

“MAKING THE BEST BETTER”: HOME DEMONSTRATION WORK ON THE  
LLANO ESTACADO, 1914 TO 1950  
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“MAKING THE BEST BETTER:” HOME DEMONSTRATION WORK ON THE  
LLANO ESTACADO, 1914 TO 1950

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*For my mother and father*

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In her most recent work, rural sociologist Carolyn Sachs applauded the efforts of feminist scholars in the last thirty years to document the history and experiences of America's rural women. She wrote, "Despite limited attention to rural women's lives, in recent years feminist theory has matured, developed, and become ever more inclusive...Much of this new theoretical framework...offers possibilities and new avenues for studying rural women." Nevertheless, a few pages earlier, she necessarily admitted that "rural women constitute yet another category of women that theorists have not yet thoroughly considered." Why? As Sachs explained, scholars of rural women have almost exclusively restricted their studies by either accepting the conviction that "Western, white, urban, middle-class women universally represent [all] women" or that rural women's work remains "invisible from the male-dominative perspective."<sup>1</sup>

There is no "homogenous" rural woman who stereotypically falls into these neat classifications. Instead, her experiences, like that of all women, defy simple categorization. Rural women were farmers, ranchers, wives, mothers, daughters, tenants, and migrant workers. As such, their experiences varied based on income, ethnicity, and sexual orientation and fell outside of "the urban-focused, theoretical work" that "inadequately addresses the context of rural women's lives." Though scholars describe

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<sup>1</sup> Carolyn Sachs, *Gendered Fields: Rural Women, Agriculture, and the Environment* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, Inc., 1996), first quote from 11, second quote from 3, third quote from 3, fourth quote from 14.

the “invisibility” of rural women’s labor, both men and women recognized its essentiality for the farm families’ survival. To better understand the experiences and choices of rural women, it is necessary to account for their differences, to embrace their complexities, and to consider the significance and diversity of their labor.<sup>2</sup>

This thesis aims to contribute to the study of the diversity of rural women’s experiences in early-twentieth-century Texas through an analysis of home demonstration work. Rural women responded to home demonstration programming in a variety of ways based on their own perceptions of their economic roles on family farms, their specific needs and desires, and their communities’ needs. Though home demonstration programming often sought to reduce the burdens and drudgery of rural women’s daily tasks, it nevertheless accounted for the versatility and essentiality of rural women’s labor, and many rural women picked and chose those programs that made the most sense for themselves and their families. Home demonstration work also tried to mitigate forces outside of rural women’s control, such as world wars, economic depressions, droughts, and epidemics, making their interactions with home demonstration programming an ideal medium in which to evaluate rural women’s responses to national and state transformations. Since many rural women flocked to home demonstration work because its programming could be tailored to address their specific needs, this thesis presents an innovative avenue in which to evaluate and understand the experiences of America’s rural women.

Texas was one of many states that launched home demonstration work in the early-twentieth century. In 1914, federal attention was directed toward America’s rural women for the first time with the passage of the Smith-Lever Act. Noting systemic rural

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<sup>2</sup> Sachs, *Gendered Fields*, first quote from 11, second and third quote from 20.

poverty, poor nutrition, and increasing rural-to-urban migration, advocates urged that something must be done to save America's rural populations before the tradition of the American family farm and the wholesome, national values it represented disappeared. The result was national legislation that allocated federal funds for the dissemination of better agricultural and homemaking education to America's rural populations through the establishment of the Cooperative Extension Service. By distributing the funds necessary to disperse agricultural and home demonstration agents into rural counties, the Smith-Lever Act hoped to provide the tools necessary to "make the best better" by allowing rural families to "help them help themselves."<sup>3</sup>

The establishment of home demonstration work in Texas not only provided women with professional opportunities that had been previously unavailable, but it also empowered rural women with new strategies to improve the living conditions of their families and nation. As the value of women's domestic work gained national attention in the concluding decades of the nineteenth century, home economics emerged as a new academic discipline in American universities, and many women professionals and scientists flocked to home economics departments despite institutional biases that paid women academics drastically less than their male colleagues and offered them little opportunities for professional advancement. Despite its limitations, home economics provided women professionals with a means to develop innovative techniques to enrich families' nutrition, to reduce the daily tasks of women's domestic labor, and to improve families' living conditions. Though many home economists embraced an urban, middle-

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<sup>3</sup> Hon. A. F. Lever, "Extension the Most Universal University," *Texas Extension Service Farm News*, September 1931, File 4, Box 1, Texas Agricultural Extension Service Historical Files, Cushing Memorial Library & Archives, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX (archival collection hereafter cited as TAMU Extension Service Historical Files), first and second quote from 7.

class ideal of what women's daily domestic labor should look like, some of their lessons did appeal to rural women after becoming part of Extension Service programming.

Other homemaking lessons were firmly rejected by rural women whose daily experiences differed drastically from their urban, middle-class sisters. Diversity and cooperation characterized rural women's daily work on the land. Unlike urban, middle-class women, rural women throughout the state labored both within and outside the farmhouse. They not only performed their domestic responsibilities, but they also directly contributed to the profits of the family farm through fieldwork, the time-honored practice of "making do," and the selling of surplus homemade goods. Furthermore, as rural women had always done, they nurtured and sustained networks of mutual aid to serve as another form of assistance when times were particularly hard. The diversity of rural women's labor was not lost on women or men in rural communities. Both recognized women's importance in ensuring that the family farm and rural community would survive.

As county home demonstration agents moved into Texas' rural counties, they also necessarily realized the diversity of rural women's experiences and labor. While much of their demonstration programming centered on ways to improve the interior living conditions in rural homes, they recognized that rural women played a crucial role in minimizing cash expenditures. Many rural women responded favorably to programs designed to teach them how to preserve fresh fruits and vegetables, to market homemade goods, to make affordable clothing, and to maintain household budgets. By providing lessons that helped women "make do," home demonstration programming allowed women to limit their household costs and to invest more income into the farm enterprise

itself. All of these lessons represented an acknowledgement on the part of agents and rural women of the value and diversity of farmwomen's labor.

Examining how and why rural women responded to home demonstration programming in Texas also provides insights into rural women's independence, agency, and duty to community. Though some agents may have encouraged rural women to adopt practices that mirrored their urban, middle-class standards, they found that rural women routinely made these lessons their own by picking and choosing which programs were particularly valuable to them. This is most evident in the home demonstration club movement, where thousands of rural women throughout the state created their own home demonstration clubs. Rural women's motivations to join these clubs varied. Some used the clubs to alleviate the isolation of rural life. Others discovered opportunities to offer their services for the improvement of their local communities. Clubwomen organized community trash pick-ups and hot lunch programs for rural school children. They also campaigned for rural electrification and raised funds for scholarships for local girls and boys. For many, home demonstration clubs provided rural women with the opportunity to become politically involved as well. By organizing special education committees designed to keep clubwomen alert to local and national political campaigns and policies, many rural women increased their civic participation.

The story of home demonstration work in Texas also illuminates how rural women responded to the vast transformations of early-twentieth-century life. Both agents and farm women confronted situations that were outside of their control, and many discovered innovative strategies to combat these challenges through home demonstration programming. Additionally, as horses and buggies were replaced with automobiles, as

increased farm mechanization reduced rural labor demands, and as increasing access to urban centers and employment led many rural Texans to abandon country life, rural Texas changed drastically. An analysis of home demonstration work provides insights into how these transformations affected the state's rural women, and it also provides insights into why home demonstration work and club activity significantly declined in the years after 1950.

The chapters that follow examine not only how Extension Service programming altered the lives of rural women in Texas, but also how rural women made the programming their own. Chapter one traces the conditions in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries that led to the origination of the Cooperative Extension Service. Just as Progressive activists turned their attention to improving urban conditions, Country Life reformers sought to alleviate what they believed to be the problems of rural America. This chapter reveals why advocates for rural reform believed that education was the solution to combating rural poverty and the inefficiencies of the American farmer, as well as why attention was directed toward America's agrarian women for the first time. Chapter two surveys the particular challenges of establishing home demonstration work in Texas while also exploring how home demonstration programming responded to larger national and state transformations. Also considered in this chapter is how previous scholars have written about the Extension Service and the benefits and shortcomings of home demonstration programming for rural women. Chapter three provides a regional case study in which to evaluate the emergence of home demonstration work in Texas. Focusing largely on the Llano Estacado region of Texas, the chapter reveals the challenges that agents encountered as they attempted to establish

home demonstration work while also describing how local rural women made home demonstration programming their own.

While home demonstration work did provide some rural women with significant benefits, its programming reflected prevailing gender and racial biases. Female home demonstration agents received drastically less funding than male agricultural agents, and for many Extension Service officials, home demonstration work took second place to the needs of the male American farmer. Largely excluded from this story are African-Americans and Mexican-Americans. The Extension Service severely underfunded the work for these Texans, and instead it focused a majority of resources on improving rural conditions for Anglo-Texans.

Nevertheless, as this thesis will reveal, home demonstration work provided some noteworthy benefits for Anglo-Texan women. Though its work was drastically underfunded and many of its programs centered on transforming rural women to more closely resemble the urban, middle-class ideal, many rural women developed innovative strategies to improve the living conditions of their families, communities, and nation. They were not simply passive recipients of its services. As Sachs argued,

Rather than seeing women as helpless victims of an all-powerful patriarchal ideology, we must account for women's potential for creativity and agency within a context of limited options. Social structures not only constrain, they also enable; thus social structures serve not simply as barriers to action but also preconditions for the possibility of meaningful choices.<sup>4</sup>

As this thesis reveals, many women in the Llano Estacado found the possibilities for meaningful choices through home demonstration work.

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<sup>4</sup> Sachs, *Gendered Fields*, 24.



## CHAPTER II

### “HELP THEM HELP THEMSELVES”<sup>5</sup>: ORIGINS OF THE COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE, 1862-1914

*Oh! Happy swains did they know how to prize  
The many blessings rural life supplies.*

*Loose from the crib and fattening stall  
The kind and sturdy oxen stray,  
And o'er his furrow's tillage small,  
The jolly ploughman plods his way.*

*Now Muse, a while forsake the town  
To view the happy rustic clown,  
As joyful me, midst frost and snow,  
From field to field doth whistling go.<sup>6</sup>*

Since the nation's inception, Americans cherished their rural population. Not only did they embody the virtuous characteristics of citizenship, such as property ownership, self-sufficiency, and ingenuity, deemed necessary for the early republic's survival, but their labor in the countryside was also revered as essential for national prosperity. Practicing the “first and heavenly-ordained labor of man,” the farmer represented “the most independent of all classes of men, generous and altruistic, the bulwark of the state.” Yet as politicians, philanthropists, and educational reformers surveyed the conditions of rural America during the mid-to-late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, many feared that this cherished American institution was disappearing. Faced with declining crop prices, systemic rural poverty, and increasing rural-to-urban migration, advocates

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<sup>5</sup> Hon. A. F. Lever, “Extension the Most Universal University,” *Texas Extension Service Farm News*, September 1931, File 4, Box 1, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, 7.

<sup>6</sup> *The New American Magazine*, October 1759 quoted in Richard Bridgman, “Jefferson's Farmer Before Jefferson,” *American Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (Winter 1962): 570.

believed that certain rural reforms were necessary in order to save the American farm and the wholesome American values it represented.<sup>7</sup>

What emerged in these reform campaigns was what some scholars call a “secular Great Awakening” in the concluding decades of the nineteenth century. Rather than celebrating the American farmer’s capability to combat these obstacles himself, leading reformers charged him with inefficiency. This inefficiency not only condemned the farmer and his family to an unending cycle of poverty, but it also threatened the very agricultural welfare of the nation. Many reformers believed that the solution to these problems depended on improving the education of rural Americans. They believed that the farmer, given the proper training, could lift himself out of poverty by developing new strategies to increase the farm family’s income. Increasing the standard of living on individual farms was not the only ambition of these educational reforms. Advocates of rural education also hoped to provide communities in the countryside with the ability to expand their infrastructure and schooling and thereby make rural life more appealing and reduce the growing tide of rural-to-urban migration.<sup>8</sup>

The seeds of the Cooperative Extension Service germinated in these educational reform efforts. As proponents of scientific agriculture developed innovative strategies to teach farmers the latest methods of seed selection, soil cultivation, and crop diversification, politicians and northern philanthropists took notice of their successes, and they instigated legislation and provided funding crucial to the dissemination of agricultural education across the nation. Additionally, in surveying the conditions in

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<sup>7</sup>Adam Smith as quoted in Paul H. Johnstone, “Turnips and Romanticism,” *Agricultural History* 12, no. 3 (July 1938): 245.

<sup>8</sup>David Danbom, “Rural Education and the Country Life Movement, 1900-1920,” *Agricultural History* 53, no. 2 (April 1979): 465-467, quote from 465.

which many rural Americans lived, advocates for reform brought national attention to what they believed characterized rural Americans' daily experiences. They demanded that something be done to combat the drudgery and inadequate living conditions under which, they believed, many of America's farm families labored.

This attention to the drudgery of rural Americans' lives was particularly significant for rural women, as their daily tasks received unprecedented attention in the concluding decades of the nineteenth century. Driven by pioneering women scientists and nutritionists, home economics emerged as a new academic discipline in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, and as it did so, the value of women's work in the home took on a new national importance in ensuring not only the health of the family, but also the health of the nation.

In 1914, the spirit of these educational reform efforts became epitomized in the Smith-Lever Act, which provided federal funds for the dissemination of better agricultural and home-making techniques to rural Americans through the establishment of the Cooperative Extension Service. Like the rural reform objectives of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the Extension Service's goals were to not only reduce rural poverty, but also to improve the standard of living in rural homes. To these ends, the federal government matched funds provided by state and county commissioner courts for the purpose of placing agricultural and home demonstration agents in America's rural counties. Yet from the organization's establishment, the programming of the Extension Service reflected prevailing gender and racial biases. Rural women's and African-American's programs received drastically less funding and resources than those for white men. Nevertheless, the emergence of the Extension Service would have a profound

influence on America's rural farm families, and many of its educational programs still exist today.

