

3-1-1960

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Lee G. Burchinal  
*Iowa State University*

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## Recommended Citation

Burchinal, Lee G. (1960) "What's Your Son Going to Do?," *Iowa Farm Science*: Vol. 14 : No. 9 , Article 7.  
Available at: <http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/farmscience/vol14/iss9/7>

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# What's Your Son Going to Do ?

Many farm boys are and will be seeking nonfarm jobs. And the results of this one preliminary study indicate that nonfarm boys may currently have an "edge" over farm boys when it comes to competing for the nonfarm jobs.

by Lee G. Burchinal

**E**ITHER BY choice or necessity, thousands of young men from the farm are and will be seeking nonfarm jobs. Most of these jobs are in urban areas. And the farm boys who leave their communities must compete for these jobs with young men who've been raised and educated in rural areas, in small towns and in big cities.

How well are farm boys prepared to compete for these jobs? What initial and long-run advantages and disadvantages do farm youths have in competing with nonfarm youths for their places in an urban setting? Answers are important, because many farm youths will have to compete with their nonfarm counterparts in seeking favorable nonfarm jobs.

Some folks have suspected that nonfarm boys have an "edge" on farm boys in the competition for nonfarm jobs. And a single limited study recently completed at Iowa State does lend some support to this.

We obtained our information by questionnaire from 323 high school boys in the tenth and twelfth grades—103 farm boys and 118 small town boys who lived in the same west-central Iowa county and 102 boys who lived in a central Iowa metropolitan area. Rural nonfarm boys

were combined with small town boys since most of them lived in a county seat town of about 4,800 persons.

While the results don't necessarily represent the state as a whole, they do provide some information on how farm, small town and urban high school boys "stand up" with each other.

## What We Found . . .

*There were no substantial differences in school grades or participation in school activities.*

We questioned farm boys and small town boys who lived in the same county and attended the same schools about their school grades and school activities. There was little difference—except for a slight tendency for farm boys to be more active than small town boys in school activities.

*Farm parents were less involved in their sons' occupation plans.*

Almost 50 percent of the farm boys said that their fathers hadn't said much to them about occupation plans. This was true of 36 percent of the small town boys but of only 28 percent of the urban boys. Boys talked over occupation plans more frequently with their mothers. The figures here are 34, 27 and 23 percent for farm, small town and urban boys, respectively.

*Farm parents provide less encouragement for their sons' education beyond high school.*



We asked the boys in separate questions how their mothers and fathers felt about the boys' educational plans. The results indicate that:

1. Urban and small town parents are more likely to *definitely* encourage their sons to consider education beyond high school. For all three groups, mothers were rated more frequently than fathers as definitely encouraging the boys to go on. For example, 32 percent of the farm boys said that fathers definitely encouraged them to plan for education after high school, while 47 percent reported definite encouragement from their mothers. Corresponding figures for small town boys were 47 and 66 percent for father and mothers,

LEE G. BURCHINAL is assistant professor of rural sociology and a member of the Center for Agricultural and Economic Adjustment.

respectively; for urban boys, 65 and 76 percent.

2. Farm, then small town, parents were more likely to be rated as being *interested* in their sons going on, but *not* pushing them to do so.

3. Farm, then small town, parents also were more frequently rated as being "not too concerned" or as being against the educational plans of their sons.

*Farm boys less frequently reported educational plans of any sort beyond high school.*

A full 30 percent of the farm boys—compared with 18 percent of the small town and 12 percent of the urban boys—reported that they had *no* educational plans beyond high school.

*Farm boys less frequently plan to enter college.*

About 47 percent of the farm boys said they plan to enter college—compared with 62 percent of the small town boys and 81 percent of the urban boys. About 23 percent of the farm boys, 20 percent of the small town boys and 7 percent of the urban boys said they planned education after high school in the areas of business or vocational training.

*Among boys planning to enter college, farm boys had less frequently chosen their college or university.*

Of the high school seniors planning to enter college, 60 percent of the farm boys, 63 percent of the small town boys and 80 percent of the urban boys said they'd already selected their college or university. Though there were differences among boys at different grade levels in high school, the same trend was observed.

### **Differing Views . . .**

We asked the boys, "Generally speaking, what do you want most from the job that you want to make your life's work?" The answers that the boys checked included: Be my own boss. Chances for advancement. Friendship of fellow workers. Work which will be interesting. Pleasant working conditions. Intellectual challenge. Opportunity to be someone.

Chance to make good money. Chance for good hard physical work.

Responses showed that "work which will always be interesting to me" was rated as of highest importance by farm, small town and urban boys. The three groups rated "advancement on the job," "chance to make money" and "pleasant working conditions" in about the same way as of moderate importance. "A job which will give me an opportunity to be somebody" or one providing a chance for physical activity rated low for all three groups of boys.

But there were definite differences between the farm and other boys for three of the work conditions. Farm boys rated "being my own boss" as highly important. Small town and urban boys attached only moderate importance to this. And, while farm boys rated "friendship of fellow workers" as moderately important, small town and urban boys rated this as of low importance. On the other hand, farm boys rated "intellectual challenge of the job" as of low importance, while small town and urban boys ranked it as of moderate importance.

*Farm boys, as a group, plan to enter occupations with probable lower income and prestige.*

We found that more of the farm boys, as compared with small town or urban boys, plan to enter occupations with low prestige ratings—according to prestige rankings of occupations made by a national sample of U. S. adults. Manual, unskilled, semiskilled and some clerical and sales jobs were included in this category. Of the farm boys, 43 percent said they planned to enter occupations that received low prestige ratings by the national sample. This was true for 39 percent of the small town and 28 percent of the urban boys. These occupations generally don't require considerable training.

