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Sources of Home Economics Research

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Most of us take for granted the fact that there is a great deal of research being done in home economics throughout the United States. Yet that field of research is vague to many of us. We know the research is being done; we may even know who is doing some little bit of it; but we do not all know the basis and background for it.

Upon investigation, we find that the research work in home economics is developed from three sources; namely, the Purnell Act, the Bureau of Home Economics and the National Research Council.

National home economics research work was begun in 1916 with the establishment of the National Research Council. This council is a cooperative organization of scientists, technical men and business men interested in industry. The real father of the organization is the National Academy of Sciences, enjoying the cooperation of the major scientific and technical societies of the country. The membership is composed largely of appointed representatives of these societies, of other research organizations, of government scientific bureaus, and a limited number of members at large.

President Lincoln approved the charter for this society, with the passage by Congress, in 1863, and since that time the Academy has been official advisor of the government in a wide variety of questions.

In 1916 the society offered its services to President Wilson, who accepted the offer and requested the Academy to organize the scientific resources of the country in the broadest and most effective manner. In response, the present National Research Council was organized.

Since the war, the Council has directed its efforts to the promotion and support of scientific research in general. The Council is composed of eleven major divisions arranged in two groups, of science and technology, the other of general relations. Publications, including both bulletins and reprints, are issued periodically by the organization.

Five million dollars have been given to the organization by the Carnegie Corporation. Special gifts are also donated occasionally, and thru these special gifts, the Council has established permanent quarters in Washington, and has started many projects for special research work, including research fellowships.

This is an organization which hopes to bring together scattered research work and workers to assist in coordinating, in some measure, scientific activity in America on large problems in any and all kinds of scientific activity, including home economics research.

The next organization established for the furthering of research work, primarily for home economics, was the Bureau of Home Economics. In 1923, investigative work was promoted by this organization for the first time, and since that period, the amount of research and extensive home economics work done has been amazing. During the fiscal year ending June 30, 1927, a total of $127,000 was available for use in the work.

The Bureau is under the supervision of Dr. Louise Stanley, who has on her staff many members whose names are familiar to us: Ruth O'Brien, Charles G. Woodhouse, Ruth Van Deeman, Greta Gray, Mary Aleen Davis, Edith Hawley, Charlotte Chatfield, Maude Campbell.

Investigational work is carried on by the Bureau in foods and nutrition, textiles and clothing and economic problems. Research bulletins and papers are issued with the results of the work. The organization is the national agency for the collection and distribution of data on food consumption. The Bureau furnishes information for the guidance of production and basic work for educational programs in nutrition. These are both greatly needed when so much misinformation about food is being circulated widely by food faddists. Advice is given concerning the utilization of products of cooperative organizations.

Studies on methods of keeping accounts have resulted in the preparation of an account book based on the forms found most useful by women cooperating in this study. Long-continued time studies on how the rural housewife spends her time, and how she can best spend it are furnished.

During the past year, all available figures on the composition of retail cuts of beef, veal and lamb, and the more useful fruits and vegetables, were analyzed and prepared for publication. Because of the emergency situation that arose in the cotton market, many studies have been started on textiles, with the centering of the work on cotton. Numerous surveys are being made constantly.

The Bureau continues its cooperation with the Bureau of Animal Industry and state experiment stations in the important national project on factors which affect the quality and palatability of meat.

The major effort in publicity has been the radio releases which are sent out each week, including subjects on meal planning, food preparation, clothing selection, budgets and other subjects related to the home and to the interest of the homemaker—that newly recognized professional woman. These releases have been sent about five times a week to about 25 stations for broadcasting, under the caption, "Aunt Sammy's Household Chats."

Last, but certainly not least, is the Purnell work. The Purnell Act, which went into effect July 1, 1925, was the first federal legislation authorizing increases in the amount of federal support for research by experimental stations in agricultural economics, rural sociology and home economics. Previous to the passage of the Purnell Act, the stations had been doing much experimental work, but developing the research to the extent it merited was prevented by the lack of means and trained personnel.

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This Act authorized an appropriation of $20,000 for the year ending June 30, 1926, with annual increments of $10,000 thereafter until the total amounts to $60,000 annually for each state. This money is used for “paying the necessary expenses of conducting investigations, or making experiments, bearing directly on the production, manufacture, use, distribution and marketing of agricultural products and including such scientific researches as have for their purpose the establishment and maintenance of a permanent and efficient agricultural industry, and such economic and sociological investigations as have for their purpose the development and improvement of the rural home and rural life.”

The projects in home economics fall under the general heads: foods and nutrition, including studies on vitamins and the importance of other minute food accessories, household management, and clothing and textiles. The aim of the investigation is purposeful, thorough, conclusive and progressive from one point to another. The ultimate aim is to be practical and to give practical facts. The object is to advance the science as well as the art, to improve the art on the basis of science.

At the present time, Iowa, with all of the work carried on in or near Iowa State College, has $7,850 with which to carry on investigations in just home economics under the Purnell Act. The work at Iowa State is being supervised by the following people: Dr. P. Mabel Nelson, A. T. Erwin, M. D. Helsor, J. B. Davidson and Dr. E. E. Hoyt.

The outlook for productive research in home economics is especially bright, with all of the projects and investigations being carried on under the direction of these three organizations.

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Cotton Is Back Again
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twenty counties in Iowa. This girl was chosen by the club to make her dress and represent them at the style show in Ames. Each girl made for herself that dress which would best interpret her own personality through the fabric. At the style show in Ames, where the finished dresses were exhibited, Miss Irma Miller of Poweshiek County was chosen as having best succeeded in interpreting herself through her dress. The county of the winning girl received $100, the county of the second place winner was given $50 and the county of the third place winner received $25. In addition, each county participating in the contest was given $5.

This project was backed by the Textile-Cotton Institute to stimulate the use of cotton fabrics, and to show the possibilities of this fabric. This contest was the first of its kind, and was marked by the unusually fine results in dresses of cotton fabrics.

New, bright, smart cotton fabrics are in increasingly great demand for dresses of many types, but the possibilities for its use are unlimited, and extend with the development of new styles of the cotton fabric.

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