The rhetoric used by late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century advocates for rural reform departed significantly from how earlier Americans characterized their nation of small farmers. In the late-eighteenth century, Americans celebrated the countryside as a place that cultivated virtue, innovation, and ingenuity. As famed eighteenth-century frontiersman and farmer St. John de Crèvecoeur wrote in his *Letters From an American Farmer*, nature inspired “the reflecting traveler with the most philanthropic ideas; his imagination...would widely spring forward to the anticipated fields of future cultivation and improvement.” Hundreds of newspapers in the early republic also published weekly articles and poems from rural residents who extolled the benefits of pastoral living. An anonymous author, known only as “The Moralist, a Rural Christian,” wrote numerous poems for *The New-York Weekly Museum*. In his poem *On Contentment*, published in 1790, he explained:

*Grant me to live a peaceful rural life,  
Remote from envy and tumultuous strife,  
There may I pass each hour by virtues rules,  
Nor vainly seek th' applauding breath of fools.*<sup>9</sup>

Rural life was not only heralded for its virtue and independence, but it was also viewed as fundamental to the very survival of the newly established republic. While prominent revolutionary landholders, such as George Washington, James Madison, and John Taylor, often spoke glowingly of the integrity, solace, and freedom they found in the nature of their plantations, it was Thomas Jefferson with his yeoman farmer ideal who solidified the farmer as the true steward of the nation's prosperity. He believed that “those who

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<sup>9</sup> The Moralist, a Rural Christian, “On Contentment,” *The New York Weekly Museum*, no. 97, March 20, 1790, 4.

labored the earth [were] the chosen people of God, if ever He had a chosen people, whose breasts He has made His particular deposit for substantial and genuine virtue.” For Jefferson, the farmer represented the ideal characteristics of the new republic’s citizens since his survival depended on self-sufficiency, hard work, and ingenuity. Additionally, not only did the conditions of rural life encourage the farmer to develop mutual networks of aid with his neighbors, thereby nurturing close-knit communities, but it would also ensure civic participation. Since voting eligibility depended on property ownership, a nation of small farmers ensured democracy would thrive in the new republic.<sup>10</sup>

Though the language of Jeffersonian agrarianism frequently referred to the farmer as male, women certainly had their place in its ideal. The farm necessitated the presence of a family where values of honesty and independence were nurtured. A woman, as mother and wife, was an essential aspect in this formula, and her primary tasks centered on reproduction and the beautification of the home. Jefferson recognized that “our own countrywomen, occupied in the tender and tranquil amusements of domestic life,” were the “building blocks of rural society.”<sup>11</sup>

Where men’s labor in the field and the market cultivated the skills necessary for civic participation, Jefferson relegated to women’s labor a reproductive role in which her primary obligations lay in nurturing children, tending the home, and guarding the family’s moral well-being. As Deborah Fink explains in *Agrarian Women: Wives and Mothers in Rural Nebraska, 1880-1940*, “Jefferson’s canonical citizen was a farmer, and

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<sup>10</sup> St. John de Crevecoeur, *Letters From an American Farmer* (London, 1792): 14-15, first quote from 14; A Whitey Griswold, “The Agrarian Democracy of Thomas Jefferson,” *The American Political Science Review* 40, no. 4 (August 1946): 657-681; Thomas Jefferson, “Notes on the State of Virginia 1781-1785” in *Thomas Jefferson: In His Own Words* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2009), second quote from 35.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Jefferson quoted in Deborah Fink, *Agrarian Women: Wives and Mothers in Rural Nebraska, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 7-8, first and second quote from 8.

his canonical family was a farm family. He saw the farm and home as separate spheres, and his agrarian ideology rested on this separation.” Jefferson was hardly alone in his vision of the separate roles of men and women on the American farm. Most of the early republic’s male citizens believed that the home was “presumably the antithesis of the economic world.” It was “an almost sacred refuge from the ravages of early industrialism” and ensuring that the home at least appeared to maintain this separation became a paramount concern for white men and women over the course of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.<sup>12</sup>

Yet the “tender and tranquil amusements of domestic life” were rarely the reality for the nation’s rural women. Fink argues that Jefferson’s “agrarian dream of the individual farmer working his own land and reaping his own [crops] contradicts the fact that farming is by its nature a collective endeavor.” Women always worked and worked in a variety of ways that significantly contributed to the economic well-being of the family and the nation. For instance, women played a fundamental role in maintaining the reproductive conditions necessary for the family’s survival. By birthing, feeding, and clothing the next generation of laborers, women’s domestic labor contributed significantly to the growth of the national economy. Yet women’s domestic labor extended beyond just its reproductive value. Providing direct monetary assistance to the family, women raised vegetables, fruits, and poultry for home consumption and sold surplus products and homemade goods at market. They frequently scavenged for necessities such as grain and wood when their husband’s wages or farm income could not provide the means to afford them. Women, especially in rural areas, were also expected

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<sup>12</sup> Fink, first quote from 21; Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), second and third quote from x-xi.

to assume their husband's work should the need arise. As gender historian Jeanne Boydston explains in *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic*, "Farm wives had to speak for absent husbands, discipline sons and male servants and assign them chores, and work in the fields as needed – although these tasks remained designated as 'men's' work regardless of how often women did them." Women's historian Nancy Grey Osterud also describes how women maintained essential community and kinship ties that served as a reciprocal network of mutual aid when times were particularly hard. Clearly, the separate spheres ideology that many used to characterize the work of rural women was hardly the reality, especially for poorer white and black families whose economic survival depended on the resourcefulness of women's labor.<sup>13</sup>

Jefferson and others not only oversimplified and ignored women's economic roles on the farm, they also romanticized the very tasks of the farmer himself. One of the cornerstones of Jeffersonian agrarianism rested on the belief that the farmer's natural resourcefulness could overcome any adversities or hardships. Believing that the farmer would be valued and protected, Jefferson ignored the larger structures that constrained the farmer's ability to control his own destiny. Even during the early republic period, the farmer struggled to ensure his farm family's survival. Many encountered overwhelming obstacles, such as fluctuating markets, economic depressions, and droughts. Nevertheless, this romanticism toward the farmer became deeply rooted in Americans' consciousness. In the 1950s, historian Richard Hofstadter coined a phrase as a means to describe the ideological romanticism of Jeffersonian agrarianism. As Americans increasingly

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<sup>13</sup> Fink, first quote from 191; Boydston, *Home and Work*, second quote from 14; Nancy Grey Osterud, "Gender and the Transition to Capitalism in Rural America," *Agricultural History* 67, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 24-26.

encountered the harsh reality of rural life, he argued that an “agrarian myth” captivated the hearts and minds of Americans. In many ways, they remembered rural life in a way that it never truly was, and as such, “the agrarian myth became increasingly fictional as time went on.”<sup>14</sup>

In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the agrarian myth assumed new importance as the nation began to survey the conditions of its rural population. What it discovered was that rural Americans were in dire need. Soil depletion and lack of crop diversification threatened not only the prosperity of farmers, but they also endangered the agricultural welfare of the nation. In the years after the Civil War, poverty not prosperity characterized rural life, especially in the South where high rates of tenancy and sharecropping as well as high interest credit systems severely limited farmers’ economic independence. By 1880, the first statistics on tenancy were collected, and they revealed that nearly a quarter of all farmers nationwide did not own their own land. As economic historian Jeremy Atack wrote, the increase in tenancy rates in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was “part of an evolutionary, rather than revolutionary, process.” Lack of capital, rising farm values, and land monopolization by speculators “who acquired most of the choice lands in certain areas” were the most likely explanations for high tenancy rates. Race and nativity also played a crucial factor in determining which rural Americans were most likely to enter into tenant arrangements. In the concluding decades of the nineteenth century in the South, “forty-seven percent of

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), 32-33, quote from 32.



whites and seventy-nine percent of African-Americans were tenants” whose landlessness kept them in relentless cycles of poverty.<sup>15</sup>

Rural poverty affected more than just the farm family’s economic stability. Comparing the conditions of rural life with that of the nation’s urban centers, leading reformers, particularly northern philanthropists, noted the rural South suffered from inadequate infrastructure and schooling, a sign that the nation’s rural citizens were falling behind the rest of the nation. They believed that it was not that southern people were apathetic toward education or infrastructure, but rather, with little taxable income, rural southerners were left without the means to properly support these initiatives. Furthermore, the increasing flight of rural families to the city and the abandonment of family farms were frightening phenomena to those who clung dearly to the agrarian myth. According to the 1900 U.S. Census, rural Americans comprised fifty-eight percent of the population in 1880. By 1900, that number had fallen to fifty-one percent. Noting all of these conditions, rural reformers who romanticized rural life believed that one of the most cherished institutions in the nation – the family farm – was disappearing.<sup>16</sup>

Reformers across the nation believed the solution to these problems was to increase the income and efficiency of the farmer. Whereas previously the farmer had been heralded as the capable, self-sufficient guardian of the nation’s agricultural resources, reformers now condemned his inefficiency. Many blamed the farmer’s lack of

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<sup>15</sup> Jeremy Atack, “Tenants and Yeoman in the Nineteenth Century,” *Agricultural History* 62, no. 3 (Summer 1988): 6-7, 11, 32, first quote from 32, second quote from 11; Melissa Walker and Rebecca Sharpless, “Introduction” in *Work, Family, and Faith: Rural Southern Women in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Melissa Walker and Rebecca Sharpless (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 7-8, third quote from 7.

<sup>16</sup> General Education Board, *The General Education Board: An Account of Its Activities, 1902-1914* (New York: General Education Board, 1915), 18; United States Census Bureau, “Twelfth Census of the United States – 1900,” Volume I –Population Part I (United States Census Office: Washington, D.C., 1901), <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/33405927v1.pdf> (accessed April 7, 2013), xxix.

education as the problem. Without the scientific knowledge and education required to sustain his crops, negotiate fair prices, and invest in modern labor-saving devices, the farmer had little recourse but to surrender to the vicious cycle of poverty or move to the city. Seaman A. Knapp, a noted educator and leading advocate for agricultural reform, recounted that “the first effort should be to increase the earning capacity of the rural toilers because every step towards a higher civilization costs money....The possibility of having a better home or school or highway or rural free delivery or better conditions of any kind is contingent upon the funds to establish and maintain them.”<sup>17</sup>

In the concluding decades of the nineteenth century, a host of reform efforts emerged aiming to improve the education of the rural farmer. One of the first federal reform efforts commenced in April of 1858 when Vermont Congressman Justin S. Morrill delivered a speech to the United States Representatives arguing that the government needed to take a more active role in protecting the nation’s greatest resource: its soil. Armed with statistical evidence of soil depletion throughout the nation, Morrill demonstrated that the “natural productiveness of the soil was steadily declining,” a fact that he believed threatened the very economic stability and health of the nation. He argued, “Agriculture undoubtedly demands our first care because it is not merely conducive to the health of society, the health of trade and of commerce, but essential to their very existence.” To save America’s soil, Morrill believed the federal government needed to educate its rural population on proper soil cultivation techniques. Since farmers

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<sup>17</sup> Seaman Knapp, “The Average Man,” speech delivered before Baylor University in June 1908, Box 2, Folder 8, Seaman Asahel Knapp Papers, Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX (archival collection hereafter cited as Southwest Collections), 1-4, quote from 4.

lacked the necessary scientific training, they engaged in agricultural practices that amounted to nothing less than “a national waste compensated only by private robbery.”<sup>18</sup>

The Morrill Act of 1858 was Congressman Morrill’s solution. He proposed that the federal government provide each state with thirty thousand acres of federal land which could then be sold by the states as a means to fund public colleges that focused on agricultural and mechanical arts. The goal would be to develop educational programs for the American farmer in order to ensure the future sustainability of the soil as well as to maximize its productivity. Four years later, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Morrill Act into law on July 2, 1862. There was a brief debate over the location where Texas would establish its college, but shortly it was agreed that the Texas Agricultural and Mechanical College would be established in College Station. In 1876, Texas A&M University and Prairie View A&M University, an all-black college, opened their doors to Texans for the purpose of educating its citizens in the agricultural and mechanical arts.<sup>19</sup>

In the decades after the Civil War, the nation’s land-grant colleges received popular support from several groups. Railroad executives, merchants, and bankers helped to fund the Morrill Act. Though they sought to provide “the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life,” altruism did not entirely drive their motivations. Businessmen correctly foresaw the value in teaching the nation’s farmers the latest soil cultivation techniques. Farmers would hopefully loan the money and invest in the capital required to implement these new techniques thus boosting corporate profits. Additionally, land-grant institutions received

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<sup>18</sup> Justin Morrill as quoted in Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1955), 7-8, first, second, and third quotes from 7.

<sup>19</sup> Alfred Charles True, *A History of Agricultural Work in the United States, 1785-1923* (Washington: United States Department of Agriculture, 1925), 31.

support from social reformers throughout the nation, especially from the Grange and the Populist movements that sought to increase the political and economic power of the nation's farmers. A mandate from the Mississippi State Grange stated, "We insist that the...shall establish an agricultural college in accordance with the intention of the act of Congress and that no further delay nor frittering away of the fund will be quietly tolerated." For many of these social reform groups, the creation of agricultural and mechanical colleges was a way to challenge the practice of higher education "for a select few – the aristocracy, whether of birth, wealth, intellect, or divine election....This institution opened the way to mass education." Additionally, many of these institutions were coeducational, thus providing educational opportunities heretofore unavailable for women.<sup>20</sup>

As enrollment in these land-grant colleges grew steadily throughout the closing decades of the nineteenth century, institutions began to explore alternative ways to improve seed, crop diversification, and the nutrients in soil. Agricultural specialists turned to science, a relatively new academic discipline that was gaining popularity among various intellectual circles in the late-nineteenth century. They distinguished their research from systematic farming – farming as business – and instead, they championed a new type of research called scientific agriculture. By applying the tools of scientific investigation and experimentation to agricultural practices, scientific agriculture sought new methods for eliminating diseases of plants and animals as well as creating new types of fertilization and moisture retention to increase soil's productivity. The Hatch Act of 1887 went a long way toward ensuring these institutions had the funds with which to

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<sup>20</sup> Earle D. Ross, "The Land-Grant College: A Democratic Adaptation," *Agricultural History* 15, no. 1 (January 1941): 26-28, 31, first quote from 26, second quote from 31, third quote from 26, fourth quote from 27.

conduct research. In establishing agricultural experiment stations at land-grant colleges that were funded by the Department of Agriculture, the Hatch Act provided land-grant institutions with the means to “provide beneficial agricultural research” in ways that were previously unavailable. As noted agricultural historian Earle D. Ross wrote, these experiment stations “won support for the colleges...Science was now shown to be of indispensable service to industry and business.”<sup>21</sup>

Reformers looked not just to improving instruction in proper agricultural techniques as a solution for rural improvement; during the mid-nineteenth century, advocates also turned their attention toward improving the conditions in the home. Catharine Beecher, generally noted as the founder of the home economics movement, was one of the first women to stress the importance of women’s education. Considered to be the first home economics textbook, Beecher’s 1841 *Treatise on Domestic Education for the Use of Young Ladies at Home* argued that just as men must prepare for their profession in college, so too should women. This was particularly important, since women’s primary obligation in the home was to not only ensure the physical health of the family, but also to nurture the emotional and moral health of its future citizens. Yet as progressive as Beecher’s campaign was, it hardly challenged the separate spheres ideal articulated in Jeffersonian agrarianism. Instead, her insistence on the importance of female education rested on the separation of men’s and women’s labor. Beecher argued that women had “distinctive duties as housekeeper, wife and mother,” and as a general rule, she believed that “women should not endeavor to gain equality by competing with

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<sup>21</sup> Hamilton Cravens, “Establishing the Science of Nutrition at the USDA: Ellen Swallow Richards and Her Allies,” *Agricultural History* 64, no. 2 (Spring 1990): 122-12; Ross, first and second quote from 33.

men.” Rather, they should prepare for their “true profession” as homemakers through increasing their knowledge of the domestic sciences.<sup>22</sup>

As the belief of educating women grew steadily in the concluding decades of the nineteenth century, a new academic discipline emerged that provided unprecedented opportunities for many women. Influenced by the work of Beecher a generation later, MIT’s first woman graduate and professor of Sanitary Chemistry, Ellen Swallow Richards, became a guiding force for institutionalizing women’s education. Like the advocates of scientific agriculture, Richards believed “science was a cure-all” that could improve the quality of life not only in the home, but also in the nation at large since “the family is the heart of the country’s life....Its more precious development of civilization...and truest form of patriotism.” Using the tools of chemistry, morphology, biology, and physiology, Richards turned to science as a means to launch home economics as an academic discipline in colleges throughout the nation. By focusing on the importance of nutrition, women scientists worked within the dominant gender prescriptions perpetuated by the separate spheres ideology, while also challenging the “practice of science as a masculine enterprise.”<sup>23</sup>

This emphasis on science was particularly significant in that it provided women with options to contribute professionally in academic institutions that were previously unavailable. Though these women concentrated their work within prevailing gender conventions, historian Nancy K. Berlage argues that these women scientists nevertheless

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<sup>22</sup> Catharine Beecher quoted in Charlotte Beister, “Catharine Beecher’s Views of Home Economics,” *History of Education Journal* 3, no. 3 (Spring 1952): 88, 91, first, second, and third quotes from 91.

