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Lee G. Burchinal  
*Iowa State University*

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# Who Are Our Future Farm Homemakers?

A young woman's future in our society depends a lot on the man she marries and his choice of a career and location. We found the plans of farm girls less definite than those of farm boys, but there are still some implications.

by Lee G. Burchinal

**F**ARMING IS a family enterprise. It has become increasingly complex as have our lives in general in this day and age. But there are few, if any, other enterprises in which the business and household or family living are so closely associated.

In the April issue (see "Who's Going to Farm?" or reprint FS-864), we presented our findings about the characteristics of some Iowa farm boys who plan to farm. The results of a similar study of farm-reared girls furnish tentative indications of the characteristics of some of Iowa's future farm homemakers.

Our preliminary study included 80 farm girls attending high school in a west-central Iowa county. In the absence of more extensive information at this time, let's look at the clues our findings provide.

Of the 80 farm girls, 69 percent said they definitely or probably would become farm wives; 31 percent said they definitely or probably would not. We asked the girls to assume that income prospects would be about the same in either case and to assume that the young man that each might marry—whether planning a farm or

nonfarm career—would be of comparable looks, personality, etc. How are the two groups of girls similar or different?

## How They Compare . . .

We found no differences between the two groups in scholastic grades. The girls who thought they'd become farm wives were slightly more active in school activities. We found no differences between the two groups when they rated their preferences or dislikes for physical or intellectual work.

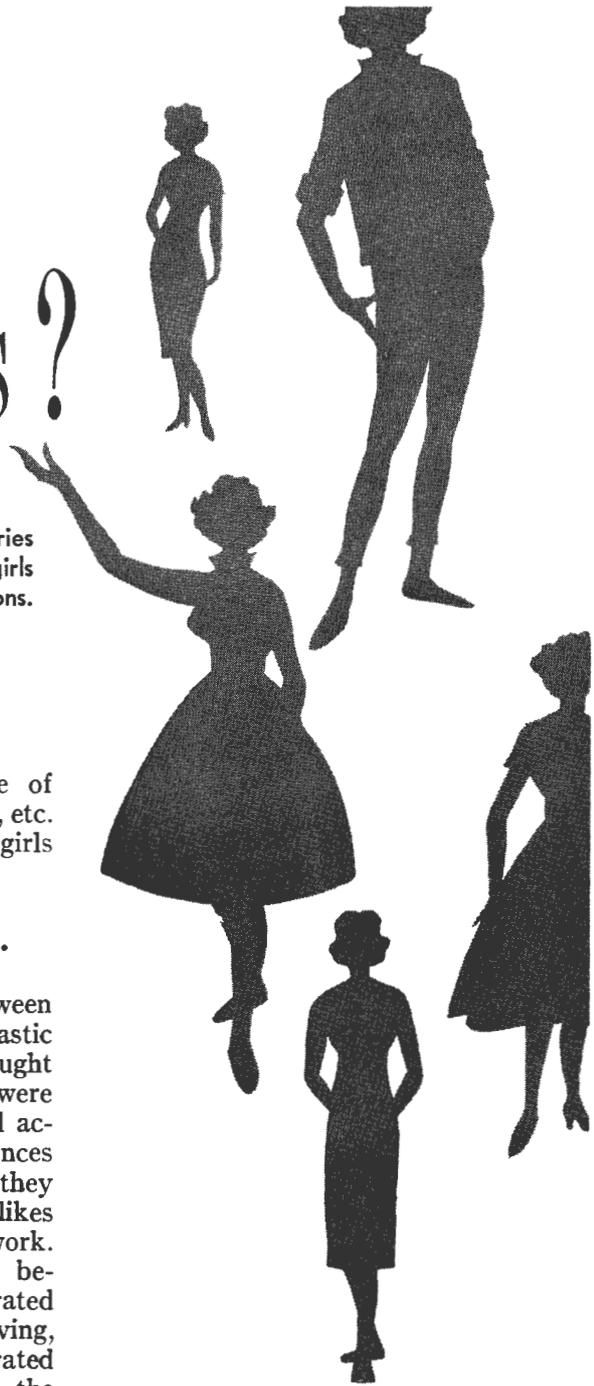
Girls who thought they'd become farm wives generally rated farm life as superior to city living, though many in each group rated each way of life as about the same.

## Their Future Plans . . .

More than 90 percent of both groups of girls thought they might plan to work for awhile before marriage. As to future educational plans, we found that the girls who thought they'd become farm wives less frequently planned for education beyond high school than did the girls who thought they wouldn't become farm wives. Of those who did have future educational plans for college or noncollege training, the potential farm wives more often than the other group did not plan for college but

planned on business, vocational or some other noncollege type of training.

