universities. The funding sources helped set precedents with a combination of state funding through the Land-grant university and local support. Contemporary faculty members in Land-grant colleges of agriculture, extension agents, and high school agricultural education teachers must look to an earlier time than they usually do to find the beginnings of cooperative extension and secondary agricultural education. Both began long before the Federal acts that actually legitimized what was already going on in those fields. A significant model for the Congressional district schools was the Land-grant university. With extensive role model use and even administrative oversight, especially with reference to funding, the Congressional district agricultural schools had a marvelous model to follow in the already established Land-grant university. Is it no wonder that they became secondary versions of their role model?

Introduction

Most agricultural professionals are quite familiar with Land-grant universities and many claim such institutions as their alma maters. Such professionals would typically report that Land-grants have been and still are instrumental in the development of scientific agriculture. They would also report that Land-grants only exist at the higher education level. Such information is almost correct. However, during the late 1800s and early 1900s, there were secondary schools which so closely emulated Land-grant universities that they could be considered miniature Land-grants. Those schools were called Congressional district agricultural schools.

Congressional district agricultural schools were state and locally funded schools, which had the tripartite mission of teaching, extension, and research primarily in the field of agriculture. Such schools were located in Alabama, Georgia, and Virginia.

Conceptual Framework

Everything has an antecedent. Before agricultural experiment stations, instructional programs, and cooperative extension could exist on a large national scale, the Land-grant the Act of 1862 had to be passed by Congress and signed by President Lincoln. With the establishment of Land-grant universities agriculturally-based instruction, extension, and research all had physical and administrative homes. Before the innovative Acts known as Smith-Lever (1914) and Smith-Hughes (1917) could be fully implemented with extension agents and agricultural education teachers on the job and the total program functioning, grassroots efforts were already in motion. Many of the grassroots efforts occurred at Congressional district agricultural schools. In addition, precedents were established at the schools which helped cooperative extension and agricultural education get off to a fast start when Federal funding became available to the programs. In fact, both of the native Georgians who sponsored the 1917 legislation were cognizant of the Congressional district agricultural schools located in their home state.

The Congressional schools were quite innovative and meant a great deal to the communities in which they were located. In fact, there was even a degree of competition among communities to have the schools located in each one. True and Crosby, 1912. reported that in Georgia alone over \$800,000 was contributed by people in local communities for the schools. Carnes (1991) reported that farmers were more up-to-date in the community where a Congressional district agricultural school was located. One alumna (Hillison, 1988) reported the establishment of such a school was the greatest thing to happen to her home community.

Not only were the Congressional district schools very much like Land-grant universities, they also had close ties to such universities. It was not unusual for the Land-grant university in states with such schools to have administrative

oversight of the schools. State funding was sometimes channeled through the Land-grant university to the district schools. The story of how Congressional district schools got started and what they accomplished is quite an interesting one.

Purpose and Objectives

The major purpose of this study was to document the activities of Congressional district agricultural schools and to demonstrate how they were secondary-level versions of Land-grant universities.

Specific objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To document the establishment and early history of Congressional District Schools.
2. To document the extension activities of Congressional district schools.
3. To document the teaching activities of Congressional district schools.
4. To document the experimental farm utilization of Congressional district schools.
5. To document the teacher preparation at Congressional district schools.

Research Procedures

Historical research methodology was utilized to accomplish the objectives of the study. Both primary and secondary sources were used to obtain the information needed. Primary sources included journal articles, state statutes, minutes of meetings, school catalogs, script from an interview, and books. Secondary sources included magazine articles, doctoral dissertations, proceedings, bulletins, and books. Information was collected at numerous sites including the Library of Congress, National Education Library, National Agriculture Library, various Congressional district school sites, and various Land-grant university libraries. All references were subjected to both internal and external criticism which tests for accuracy of material and to determine if the material examined was authentic.