<sup>23</sup> Rima D. Apple, “Science Gendered: Nutrition in the United States, 1840-1940” in *The Science and Culture of Nutrition, 1840-1940*, ed. by Harmke Kamminga and Andrew Cunningham (Atlanta: Editions Rodopi B.V., 1995), 129; Ellen Swallow Richards quoted in Emma Seifrit Weigley, “It Might Have Been Euthenics: The Lack Placid Conferences and the Home Economics Movement,” *American Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (March 1974): 82, 80, first quote from 82, second quote from 80.

“redrew the boundaries that constrained women’s choices.” By embracing the ideals of their male colleagues, such as “the importance of an empirical, scientific tradition, national professional associations and journals, and ever higher standards of academic credentialism,” these women “merged science, reform, and gender issues with personal imperatives to construct a professional identity.” Nevertheless, as Rebecca S.

Montgomery argues in *The Politics of Education in the New South: Women and Reform in Georgia, 1890-1930*, gender politics limited women’s professional opportunities. She writes, “Progressive women regarded domestic science as an avenue of female advancement and social progress, but in the hands of men hostile to sexual equality, it became a road to segregated and inferior careers.” In many institutions, women’s professional training in home economics was an indication of their perceived “inferior education,” and it served as a justification for “their assignment to lower-level and poorer-paying jobs.”<sup>24</sup>

By 1900, more than thirty departments of home economics were established at universities across the nation. Many of these departments were located at land-grant colleges, since teaching women “domestic duties as an applied science” seemed to fit within the institutions’ “utilitarian ideal.” The federal government also provided funds to these land-grant institutions for the specific purpose of studying nutrition and food science at experiment stations. In 1893, only \$10,000 was allocated for these purposes, but over the next fifteen years, these funds tripled. As agricultural scientists developed

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<sup>24</sup> Nancy K. Berlage, “The Establishment of an Applied Social Science: Home Economists, Science, and Reform at Cornell University, 1870-1930,” in *Gender and American Social Science: The Formative Years*, ed. by Helene Silverberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 186-187, first quote from 186, second and third quote from 187; Rebecca S. Montgomery, *The Politics of Education in the New South: Women and Reform in Georgia, 1890-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996) 43, 50-51, fourth quote from 51, fifth quote from 43.

the science of animal nutrition at experiment stations, women scientists conducted experiments on food chemistry. The purpose of this research was tri-fold. Not only would it mitigate the influence that poor nutrition had on the physical and emotional stability of the family, but it also promised to increase “the health of the nation” by improving “the health of the family.”<sup>25</sup>

Despite the increase in scientific research and educational resources at land-grant universities, many reformers expressed discontent at the limited extent to which these educational programs seemed to influence the agricultural and homemaking practices of rural Americans. Since much of the rural population did not attend land-grant institutions and seldom received the instructions produced in university pamphlets and textbooks, many believed their lessons were failing to reach the targeted rural audience. As Knapp recounted, “When the Agricultural Colleges were established, it was thought that they would educate and train the youth of the land to solve the problems of the farm. They have not done it to any appreciable extent.” He surmised that if one in 200,000 farmers attended an agricultural college, it was “as potent an influence to readjust rural conditions as a drop of peppermint in the sources of the Mississippi would be to transform its mighty volume of waters into a potent colic remedy.” Furthermore, the method of disseminating information failed to reach a majority of poverty-stricken rural Americans. Jackson Davis, assistant director of the General Education Board, recounted, “Poor farmers do not

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<sup>25</sup> Apple, first and second quote from 138; Berlage, “The Establishment of an Applied Social Science: Home Economists, Science, and Reform at Cornell University, 1870-1930,” 189-190; Apple, third quote from 138.



become good farmers by attending lectures or reading bulletins any more than a boy masters algebra by having a text-book available for his use on a library shelf.”<sup>26</sup>

Reformers also noticed that there seemed to be a general mistrust and skepticism toward these programs. This was especially prevalent in the South, where lingering resentments of federal intervention continued to influence public opinion and political allegiances. In discussing the political and social conditions of the South between 1880 and 1930, southern historian William A. Link describes how many rural southerners clung tightly to a traditionalist ideology that was “suspicious of outsiders and strongly resistant to any threats to their autonomy.” These traditionalists, who lived in mostly rural areas, understood “community in local, neighborhood terms,” and they developed a “powerful version of southern political culture that exalted values [that] reinforced localism and [opposed] outside interference.”<sup>27</sup>

Given these obstacles, advocates of rural reform were forced to get creative. They not only needed to develop different methods through which to implement land-grant universities’ educational programs, but they also had to find a way to build trust in the community. Knapp accepted the challenge. He believed that “the farmer must solve the problem on his own farm and with his own hands.” After this was accomplished, he believed that the farmer’s “neighbors would also be ready to undertake the work, and so better practices would be spread.” Knapp called this approach the demonstration method, and he believed that it would not only provide tangible results and yield greater profits

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<sup>26</sup> Seaman A. Knapp, “How Can the Masses Be Induced to Adopt a Better System of Agriculture,” Folder 8, Box 2, Seaman Knapp Papers, Southwest Collection, 1-2, first and second quote from 1; Jackson Davis, “A Tribute to Seaman Knapp,” Folder 4, Box 1, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, third quote from 3.

<sup>27</sup> William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), xi-xiii, first, second, and third quotes xii.

for the individual farmer, but it would also mitigate any apprehensions that farmers felt toward outsiders by encouraging the community to learn from and work with one another.<sup>28</sup>

To test the effectiveness of this approach, Knapp held a meeting in Terrell, Texas on the morning of February 25, 1903. He assured the fifty men gathered there that his presence in the community was intended “to help organize the community so as to enable us to help ourselves” through demonstrating the latest agricultural techniques of seed selection, fertilization, methods of cultivation, and crop diversification. To begin, Knapp asked for a local farmer to volunteer part of his acreage for the purpose of the demonstration. Although the USDA promised to cover the costs of the experiment, the participating farmer would have to follow all of Knapp’s instructions and allow USDA representatives access to his land. Understandably, there was a great deal of trepidation from the farmers gathered who doubted that the new agricultural techniques would yield any particular benefit on their farms. Many continued to practice agricultural techniques that were handed down by their fathers and grandfathers, and they were reluctant to accept change. Knapp was keenly aware of this, and in order to soothe their apprehension, he explained, “It is all rot to say we should follow in the same old rut our fathers traveled. I respect my father and the memory of the old days, but we are living in a new age.” After hearing statistical evidence that these practices would increase farmers’ income by at least a third, two farmers volunteered for the demonstration. The final decision came down to a raffle between Walter C. Porter and B.T. Childress, with the Porter farm selected as the winner. Over the next year, Knapp worked closely with Porter, and the results were better than expected. Porter announced he had cleared “\$700

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<sup>28</sup> Jackson Davis, “A Tribute to Seaman Knapp,” 4-5, first and second quote from 4.

more than would have been made under the ordinary methods of farming employed, and that in 1904 he would work his entire farm, about 800 acres, upon the basis of the same cultivation methods which had been followed on the experimental plats.”<sup>29</sup>

The success of the Porter Farm demonstration garnered national attention, particularly from northern philanthropists. After establishing the Farmer’s Cooperative Extension work in 1904, Knapp chose Houston, Texas as the agency’s headquarters since the presence of railroads in the area appeared to make it the best place to coordinate extension work throughout the South. Yet in the first years of Cooperative Extension work, the organization was plagued with inadequate funding. Around the same time, a northern organization called the General Education Board was founded on January 15, 1902 by John D. Rockefeller. His goal was to “promote education throughout the nation” by cooperating “with state and local authorities as well as private organizations” for the purposes of conducting “educational experimentations along new and hitherto untried lines.” The Board was particularly interested in improving southern education which it deemed “necessarily inefficient and unsatisfactory.” After learning of the success of Knapp’s work with the demonstration method, the General Board of Education offered to finance the educational extension of farm demonstrations. This would, they believed, increase farmers’ income as well as lead to the creation of better schools throughout the South. Furthermore, it “hoped to aid, not by foisting upon the South a program from

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<sup>29</sup> Jackson Davis, “A Tribute to Seaman Knapp,” 4-5, first quote from 4; Terrell Transcript, “A Record of the First Demonstration Farm, and the Events that Resulted in the Demonstration Method of Teaching, Now Known Throughout the World as the Extension Service,” File 3, Box 1, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, 1-14, second quote from 1, third quote from 3; U.S. Department of Agricultural, Bureau of Plant Industry, “The Work of the Community Demonstration Farm at Terrell, Texas by Seaman Knapp,” Bulletin no. 51, part II (February 17, 1904), Folder 1, Box 1, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, 4-5, fourth quote from 4.

outside, but by cooperating with Southern leaders in sympathetically working out a program framed by them on the basis of local conditions and considerations.”<sup>30</sup>

An agreement was reached between the Secretary of the General Education Board, Wallace Buttrick, and Knapp in April 1906. The funds provided by the Board led to an “immediate and rapid expansion of the demonstration movement in every direction.” By extending demonstration work in eight states, the Board helped the USDA conquer “new territory, rapidly increase the number activities, and touch more people.” In accepting the funding from the General Education Board, however, the USDA was careful not to relinquish complete control to the Board. The memorandum between the two clearly stated that USDA representatives would be responsible for coordinating all demonstration work in the South as well as controlling where the Board’s funds would be distributed. In a letter from the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture to Wallace Buttrick, B.T. Galloway warned Buttrick that “the Department recognizes that the work you are undertaking is purely philanthropic and therefore deserving of the highest consideration...However, the Board can in no way consider itself responsible for the management of these funds.”<sup>31</sup>

Though Knapp and the General Education Board predominately focused their attention on improving agricultural practices in the South, they also foresaw the value in extending demonstration education to rural women. Knapp wrote,

If much can be done for boys to interest and instruct them in their life work, more can be done for girls...If the spoon can deplete the resources of the farm more rapidly than the shovel can increase them, then the

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<sup>30</sup> Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas* (San Antonio: The Naylor Company, 1958), 2; General Board of Education, 3-4, 20-22, 14, first and second quote 3, third quote 22, fourth quote from 35.

<sup>31</sup> General Board of Education, 35; B.T. Galloway to Dr. Wallace Buttrick, May 22, 1906, Folder 12, Box 1, Seaman Knapp Papers, Southwest Collection, 1-3, first, second, and third quotes from 1.

training of girls in home management is the most important branch of agriculture.<sup>32</sup>

The General Education Board agreed that “domestic arts” should become “an accepted feature of rural education.” Certainly, this was an important acknowledgment of women’s role in maintaining a sustainable farm. Yet just as the ideal of separate spheres perpetuated in the agrarian myth and home economics course work reduced women’s role to the home, so too did Knapp and the General Education Board. Girls were fundamentally “the homemakers,” whose primary tasks centered on developing the skills necessary to “transform the environment of the home into a place of beauty.”<sup>33</sup>

During the early decades of the twentieth century, programs were targeted specifically at rural America’s female population. The first girls’ demonstration programs originated in Aiken County, South Carolina, and soon after, Texas developed its own demonstration work for girls. Edna Westbook Trigg, a farm wife and school principal in Milam County, was asked to organize a “Girls’ Tomato Club” for young women in December 1911. After accepting the position, Trigg worked diligently with girls throughout the spring by teaching each girl in the club to cultivate a tenth of an acre in tomatoes which they would later can for food storage. Less than a year later, more than 3,000 citizens gathered in Milano, Texas in order to witness the first exhibit of girls’ garden products in the state. Trigg recalled, “It was as fine an exhibit as I ever witnessed. It consisted of canned tomatoes, also peaches....The girls wrote essays, and prizes were given....The county superintendent of schools offered a set of Encyclopedia for the best.”

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<sup>32</sup> Knapp, “The Purposes for Which the Farmers’ Cooperative Demonstration Work is Organized By the United States Department of Agriculture and the Methods of Organization,” Folder 20, Box 1, Seaman Knapp Papers, Southwest Collections, 8.

<sup>33</sup> Knapp, “The Purposes for Which the Farmers’ Cooperative Demonstration Work is Organized By the United States Department of Agriculture and the Methods of Organization,” 1-9, first and third quote from 8-9; General Board of Education, second quote from 25.

Trigg had not only proved that girls wanted to work in demonstration clubs in Texas, but she also showed that the community supported female demonstration education.<sup>34</sup>

By the early 1900s, interest in improving the conditions of rural America extended beyond the USDA's efforts. One organization, called the Country Life movement, gained national prominence in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Often called the "rural arm of American Progressivism," Country Lifers were comprised of intellectuals, journalists, politicians, and scientists. Even President Theodore Roosevelt, who already considered himself a Progressive, joined the campaign efforts. In 1907, he created the Country Life Commission to "survey the quality of rural life and to make recommendations on how the government might ameliorate rural conditions." Two years later, the commission's director, Professor Liberty Hyde Bailey, presented the findings of the committee. In all categories, the report found that America's rural population suffered far worse than the urban population. Problems of "rural poverty, social disorganization, poor schools, poor roads, poor nutrition and health, soil depletion, and lack of responsible rural leadership" plagued America's agrarian populace. By stressing the pathological conditions of rural America, Country Lifers increased national awareness of the problems that beleaguered the nation's countryside.<sup>35</sup>

Country Lifers also levied criticisms toward the Department of Agriculture, believing that it was not doing enough for the rural women of America. In response, D. F. Houston, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, addressed a letter to America's rural women in the fall of 1913. He stated, "Because we believe that women themselves

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<sup>34</sup> Edna W. Trigg, "Early Extension Work as I Remember It," in *Home Demonstration Work in Texas* (San Antonio, TX: Naylor Company, 1958), 17-19, first and second quote from 17.

