

A FOOD BUSINESS CURRICULUM FOR ELEMENTARY EDUCATION - FOOD PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION - FROM FARMER TO CONSUMER

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Introduction

The Food Distribution Research Society is concerned about the total food industry. For the past several years the authors have been concerned about the lack of attention given to food business education in our elementary schools. The educational attention has focused on nutrition for the most part during the past years.

This concern was reinforced when, last May, assistance was given a sixth grade teacher in Terre Haute, Indiana, in developing a short learning experience in food business for his pupils. The experience was interesting but frustrating at the same time. The frustration resulted from the fact that no organized lesson plan exists for elementary school teachers dealing with food production and distribution. It was an experience in food business education.

There is a need for elementary education material and this need exists for several reasons. First, the food distribution system is not well understood by today's citizens. Second, more and more children have no rural or food production experience, and finally, fewer and fewer teachers understand the food industry.

Drastic price increases, product shortages, consumer pressure groups, and state and federal legislation have led to misunderstandings regarding the system of food production and distribution. These misunderstandings have created an atmosphere of distrust regarding cost and profitability information and have raised doubts regarding the credibility of industry spokesmen.

The difficulties discussed above have implications for the development of an indirect approach to economic education through a vehicle called "food business" education.

This all boils down to a need to upgrade our economic understanding of the food industry.

Can elementary students appreciate food business as a learning experience? The answer is reflected in a conversation with a potato chip plant manager who commented that the sixth graders being worked with asked more and better questions than did a marketing group from a local university. Elementary school students ask penetrating and interesting questions. They want and need information about our society, country, and human needs. We need to fill their needs. We need to satisfy

their curiosity in order to make them more informed and interested consumers and employees in the vital food industry.

The Bureau of Business Research, Indiana State University, is designing a prototype elementary education curriculum in food production and distribution. Presently a food business curriculum guide does not exist for elementary school teachers. There is a need for a structured, but flexible, curriculum which can be adapted to different time frames.

The Bureau is also considering a system of delivering relevant information and curriculum materials to elementary school teachers.

Curriculum related materials of value to elementary education programs have been developed by industry representatives, trade associations, and the Federal government. However, no effective system exists which identifies, acquires, evaluates, or disseminates the already available materials.

Currently, elementary schools do not have access to food production and distribution educational materials organized into learning units. As a result, the Bureau is developing the educational resources needed to meet the needs and will, in the end, provide a series of teacher guides, lesson plans, and material catalogs to elementary schools.

Achievements Expected

Broadly stated, the achievements of this project will include:

1. An increased comprehension and understanding of the food production and distribution industries of the United States through classroom and real world experiences.

2. Curriculum guides, lesson plans, and food industry information for the development of unique and innovative learning experiences.

3. Periodical reports on current food production and distribution developments; and an exchange of curriculum development experiences of teachers.

4. A teaching resource material center available to teachers and a distribution system for the dissemination of classroom materials.

5. An annual in-service training program for elementary educators, state department of education personnel, and others responsible for teacher and curriculum development.

Project Components

This project has two basic components; namely, curriculum development and curriculum support. Each of these components is briefly outlined in the following discussion.

Phase I - Curriculum Development

This phase involves the development of curriculum guides for food business, elementary education, and the suggested alternative lesson plans.

The specific components of Phase I are:

1. A food production and distribution curriculum for elementary school teachers.

2. Suggested alternative lesson plans.

3. The collection and evaluation of existing relevant information.

4. A pilot test of the curriculum and selected materials in several elementary classrooms.
5. A determination of the need for additional classroom materials.
6. The publication and promotion of the program through seminars and workshops.

What criteria should a curriculum meet?

