

VOCATIONAL



AGRICULTURE

Texas women find opportunities, challenges, success in new field

By KIPP SHACKELFORD

The setting was League City, Texas, in the fall of 1974. A new teacher walked down the hall toward the classroom. When she opened the door and saw the students, she realized that everything she had been through to receive that teaching certificate was worth it.

So began a new type of career for Anna Beth Neason, the first woman to teach production agriculture in a Texas high school.

Neason grew up on a farm near Shiro, Texas, and there acquired much of her experience in agricultural practices. Upon graduation from Navasota High School in 1970, she entered Texas A&M University as a chemistry major.

It was in the summer after her freshman year that Neason talked with Dr. Herman Brown, professor of agricultural education at A&M, who encouraged her to change to that department and pursue a teaching career.

In the spring of her senior year, Neason began work in the student teaching block. This is a 15-week program, in which she spent six weeks taking courses in the fundamentals of teaching. Neason worked as a student teacher in Caldwell, Texas, for the last nine weeks. Upon completion of the program, she graduated from A&M with a specialty in horticulture and a teacher's certificate in hand.

Neason's first real job was at Clear Creek High School in League City, where she worked for two years. She taught production agriculture, which includes such subjects as leadership, record keeping, woodshop and welding. Other areas of the

course involved lessons in plant, animal and soil sciences.

Neason also taught an agricultural cooperative part-time training course in horticulture, which allows students to attend classes for half a day and work outside of school for the other half.

From there Neason transferred to Stephen F. Austin High School in Bryan, where she now teaches ninth grade production agriculture.

"I was eager to begin that first year of teaching, but was slightly unsure of myself, as this was a totally new field that no woman had ever taught in Texas before," Neason said.

Neason said she felt teaching might have been easier if she had been given the opportunity to experience the vocational agriculture program during her own high school years. She said girls in her hometown were not allowed in the agricultural programs until 1971, a year after she graduated from high school.

"Looking back at my first experiences in teaching, and remembering how uninformed I was and my many mistakes, it's surprising that I was able to accomplish as much as I did," Neason said.

Her current job does not merely involve classroom work, but includes many outside activities for the students. Neason is an advisor at Stephen F. Austin for Future Farmers of America Greenhands, which are first-year vocational agriculture students.

In the past nine years many changes have taken place in agriculture. One of the most recent changes, and perhaps one of the greatest, is the entrance of women into vocational agricultural education. Historically the field has been

considered a male-dominated profession, but this attitude seems to be rapidly changing, said Brown.

Today's world constantly faces social change as more and more women enter into professional, non-traditional fields. This is evident from statistics which show that there are 6.25 million women in Texas today, or 51 percent of the total population, compared to less than 6 million men. Predictions are that by the year 2000, the female population in Texas will reach 8.8 million, with the male population being approximately 8.4 million.

The Texas A&M department of agricultural education is aware of these trends and also of the severe shortage of vocational agriculture teachers all over the country this year. Dr. Earl Knebel, head of the TAMU agricultural education department, said there are more than 65,000 vocational agriculture students in Texas. Seven thousand, or 11 percent, of these students are women. However, only 40 women are currently enrolled in agricultural education at A&M.

Knebel said four women entered the teaching profession last year. In 1975 there were only three women vocational agriculture teachers in Texas, but this year there are 20.

"Almost any agricultural education student, male or female, who genuinely wants to work toward a teaching career would have an excellent chance at being placed into the field," said Knebel.

He said the women he has seen enter the agricultural teaching field have fared exceptionally well, earning the respect and confidence of their male counterparts.

Colleges are not only areas in

which women are becoming involved in agriculture. Female enrollment in high school vocational agriculture is rapidly increasing.

In a recent agricultural education workshop conference, sponsored by A&M's Collegiate FFA, high school students, parents and teachers evaluated the attitudes and problems facing women who anticipate careers in vocational agriculture.

The majority of parents and students at the conference felt that women are making slow but steady progress in agricultural teaching professions. Most of the students believed that women are just as qualified and capable of handling jobs in agriculture as male teachers in the same positions.

One problem discussed at the conference, which women agriculture teachers have encountered, was acceptance by male counterparts in school departments. Neason said she has found three main attitudes toward women. She said there are those who accept a qualified woman teacher with no problem. Then there are those individuals who are reluctant to accept a woman in the beginning, but who give them a fair chance by listening and trying to work out problems. Neason said the other attitude is that women do not have a place in agriculture, and never will have.

Janet Golub, a graduate of Cornell University in New York, is currently attending TAMU. Golub, who taught vocational agriculture in Vermont for one year, said she encountered some of the same acceptance conflicts as the only woman in a five-person department. Golub said the teachers were unsure at first, but eventually accepted her as she

proved to be qualified and competent in handling the job.

Another Stephen F. Austin High School teacher, Sue Rodgers, graduated from Texas A&M in agricultural education. Rogers said she found problems during job interviews, and at one point was told that women were just not hired to teach agricultural courses. She proved, however, that this is not the case and is now teaching a vocational education horticulture course for handicapped students.

A high school vo-ag teacher in League City, Cindy Schnuriger, said she had difficulty during her own high school years in convincing counselors that she wanted a career in agriculture education.

However, Schnuriger entered Texas A&M and is now teaching production agriculture. Schnuriger said she and male members of her department are presently working together toward creating activities which will help involve more high school girls in agricultural projects. They plan to experiment in team teaching of various subjects, such as farm shop.

Brown, who helped encourage Neason toward that first teaching position, said he feels that a greater percentage of women will enter into the teaching profession in the future, with the majority of male students becoming involved in agribusiness or returning to the home ranch.

He said, "There are prejudices in any kind of new practice. However, I think that these problems will work themselves out because there always has been and will continue to be a demand for competent teachers in agriculture, both male and female."

Texas A&M University Dairy Science Club exhibits cows, wins awards at State Fair

By LISA A. COTROPIA

Twelve Texas A&M Dairy Science Club members journeyed to the State Fair of Texas in October and returned to College Station with several awards.

They exhibited 10 dairy cattle--four Holsteins and six Jerseys at the Pan American Dairy Competition. Two of the 4-year-old Jerseys placed seventh and tenth in their class. A 2-year-old Jersey placed fifth in a field of 18. A Holstein senior yearling finished ninth out of the 25 entries, while a 2-year-old Holstein placed 11th in a field of 28.

In addition, the Aggies entered a Jersey cow in the Milking Derby. The cows were milked twice a day for three days. Entrants with the highest dollar value of milk for their breed won the competition.

A&M's Jersey captured her class by producing 55 pounds of milk a day with four percent butterfat. In overall competition, she placed sixth out of 24 competitors. The \$275 premium she won helped defray costs to Dairy Science Club members on the State Fair trip.

Dr. Chris Woelfel, the club's adviser, said the exhibitors followed a rigorous preparation schedule to ready the animals and themselves for the contest.

In September the cattle were selected from the A&M Dairy Cattle Center herd to compete at the State Fair. They were housed individually to receive special care until showtime. Every day, two club members cleaned stalls, fed, washed and practiced showing the animals until the night before the competition.

Woelfel was pleased with the competitors' results because "the exhibitors had little, if any, show ring experience."

"They had a lot of enthusiasm and worked real hard. I'm very proud of them."



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