<sup>35</sup> Katherine Jellison, *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913-1963* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 3-5, 25-28, first quote from 3, second and third quote from 25.

are best fitted to tell the department how it can improve its service for them, I respectfully request you communicate your ideas to me in the enclosed franked envelope.” Secretary Houston received 2,241 letters from the rural wives of America. Some women advocated for specific reform campaigns, such as a policy to eliminate the housefly, ptomaine poisoning in tin cans, or bacteria in milk bottles. Others expressed discontent with the drudgeries of everyday life. One woman lamented, “I have never been to a lecture, nor play, nor show since marriage...Don’t have time. I am making soap and catchup today.” Another woman expressed similar sentiments regarding the needs of farm families. “The greatest benefit that any government could bestow...would be to put them in touch with the world of thought, progress, and amusement. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy – and it is even more disastrous for Jill.” As Secretary Houston discovered, the Department of Agriculture could no longer ignore the rural women of America.<sup>36</sup>

In many ways, Country Lifers’ reform efforts closely mirrored the campaigns of the nation’s land-grant institutions. In discussing the reform agenda of the Country Life Movement, William L. Bowers described that the “major purpose of rural reform efforts was to make the social, intellectual, and economic aspects of country life more satisfying” in order to meet the agricultural demands of urban populations, to reduce the rural-to-urban migration, and to encourage the European immigrants to stay in the rural countryside. To meet these goals, the Country Life movement focused on two tactics. The first encouraged farmers and ranchers to adopt modernization in their agricultural practices. Ideally, they hoped “the limitless opportunities of the nineteenth century” and “the technological achievements of the twentieth century” would provide prospects for

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<sup>36</sup> Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas*, 8-12, first and second quote from 8-9, third quote from 11-12.

rural Americans. Women's historian Katherine Jellison in *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913-1963* calls this approach New Agriculture. By encouraging farmers and their wives to rely more heavily on modern technology and scientific farming methods, the focus of New Agriculture hoped to reduce the daily requirements of physical labor on the family farm. This would allow rural Americans, Country Lifers argued, the time to meet their second goal: "the 'elevation' of rural society through the improvement of rural churches, schools, health care facilities, voluntary organizations, and family life."<sup>37</sup>

Jellison and others chastise these reformers for their insistence that rural farm families adopt urban, middle-class standards. Rooting their reform campaign in the belief that rural conditions were backward and inferior to the urban condition, advocates believed that rural uplift meant that the daily tasks of rural women should more closely resemble that of urban, middle-class women. In promoting the proliferation of modern, labor-saving devices in the country home as a means of reducing farm women's daily burdens and allowing more time for participation in community uplift campaigns, early-twentieth-century efforts for rural reform closely mirrored the urban, Progressive equivalent.

Nevertheless, as Jellison argues, these reformers "ignored the cultural and economic realities of the women they were attempting to aid." The survival of the American farm depended on the diversity of rural women's labor, and rural women knew it. Working in the field and barn was just as significant for rural women as laboring in the home, and without acknowledging the diversity of women's labor or its importance,

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<sup>37</sup> William L. Bowers, "Country-Life Reform, 1900-1920: A Neglected Aspect of Progressive Era History," *Agricultural History* 45, no. 3 (July 1971): 211-215, first quote from 211, second quote from 215; Jellison, 4-5, third quote from 4.



many advocates of rural reform centered their efforts on the perpetuation and re-establishment of “the gender hierarchy on American farms.” By centering their reform efforts on alleviating women’s work within the farm home, many officials misunderstood farm women’s central complaints. They desired that their work both inside and outside the family farm be valued as essential to its economic success, not simply reduced to household duties.<sup>38</sup>

Regardless, the call for rural reforms in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries gained national prominence. The origination of land-grant colleges and experiment stations provided new scientific methods of cultivation, seed selection, and fertilization that promised to not only increase farmers’ economic prosperity but also to increase the agricultural prosperity of the nation. The development of the discipline of home economics gave women academics a place in institutions of higher learning as well as created a public forum in which to discuss innovative methods for increasing the health of America’s families. In finding new ways to disseminate these lessons to rural Americans, the demonstration method, funded both by federal and private funds, became an innovative way to teach agricultural and homemaking techniques. Furthermore, the national attention garnered by the Country Life movement continued to convince Americans that something needed to be done in order to save its rural population. All of these reform campaigns based their solutions on education, and politicians, scientists, and philanthropists realized that a more permanent method of disseminating this education needed to be established.

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<sup>38</sup> Jellison, 3-17, first quote from 3, second quote from 17; For other examples of criticizing these reform efforts, see Melissa Walker, *All We Knew Was to Farm: Rural Women in the Upcountry South, 1919-1941* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

In 1914, southern congressmen took the lead in advocating for federal rural reform measures. For the first time in eighteen years, southern Democrats dominated the United States House and Senate, where their “traditional one-party nature of southern politics” gave them an “obvious advantage” in passing legislation. As “the political spokesmen of a region harboring the nation’s highest proportion of rural population,” southern representatives hoped to garner the support of their rural constituents by enabling “the South to be more competitive in developing its farm economy,” while also improving “the quality of rural life.” Senator Hoke Smith of Georgia and Congressman Asbury F. Lever of South Carolina proposed a bill that would allocate federal funds to the Department of Agriculture and land-grant colleges for the purpose of appointing an agricultural and home demonstration agent in each of the nation’s 2,850 rural counties.<sup>39</sup>

Local and state support for these programs was a paramount concern in the bill. By stating the federal government would match state and local funds in establishing agricultural and home demonstration work, the Smith-Lever Act made sure rural counties themselves wanted these programs established. Convinced of the success of the demonstration method, these advocates of the Smith-Lever Bill believed it would solve the problems that plagued America’s agrarian populace. Smith stated, “By it the yield of the farm will be enhanced so that the cost of living will be reduced, farm income multiplied and reflected in better farm dwellings, more of the comforts of life, rural life made more attractive, and the farming population increased.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Philip A. Grant, Jr. “Senator Hoke Smith, Southern Congressmen, and Agricultural Education, 1917-1917,” *Agricultural History* 60, no. 2 (Spring 1986): 112-121, first and second quote from 121, third quote from 112.

<sup>40</sup> Grant, quote from 120.

The bill was not unopposed, especially by northern and Midwestern Republicans. Albert B. Cummins of Iowa worried that the Smith-Lever Act's allocation of funds would overwhelmingly benefit the South at the expense of other rural populations in the nation. To combat this, he proposed an amendment that based the allocation of federal funds on farm acreage rather than rural population numbers; however, it was overwhelmingly defeated in the House with "not a single southerner recorded in the affirmative." Additionally, Wesley L. Jones from New York worried that the southern whites would extend services primarily to rural whites and exclude the aid to southern African-Americans who suffered from poverty at rates much higher than white farmers. Jones' concerns proved to be correct. Though Jones advocated for dividing funds equally between black and white colleges, southern senators blocked the amendment. Senator James K. Vardaman of Mississippi denounced the Jones Amendment by arguing "agricultural extension work had to be directed by the Anglo-Saxon, the man of proven judgment, initiative, wisdom, and experience." It is important to note that from the moment of the Extension Service's inception, its programs were highly racialized, a trend that would continue in the organization for over fifty years.<sup>41</sup>

Despite opposition, southern congressmen and senators succeeded in passing the Smith-Lever Bill, and President Woodrow Wilson signed it into law on May 8, 1914. In doing so, he provided the establishment of the Extension Service at land-grant universities all across the nation. This was significant not only for American farmers but also for their wives. Though its aid was predicated on the ideology of separate spheres, Smith-Lever provided educational resources for the rural wives of America. After the bill passed, Congressman Lever made a speech to Congress in which he commented on the

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<sup>41</sup> Grant, 116-120, first and second quotes from 116.

importance of the Smith-Lever Act for farm women. He stated, “Our efforts heretofore have been given in aid of the farm man, his horses, cattle, and hogs, but his wife and girls have been neglected almost to a point of criminality.”<sup>42</sup>

After the passage of the Smith-Lever Act, Texas established its Extension Service at Texas A&M University in College Station. Clarence Ousley was appointed the first director of the Texas Extension Service in 1914, and he served in that capacity until 1919. Bernice Carter was appointed the first state home demonstration agent, and under the direction of Ousley and Carter, agricultural and home demonstration agents dispersed into the rural counties of Texas. Male agricultural agents worked with farmers to improve agricultural conditions while female home demonstration agents worked primary with farmers’ wives for the purpose of developing better home-making and food preservation techniques. Both types of county agents were under the supervision of district agents to whom they sent monthly reports. After compiling the monthly reports into annual reports, the district agents sent the reports to the Extension Service’s headquarters as well as to the Department of Agriculture.<sup>43</sup>

During the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, advocates for rural reform pressed for the extension of education to America’s rural communities. Each one of these rural reform efforts contributed to the development of the Extension Service and the programs it disseminated across America’s rural counties. The establishment of land-grant universities not only provided a home for state Extension Service reform services, but their trained agricultural and home economic specialists structured and coordinated all of its educational programming. By advocating self-efficiency and resourcefulness

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<sup>42</sup> Jellison, 16-17, quote from 16.

<sup>43</sup> Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas*, 14-22.

within a rural, communal environment, the development of the demonstration method also provided the ideal model in which to teach and disseminate information to rural Americans. Due to their interests in improving the poor living conditions in rural America as well their ability to fund programs, the General Education Board and the Country Life Commission garnered the necessary national attention that allowed for the development of a more permanent method of extending rural education. With the establishment of the Extension Service in 1914, educational reformers believed they could provide rural Americans with the tools necessary to “help them help themselves” in the “most universal university in the entire field of education.” Almost a hundred years later, the Extension Service’s mission has changed only slightly. Known today as the Texas AgriLife Extension Service, it still proudly boasts that its mission lies in “improving the lives of people, businesses, and communities across Texas and beyond through high-quality, relevant education.”<sup>44</sup>

The establishment of federal Extension Service programs was particularly significant for the rural wives of America. By offering educational demonstrations on a wide variety of subjects in the domestic sciences, it taught rural women skills that would not only improve the standard of living on their farms and in their homes but would also encourage larger community improvement campaigns in rural counties. Yet the dissemination of these programs was not without contention. For many rural Texans, federal intervention sparked skepticism and distrust, and many Extension Service personnel encountered rural individuals who wanted neither their services nor their presence in their counties. Additionally, since nearly all home demonstration agents were

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<sup>44</sup> Hon. A. F. Lever, “Extension the Most Universal University,” 7-9, first and second quote from 7; Third quote from Texas AgriLife Extension Service, “What Is Extension?” *Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service*, <http://agrilifeextension.tamu.edu/about/> (accessed 1/10/2013).

single, educated women, rural women of the counties, who married young and had little formal education, doubted whether these agents could really understand the reality of their daily lives. The purpose of the following chapter is to explore how and what home demonstration agents attempted to teach rural women as well as to evaluate their attempts to “make the best better” for the rural women of Texas.

### CHAPTER III

#### **“WE ARE NOW REACHING FOR THE HOME”<sup>45</sup>: HOME DEMONSTRATION WORK IN TEXAS, 1914-1945**

Due to her work with the girls' tomato canning club in Milam County in 1912, Mrs. Edna Westbrook Trigg is renowned as the first home demonstration agent in Texas. Yet shortly after her success with the girls, Milam County ended the work due to lack of funding. It was only after the passage of the Smith-Lever Act in 1914 that home demonstration work returned to Texas. From the moment of its reinstatement, Trigg eagerly resumed the work, and in February 1916, she promptly accepted a position from the director of the Texas Extension Service to serve as the first home demonstration agent for Denton County. In accepting the position, Trigg left behind her home in Milam County, a place where she had lived almost all her life. A woman nearing her fifties, she was married with two raised children and worked as a principal and teacher at a rural high school. It is somewhat unclear what motivated Trigg to uproot her life in Milam County for the uncertainty of this new career. What does emerge in her memoirs is that she was determined to do so. Upon receiving the telegram from Texas A&M, she was advised by her son, “But of course you are not going” to which Trigg responded sternly, “But of course I am going!” Undoubtedly, she was lucky in that her husband supported her decision and “readily agreed” to move with her. By noon of that day, she sent letters

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<sup>45</sup> Myrtle Murray, “History of Home Demonstration Work, 1915-1939”, 1939, File 7, Box 4, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, 2.

to the board of trustees at her school informing them of her decision to leave.<sup>46</sup>

Despite Trigg's success in the past, she met significant obstacles within the first few years of her employment as home demonstration agent for Denton County. With little direction, limited training, and scarce funding, Trigg depended on her own ingenuity and social skills as she sought to establish home demonstration work there. After receiving a brief training session given by Professor O.H. Benson from the United States Department of Agriculture in Washington, D.C., she lamented, "Mr. Benson, you have thrown us in the lake and given us no means of saving ourselves." Benson responded bluntly, "Well, you *are* in the lake, and those that can swim will do so – those that can't will simply have to drown." This lack of training could have significantly hindered Trigg's ability to connect to the rural families in Denton County. After a failed attempt to pressure-cook corn ended with exploding tin cans and smatterings of canned corn over the walls, ceiling, and floor, the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce informed Trigg, "Now you take all the blame for this." Trigg recounted, "Of course, I took the blame."<sup>47</sup>

Her lack of training may have caused embarrassment at first, but it was hardly her most significant obstacle. Though she observed that the county judge and commissioners were "very courteous" to her, they were nevertheless "not enthusiastic for they were criticized for having this 'government woman' here." Trigg's affiliation with the federal government certainly caused her to feel the antagonism of local residents. A farmer on the street approached her saying, "You must be that government woman sent here to show our wives how to do things," and he quickly offered her five dollars if she would pass his house and not offer a demonstration to his wife. Craddock, the male county agent

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<sup>46</sup> Edna W. Trigg, "Early Extension Work As I Remember It," 1928, File 2, Box 3, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, 3-5, first and second quote from 3, emphasis original.

<sup>47</sup> Trigg, 8-10, first and second quote from 8, third and fourth quote from 10.



in Denton, went so far as to give Trigg a list of people in each community who were “friendly to the government people” and the ones who were most certainly not. He warned her, “You try to make it to this place to spend the night. Don’t stop at that place.”<sup>48</sup>

Overcoming prejudice and gaining the confidence of residents in the county were some of Trigg’s most significant obstacles to mount in establishing home demonstration programming in Denton, as they were for home demonstration agents throughout the state. In order to “sell Extension work to the people,” agents not only had to “find out [locals’] ways of thinking and their needs,” but they also had to establish themselves as professionals with the training and skills necessary to offer legitimate suggestions on how to improve farm life. Creating personal relationships with rural women while also establishing their authority was tricky business. Since most home demonstration agents were young, college-educated, and unmarried, rural women assumed that they had little in common with these “uppity” Extension Service employees. Furthermore, many rural women believed that agents’ insistence on science devalued “the homemaking techniques that had been handed down from grandmother to mother to daughter,” and they feared that these new scientific demonstrations in homemaking undervalued a cherished convention of rural life, the “knowledge of experience.”<sup>49</sup>

For these reasons, agents had to be bold and tenacious while also sensitive and understanding in their interactions with rural women. Trigg went against Craddock’s advice and visited the houses that were supposedly unfriendly to “government people,” a

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<sup>48</sup> Trigg, 11-13, first, second, and third quote from 11-12, fourth quote from 13.