Findings and/or Conclusions

Establishment of Schools

Alabama established the first Congressional district schools on February 28, 1889 (Acts, 1889). Act No. 579 established two branch agricultural experiment stations and agricultural schools in the state (Acts, 1889). The Alabama farmers and Grange worked hard to establish such schools at a time when high schools were virtually non-existent in Alabama (Thompson, 1965).

Georgia established such schools on August 18, 1906 (Acts, 1906). The specific language of the Act stated

That the Governor is hereby authorized to establish and cause to be maintained in each congressional district of the state an industrial and agricultural school in accordance with the further provisions of this Act. Said schools shall be branches of the state College of Agriculture, a department of the University of Georgia. (p.72)

The governor at the time of full implementation of the Georgia Act was Hoke Smith. One of the Georgia schools was built in the home district of Congressman Dudley Hughes.

Two years after Georgia passed its enabling legislation, Virginia also established such schools (Acts, 1908). By 1910 the Virginia legislature was very specific in how its legislation was worded.

. . . that at least one public high school to be selected by the State Board of Education in each congressional district in the state, a thorough course in agriculture, the domestic arts and sciences and manual training shall be given in addition to the academic course prescribed for such high schools, and at least one-fourth of the school time shall be devoted to these subjects. (Acts, 1910, pp. 362-363)

The 1910 legislation also required the State Board of Education and the president of Virginia College of Agriculture and Polytechnic Institute in Blacksburg be the governing bodies of the schools (Acts, 1910).

Extension

There was a strong relationship between the development of the Congressional district schools and the beginning of extension work in the state. In fact the principal, who also served as an agriculture teacher at the school, carried on a great deal of extension work. The principal supervised home projects of his students, organized boys' and girls' clubs, organized farmers' institutes, offered responses to farmers and homeowners making agricultural requests, set up farm experiments and farm demonstrations, and traveled to other schools and community meetings to provide educational programming (Lane, 1915).

Extension work in the Virginia schools was especially strong where each of the 11 carried on some form of the work. The success of the extension programming efforts at these schools helped lay the groundwork for extension programming in the traditional areas of agriculture, home economics, and youth development. By doing so, the

Congressional district agricultural schools contributed significantly to the ultimate success of the extension program in Virginia.

Agricultural Education. The Congressional district agricultural schools conducted a wide variety of agricultural extension work. Most of the schools organized and conducted farmers' institutes which were typically 1 or 2 days in length. Farmers would gather at the Congressional district agricultural school and participate in educational programs conducted by faculty of the state agricultural college and other agricultural experts (Agricultural Instruction in High Schools, 1913). In addition, the farmers' groups often took field trips for on-farm demonstrations and frequently successful farmers shared information during the farmers' institutes (Siddons, 1994). The Manassas Agricultural High School organized the first farmers' institute for their school in 1908 and after three years had an average attendance of 75 farmers (Agricultural Instruction in High Schools, 1913).

As valuable as the information given by the speakers was, the social interaction was even more valuable. Rural citizens, at that time, were isolated by bad roads and by the lack of community spirit due, in part, to the rapid turnover in ownership patterns of farmland in the late 1800s (Agricultural Instruction in High Schools, 1913). The Congressional district agricultural school helped alleviate this isolation through the organization of farmers' institutes. Farmers and their wives attended the meetings and time was provided for social interaction.

Another area of agricultural programming conducted through the Congressional district agricultural schools was the winter short course program which was modeled after the short course offered by the agricultural college. Each short course concentrated on an agricultural topic of interest to the local community (Agricultural Instruction in High Schools, 1913). The target audience consisted of the sons of farmers. The youth did not have to attend the Congressional district agricultural school to participate in the short courses (Siddons, 1994).

The principal/agriculture teacher at the Congressional district agricultural schools also responded to requests for agricultural information, tested milk and seeds, carried out experiments on the school farm and with cooperating farmers, figured feed rations, and calculated fertilizer formulas ("Chartered in 1795", 1913). In addition, the agricultural teacher spoke to farmer groups, on road trips, and at other schools. Further, he visited the farms of his students during the summer to assist them in conducting their projects (Davis, 1981).

