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Friend to Homemakers

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Extension Home Economist . . .

Friend to Homemakers

by Jane Hammerly
Technical Journalism Junior

IF SHE DOESN'T KNOW, she'll find out. That's the motto which applies to every county extension home economist.

The county home economist is an employee of Iowa State College, the United States Department of Agriculture and the county in which she works. She is a teacher, a member of the college faculty, but she teaches homemakers in her county in their own homes, over the telephone or in organized groups. She teaches them what they want to know about home economics and related fields.

Her job is to serve the people, to provide the programs which they desire. Not strictly an academic teacher, she works personally with the homemakers and their families in her county. She gives them guidance and inspiration for better family living, helps them become better citizens and develops leadership.

Works with all Ages

With whom does she work? And how does she go about her teaching? The county home economist works with any individual or organization in her county which requests her assistance. The 4-H, Rural Young People, and the young married groups are some of the young people's organizations with which she works. Much of her time is given to working with adult groups also. She is the college representative in her community. Through her cooperation with the organizations in her county, she brings science to aid the homemaker.

To accomplish all these things by herself, the extension home economist would have to work 24 hours a day. That's where leadership development comes in. She trains local women to be 4-H club leaders, for example, and she informs them of the things the girls use in their program for the year. Likewise, she trains leaders for adult groups.

Betters Family Living

Much of the home economist's work, of course, is in the field of home economics and the betterment of family living as a whole. A farm woman has expressed her ideas on what she has obtained from working with the county extension home economist. . . . "Although I live in only a little cottage, I have food prepared and served in the right way, beds made correctly and plenty of fresh fruits and flowers. Through extension work we have learned to make the best of what we have and in that have found contentment."

One very effective way the home economist can reach all the people of her county is through constant use of radio, television and newspaper. The growing demand for her help requires her to be constantly up to date on information in her area of work. To go into extension work she needed a degree in home economics and an interest in working with people. While on the job she still receives specialized training in fields such as kitchen planning, tailoring and nutrition. Not only is she trained in the specific subject matter, but in the methods of conducting a workshop.

One county worker heard a farmer mention he didn't think the farm youth of today had a broad enough background of American agriculture as a whole. She started thinking about that. What could she do to help the youth gain more knowledge? She organized a 4-H exchange with about 90 young people from her county going to North Carolina for a week. There they studied the different farming methods and got acquainted with new people. The next year Wyoming 4-H'ers came to her county and did the same thing. All this sprang from a small comment to just the right person, the person with initiative enough to put the plan into action.

Helps Individuals

These are the things which you hear about; but you mustn't forget the little things that a home economist does for the women of her county individually. She tries to find the answers to such questions as: "My child is underweight; what should she eat to gain?" or "Blight struck my tomatoes last year; what will prevent its coming again?" People appreciate these individual services. Miss Louise Rosenfeld, Assistant Director of the Iowa State College Extension Service, was visiting in a county in which she had worked many years previously as a county home economist. A woman stopped her on the street and told her how much she appreciated Miss Rosenfeld's teaching her to set in a dress sleeve. To that woman setting in a sleeve had always been a problem. The process Miss Rosenfeld taught her was remembered; and the "teacher" was remembered too.

This is the county extension home economist, a woman eager to help when the homemaker needs her, whether it's advice on remodeling a kitchen or information on women's legal rights. She's a woman who is a friend to all, knows their names and waves when she passes. She is a person who brings satisfaction to others, and is, in turn, a contented person herself.