<sup>49</sup> Dora Barnes quoted in Kate Adele Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas* (San Antonio: The Naylor Company, 1958), first and second quote from 48; Kathleen R. Babbitt, “The Productive Farm Woman and the Extension Home Economists in New York State, 1920-1940,” *Agricultural History* 67, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 88-89, third quote from 89.

decision she later reported as being one of the best ones she ever made. Once these rural wives discovered that Trigg “was really human and made no claim to be a ‘know-it-all’,” they became “fast friends and very enthusiastic” about the lessons she imparted. In reflecting on her training session with Benson, Trigg recounted “Evidently, according to his metaphor, I swam.”<sup>50</sup>

In the few studies on home demonstration work across the nation, scholars writing about the Midwest and Deep South have addressed reasons why agents could initially be greeted with suspicion. They argue that since Extension Service employees based their reform objectives on transforming rural life in order to more closely resemble urban, middle-class standards, home demonstration agents were especially critical of rural living conditions and neglected to fully grasp the complexities of rural women’s daily labor. The foundation of these criticisms is most evident in the separation between male and female Extension Service employees’ spheres of influence. Since male agricultural agents worked outside the home and focused their demonstrations on increasing farming income while home demonstration agents primarily focused on reducing the heavy burdens of the farmwife’s labor inside the home, many argue that the Extension Service created new divisions of labor on the family farm based on urban conceptions of gender difference. The result designated men as the primary breadwinners, and women’s work on the farm became increasingly devalued and invisible. This has led many feminist historians of the Extension Service to argue that patriarchy not only remained unchallenged on the American farm, but that it also took on new intensity as farm men and women increasingly accepted modernization. Additionally, since the Extension Service drastically underfunded African-American home demonstration work and largely ignored

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<sup>50</sup>Trigg, 8-10, first, second, and third quote from 8.

white tenant farm families, scholars have also argued that the Extension Service's targeted audience was "middle-class white farm wives – a vision modeled on the suburban homemaker," and as such, Extension Service programs "assisted in the maintenance of a racially segregated rural society."<sup>51</sup>

To what extent the Extension Service's activities in Texas conformed to these practices well as how many rural women throughout the state responded to home demonstration programming will be the topic of this chapter. It will show that many rural women found significant benefits in home demonstration work. Not only did the programs foster skills in early-twentieth-century rural women that allowed them to escape the poverty and drudgery of their everyday labor, but they also encouraged women to take a more active role in national and community improvement campaigns. Furthermore, this chapter will reveal the challenges that home demonstration agents encountered as they embarked on Texas' rural counties. Even though home demonstration agents faced significant gender biases in the Extension Service and encountered their fair share of hardships in establishing home demonstration programming, they nevertheless believed their efforts were crucial to the progress of the rural counties they served.

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<sup>51</sup> Melissa Walker, *All We Knew Was to Farm: Rural Women in the Upcountry South, 1919-1941* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000), 117, 141, first quote from 117, second quote from 141. Though scholars' criticisms of the Extension Service will be discussed in this chapter, see the following texts for a more thorough debate over Extension Service activities: Katherine Jellison, *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913-1963* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Melissa Walker, *All We Knew Was to Farm: Rural Women in the Upcountry South, 1919-1941* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000); Lynne Rieff, "Revitalizing Southern Homes: Rural Women, the Professionalization of Home Demonstration Work, and the Limits of Reform, 1917-1945," in *Work, Family, and Faith: Rural Southern Women in the Twentieth Century*, ed by Melissa Walker and Rebecca Sharpless (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006); Rebecca S. Montgomery, *The Politics of Education in the New South: Women and Reform in Georgia, 1890-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996); Nancy Grey Osterud, *Putting the Barn Before the House: Women and Family Farming in Early-Twentieth-Century New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).

In 1914, federal attention was directed to America's agrarian women for the first time with the passage of the Smith-Lever Act. By matching local and state funds for the placement of home demonstration agents in Texas, the federal government made it possible to begin home demonstration work in July 1914. When the work began, the Extension Service was optimistic that Texas' rural population would immediately see the value of the lessons it offered. After all, as home demonstration district agent Myrtle Murray wrote, "We are now reaching for the home" for the purpose of placing "rural life upon a higher plain of profit, comfort, culture, influence and power."<sup>52</sup>

It was soon evident that establishing home demonstration work in Texas would not be an easy task. Agents not only had to appeal to rural women of the county, but they also had to negotiate and sell their services to powerful male county leaders in order to secure the necessary funding to begin their work. In order to assist these new agents, Extension Service officials formalized a set of procedures they believed would best introduce home demonstration work into these potentially hostile environments. If there was a male agricultural agent in the county, home demonstration agents were advised to start with him. Since he had undoubtedly established a reputation with a county judge and a commissioner court, he could propose the idea in a casual manner.<sup>53</sup>

The next step was to gain the support of local women. Home demonstration agents were encouraged to call on "the President of the Federation of Women's Clubs," who could help them make the right contacts and arrange meetings with other prominent women in the county. In most cases, home demonstration agents received a warm welcome from the federation. By 1919, the State Federation of Women's Clubs had

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<sup>52</sup> Murray, first and second quote from 2.

<sup>53</sup> Murray, 7-9.

adopted a slogan that called for “A home demonstration agent for every county in Texas,” and local clubs often donated fifty dollars or more for the establishment of home demonstration work. If the agent established a good relationship with clubwomen, the likelihood of her securing funding through the commissioner court was much greater. The “influential women in the town” would frequently accompany or take her to the local county court meetings and speak on her behalf. The last step, “if the attitude was favorable” (and sometimes it most certainly was not), was to “call on the county judge.” After the county established home demonstration work, agents continued to work with a variety of women’s clubs, such as the local federation group or the Red Cross, in order to maintain local women’s support. They not only attended meetings to give personal demonstrations to these club women, but they also helped local clubwomen with fundraisers.<sup>54</sup>

Early reports of Extension Service personnel indicate these procedures did not guarantee an agent’s appointment to the county. By April 1922, there were only fifty-three white home demonstration agents appointed in Texas out of 254 counties, and many of these agents were responsible for two or more counties. The slow growth of home demonstration work in Texas was due to two particular problems. Since Smith-Lever only allocated about \$150 a year for agents’ salaries, a bulk of their income depended on the support of county officials, and even if local commissioners courts approved the allocation of funding for home demonstration work, they often allotted a greater percentage of funding to male agricultural agents. This practice was not simply a local phenomenon. In 1933, state legislators introduced Texas House Bill 166 that drastically

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<sup>54</sup> Murray, 7-9, first, second, third, and fourth quote from 7-8; For an example of how home demonstration agents worked with local women’s clubs and how the relationships with the county judges were not always courteous, see chapter three of this thesis.

cut state funding for home demonstration agents. While the bill allocated \$80,000 for county agricultural agents, it slashed home demonstration funding by nearly fifty-four percent, leaving a budget of just \$30,000 for county home demonstration agents. The inequitable funding for the Extension Service's male and female county agents reflected the conventional gender bias that assigned a greater economic value to men's work rather than to women's. As women's historian Lynne Rieff explains, officials, reflective of a "patriarchal society [that] viewed men as the family breadwinners," predominately gave "farmers' problems top priority" over the potential benefits that home demonstration work could offer. This was true across a variety of professions. In his 1933 thesis, "Survey Study of Teacher Training in Texas and a Suggested Program," George Crutsinger reported that the median salary average for female teachers in Texas was between \$600 and \$800. In contrast, male teachers' salaries ranged from \$1,000 to \$1,500.<sup>55</sup>

Even if counties appropriated funds for home demonstration work, agents encountered skepticism from the rural population itself. As Extension Service specialist Helen Higgins Davis recounted, "The securing of farm women's active interest was a slow process... [Rural people believed] it was a needless expenditure of public money;

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<sup>55</sup> Bernice Carter, "Brief Summary of Home Demonstration Work in Texas," April 1, 1922, File 36, Box 2, TAMU Texas Agricultural Extension Service Historical Files, 1-2; Murray, "Historical Sketch of Home Demonstration Work in Texas," 1; Mrs. Ben B. Anthony to Chairman of Co. Home Dem. Councils, April 12, 1933, File 29, Box 1, TAMU Texas Agricultural Extension Service Historical Files; Lynne Rieff, "Revitalizing Southern Homes: Rural Women, the Professionalization of Home Demonstration Work, and the Limits of Reform, 1917-1945" in *Work, Family, and Faith: Rural Southern Women in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Melissa Walker and Rebecca Sharpless (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), first and second quote from 141; George Crutsinger, "Survey Study of Teacher Training in Texas and a Suggested Program," (master's thesis, Columbia University, 1933), 191.

women knew how to cook, grow spring gardens, and raise chickens... [And] early agents found farm people plainly antagonistic toward their endeavors.”<sup>56</sup>

To combat these antagonisms, Extension Service personnel turned to the academic discipline of home economics as a means to expand and legitimize the lessons they offered. From 1917 to 1923, Texas Extension Service Director Dr. T.O. Walton made a conscious effort to hire “additional and experienced home economics women” for home demonstration work. This was a marked departure from the early hiring practices. As Trigg’s early training sessions indicate, home demonstration agents received little or no specific training before their appointment. As the Extension Service sought to increase its credibility within the first ten years of home demonstration work, this practice changed. Gradually, women who had received degrees in home economics became agents. Since Texas A&M University did not accept women, the Texas Extension Service developed a working relationship with the women’s College of Industrial Arts [CIA], later renamed Texas Women’s University, in Denton as it attempted to hire trained home economics specialists. At first, tensions emerged between A&M and CIA as the Extension Service began to organize and coordinate home demonstration work throughout the state. In November 1914, President P.M. Bralley of the CIA addressed a letter to Texas A&M requesting that oversight of state home demonstration work be transferred to his institution. Since the college “has for its entire existence specialized in the problems of the woman in the home” and “it is more vitally connected with the girls, the women, and their part in home-life than any other Institution in Texas,” Bralley demanded “it was a matter of right and justice” that the CIA “should do the home

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<sup>56</sup> Helen Higgins Davis, “Home Demonstration Work in Texas,” 1936, File 4, Box 3, TAMU Texas Agricultural Extension Service Historical Files, quote from 7-8.

demonstration work.” Despite Bralley’s appeals, the A&M board paid little attention, and the Extension Service continued to run home demonstration work out of College Station.<sup>57</sup>

The working relationship between home economists and home demonstration agents had primarily two effects for home demonstration work. First, it provided women academics with the authority to enter into previously male-dominated academic disciplines and institutions. These women argued that home economics relied on the same empirical, scientific research methods as other disciplines; therefore, women’s work deserved as much attention in “rural sociology, dairy husbandry, animal husbandry, agricultural engineering, agronomy, and horticulture” as men’s. The effect of this, as Nancy K. Berlage has argued, was that “home economics experts gradually extended their influence into everyday life, evoking the configurations of power, authority, and knowledge within the family” while at the same time imbuing themselves with the “confidence they needed to seize opportunities in a variety of institutional settings.” By the early 1930s, nearly two-thirds of the 235 home demonstration agents in Texas held a bachelor’s degree in home economics.<sup>58</sup>

By claiming scientific authority in all matters of home life, home economics helped agents find the means to establish their authority thereby allowing them to insert themselves into nearly all aspects of family life. As professor Hasel Kyrk observed in the

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<sup>57</sup> Jessie Whitacre, “A Glimpse of the History of Home Economics Research,” January 31, 1936, File 4, Box 3, TAMU Texas Agricultural Extension Service Historical Files, first quote from 1; P.M. Bralley to Sirs, November 4, 1914, File 22, Box 10, TAMU Texas Agricultural Extension Service Historical Files, second, third, fourth, and fifth quote from 1.

<sup>58</sup> Bernice Carter, “Brief Summary of Home Demonstration Work in Texas,” April 1, 1922, File 36, Box 2, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, first and second quote from 1-2; Nancy K. Berlage, “Organizing the Farm Bureau: Family, Community, and Professionals, 1914-1928,” *Agricultural History* 75, vol. 4 (Autumn 2001): third and fourth quote from 425-426; Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas*, 180-181.



1920s, “Home economics research is not anything or everything pertaining to food or to textiles or clothing, to equipment or to any other commodity the family uses... All problems of home economics research inevitably fall into some branch of the fundamental sciences or arts or learning.” Anything that might improve “the health, the comfort, the well-being...the social relationships of individual membership and (or) the whole family group” could fall under home demonstration work.<sup>59</sup>

The all-encompassing definition of home economics was particularly important for women employed by the Extension Service in that it also instilled in them the authority and assurance needed to conduct and gain support for their demonstrations. Along with “technical training in all problems of the rural home,” agents were also expected to master etiquette, business, and penmanship skills. Armed with a “pleasing personality” and “discriminating judgment,” agents navigated various social and political spheres on a routine basis. Since many home demonstration agents shared an office with the agricultural agent in the county courthouse, they frequently interacted with county judges and the commissioners courts. Additionally, they were expected to interact with “local merchants bankers, editors, and others” in order to promote home demonstration work and secure additional funding. Most county agents also prepared weekly columns for the local newspapers and gave regular radio broadcasts. It was also understood that they would give “valuable assistance” in emergency situations, whether these be an outbreak of “influenza, hurricane, flood, drought or economic distress.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Jessie Whitacre, “A Glimpse of the History of Home Economics Research,” January 31, 1936, File 4, Box 3, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, first and second quote from 2.

<sup>60</sup> Grace Frysinger, “Home Demonstration Work,” U.S. Department of Agriculture Miscellaneous Publication, no. 173 (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1933), first and second quote from 8-9.

In all, Extension Service officials demanded much from their home demonstration agents though they received less funding than male agricultural agents. As Director Martin wrote, an agent “should be an ambassador, a diplomat, and a financier... a nurse, sanitarian, and health officer.... She is a chorist, a gymnast, and an all-around recreationist... [and] a good carpenter, cabinet-maker and tinner.” Though much was expected of these agents, many believed they were “overworked, underpaid, and often unrecognized for their contributions.” Agents’ salaries ranged from \$900 a year to less than \$300 a year, depending on the generosity of their counties. In the beginning, they were only paid for three or four months out of the year, but by the mid-1920s this practice changed due to the recognition that home demonstration work demanded “full-time employment instead of seasonal.” The salary home demonstration agents received was strikingly similar to female schoolteachers throughout the state. As Crutsinger reported in 1933, the median salary average for female teachers in Texas ranged from \$800 to \$600.<sup>61</sup>

Though agents instructed other women how to run their households and to care for their families, they were not allowed to have their own. When home demonstration work was first established, the Extension Service hired its fair share of married women, but by the mid-1920s, agents who chose to marry were no longer allowed to continue their work. Employment records of home demonstration county agents reveal that marriage was the primary reason for the high turn-over rates among agents. Many in the Extension Service considered this a natural occurrence, since as Director Martin wrote, agents who married became a testament to the value of home demonstration work.

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<sup>61</sup> O.B. Martin quoted in Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas*, first quote from 169; Carter, 2; Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas*, second quote from vi; Crutsinger, 191.