The following quote provides insight as to the similarities between the daily work of the Congressional district school principal and that of an agricultural extension agent of today (Agricultural Instruction in High Schools, 1913, p. 76):

In the village I am constantly called upon to prescribe for the ailments of flowers, trees, shrubs, and to destroy scales, plant lice, caterpillars, and miscellaneous bugs. Outside the village I am more and more frequently called on for expert advice on alfalfa, drainage, locations for orchards, sick cows, sick trees, and the like.

In the same article Professor Button, Principal of the Manassas Agricultural High School, explained that he wrote an article for the two newspapers each week. Mr. Button kept abreast of the latest research at the land-grant college and read current scientific publications in order to provide information to farmers.

It is interesting that the Appomattox Agricultural High Schools' song and the current 4-H pledge both use the words 'head, heart, and hands'. Following is the school song as remembered by Mary Inge, a graduate of the Appomattox Agricultural High School (Hillison, 1988):

Girded by a circling hill
Stands a high school proud and wide
The pride of every boy and girl
For she's known throughout the land
Highest purposes to stand
For the enlightenment of the head, heart, and hand.

In his 1914 annual report of farmers cooperative demonstration and extension work, Dr. Joseph Eggleston made the following statement concerning corn club work (Eggleston, 1914):

There is not a single reason why an intelligent, patriotic teacher or superintendent of schools should not give this work his enthusiastic support, while there is every reason that he should. The corn clubs should be organized by the teachers, and in most cases the agent should give his instruction through field meetings on the demonstration plots. I believe that in the future the work will have to be done this way. (p. 37)

Funding. The development of extension work at the Congressional district agricultural high schools led to the initiation of shared funding sources for extension programming. Several Congressional school principals simultaneously served as the county demonstrator. This was true of at least two of the Congressional district agricultural schools: Turbeville Agricultural High School ("Coming home," 1978), and New London Academy

("Chartered in 1795", 1913). During the 1914-15 school session, W. G. Wysor was teaching at the Lebanon agricultural high school two days a week and as the county demonstrator four days a week. Wysor was being paid \$750.00 from federal and state funds and \$750.00 from the county government (J. D. Eggleston, Jr., Eggleston collection, June 17, 1915). Several principals were employed for 12 months, nine months at the school and three months as a county demonstrator (W. S. Green, Eggleston collection, August 18, 1917).

Later the schools had a more formalized relationship as evidenced by school letterhead, which included extension farm and home demonstrators as faculty members (B. K. Watson, Eggleston collection, March 13, 1917). Another example was found at the Elk Creek Training School. In a letter to Dr. Eggleston, dated August 24, 1916, Principal Chas. Graham requested \$300.00 for the school's part of the county demonstrator's salary and an additional \$250.00 for organizing girls' clubs.

Instruction

The recommended course of study for the Georgia Congressional district schools was both comprehensive and practical. Lane and Crosby (1916) indicated the State College of Agriculture and the district school principals recommended a course of study that included English, mathematics, history, science, agriculture, farm mechanics, and domestic arts and science. The agricultural portion of the curriculum included general agriculture, poultry, rural school agriculture, feeding, general horticulture laboratory in pruning and spraying, popular fruit growing, soils, fertilizers, farm management, and landscaping. Farm mechanics instruction included freehand drawing, woodwork, forgework, and elementary farm surveying.

The recommended faculty for a Georgia school was: (1) The principal, who, the committee thinks should be an educator with an agricultural training. (2) A teacher of agriculture. (3) A teacher of science, who should be a man capable of assisting the professor of agriculture. (4) A teacher of mathematics and farm mechanics. (5) A teacher of English and history. (6) A teacher of domestic science. (7) A matron. (Lane & Crosby, 1916, p. 9)

Alabama had specific recommendations for the academic courses taught at its district schools. The science classes recommended were physics, botany, and chemistry. The mathematics recommended were geometry, algebra, and arithmetic. Specific recommendations on English included spelling and composition (An Educational Study, 1919).