Criteria in Curriculum Planning and Development

In the development of a curriculum guide, specific criteria must be met before implementation into the school system. A curriculum guide for elementary education in food production and distribution should answer the following basic questions:

1. Does a study of "Food Business" relate to other basic subjects and to the faculty and school system as a whole?
2. Is there time within the total commitment of the school to plan, develop, and utilize a food business curriculum guide?
3. Would a food business curriculum offer widened opportunity for participation of teachers, administrators, supervisors, community people, industries, and universities?
4. Are there cooperative ways of working with neighboring school systems, the state departments of education, universities, and the food business industry in the publication and promotion of the program?
5. Can a study of Food Business stimulate interest and learning, provide a variety of new skills, change attitudes

and values by providing opportunities for inquiry, discovery, participation, and examination of ideas concerning food production and distribution?

6. Can the necessary in-service education workshops and seminars be arranged for teachers who are willing to participate in the program?
7. How will the required instructional materials and equipment be made available?
8. Can the program be flexible in order to adapt itself to the nature of the community in which it will be utilized?
9. Can sufficient time be scheduled for pilot testing and continual and effective evaluation?

Structure of a Curriculum Guide in Food Business

There are various divisions of a curriculum guide. The following divisions are considered in planning a food production and distribution curriculum guide.

Selecting Topics

In developing a curriculum, major topics must be selected that should be treated in the content area of study. These specific topics become the scope of the program. They provide the emphasis and direction to the instructional planning.

At the present time the major topics to be covered are:

- I. Agriculture: An Introduction to Farming
- II. Food Processing and Preservation

III. Marketing

IV. Food Resources and the Role of Government in Agriculture

V. The Consumer

These, in turn, will be broken down into detailed subtopics.

Learning Objectives

A curriculum guide utilizes "learning objectives" which specify student achievements and suggest ways they should behave differently after studying the topic of food business.

Through the study of a unit in food business a student should acquire new attitudes and a better understanding of:

- a. The structure and functions of food production and distribution.
- b. The flow of food products from the farm to the grocery.
- c. The workers behind the production and distribution processes who together provide food for our country and other nations.
- d. The economic and social factors related to the crisis of overpopulation, inflation, and famine.
- e. The consumer's role in food marketing.
- f. The role of government in food production and marketing.

Subject Content

Many of the student's learning experiences will be a function of subject content. The level at which to start a topic, depth of treatment, and the variety

and extent of learning activities will determine the subject content.

Teaching/Learning Activities and Resources

Following "subject content" is the need for selecting instructional activities and resources which will be most efficient and effective in teaching food production and distribution.

Support Services

Directly related to the necessary instructional activities and resources are the support services required. These include funds, facilities, equipment, materials, and personnel, whose time must be scheduled to carry out the program.

Evaluation

Finally, curriculum development is a continuous long-range process. Evaluation must be an integral part of it. Evaluation serves two purposes:

First, it measures learning acquired by students, and, Second, it determines the weaknesses and facilitates recommendations for improvement of the food business curriculum.

A food business curriculum guide in elementary education should be flexible and adaptable to the various teachers, school systems, and communities in which it will be utilized.

The curriculum is subject to continuous revision as a result of the experiences of teachers who use it, the development of new educational materials by the food industry, and finally, by the influence of our constantly changing society.

The second phase deals with curriculum support. This phase is briefly described as follows:

Phase II - Curriculum Support System

This phase involves the development of a system for continuous materials collection and dissemination to elementary school teachers in support of the curriculum.

The components of Phase II are as follows:

1. The development of a prototype system for rapid educational materials dissemination.
2. The evaluation of the feasibility of the prototype system and an evaluation of the need for same.
3. The collection of multiple copies of materials for distribution and the cataloging of sources of materials and educational resources.
4. A pilot test of the system and the development of recommendations for improvements.
5. Developing an operational system.

Conclusion

The need for an elementary education program in Food Business has, to the authors' satisfaction, been clearly demonstrated. One way or another, a curriculum and related lesson plans will be developed by the Bureau, Indiana State University, and hopefully some interested benefactor or two. We look forward to developing a relevant, flexible, but comprehensive elementary education program in Food Business. Eventually it is hoped that this program can be expanded to middle school levels of education and to other sectors of the educational systems of the United States.

We are pleased that the Food Distribution Research Society invited us to present this paper and share our experiences and ambitions.

This is a healthy attitude and one which will benefit us all.