There is a strong disposition on the part of agents to practice what they preach... This probably accounts for the fact that a large number of home demonstration agents get married every year. It is a loss to the work, of course, but not a total loss, for they soon make homes which are conscious and helpful as object lessons of the very things which they have been promoting.<sup>62</sup>

In not allowing home demonstration agents to be both employees and wives, the Extension Service's policy reflected a prevalent and long-standing gender convention grounded in the English common law of coverture. Under the practice of coverture, upon marriage a wife's legal status became subsumed under her husband's. The result, as labor historian Amy Dru Stanley writes, was that marriage "ordained male proprietorship and absolute female dispossession, establishing self-ownership as the fundamental right of men alone." Marriage not only bound a wife "to serve and obey the master of the household" but also "to yield all she owned – her person, her body, her 'being.'" Wives were dispossessed of self-ownership, bound to a relationship wherein their bodies and their labor belonged to their husband.<sup>63</sup>

Well into the twentieth century, cultural prescriptions defined that wives' primary obligation was to their husbands and households, a concept that was clearly internalized in the Extension Service's employment practices by the mid-1920s. When local San Angelo resident Mrs. Elizabeth Passow requested appointment as Tom Green County's home demonstration agent, Director Martin wrote a long letter explaining why married women were not allowed to become agents. After conducting an analysis of the performance of married versus unmarried agents, he explained that there were only two

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<sup>62</sup> Martin quoted in Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas*, 168.

<sup>63</sup> Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 10-11, first quote from 10, second quote from 11.

possible outcomes. “They either neglected their home duties or else neglected the public service.” In the mind of male Extension Service specialists, women could not do both jobs equally. Martin further claimed that since a wife’s primary “responsibilities [were] to her home and children, she always and invariably [sides] in favor of the home and thus her responsibilities as a public servant took second place.” He concluded:

There are of course exceptions to all rules, but our experience has been in ninety out of a hundred cases at least, when women with home responsibilities were appointed to the positions in this Service, that the Service sooner or later suffered as a consequence...If she should make a successful county Home Demonstration Agent, she would of necessity be compelled to neglect her home and family.<sup>64</sup>

Even though “unmarried women seldom [remained] in the Service as long as married women,” Martin did not believe the high turnover rates of home demonstration agents were of a serious consequence. Instead, it was more detrimental to society and the service if a wife’s first and primary duty to her husband, household, and children was neglected due to public employment.<sup>65</sup>

Martin’s letter also reveals why extension specialists refused to appoint unmarried women in the county where they were raised. Though many home demonstration agents came from farming and ranching backgrounds, they were not allowed to serve as their communities’ agent. There were primarily two reasons for this. First, Martin argued that outside agents were better trained and qualified to offer agricultural and homemaking education. Additionally, Extension Service specialists found “that in a great many instances the farmer or farm housewife did not follow the leadership of local persons to the degree and with the same enthusiasm they would follow the same character of

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<sup>64</sup> Director Martin to Hon. J.E. Hoggs, January 26, 1925, File 25, Box 15, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, 4.

<sup>65</sup> Director Martin to Hon. J.E. Hoggs, January 26, 1925, first, second, and third quote from 4.

leadership of persons they did not know.” Martin cited the experience of Elizabeth Passow as case and point. After Passow circulated a petition to advocate for her appointment as Tom Green County home demonstration agent, Martin learned that some residents refused to sign the petition or “signed it reluctantly because of their fear of causing offense to Passow.” Fearing that local politics would make citizens of Tom Green County either “unwilling to follow her leadership” or “lukewarm” toward Extension Service programming, Passow was denied appointment. “The Service is of greater importance than any individual,” Martin concluded by telling Passow, “I hope this proves to you conclusively that there is nothing antagonistic in our attitudes or actions.”<sup>66</sup>

Given that home demonstration agents were paid drastically less than agricultural agents, were not allowed to marry, and had to move away from their home counties, women who chose to become home demonstration agents must have been quite determined to do so. While there were undoubtedly various motivations to enter the profession, many chose it because they believed in the importance of the work and had an inherent desire to help Texas rural populations. As Bernice Carter wrote, the requirement of a home demonstration agent was “to have a love of people and an intelligent interest in their welfare.” As evident in Trigg’s memoirs as well, they clung dearly to the belief that the lessons they offered were of vital importance to the state’s rural population, and many embarked on their work with the upmost joy and optimism. For many rural reformers, home demonstration agents came to represent the “unsung heroines of a great educational movement in the interest of the farm and ranch homes of Texas.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Director Martin to Hon. J.E. Hoggs, January 26, 1925, first, second, and third quote from 3, fourth quote from 4.

<sup>67</sup> Carter, “Brief Summary of Home Demonstration Work in Texas,” first quote from 1-2; Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas*, second quote from vi.

From 1915 to 1945, home demonstration work in Texas organized a variety of educational programs for rural women that shifted over time in response to wars, droughts, depressions, and improvements in technology. At the heart of all of these programs was the belief that home demonstration work was “an interactive process, shaped as much by its subjects as by its leaders.” Attempting to gain the confidence of local women while also offering education programs that would best meet their specific needs, agents structured their demonstrations so that no two would be alike. Nevertheless, each had a goal to help rural women develop self-sufficiency, to reduce the burdens of their daily tasks, and to improve their standard of living by providing them with the tools to “help them help themselves.”<sup>68</sup>

Home demonstration work’s first and most enduring emphasis was on improving the nutrition and food storage of rural families, a trend that is still evident in the organization today. Influenced by home economists’ occupation with nutrition, many home demonstration agents feared that rural families suffered from malnutrition. As they surveyed rural homes across the state, agents discovered that many rural families could only enjoy fruits and vegetables seasonally since they lacked the equipment and knowledge necessary to can and preserve them. By stocking the pantry with canned fruits and vegetables, home demonstration agents hoped to instruct rural women on how to use a “balanced diet” to ward off germs and diseases. They urged that “just as the stockmen are taught to feed their cattle balanced rations,” so too should rural mothers provide proper nutrition for their children to “condition the right bone growth and right strength of muscle.” Many women responded to this message. As one rural woman wrote:

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<sup>68</sup> Walker, *All We Knew Was How to Farm*, first quote from 99; A .F. Lever, “Extension the Most Universal University,” *Texas Extension Service Farm News*, September 1931, File 4, Box 1, TAMU Texas Agricultural Extension Service Historical Files, second quote from 1.

The most important [thing I learned] is my knowledge of food values and preparation. My little daughter was skinny and looked ill all the time....I learned that foods contained different nutrients and that each of them has a special work to perform...I set about correcting my child's diet and now she is the picture of health.<sup>69</sup>

Though canning equipment was “scarce, expensive, and difficult to use,” agents devised ways to introduce canning to rural women. One of these ways was to solicit the help of corporate firms. In 1915, home demonstration agents approached J.P Dowell and Sons of McKinney, a company that specialized in making pressure cookers, to ask its assistance in furnishing equipment for home demonstration work. The company willingly agreed and provided equipment to agents who promised to pay when they could spare the money. This was a clever strategy on the part of J.P Dowell and Sons of McKinney. Not only was it providing resources to help rural Texans, but it was also introducing its products to rural women who would hopefully become hooked on its equipment and invest their own income in securing canners for their families. From 1915 to 1917, home demonstration agents devoted a considerable amount of their time to teaching rural women how to properly can fruits and vegetables whose value to Texas farm families totaled over \$92,000 in just two years.<sup>70</sup>

It was not just the nutrition of the rural family that consumed home demonstration agents' interests. In 1921, Kittie Washington turned her attention to alleviating poor

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<sup>69</sup> Anonymous farmwoman quoted in Walker, *All We Knew Was How to Farm*, 105.

<sup>70</sup> Mrs. Nat P. Jackson, “Health in Farm Homes,” *Cooperative Extension Service and Home Economics*, Course #3, 1917, File 27, Box 4, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, 2; Louise Bryant, “Farm-Home Management and an Agricultural Policy for Texas,” in Statements Prepared by Texas Agricultural Extension Service Specialists to Aid in Developing a Board Agricultural Policy for Texas (College Station, TX: Extension Service, Texas A. and M. College, 1941), File 26, Box 1, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, first, second, and third quote from 65; Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas*, 3, 31, 33. For a more complete discussion of home economists and Extension Service personnel's turn to nutrition, see Nancy K. Berlage, “The Establishment of an Applied Social Science: Home Economics, Science, and Reform at Cornell University, 1870-1930,” in *Gender and American Social Science: The Formative Years*, ed. by Helene Silverberg (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998): 185-231.

nutrition among children in rural schools. She wrote, “The percent of malnutrition cases per hundred school children in Texas is said to be 16% for rural districts to 6% in cities...Indications are that the number will be greater than this and why – because of inappropriate foods being eaten.” In meeting with rural teachers and clubwomen as well as rural mothers, Washington demonstrated techniques on how to improve the nutrition needs of children by encouraging local communities to can and preserve fresh fruits and vegetables. She also developed a program for preparing hot lunches in rural schools. For those children whose families did not have the resources to prepare school lunches, these efforts went a long way toward improving their health.<sup>71</sup>

From 1917 to 1945, food preservation and conservation continued to receive the bulk of home demonstration agents’ attention. With the nation’s entrance into World War I, the need for rural families to maintain an adequate food supply became a paramount concern for home demonstration agents. “Since a greater portion of public transportation was converted to wartime use,” shipments of food became progressively more difficult, and the Extension Service launched extensive canning and food conservation programs as a means to not only meet the food demands of rural families, but to also ensure that a steady supply of food would be available for servicemen overseas. During wartime years, Texas rural women saved an estimated \$1,259,194 in food costs with the “Feed Yourself at Home” campaign. Later, in 1930, pantry demonstrations became another popular program for rural women. In displaying what a well-stocked pantry should contain,

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<sup>71</sup> Kittie Washington, “1921: Annual Report of Home Economics Specialists,” A&M College of Texas, 1922, File 34, Box 2, TAMU Extension Service Historic Files, 1-2, quote from 2.



pantry demonstrations were “an extremely graphic method of teaching planned home food conservation for the family.”<sup>72</sup>

During the Depression years, food conservation and preservation again took center stage in home demonstration work as Texas experienced a statewide drought. Cooperation between the Extension Service, the Texas Relief Commission, and various New Deal relief agencies brought meat canning programs to Texas. In 1934, a hundred and seventy two meat relief canning plants were established in Texas rural counties employing more than 27,000. Between the years of 1930 and 1939, more than 90,000,000 cans of fruits and vegetables and nearly 60,000,000 cans of meat were preserved by these plants. “All in all,” wrote Kate Hill, “the cattle were canned, the people fed, and the Extension Service could add another star to its banner.”<sup>73</sup>

With the onset of World War II, the Victory Garden program emerged, and more than 119,723 Texas families signed Victory Demonstration Pledge Cards in Texas. In doing so, thousands of rural women pledged, “I will produce food, feed, and fiber to assure good health for myself, my family, and others.” Not only did this benefit rural families, but it also sought to improve the health and security of the nation. In a nation at war, concerns about the physical strength of Americans surfaced. Many believed that the Extension Service’s programs would improve the health of Americans. As Hill wrote, “Since the need for better physical strength through proper nutrition was an objective which was being emphasized from coast to coast,” the Victory Garden program “gave the motivation for teaching nutrition in relation to the nutrients provided by the remarkable foods which can be grown in the family or community garden.” Officials also hoped

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<sup>72</sup> Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas*, 33-37, first and second quote from 33, third quote from 37.

<sup>73</sup> Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas*, 38-39, quote from 39.

Victory Gardens would shift food production to wartime needs for troops. At the same time, Extension Service specialists developed the *Texas Food Standard*, a nutritional bulletin that listed the daily requirements for men, women, and children by age. As the war progressed, home demonstration agents also provided assistance to rural women forced to find new ways to “make do” due to strict war-time rationing. Agents developed recipes that used honey and molasses as a sweetening agent instead of sugar, and they also organized a “fat salvage campaign” to develop “more economical uses of fats at home.”<sup>74</sup>

Another significant aspect of home demonstration work for the rural women of Texas was clothing improvement programs. Beginning in 1923, county home demonstration agents focused on “millinery, dress forms, flower making, tailored finishes, dyeing techniques, and how to shop for clothes on a budget.” Though the rationale for extending clothing improvement programs sometimes appeared patronizing, it did identify a genuine need among rural women. Most clothes were produced at home with “comparatively few garments made by dressmakers or sewing women in the towns and cities.” For many rural women, infrequent trips into town and the lack of disposable income limited the options for new clothes, and most routinely wore “just a cotton dress.” Unfortunately, many agents believed that rural women “were not style conscious” and lacked the knowledge to “construct well-fitting garments of pleasing design,” which was one reason why “country women dressed differently in those days from urban women.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas*, 40-43, first quote from 42; Cooperative Extension Service in Agriculture and Home Economics, *Texas Food Standard* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M College System and U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1914), File 20, Box 2, Kate Adele Hill Papers, Cushing Memorial Library & Archives, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX (hereafter cited as Texas A&M Hill Papers), second quote from 2.

<sup>75</sup> Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas*, 46-47, first, second, third, and fourth quote from 46-47.

Though the motives of the clothing improvement programs could appear to belittle rural women and place excessive significance on fashion, agents believed that better clothing would assist rural women's efforts to limit cash expenditures and improve their self-esteem while also providing some amusement. Many Texas ranch and farmwomen predominately managed and guarded the cash expenditures necessary to feed and clothe the family, a fact that was certainly not lost on Extension Service specialists. In developing innovative ways to reduce rural families' clothing budgets, agents certainly recognized the economic responsibilities of rural wives. In 1931, Mrs. Dora Barnes, the Extension Specialist in clothing for Texas, produced a detailed budget that could clothe family members for a year at the cost of just twenty-five dollars. Additionally, just as food preservation programs influenced the emergence of pantry demonstrations, Extension Service specialists developed wardrobe demonstrations for the purposes of organizing and prolonging the lives of garments and linens, thus reducing the need to constantly buy the family's clothing and textiles. By instructing rural women on how to reduce the cash spent on clothing, agents hoped to provide rural families with additional financial resources that could be used to improve their farms and households.<sup>76</sup>

Of all the demonstration programs offered by the Extension Service, clothing and wardrobe demonstration seemed to provide the most entertainment for rural women. Not only was sewing a form of creative expression, but after the Extension Service established annual clothing competitions on the county, district, and state level, it also provided opportunities for friendly competition. Winners could also expect to receive

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<sup>76</sup> Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, "Wardrobe Demonstration," (College Station, TX: Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas and the United States Department of Economics, 1931), File 26, Box 3, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, 2, 5.

significant prizes for their work, such as a washing machine, sewing machine, or chest of silver. Additionally, wardrobe competitions provided opportunities for women to leave their farms or ranches to socialize.<sup>77</sup>

Another program developed by Extension Service specialists focused on improving the interior and exterior of farmhouses throughout the state. When home demonstration work was established in Texas in 1914, the “usual farm home consisted of a framed house of three to five rooms, with or without screens, heated by wood stoves, lighted by kerosene lamps,” and with no running water. In surveying these conditions, home demonstration agents began to instigate home improvement programs that advocated the implementation of labor saving devices, such as fireless cookers, electricity, and the installation of running water. They also initiated kitchen, living room, and bedroom improvement programs, in which agents showed rural women how they could perform minimal interior designs on shoestring budgets. Not only did women learn proper placement of furniture in order to minimize the number of steps they had to take in the course of their daily work, but they also experienced the emotional rewards of living in aesthetically pleasing environments. For instance, one woman who engaged in a home demonstration kitchen improvement program stated, “Dreams do come true...For 10 years, I have lived in this house, looking at its aged, bare, brown walls, dreaming how it would looked if I had the money to fit it with. I thought it would cost a couple of hundred dollars. Through the guidance and instruction I received from a home demonstrator, I refinished it at the cost of \$26.90.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas*, 53-55; Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, “Wardrobe Demonstration,” 2, 5.

