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The Importance of Practical Training in Agriculture

A Message from

DR. R. NAGAN COWDA, M.Sc., Ph.D. (Iowa)
Minister for Agriculture

I am glad to be informed by the Secretary of the Madras Agricultural Students Union that they propose to bring out an Annual Number of the Madras Agricultural Journal. The journal is a useful medium for discussion of agricultural problems for the past and present students and the staff of the Agricultural Colleges in our State. I wish the journal many more years of useful existence.

On this occasion I would like to draw the attention of students and teachers of agriculture and the research workers to one important aspect of their training which unfortunately is being more and more neglected. I refer to the need for practical training in all farm operations which would enable one to observe with his own eyes and to do things with his own hands and thus verify and apply the knowledge that one gains through books or experiments in the laboratory. No graduate in agriculture or research worker or a member of the Department of Agriculture will be a true agriculturist without this practical knowledge. If you look back at the history of your own college you will find that in the early years agricultural education started with practical training. The Farm at Saidapet to train students preceded the School of Agriculture and was its fore-runner. Later on in 1902 on the report of Mr. J. Mollison, Inspector-General of Agriculture, it was decided to shift the venue of the college to a more suitable place 'in order to emphasise in the college course itself the practical aspects of agricultural studies.' The Royal Commission on Agriculture, 1928 again stressed the importance of practical training if graduates in agriculture were to have the confidence to give advice to cultivators. But the Commission were under no illusion that any arrangements during the academic course would entirely remove the cause of complaint that the training of graduates was not of a sufficiently practical character. They therefore suggested that further facilities for acquiring practical experience should be given outside the academic course. We in this State have lately realised the shortcomings of our agricultural recruits as practical agriculturists in connection with the Food Production Campaign. The Universities and the recently set up All-India Council of Agricultural Education are all agreed on the need for a practical grounding for our students. Certain proposals for intensifying practical training for students in this State are under consideration but I believe with the Royal Commission on Agriculture that no academic

device or Government compulsion could remedy the defect unless the agricultural graduates themselves develop a natural inclination to do all things from A to Z on a farm and learn to observe things with a scientific eye. Indeed this practical training is necessary not only to the students but also to the research scientists whose work will be unrelated to realities unless they go out to the field as frequently as possible and apply and test their experimental findings and continue intelligently follow-up observations instead of getting second hand reports. I have never been tired of suggesting that students of agriculture during their holidays and vacations should go to their own farms or other farms where their service will be accepted and do things with their own hands. Students who wish to do actual farm work on our Government farms or learn to handle agricultural machinery in Departmental workshops during their vacation would be accepted and be paid the usual wages. After graduation students who want to pursue their profession intelligently and with confidence would do well to work on a farm for a full crop season and do extension work in the neighbourhood. It is the only way to round off a useful education obtained at the colleges at considerable expense to themselves and to the State. By and by it may be necessary to have a compulsory apprenticeship in a farm before an agricultural candidate is recognised as a full-fledged agriculturist, but the time is not yet, as agriculture is not an organised industry and we have not got big farms which will receive apprentices. The practical training which I have pleaded for is the only way to make our college trained agricultural workers true devotees to the glorious science of Agriculture and true servants of the community.