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What About Your Daughter's Future?

Lee G. Burchinal
Iowa State University

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Some farm-reared girls will be marrying young men who plan to farm. Others will be marrying young men planning nonfarm careers. Still other farm girls themselves will be seeking a college education or looking for nonfarm jobs.

by Lee G. Burchinal

WHAT ARE YOUR daughter's plans following high school? She may plan to marry in the near future. She may already be aware that her chances of marrying a young man who's going to farm are much less than those of her mother when she was a girl. The young man she hopes to marry may be planning to seek a college education before returning to the farm or entering a nonfarm career or occupation.

If your daughter doesn't plan to marry immediately, she'll probably want to work for a year or two or go to college herself. Whether she decides to work, to go to college or to marry a farm or nonfarm youth seeking an offfarm career, she'll be starting a new adult life. And she'll be competing with or living among other young women from farms, from towns and from cities. How well is she prepared? Do farm girls have any initial or long-run advantages over town and city girls? Are there disadvantages?

As for boys as reported in the March issue (see 'What's Your Son Going to Do?' or reprint FS-861) our preliminary study also furnished some tentative answers to these questions for girls. In this case, our information comes from 331 high school girls in the tenth and twelfth grades — 80 farm girls, 117 small town girls who lived in the same west-central Iowa county as the farm girls and 134 girls living in a central Iowa metropolitan area. Thus, the results don't necessarily represent the state as a whole. But they do give us some information on how farm, small town and urban high school girls measure up with each other.

What We Found . . .

There were no great differences in school grades or participation in school activities.

Farm and small town girls made about the same grades in school. There was no large difference, either, in participation in school activities between the two groups of girls. But, as we found for boys, the farm girls were slightly more active in extracurricular activities. (We asked questions about school grades and activities only of the farm and small town girls who lived in the same county and attended the same schools.)

Fathers of farm girls were less involved in their daughters' occupational plans.

About 46 percent of the farm girls indicated their fathers hadn't said much to them about occupational plans after high school. This was reported by 39 percent of the small town girls and by 34 percent of the urban girls.

Mothers of farm and urban girls were about equally involved in their daughters' occupational plans.

Generally smaller proportions of the farm, small town and urban girls reported that their mothers, as compared with fathers, hadn't said much to them about occupational plans after high school. This was reported by 19 percent of the farm girls, by 25 percent of the small town girls and by 16 percent of the urban girls.

Farm parents provided less encouragement for their daughters' education beyond high school.

All three groups of girls reported that their mothers, more frequently than their fathers, were definitely encouraging them to plan for education beyond high school. But farm girls reported slightly less encouragement from either parent than did small town and city girls. Definite encouragement from mothers to continue their education was reported by 47 percent of the farm girls, 56 percent of the small town girls and 55 percent of the urban girls. Similar encouragement from fathers

LEE G. BURCHINAL is assistant professor of rural sociology and is a member of the staff of the Center for Agricultural and Economic Adjustment.
was reported by 29 percent of the farm girls, 47 percent of the small town girls and 46 percent of the urban girls. The greatest difference between mothers and fathers was among farm parents.

Farm girls more frequently reported educational plans of some sort following high school.

Differences in the proportions of the three groups of girls with educational plans of some sort following high school weren’t great. But—in contrast to the situation for boys reported in the March issue—the difference was in favor of the farm group. Only 16 percent of the farm girls, 20 percent of the small town girls and 23 percent of the urban girls reported no education plans after high school.

Farm girls more often planned business or noncollege training and less frequently planned to enter college.

Almost 45 percent of the farm girls indicated plans for additional education in business or noncollege educational programs; 36 percent of the small town girls and 21 percent of the urban girls reported such plans. College plans were reported by 39 percent of the farm girls, 44 percent of the small town girls and 56 percent of the urban girls.

Among girls planning to enter college, farm girls have less often chosen their college or university.

Small town girls most often reported college choices; 69 percent indicated that they’d made a choice. Urban girls came next, with 60 percent; farm girls last, with 48 percent.

There were no differences in plans to work after schooling.

About 92 percent of both farm and small town girls and 89 percent of the urban girls planned to work after they finished their schooling. Unlike the situation for boys, there was no tendency for farm girls to plan to enter the relatively lower prestige-income occupations.

A Smaller Gap . . .

In the report on boys in the March issue, we generalized that farm boys and their parents “had to come up from behind” to match small town and urban boys and their parents in terms of preparation for competition for nonfarm occupations. In some ways, this generalization also seems to hold for the farm girls and their families. But the differences among farm, small town and urban girls didn’t point as consistently in this direction as for the boys.

The differences in results between boys and girls probably is mainly a reflection of the importance of work and advance training in the lives of men and women.

Occupational training generally is more important for men than for women. Marriage is the prominent career for most women. And marriage comes relatively early in adult years for the majority of Iowa young women. Last year, for example, the single, most frequent age at marriage for women was 18. More than half of all women married last year in Iowa were 20 years of age or younger.

But this doesn’t mean an education beyond high school isn’t necessary for girls.

Quite to the contrary, it’s important for girls. For one thing, an increasing proportion of young women are working after marriage. “Two-income” families are becoming commonplace, both before and after children are born. Education helps assure the modern wife and mother a more satisfactory, less strenuous and higher income job. Apart from employment, additional training provides a young woman with the resources to be a better wife, mother and member of her community.

We’ve mentioned that the differences between farm, small town and urban girls weren’t as consistently in favor of urban girls as was the case for the comparisons of the farm, small town and urban boys. But some of the results for girls agreed with those found for boys.

Farm fathers, for instance, were less frequently reported as involved with the occupational plans of their daughters than were small town or urban fathers. Farm fathers and mothers were less frequently reported as definitely encouraging their daughters to continue their education beyond high school.

But contrary to the results for boys, farm and urban mothers were about equally involved in their daughters’ occupational plans. Another difference: Slightly more—rather than less, as was the case for boys—of the farm girls planned for some education beyond high school. When we looked at the kind of training planned, the direction of farm, small town and urban differences for girls was the same as that found for boys. Farm girls planning further training more often planned noncollege education. Small town and urban girls planning further training more frequently planned to enter a college or university.

In Brief . . .

Much of what we said in the March article about boys’ educational and occupational plans (and of their parents’ involvement in these plans) could be repeated for girls. Farm fathers, as compared with small town and urban fathers, apparently tend to underestimate the importance of occupational and educational plans in today’s modern setting. Farm mothers tended to lag in definitely encouraging their daughters to continue their education after high school. Probably as a partial consequence, farm girls seemed less likely to consider college training than small town and urban girls.

Many factors probably operate to produce these conditions. One important factor may be that farm parents haven’t had to think so much in terms of nonfarm work and family life for themselves. But because many farm youths must now plan to work and live in urban areas, it’s doubly important for farm parents to encourage their children to prepare for successful nonfarm (or farm) living. Schools and other community institutions can help, but a good share of the responsibility lies also with the parents.