<sup>78</sup> Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas*, 87- 91, first quote from 87, second quote from 91.

Though food preservation, clothing demonstration, and home improvement programs were the three main programs of Texas home demonstration work, agents also encouraged women to pursue a variety of other ventures. For example, they taught women how to market their surplus food and to develop home record-keeping systems, another acknowledgment by Extension Service specialists that rural women's productive labor was economically essential for the family's survival. Additionally, due to an excess supply of government-controlled cotton during the Great Depression and concerns for rural residents' health, home demonstration agents launched a campaign for making inexpensive mattresses at home. In 1939, more than 39,000 mattresses were made by women in home demonstration clubs. Furthermore, agents also stressed the importance of recreation, and they encouraged women to sing, dance, read, and explore their spirituality through a variety of programs. Extension Service Specialist Maggie W. Barry wrote a radio series called "The Art of Living" in the 1930s, through which she encouraged rural women to explore the beauty of their everyday surroundings. She believed that "women who live on a farm or ranch had an especially good opportunity to see the beauties of nature, and to appreciate the oneness with the Infinite in being close to growing things."<sup>79</sup>

While these programs certainly provided opportunities to elevate rural women's everyday standard of living, some scholars chastise the Extension Service for making rigid gender distinctions between men's and women's work on family farms. In Extension Service programs, male agricultural agents worked outside the home, and their sphere of knowledge centered on providing new and innovative ways to increase profits on family farms. By focusing attention on men's work in the fields and with livestock,

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<sup>79</sup>Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas*, 91, 178; Kate Adele Hill, "The Contribution of Home Demonstration Work to the Art and Literature of Texas," File 17, Box 1, Texas A&M Hill Papers, quote from 1.

agricultural agents equated men as the primary breadwinners. Conversely, women home demonstration agents focused on reducing the heavy burdens of the farm wife's labor through such programs as food preparation, clothing construction, and interior design.

Due to the Extension Service's effort to separate breadwinning labor from domestic labor, some feminist historians argue that women's work was devalued and patriarchy remained unchallenged. As Katherine Jellison argues, "In bettering the lives of farm women, the Extension Service would thus improve the overall quality and efficiency of the patriarchal farm life." Melissa Walker makes a similar argument in her work on the Extension Service in South Carolina. She states, "Agents seemed determined to separate the farmhouse from the barnyard," and their agendas must "have seemed far removed from the realities of [rural women's] daily lives." Like the ideology of separate spheres championed in "the agrarian myth," many believe that the Extension Service's programs devalued rural women's labor by placing it in the domestic and moral realm while accentuating and elevating the market value of men's.<sup>80</sup>

Certainly, Extension Service programs reflected the contemporary gender prescriptions of the urban middle-class ideology of separate spheres. Beginning in the late-eighteenth century and becoming solidified in the nineteenth century, separate spheres became internalized and normalized in American culture, with its effects evident well into the twentieth century. In trying to reduce the drudgery and isolation of rural life, Extension Service specialists tried to make rural women and the labor they performed more closely resemble their urban middle-class sisters.

The urban middle-class ideal that kept white women's labor inside the home was

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<sup>80</sup> Jellison, first quote from 17; Walker, *All We Knew Was How to Farm*, second quote from 103, third quote from 119.

simply a luxury that rural women did not have, and rural women both acknowledged this reality and took pride in it. In her seminal work *Putting the Barn Before the House: Women and Family Farming in Early-Twentieth-Century New York*, Nancy Grey Osterud interviewed various rural women in New York over the period of several decades, and what she observed was their “marked variations in the gender division of labor.” Survival of the family farm depended on the versatility of women’s labor. They tended gardens, raised poultry, labored in the farmhouse, hauled water, and gathered firewood for wooden stoves, which set them apart from their urban middle-class sisters. Additionally, many rural women’s labor involved doing men’s work. In their essay “Pretty Near Every Woman Done a Man’s Work: Women and Field Work in the Rural South,” Rebecca Sharpless and Melissa Walker interviewed a variety of rural wives and daughters who routinely performed physical labor in the fields. Texan Rowena Weatherly Keatts recalled learning to plow from her father. She remembered, “I could plow just as good as he could. Plowed with mules and horses.” In another interview, Etta Carroll, the wife of a Texas cotton farmer, recalled, “Well, if it hadn’t been for the women, the men couldn’t have gotten to work. They [the women] did housework and helped with the farm work, too. They did both.” Women also directly contributed to the farm families’ cash income by selling surplus and handmade goods and practicing the time-honored tradition of “making do.” Clearly, as Grey Osterud explains, “The work of women in the household, barnyard, field and pasture was more integrated than distinct.” For this reason, rural women did not see their labor as separate or undervalued on the farm; instead, they saw their labor as well as their husbands’ and children’s as necessary to the farm families’ survival.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Grey Osterud, *Putting the Barn Before the House: Women and Family Farming in Early*

Despite the gendered division of extension services, home demonstration agents certainly recognized the diversity and importance of rural women's labor and offered numerous programs to provide them with the tools to economically contribute to the income of the family farm. In one such demonstration called Home Industries, agents educated rural women on how to sell surplus goods and homemade products at public markets. Originating in the late 1920s and 1930s when agricultural industries were in dire need due to a widespread economic depression and drought, these demonstrations covered topics such as how to buy clothing, furniture, food, and other necessities at the best values, how to assemble attractive packages for sale of homemade goods, how to price sellable homemade products, and how to find suitable markets for them. While these programs certainly targeted rural women's roles as consumers, they nevertheless provided some lessons that rural women desperately wanted. In describing the 1919 USDA survey of "Farm Home Conditions for Women," Grey Osterud explains that "women overwhelming asserted that what they needed most was an increase in farm income in general and new ways of obtaining economic return from their own labor in particular." In many of these programs, rural women learned skills "that would help them manage money and make financial decisions, either independently or in co-operation with their husbands."<sup>82</sup>

Rural women sold all sorts of things in the public market: rugs, clothing, canned and dried fruits and vegetables, milk, cheese, butter, and eggs. In 1933, nearly 45,000

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*Twentieth-Century New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), first quote from 4; Rebecca Sharpless and Melissa Walker, "Pretty Near Every Woman Done a Man's Work: Women and Field Work in the Rural South" in *Work, Family, and Faith: Rural Southern Women in the Twentieth Century* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), second quote from 59, third quote from 42; Grey Osterud, fourth quote from 225.

<sup>82</sup> Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas*, 114-115; Grey Osterud, *Putting the Barn Before the House*, first quote from 228, second quote from 229.



women participated in home industries demonstration programs, producing nearly \$20 million of income for Texas's farm families. In egg production alone, women who participated in home demonstration poultry work brought in "an average \$26 per farm." This was a significant income for farm families, particularly since fluctuating crop and livestock prices made farming income highly unstable. By earning their own money through the sale of homemade goods and products, rural women found opportunities to not only contribute to the economic stability of the family farm, but also to improve their own living situations. Nancy Granovsky, professor and Extension Family Economics Specialist at Texas A&M's AgriLife Extension Service, explains, "Some women were able to apply skills they learned from home demonstrations toward starting a home-based business, like selling eggs, in order to supplement household income. This gave them an even greater sense of accomplishment and self-worth."<sup>83</sup>

Though scholars criticize the gendered division of labor among Extension Service programs, it was not always as inflexible as they have described. In *The Demonstration Method*, a book by Texas Extension Service Director O.B. Martin, home demonstration agents and agricultural agents were advised not to see their work in separate terms. He wrote, "It should be noted that there is some overlapping of the qualifications and duties of the farm demonstration agents and those of the home demonstration agents .... The work mutually supports and supplements each other." In some demonstration programs, this mutual support was more obvious than in others. If no agricultural agent was available in the county or if he lacked proper training in a specific aspect of gardening

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<sup>83</sup> Texas Extension Service, "Extension Service Farm News," College State, 1934, File 34, Box 2, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, 5-6; "Farm Home Makers' Market," 1934, File 32, Box 2, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, 1-2; Quote from Nancy Granovsky, interview by author, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX, March 7, 2012.

and poultry work, often the home demonstration agent would instruct women as well as men on these demonstrations. Additionally, women frequently attended agricultural demonstrations with their husbands in the event that they might need help with laying seed, tilling soil, or harvesting crops. Agricultural agents also helped women on large-scale improvement projects, such as installing bathrooms and sinks in the farmhouse. Thus, Extension Service personnel, who firmly believed that farming was a “co-partnership business between a man and a woman,” could traverse specific gender tasks in an effort to improve the living conditions of Texas rural families. They acknowledged, just as Grey Osterud describes, that the value of rural men’s and women’s labor was inextricably linked.<sup>84</sup>

Yet despite the Extension Service’s recognition of the versatility of women’s labor, most of its programs focused on improving the rural living conditions and labor demands of women *inside* the home. In doing so, some scholars argue that home demonstration agents created unrealistic expectations for rural women based on urban, middle-class standards of domesticity. Since popular support for Extension Service programs originated in a “culture that saw rural life as backward and inferior to modern urban life,” Walker writes that home demonstration agents’ “very contact with farm people was a sign of lower status,” and they “promoted a new farm gender hierarchy,” articulated through home economics education, that attempted to transform rural women into urban housewives. Scholars have demeaned this objective of home demonstration agents. In her essay in *All We Knew Was How to Farm*, Lynne Rieff argues, “The specialization that home agents learned in home economics courses influenced their

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<sup>84</sup> Martin quoted in Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas*, first quote from 162; Liberty Hyde Bailey, *The Country-Life Movement in the United States* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920), second quote from 84; Walker, *All We Knew Was How to Farm*, 106.

attitudes and demonstrations, promoted domesticity, and trivialized their work;” agents were always working “toward achieving the domestic ideal of the perfect home.” Walker offers a similar metaphor. Since agents believed that “farm women envied the lifestyles of their middle-class sisters,” they advocated for “a model farm home that looked very much like the middle-class home.” Wallpaper, paint, and new curtains were part of this “perfect home” vision – topics that Rieff argues many rural women found “frivolous.”<sup>85</sup>

In advocating that rural women accept modernization and the latest labor-saving household conveniences, Extension Service personnel described the technological double-standard of rural women’s daily tasks compared to that of their rural husbands. Considering they were looking into from the outside into rural family farms, it is hardly surprising that they did so. In pointing to the 1919 USDA survey that questioned 10,000 farmwomen in the summer and fall, Extension Service specialists found that rural women worked an average of 13.2 hours a day, 68 percent of women hauling their own water, and less than 22 percent owning any kind of power machinery. Home demonstration agents noted these conditions in their work with rural women throughout the state. As district agent Kate Hill described in a 1931 radio broadcast:

As it has been related to me: Her liege lord is availing himself in labor-saving appliances, such as a reaper, binder, thatcher, riding plow, and gas engine, while the women’s labor-saving help consists of her routine...At this time of year, she is up at 5 a.m., preparing the breakfast, often building her own fire; milks the cows, cares for the milk...churns milk by hand. Puts the house in order, eats with the family at the noon meal, leaves the house in disorder, goes to the cotton field, and picks cotton all the afternoon, dragging the weight of 60 pounds along the ground. At about sundown, she goes to the farmhouse, puts the house in order, washes the

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<sup>85</sup> Walker, *All We Knew Was How to Farm*, first and second quote from 102; Reiff, third and fourth quote from 159; Walker, *All We Knew Was How to Farm*, fifth quote from 116, sixth quote from 119; Reiff, 160.

dishes, prepares supper- most of the time too tired to eat, gets the children to bed, and falls asleep herself- and so it goes on from day to day.<sup>86</sup>

For many Extension Service personnel, it appeared the value of farmwives' labor was ignored and undervalued by their husbands.<sup>87</sup>

Yet Extension Service officials neglected to see that the priorities of rural women lay elsewhere. As Grey Osterud explains, the reason why farm families neglected to invest in household conveniences in the early to mid-twentieth century was not because women's work was devalued; rather, the decision was financial and centered on the survival of the family farm. As she writes, "Farm income was limited, and investments in equipment that increased income took priority over expenditures for conveniences that offered comfort." Farm families were much more willing to invest in technology that improved crop production, the farm's main source of income. Rural women, as they had done for centuries, were accustomed to "making do," and women "who regarded the entire farm as their domain willingly put the barn before the house" to ensure the farm families' endurance.<sup>88</sup>

Nevertheless, many rural women who participated in these home demonstration programs designed to beautify and to improve the inside of the farmhouse did speak glowingly of the results. Extension Service personnel recognized that many farm families had little disposable income compared to those of the urban, middle-class, and if farmwomen did have surplus money to spend on improving the home, it was often very little. Agents taught rural women how to stretch those dollars for their maximum value. In this way, home demonstration agents celebrated the rural work ethic of "making do"

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<sup>86</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, "Economic Needs of Farm Women," Report 106, File 10, Box 1, Texas A&M Hill Papers, 16.

<sup>87</sup> Jellison, 34.

<sup>88</sup> Grey Osterud, *Putting the Barn Before the House*, first quote from 226, second quote from 228.

by teaching women how to improve their standard of living on shoestring budgets. Through such programs as kitchen and living room demonstration programs as well as wardrobe demonstration programs, rural women with a limited budget learned how to make fashionable and attractive items of comfort without diverting significant funds away from the farm enterprise. Birdie Wright wrote in 1946, “I have learned many wonderful things that has helped make my home brighter, better, and a happier place to live.”<sup>89</sup>

Sometimes, rural women found a new sense of empowerment and confidence in entering these programs. Mrs. Duncan of Lamar County entered a wardrobe demonstration in 1932 and learned how to sew a tailored dress. In recounting the first time she put it on for her husband, she remembered, “He said I looked as good to him as I did twenty years ago. It was then that I felt that I was fully repaid for all the time and work.” Another woman won a trip to the Short Course at A&M for her newly remodeled kitchen. Upon hearing the news, she exclaimed, “You mean, I’m going to college? I never saw inside a college building in my life!” Standing on the stage of the grand assembly hall while professors, newspaper men, and others listened, she “told with pride the simple story of her accomplishment.” Additionally, some women entered into demonstrations with little to no support from their husbands but were soon praised by them for their work. One rural woman wrote of her experience in a kitchen improvement demonstration:

I did all the work of improving the kitchen, even elevating the barrel for running water...My! How many steps it saves me. My husband did not

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<sup>89</sup> Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas*, 91; Birdie Wright quoted in Mildred Horton, “Home Demonstration Work in Texas as a Means of Adult Education” (master’s thesis, Texas State College for Women, 1946), quote from 159.

help. He looked his disapproval. But, when I won first place in the county and a trip to the Short Course in College Station, he was proud as I was. At his suggestion, we have 'done over' the bedroom and added another room for a living room. And, best of all, we are happier than we have ever been.<sup>90</sup>

This wife found opportunities to empower herself in home demonstration work, with or without her husband's help, as she sought to reduce the heavy burdens of her labor. The result was not only an improved kitchen, but also in a sense accomplishment and pride in her ability to contribute to the betterment of the family farm.<sup>91</sup>

While other scholars chastise this reform effort of the Extension Service for placing unrealistic demands on rural women, those farm families who could invest in more modernization on their farm undoubtedly received the health, physical, and psychological benefits that modernization offered. For rural women took the advice of home demonstration agents and improved living conditions in their homes, an indication that some found the work very rewarding. In 1932, home demonstration agents assisted in improving household conveniences for rural women in a variety of ways: 175 families installed a water system in their homes; 216 families installed sanitary toilets, and 225 families bought or made fireless cookers.<sup>92</sup>

One of the most significant benefits of home demonstration work that has received little attention from scholars of the Extension Service is the home demonstration club movement. Home demonstration clubs were organizations of "groups of women in a rural or village community not exceeding 2,550 in population organized to study better ways of living." These rural women created their own constitutions and by-laws and

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<sup>90</sup> Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas*, 90-91.