Students in the high school agriculture classes attended the Manassas farmers institutes and wrote reports which served as material for both English and agriculture classes. According to the principal of the Manassas Agricultural High School, the reports on the farmers' institutes were the best English papers turned in at the school (Agricultural Instruction in High Schools, 1913).

Several examples of youth organizations can be found as part of the instructional program in Virginia district schools. The first corn clubs were organized through the Congressional district agricultural schools at Burkeville and Chester (Epsilon Sigma Phi, 1940). In 1909, the Chester Corn Club enrolled 25 boys and won the state corn championship (Chester Agricultural High School Catalogue, 1911). Each member of the club conducted a demonstration by growing an acre of corn. The stated purpose of the club was to create interest in practical farming among boys (Chester Agricultural High School Catalogue, 1911).

In 1910, Ella Agnew, State Agent Girls Tomato Clubs, started the first tomato clubs in Nottoway County through the Haytokah Agricultural High School. The purpose of the tomato club was to teach girls better methods of canning for family use and to make it possible for them to earn money for the sale of their product (Epsilon Sigma Phi, 1987). The Haytokah Agricultural High School also organized a poultry club for girls and boys.

Another Virginia Congressional district agricultural high school, New London Academy, had an active corn club from 1909 until it was converted into a 4-H club in the 1920s (Siddons, 1994). The corn club was selected as the Virginia state champion corn club in 1913. At that time there were 23 members. The school also had poultry and livestock clubs as well as a canning club (Siddons, 1994).

The agricultural clubs offered by the Congressional district agricultural schools were open to any youth. While most of the members were students of the school, several youth in the local community also joined the clubs (Third Annual Catalogue, 1912). Benson (1915) even suggested that boys and girls should be given school credit for their club work.

In addition to organizing agricultural clubs, the schools conducted youth work at rural elementary schools within the district in which the school was located. The principal of Manassas Agricultural High School, Professor Button wrote the following concerning the in-school instruction which he was conducting (Agricultural Instruction in High Schools, 1913, pp. 74-76):

Another successful line of work has been in the rural schools. As 75 per cent of the school children and practically all of the next generation of farmers attend the one-room rural schools. I have endeavored to reach them by such methods as would quickly interest them and were at the same time within reach of my very limited resources. My efforts to improve these schools are along two lines, the schools themselves and the future teachers who are now in the normal training class.

As all farmers keep cows and raise corn, I chose milk testing and seed-corn selection as the best topics for my work in the schools. I borrowed a Babcock milk tester from the dairy division of the United States Department of Agriculture, and with a small exhibit of choice seed corn I visit a country school each week. If the lesson is to be on milk testing, the pupils bring samples of milk and with these I instruct both pupils and teacher in the operation of the test.

Lane (1915) suggested several ways teachers in the instructional program could integrate with other programs to extend the classroom instruction in the fashion of cooperative extension and the youth organization experience possible for students.

(1) by supervising the home-project work of his pupils; (2) by directing agricultural instruction in the grades; (3) by organizing and following up boys' and girls' clubs; (4) by acting as organizer for the one week's short courses for farmers; (5) by offering personal counsel and advice on certain days to farmers of the community; (6) by assisting in organizing farmers' reading courses; (7) by directing school agricultural exhibits locally and at the county fair; and (8) thru (sic) Saturday meetings with farmers and by farm visitation. (p. 1134)

Experimental Farm

If it had not been for the research and experiment station portion of the Congressional district schools, the first state to establish such schools, Alabama, might not have passed its enabling legislation. Thompson (1965) held the opinion that the Alabama legislature was initially more interested in the experiment station part of the facility than the school part. The wording of the first act verifies his point.