Choices by farm and urban boys for occupations in the middle prestige range were fairly similar, 28 and 26 percent, respectively. Fewer, 19 percent, of the small town boys indicated they planned to enter occupations in the middle prestige range. The national sam-

ple included in this range such occupations as technicians, retail businessmen, teachers, druggists, farm owners and operators, farm managers and other business and sales managers.

High income and prestige occupations, as rated by the national adult sample, included lawyers, doctors, clergymen, accountants, school administrators, architects, veterinarians and all of the fields of engineering, science and mathematics which required at least a college education. About 19 percent of the farm boys, 30 percent of the small town boys and 46 percent of the urban boys reported plans to enter these occupations.

The farm and small town percentages don't add to 100 because 10 percent of the farm boys and 12 percent of the small town boys reported they hadn't decided what occupation they'd be most likely to enter. But all of the urban boys indicated an occupation which they'd thought about pretty seriously.

*Farm boys who said they don't plan to farm more frequently planned to enter low prestige occupations.*

About 72 percent of the farm boys indicated they didn't plan to farm or were undecided about farming. Of these, 31 percent planned to enter the low income and prestige occupations, about 28 percent planned to enter middle range occupations, and 26 percent planned to enter high prestige occupations. Approximately 15 percent of the boys who didn't plan to farm hadn't yet made up their minds on what other occupations they might follow.

### **What Does It Mean?**

Admittedly we're working with only a few pieces of the total picture. We have only the statements of the boys regarding their educational and occupational plans. We don't know if they'll carry out these plans. But the boys' ideas about these plans are still worth looking at. From the information from this one study, it looks as if farm boys, as a group, have to "come from behind and catch up" with the small town and urban

boys in terms of job competition in urban settings.

Farm, small town and urban boys probably are no different when it comes to actual basic abilities. Our findings indicate that farm and small town boys receive about the same grades in school, and their intellectual abilities are probably similar. There's no convincing argument that urban children, as a group, are more intelligent than rural children. We also found no substantial difference in school activity participation. So, without evidence to the contrary, we may assume that farm, small town and urban children are pretty well matched.

But our findings indicate that the similarities end at about this point. On all of the remaining points on which we obtained information, farm boys and their parents came out less favorably than small town and urban boys and their parents. By "less favorably" we're speaking in terms of the realities of the educational and occupational competition which farm youths must face when they leave their farms and home communities.

Once we found that fewer of the parents of the farm boys had definitely encouraged the boys to plan for further education, it wasn't surprising to find that fewer farm boys planned to continue training beyond high school. This may be the reason also that considerably fewer farm boys planned to enter college—and that fewer of the boys who said they thought they'd enter college hadn't yet chosen their college or university.

When we found that fewer farm youths planned to take business or vocational training or to go to college, it also followed that the occupations they expected to enter were lower on the prestige-income scale. This, too, may be partly because farm parents apparently discuss occupational plans with their sons less frequently than do small town and urban parents.

### **Look Again . . .**

As farm-oriented people, we like to think of the virtues of farm over city life. There are some—to us. It's often said that family

living among rural families is superior to family living among urban families and that farm life generally is superior to city life. But, here, we're getting more and more into areas of values, viewpoints and judgments. These differ considerably among individuals.

Each way of life, farm and city, offers certain advantages and disadvantages, and we're free to rate and view them as we choose according to our values, viewpoints and judgments. Individuals, thus, rate and view the advantages and disadvantages differently; an advantage to one may very well be considered a disadvantage by another.

The point is that many farm youths are and will be having to come to terms with the advantages and disadvantages of urban life. Those who will, through circumstances or choice, be working and living in an urban area need help in making intelligent job choices—and adequate counsel and training for these choices.

Farm youths and their parents are going to need to think carefully about these conditions. Once, a high school education or less was sufficient for successful farm operations or for seeking satisfactory nonfarm employment. In some cases it still is—when coupled with experience acquired over time. But it's becoming increasingly necessary to have training beyond high school both for getting started in and for carrying out successful farm operations and nonfarm employment.

We have plenty of unskilled and semiskilled workers. We need trained craftsmen, technicians, mechanics, salesmen and accountants, to mention a few—as well as social workers, teachers, engineers, scientists, mathematicians and doctors.

It may be that small town and urban parents live and work in environments that place emphasis on preparing for occupations of one's choosing. Many of these parents left farm homes themselves and made the transition to nonfarm life and work.

Present farm parents, on the other hand, haven't gone through

this farm-to-nonfarm transition and the resulting adjustment in their life and work patterns. They moved easily from the farm homes in which they were reared into the farm homes they established after marriage. But, now, many of their children are faced with the farm-to-nonfarm transition and the consequent adjustments. The parents, generally, haven't the background of experience in nonfarm job selection and necessary educational training that small town and urban parents have had. This makes it extra important for farm parents to recognize the value of *home and school* preparation of their children for their life's work.

Rural as well as urban society can prepare its youth to fill the ranks of needed occupations. But, on the basis of this one study, it looks as though young men from the small town and urban environments may currently have an edge over farm youths—both in their training-educational and occupational plans and in their *hopes* for them! But assuming roughly equal abilities—and there's no evidence to the contrary—this edge doesn't need to continue.

### **Closing the Gap . . .**

Rural youths deserve an equal opportunity for competition with their small town and urban counterparts in terms of educational and occupational success. Some things already are helping to close the gap. School reorganizations and changes in course offerings and content are bringing rural and urban educational systems more into line. The 4-H programs are focusing more attention on career selection. The State Employment and Security Commission is helping to provide testing and educational guidance services in Iowa high schools.

But parents, too, have a role to play in shaping their children's occupational and educational plans. Remember that our results indicate that farm parents—especially fathers—are less active in encouraging their sons to plan past high school education than are urban and small town parents. And this seems to be reflected in the plans of their sons.