Among the girls who thought they'd become farm wives, the single most important reason given was, "The person I am pretty serious about is going to farm." Other reasons of secondary importance that ranked about the same were: "I wouldn't want to leave the farming way of life"; or put the other way around, "I wouldn't like living in the city"; and "The farm is the best place to raise a family." Several other reasons, barely cited: "My parents want



LEE G. BURCHINAL is assistant professor of sociology and a member of the staff of the Center for Agricultural and Economic Adjustment at Iowa State.

me to marry a farmer," and "I don't want to leave my family."

The single most important reason given by the other group was, "I would just dislike being a farm wife." The next most often mentioned reason was, "I just haven't met the type of fellow whom I would think about marrying and who is a farmer." Of third importance: "It takes too much money to get started (in farming)." Other reasons cited less frequently were: "A family can't make a decent living at farming"; "There are little social, recreational and other community activities in farm communities to interest young people even if they want to farm"; and "My children wouldn't have all of the advantages that I want them to have if I stayed on a farm."

### Less Certain . . .

We haven't gone into so many details for the farm girls as we did for the farm boys. One reason is that we'll have to regard the preferences and plans of the girls as "less certain" than those of the boys in terms of the possible actual outcomes.

The future of a young woman in our society hinges considerably on the man whom she marries. The husband and his choice of a job or career pretty much determine where she'll live, how much income she'll have available and many other facets of their family living.

In this study we asked high school farm girls to look into their futures and, in effect, judge the likelihood of their becoming or not becoming farm wives and homemakers. This has certain limitations. The majority of the farm girls said they'd prefer to marry a young farmer than a young man engaged in some other occupation "if all things were equal."

Their statements of preference, however, may not coincide with their actual marriages. Some girls who think they might marry a young farmer may not "meet the right guy" who plans to farm. Other girls who think they wouldn't marry a young farmer "if all other things were equal," likewise, may fall in love with and marry a

young man who's going to farm. Or if definitely opposed to becoming a farm homemaker, they may avoid serious dating relations with young men who plan to be or are farmers.

We have only the statements of preferences from the girls. We don't know how their marriage plans will actually work out. But let's assume that actual developments will pretty closely follow the girls' preferences and see what clues and possible meanings we can find.

### Girls More Alike . . .

We found fewer differences among the girls than we did among the high school boys who planned to farm, to enter nonfarm jobs or were undecided. Whether the girls preferred to marry a young farmer or a young man in some other pursuit, the girls tended to be more alike than the boys.

This is likely because a man's occupation (as a career and source of the family "bread and butter") often is the single most important activity in his life. For women, home and family activities more generally are the most rewarding and satisfying things in their lives. This doesn't mean that the setting, farm or nonfarm, of the home and family activities isn't important to young women. But the actual location of the home may be secondary—with primary importance attached to the personality, earning ability and other characteristics of the future husband.

### Why Differences?

The main reason given by the girls who thought they'd become farm wives was that they already were "serious" about a young man planning to farm. All but 10 percent of these girls rated farm living as at least equally or more appealing than life in a city. The combination seemed to be a preference for farm living and the development of a basis for marriage and family life that would be compatible with this preference.

Most of the girls who thought they would *not* marry a young farmer also preferred farm living

over city living, but they disliked the idea of being a farm wife. They seemed to be saying that they like rural, but not necessarily farm, living but didn't like some of the conditions attached to managing a farm household. Another reason they gave was that they hadn't met "the right guy" who was both planning to farm and a person with whom they'd consider marriage. This could change. But the fact that they hadn't met the "right guy" may mean that these girls had different ideas than the other girls about the type of man they wanted to marry, when they wanted to marry and the level of living they wanted.

Some clues in our findings have a bearing on this point. More of the girls who said they wouldn't marry a farmer were planning to go to college. And we found in another part of the study that more of the mothers of these girls were definitely encouraging them to go to college. College plans may cause these girls to put marriage plans later in their lives, and marrying a local boy may be less likely whether he is farming or in a nonfarm pursuit.

There's also the possibility that, because some of the farm girls were already in love with a young man who planned to farm, they saw no reason to plan for further education. Their parents may have been less likely to encourage additional education for the same reason. If so, this view tends to assume that a modern young farm homemaker doesn't need the additional education or training that more of her urban counterparts intend to get.

Of the tentative findings in this limited study, the indication of a probable lower educational level of future farm wives compared with the girls who will more likely migrate is the most disturbing. While our study was too limited to permit positive conclusions, the findings suggest the possibility that adequate education for home, family and community life and responsibilities for future farm homemakers may be being "sold short" — to the extent that rural communities need and will continue to need intelligent, educated and responsible women.