. . . that the board must cause such experiments to be made at the stations as will advance the interests of scientific agriculture, particularly on Tennessee Valley lands, and on red pine lands and lands of similar character in southeast Alabama, and to cause such chemical analyses to be made as deemed necessary; all such analyses, if requested, to be made under the supervision of the commissioner of agriculture by the chemist of the agricultural department without charge. (Acts, 1889, p. 1037)

Carnes (1991) gave testimonial to the importance of the experimental farm at Albertville, Alabama school. He noted that the research was supervised by a practical farmer with help from the agricultural teachers and students on a 40 acre plot of land. He further stated

The farm and experiment station was a very important part of the school, and most of the school's emphasis centered around it. It was a teaching laboratory for the student, and they were required to do a certain amount of practical work on the farm every week. Before home economics was established as a course, the girls were required to do work in floraculture (sic) and horticulture. (p. 187)

Carnes (1965) further reported the use of research aspects of the farm. He noted that work with Auburn University and the United States Department of Agriculture meant the school had the very latest research information. Farmers in the community were encouraged to attend open houses at the school where research findings were shared.

The Second District Agricultural and Mechanical School located in Tifton, Georgia reported a farm inventory of "2 mules, 2 horses, 6 cows, 8 young cattle, 75 hogs, 100 chickens, \$400 tools, 1 barn, 47 acres cultivated last year, 35 acres more cleared this year . . ." (Georgia Department of Education, 1910, p. 168) The same report noted that the 1909 farm crops were valued at \$2,800. (p. 168)

A. C. True, director of the Office of Experiment Stations for the United States Department of Agriculture and also President of the American Association Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations, recognized the use of farms and research components at Congressional district agricultural schools by expressing a degree of concern about them. Charles Prosser, as a member of the 1914 Commission asked True if he was opposed to the establishment of experiment stations at such schools in the future if it was part of Federal legislation. True's response was "Yes, as a general rule" (Report, 1914, p. 212). In fact True and the Land-grant universities only supported the Smith-Hughes Act after it became obvious that experiment stations would not be part of future schools.

For most schools the experimental farm was a local contribution. Georgia farms averaged 280 acres. The schools received proceeds from the state oil and fertilizer taxes (Leake, 1915, p. 136). Using commodity checkoffs would become a very common way to fund experiment station research. Virginia school farms were from 5-20 acres in size (Hutcheson, 1910).

Teacher Preparation

Teacher preparation was a minor part of the purpose of the Congressional district schools. It was based primarily on the Lancasterian method of peers teaching each other. A typical situation was older students teaching younger students under the supervision of the school principal. Mary Inge, a 1915 graduate of the Appomattox school learned enough from that type of experience that she had a career as a substitute teacher (Hillison, 1988). Carnes (1991) reported more graduates of the Albertville Agricultural School had chosen teaching as a career than any other choice. He also reported that one district school had 65% of its graduates in the teaching profession (p. 208).

Implications and Discussion

Congressional district agricultural schools were truly innovative and precedent setting. They influenced the lives of thousands of graduates. They influenced the lives of an untold number of people, especially farmers, who lived near the schools and learned the latest in scientific agricultural research. The schools also influenced both the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 and the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 by being located in the home state of Hoke Smith and the home Congressional district of Dudley Hughes.

Congressional district schools truly emulated the structure and the success of the older and larger Land-grant universities. The traditional tripartite mission of extension, instruction, and research was achieved on the secondary level.

Perhaps today's high school agricultural education programs should place more emphasis on also emulating Land-grant universities. We would find contemporary programs that would provide instruction in classrooms, laboratories, and experimental farms. We would find agricultural education departments that worked more extensively with the community. Youth organizations would continue to play an important role in the department.

A magnificent model of cooperation was established between extension activities and instructional activities at the schools. There was no concern over which portion of the program received credit for winning certain contests. Both the extension activities and the instructional activities were provided by the same person. The youth organizations were commodity-specific, not general in nature as 4-H and FFA became. With the same person performing both activities communication could not have been better. Perhaps contemporary agricultural educators need to look to Congressional district agricultural schools to find more compatible partners. Do agricultural educators have more in common with peer extension agents or with other vocational educators?

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