

Duane Dailey photo



Because of his involvement in Agricultural Leaders of Tomorrow, Paul Siegel thinks beyond the rolling soybean and corn fields of Central Missouri farms. Gathering on the family hearth are, from left, Paul II, Sheila, Joshua, Barb, and Paul.

By Karen Worley

A crop of CAPABLE LEADERS



Larry Boehm photos

FARMER PAUL SIEGEL has "alot" on his mind besides livestock, crops and other agribusiness. Because of his participation in ALOT, Agricultural Leadership of Tomorrow, the 37-year-old Florence, Mo., farmer thinks beyond the rolling hills and creek beds of his Morgan County farm. Having just returned from a trip to California and Mexico, he's tuned into the rural problems of illegal immigration, stringent pollution control and scarcity of water. Thoughts of urban problems, snow removal, vandalism and welfare, linger from a new York trip a year earlier.

"I would've never had the opportunity to experience these things if

weren't for ALOT," he says. "It's not that we'll see a crop or machine we can bring back," Siegel says of his 65 days of travel and seminars, "but maybe a little idea." Today, those thoughts furrow his brow; tomorrow, the field of agriculture may reap the benefits, just as seeds planted in a field.

The W. K. Kellogg Foundation started ALOT in 1965 in Michigan. Currently, it's in operation in 21 states and the province of Ontario. Missouri's program began in September 1983 with a \$200,000 foundation grant. For the first 30-member class, 130 people applied, and 50 were interviewed. A majority of those selected, 25, are farmers. Rounding out the group are a veterinarian, grain

elevator operator, a Federal Land Bank officer and two agricultural consulting firm employees. One participant moved out of state, leaving 23 males and six females.

"THE CLASS is going to bring an even more enlightened leadership to things that relate to food and agriculture," says Agriculture Dean Roger Mitchell. "They're going to be people who see the big picture, understand some of the constraints and tradeoffs in a much more realistic way. They will not tend to take a partisan or parochial viewpoint."

On top of the Kellogg Foundation's one-time contribution, UMC supports the program indirectly by funding the



salaries of Director Ron Plain and his secretary and by providing meeting locations on Campus. Also helping are Farm Bureau, MFA and Farmland Industries, among others, which offer facilities for ALOT meetings across the state. Tuition costs \$1,000. Participants of the next class, for which applications are being accepted, will pay a \$2,000 tuition.

"With each year, we need to raise more money to continue the program," Plain says. Annually, \$100,000 will be raised through private fund raising to augment the original Kellogg seed money. Tax-deductible contributions may be sent to 200 Mumford Hall.

TO IMPROVE quality of life in rural America, the program takes people with strong leadership potential and provides skills that will help them become effective leaders. Agricultural economics Chairman Bruce Bullock likens the program to the Harvard philosophy: "Take successful people and make them more successful."

The man who leads the curriculum committee underscores the program's importance. "Since rural America has become a smaller part of the total population," says Dr. Daryl Hobbs, professor of rural sociology, "it's not as effectively represented as metropolitan or industrial parts of the country." The nation's farmers and their families num-

bered 30 million in 1940 vs. 8 million in 1984. Yet, fewer farmers are feeding more people. Missouri ranks second in hog farms and beef cows, third in soybean exports, and fourth in turkey production.

THE ALOT PROGRAM hopes to develop a group of men and women who can speak for and give an accurate public image of agriculture. But in order to have two-way communication, ALOT participants must understand how agriculture fits into an increasingly complex, interdependent world.

The program is rich with experiences designed to help participants increase self-confidence, develop constructive skepticism and social skills, become effective communicators, use time efficiently, and learn teamwork.

Before Siegel's ALOT involvement, his view of the world was more myopic. He farms 1,400 acres, some of which has been in the family for more than a century. While working on a bachelor's degree in agricultural economics at Mizzou, he was on Campus four weekends in four years; the rest of the time was spent helping out on the farm.

After graduating in 1969, he and his wife, Barbara, now 35, settled in a trailer a stone's throw from the white, two-story house in which he grew up and in which his mother, Roma, still lives. In

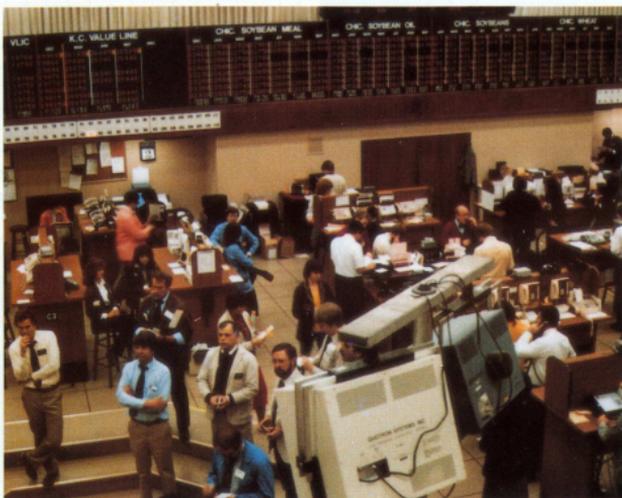
15 years of marriage, three children joined the ranks: Sheila, 13; Paul II, 11; and Joshua, 6. Their home has grown, too. The trailer went from a single to a doublewide, then they built a passive solar, earth-contact home with, not a south, but southeast orientation. "We needed to see the school bus coming," Siegel says.

But through his thermal-insulated windows, he can see some agricultural changes on the horizon, too. Siegel anticipates further involvement through the Farm Bureau and Missouri Clean Water Commission. "If a vote was coming up and I were talking to a legislator, I could make an intelligent statement instead of just saying I saw it on TV," he says.

Siegel furthered his political savvy by drafting a 1985 bill as an ALOT class project. Three participants, Stan Cook, Cecil Harness and Glenn Ridder, spoke on credit conditions of Missouri farmers at a Congressional hearing sponsored by U.S. Rep. E. Thomas Coleman, R-Kansas City. Their testimony was included in a report to the House of Representatives' agriculture committee.

A trip to the inner city of Kansas City influenced his opinion of social programs. "He had never realized people are that down," wife Barbara says. He learned "everybody's not able to do so much for themselves."

A trip to Washington called for a group shot in front of the White House. First row, from left: Duane Leimkuehler, Keytesville; Paul Siegel, Florence; Ron Brock, Stet; Robin Cross, Osborn; Pam Dowdy, Dexter; Andy Jackson, LaPlata; Joyce Niggley, Smithville; and Ellen Burkemper, Troy. Second row: John Gill, Kansas City; Keith Schnarre, Centralia; Gary Riekhof, Higginville; Fred Scherer, Bell City; G.A. Salmon, Creighton; Dennis Fulk, Platte City; Tom Morris, Vandalia; Susie Oberdahlhoff, Bowling Green; John Gibson, St. James; Jim McRoberts, Monticello; Dan Jennings, Sikeston; and Glenn Ridder, Marthasville. Third row: Cecil Harness, New Hartford; Tony Martin, Warrensburg; Tom Fowler, Unionville; Marty Hutcheson, East Prairie; Mark Clements, Lamar; Ron DeLong, Marionville; Stan Cook, California; Ted Abele, Nevada; Tim Kelley, Savannah; and Barry Slayton, Alton.



SOCIAL LIFE of the self-reliant Siegel revolves around St. John United Church of Christ activities in Florence, attending children's sporting or music events in Otterville and playing in a coed volleyball league in Sedalia. ALOT has taken ALOT participants to a symphony, Broadway play and a German-language opera. "I made it through two acts," admits Siegel of the opera, "but it's something I would've never done on my own."

An upcoming trip to Europe and Egypt this summer may change Siegel's thoughts on free trade. He feels the high value of the American dollar is holding down exports. "If we really want free trade, it's got to be both ways. Anytime we're importing more than we're exporting, that's bad. The high value of the dollar hurts us. Foreign countries can't afford to buy. I used to think it's unpatriotic to say the value of the dollar is too high, but we've got an overvalued dollar."

The economic situation for farmers could be better. Poor weather the past three years, compounded by high interest rates and low product prices, have some farmers in a bind. "It's all interrelated," Siegel says.

Especially hard hit are farmers who bought land at high prices in the late 1970s. In a survey of 2,500 Missouri farm families conducted by the agricul-

tural economics department and the Missouri Department of Agriculture, Bullock found 12 percent of farm real estate loans are delinquent on principal payments and another 10 percent are also delinquent on interest payments. For many farmers, farm income isn't enough to cover interest payments. Debts average more than \$100,000.

"In the 1970s, margins got smaller and smaller so farms got larger and larger," Siegel says. "Now, agribusiness is taking a different tack" of improving margins.

The Siegels are like 39 percent of families surveyed in 1983 in that their income includes a wife's earnings. Barbara sells Princess House crystal and works part time in a Sedalia dress shop. On the farm, he sells Vemeer balers, farm supplies and equipment and Pioneer seed.

The extra income was a welcomed diversification, Siegel says. But it's just one of many changes that need to be communicated. "Farmers understand what other farmers are saying, but they haven't been effective in communicating to the rest of our society," says ALOT Director Plain. "We take these people and give them some of the same experiences [agricultural activist] Wayne Cryts has had without their having to get thrown in jail or break soybeans out of an elevator."

From an observation deck, ALOT participants watch action on the floor of the Kansas City Board of Trade where agricultural commodities are bought and sold.

Even though Cryts has gained national attention, not everyone agrees with his methods. For Siegel, more effective representation could come through existing farm organizations as well as networking through ALOT alumni, such as the group of 450 California has been developing for 15 years. As a start at networking, he planned a February meeting of mid-Missouri ALOT members. When participants and spouses are counted statewide, "We've got 58 new friends for the rest of our lives."

"AGRICULTURE HAS A FUTURE, I feel, but it's up to all of us for it to have a bright future. I wouldn't trade it for anything. I hope to give back to the agricultural community some that I've been fortunate enough to gain," says Siegel, whose sons want to go into farming. "I don't plan to give up farming and go do something else. Farming comes first."

That's the kind of dedication Bullock expects from this crop of leadership. "It's not so much what they learn in the next two years," he says, "but how they apply it in the next 40." □