<sup>91</sup> Dora Russell Barnes, "History of the Wardrobe Demonstration" 1947, File 35, Box 2, first quote from 5; Helen Higgins Davis, second quote from 19.

<sup>92</sup> Mrs. Nat. P. Jackson, "Rural Women's Division Report," 1932, File 32, Box 2, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, 4.

elected their own officers. In many counties, the clubs served as a liaison between agents and rural women, and they alleviated tensions between agents and rural communities. Club women voted on what demonstration programs the agents would offer, and they worked closely with the agents to develop unique programs that would benefit their particular county. Home demonstration clubs were extraordinarily popular in Texas. In 1917, only 152 clubs existed, but by 1934, the number exceeded 2,200 and would continue to grow over the next two decades.<sup>93</sup>

For many rural women, participation in these clubs provided opportunities that had previously been unavailable. Many often described the drudgery of life on the rural farm or ranch. With little opportunity to socialize, rural women expressed that loneliness and routine were significant psychological realities. Letters sent to U.S. Secretary of Agriculture D.H. Houston prior to the passage of the Smith-Lever Act indicated that socialization was one of the most desired wishes of rural women. One woman wrote, “Great good might be done if the women were urged to form neighbored clubs and talk over the work of the department in their behalf while spending a social afternoon.” Many home demonstration clubs met at least once a month, providing rural women with temporary relief from the isolation of rural life.<sup>94</sup>

Home demonstration clubs also provided an opportunity for many rural women to articulate their concerns and grievances publically and to instigate community improvement campaigns. Mildred Horton, author of a 1946 thesis on home demonstration work in Texas, applauded home demonstration clubs for their democratic nature. She

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<sup>93</sup>Mary Nell Wills, “The Home Demonstration Club Work in Hays County,” (master’s thesis, Southwest Texas State Teachers College, 1940), quote from 3; Debbie Mauldin Cottrell, “HOME DEMONSTRATION,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, < <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/aah01>>, last accessed 2/2/2013.

<sup>94</sup>Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas*, quote from 11.

believed home demonstration work was “a democratic process which encourages free and full use of intellect, the creation of values and guides, and the development of a sense of social responsibility and usefulness in each individual.” Club members raised money and boosted awareness for rural neighborhood improvements all over Texas. For instance, in 1947, home demonstration clubs contributed to the improvement of public roads, rural electrification, mail routes, and school bus routes in several counties. Additionally, families came together to engage in numerous campaigns for such issues as safe water, immunization, and mosquito and rabies control. Scholarships for young girls and boys were also a common purpose of home demonstration club fundraisers. By encouraging voluntary contributions from their members, home demonstration clubs raised thousands of dollars to help rural boys and girls attend universities or short courses. As one Extension Service director articulated, “shaking his head in astonishment and profound respect, ‘Never did I see butter and egg money go so far.’”<sup>95</sup>

Texas women in home demonstration clubs became politically involved as well. They sewed flags for the United Nations, raised funds to help rural women in Bolivia and Great Britain, and campaigned for an amendment to allow women access to jury service. Whereas previously their voices had been silenced or their opinions ignored, rural women came together in a democratic environment which allowed them to articulate their concerns and to offer solutions. Home demonstration clubs empowered rural women to improve not only their own lives and those of their families, but also conditions in their communities and nation.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Horton, 45-46, first quote from 45; Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas*, 124-125, second quote from 86.

<sup>96</sup> Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas*, 84.



Yet while home demonstration work provided opportunities for some Texas rural women to improve their lives and communities, others in Texas did not benefit significantly from the lessons offered in home demonstration work. This is certainly evident when one explores African-American Extension Service activities in Texas. In August 1915, African-American home demonstration work began in Smith County in East Texas. From the beginning, the work was severely understaffed and underfunded. Only twenty-three home demonstration agents were employed in the first few years of African-American Extension work in Texas, due in large part to lack of county support and funding for their work. In 1940, the number of African-American home demonstration agents in Texas gradually increased to forty-four while white home demonstration agents numbered 230. In counties skeptical or unwilling to allocate funding for African-American Extension work, agents received their limited income from the federal government and private philanthropic organizations, such as the Julius Rosenwald Fund. Unlike white Extension agents, African-American agents rarely had offices or received regular paychecks. In a letter from Mary Evelyn V. Hunter (referred to as “the Mrs. Trigg of Negro home demonstration work”) to her supervising district agent in 1936, she reported that only “two Negro home demonstration agents had offices,” and she regrettably informed her district agent that Jesse Lee Purish had left her position because the county refused to pay her salary.<sup>97</sup>

As evident in the 1926 USDA circular detailing the emergence of Negro Extension work, internalized Southern racism hindered the organization’s attempts to

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<sup>97</sup> Walker, *All We Knew Was How to Farm*, 100; Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas*, 140-141; Jane E. McAllister and Dorothy M. McAllister, “Adult Education for Negroes in Rural Areas: The Work of the Jeanes Teachers and Home Demonstration Farm Agents,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 14, no. 13 (Summer 1945): 334. Mrs. E. V. Hunter to Mrs. I.W. Rowan, May 17 1936, File 11, Box 4, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, first and second quote from 1-2.

improve the conditions for the rural African-American farm families. Noting that nearly 800,000 African-Americans in the South suffered from exploitative tenancy and sharecropping arrangements, white Extension Service personnel placed “land ownership and home improvement” as the top priority “in developing negro farm life in the South.” Yet white proponents of this program hardly intended to combat the larger social structures that limited African-American land ownership; instead, they placed the tasks of rural African-American uplift on the back of the black farmer himself. It was “not surprising that it has taken a backward race a long time to acquire property and develop farms,” Extension Service officials explained. What was needed to encourage “negro land-ownership in the next twenty-five years” was to show them how to do it. The Extension Service could be a great teacher for the black farmer since “the negroes are especially responsive to the demonstration method, because of their faith, confidence, and optimism.” In all, they surmised that “the demonstration method has proved to be ...the best for the ignorant .... [The work with] negroes has emphasized the fact that men and women limited in ambition and will power may be greatly situated to successful effort by the esteem and encouragement.” Extension Service personnel also believed that the growth of African-American home demonstration work appeared to stem from the kindness and benevolence of white Extension Service employees. It was only “through the interest and aid of white agents” who took a “sympathetic interest in negro extension activities” that African-American home demonstration work originated.<sup>98</sup>

Given prevalent racism, lack of funding, and inadequate training, it is hardly surprising that home demonstration work made less difference for Texas African-

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<sup>98</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, “A Decade of Negro Extension Work, 1914-1924,” (Washington D.C.: USDA, 1926), File 11, Box 4, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, first, second, third, and fourth quote from 6, fifth, sixth, and seventh quote from 4.

Americans. The most successful programs offered by black home demonstration agents were in canning and home improvement. Believing that African-Americans would improve their situations only through the sweat of their own brows, Extension Service personnel were advised to “emphasize work more than clubs,” and as a result, black home demonstration club membership fell abysmally low compared to white rural women. Additionally, agents rarely emphasized the buying of consumer goods and labor-saving appliances “since [black] women had few resources with which to purchase the consumer items the extension service promoted.” African-American home demonstration agents also neglected to provide the same home industries programming that they did for white women given the belief that black women lacked the markets in which to sell homemade goods. This trend was indicative of home demonstration work with African-Americans all across the South. As Melissa Walker writes in “Home Extension Work among African-American Farm Women in East Tennessee, 1920-1939,” the “black farm population had a difficult time finding sufficiently large markets for their products among other poor black farmers, and whites generally would not buy food or processed farm products from blacks.”<sup>99</sup>

Nevertheless, African-American agents tried to make the best of their situation and they did report some progress among some rural Texas black families. After visiting a family in Robertson County, African-American home demonstration agent Hunter described that “this family, like hundreds of others I visited, had lost confidence in themselves and in humanity. I learned years ago that the way to begin to help people is show them by doing and by sympathizing with them.” Over the course of the next few

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<sup>99</sup> USDA, “A Decade of Negro Extension Work, 1914-1924,” first quote from 7; Melissa Walker, “Home Extension Work among African American Farm Women in East Tennessee, 1920-1939,” *Agricultural History* 70, no. 3 (Summer 1996): second quote from 490, third quote from 499.

weeks, Hunter made frequent stops at this family's home and offered demonstrations on sanitation, canning, and simple home improvements, and she reported with pride that she "saw a great gain in hope and prosperity" despite the fact that prevalent racism and lack of economic opportunities had demoralized this farm family. Additionally, to supplement the lack of funding and resources of home demonstration work among African-Americans, Jeanes teachers dispersed into fourteen southern states for the purposes of providing "Negroes in rural areas with practical adult education... on the problems of health, making a living, and recreation." Funded by northern philanthropist Anna T. Jeanes, the Jeanes teachers predominately focused their programs on improving African-American illiteracy and sanitation, and they frequently worked with African-American home demonstration agents to these ends. Yet since "the aims of the Jeanes teachers in adult education [were] less clearly and specifically defined than those of the Extension Service," their programming was more easily adapted to "the local needs and situations" of rural African-American communities. Nevertheless, their numbers remained minute all across the South. In 1940, only thirty Jeanes teachers were employed in Texas. The result of the lack of funding for both Jeanes teachers and home demonstration agents, as Walker writes, was that the work "rarely matched the goals of government officials, nor did it fully meet the needs of women themselves." Instead, it was "a mixed legacy of assistance and discrimination."<sup>100</sup>

Additionally, since tenancy rates in Texas remained extraordinary high for both white and black farm families throughout the early-twentieth-century, many of Texas rural farm families were largely excluded from home demonstration programming.

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<sup>100</sup>Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas*, first quote from 141-142, second quote from 135; McAllister and McAllister, third quote from 331, fourth quote from 340, fifth quote from 339; Walker, "Home Extension Work among African American Farm Women in East Tennessee," sixth quote from 502.

According to the 1920 U.S. Census, more than fifty-three percent of farm operators in Texas were tenants. Seventy percent of all African-Americans and nearly fifty percent of whites who lived on farms were either tenants or sharecroppers. These landless African-American and white farmers were largely excluded from Extension Service programming. Not only did they lack the disposable income that many of the home demonstration improvement programs required, but since many did not own the land they lived on, they were reluctant to make the long-term improvements on their farmland or in the households that were advocated by home demonstration agents.<sup>101</sup>

Nevertheless, home demonstration agents attempted to improve living conditions for tenant families and incorporate tenant wives into their programs. In one particular incident, home demonstration agent Edna Trigg recounted that her “county was largely tenant farmers,” and after giving gardening and poultry demonstrations, she found to her surprise that the women “reported that their landlords would not let them have a garden plot nor pastures for a cow.” While this may have been an attempt on the part of large landowners to reduce the economic independence of tenant families, home demonstration agents sometimes intervened on tenant families’ behalf. Trigg took matters into her own hands. As she recollected, “I procured the names and addresses of the landlords and when I requested a garden plot and permission to keep a cow, all, with one exception, agreed to my request.” Additionally, though many poor white women did not engage in home demonstration improvements on their own property, they did nevertheless benefit from many of the community campaigns launched by the wealthier home demonstration clubs. The hot lunch program in rural schools, campaigns for rural electricity and better mail

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<sup>101</sup> United States Census Bureau, “Farm Tenancy in the United States: An Analysis of the Results of the 1920 Census Relative to Farm Classified by Tenure,” Census Monographs, Volume IV, 1924, <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html> (accessed March 30, 2013), 214.

route roads, and simple sanitation improvements such as installing window screens to reduce mosquitos did prove helpful for many rural families in poverty.<sup>102</sup>

Though African-Americans and poor white rural families may not have significantly benefited from home demonstration work, it would be a disservice to write-off the benefits of home demonstration work for rural Texas women. The development of Texas' home demonstration programming in the early decades of the twentieth-century reveals that the work and the agents could be much more flexible than other scholars have described. Extension Service personnel realized that in order for the work to progress in Texas' rural counties, they had to adapt to the local rural population's specific needs. They necessarily accepted the diversity of rural women's labor and its significance to the family farm, and they tailored their programs to not only improve rural women's standard of living, but also to increase the awareness and efficiency of rural women's role as economic partners in ensuring the farm families' survival. Additionally, as rural women throughout the state encountered conditions that were beyond their control, such as world wars, droughts, and depressions, agents provided strategies they hoped would ameliorate their hardships and "make the best better" for rural families throughout the state.

Equally important for rural women throughout the state was the home demonstration club movement. By encouraging local rural women to come together, pick their own programs, and instigate community and national improvement campaigns, home demonstration clubs provided rural women with an escape from the isolation of rural life and the means to interject themselves in the cultural, economic, and political spheres of the community. Built on already established networks of mutual aid in rural

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<sup>102</sup> Trigg, first, second, and third quote from 19; Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas*, 118.

Texas communities, the clubs also provided rural women with innovative strategies for survival and improved living conditions and with coping mechanisms for rural isolation. As Grey Osterud explains, “Mutuality extended from household into the neighborhood and kinship network. And in what Mary Neth aptly called ‘building the base,’ women nurtured social connections that supported community cooperation,” ensuring that women “were not subordinated or marginalized.”<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Grey Osterud, *Putting the Barn Before the House*, quote from 245.

## CHAPTER IV

### **“A TEACHER ON WHEELS FOR FARM AND RANCH WOMEN”<sup>104</sup>: HOME DEMONSTRATION WORK & RURAL TRANSFORMATION ON THE LLANO ESTACADO, 1914-1950**

On May 4, 1892, Nellie Witt Spikes and her family arrived on the frontier edge of the Llano Estacado. Like hundreds of other East Texas farming families making the lengthy journey west, Spikes’ venture was a “multi-family, multigenerational migration” that brought with them their most valuable possessions: “a well-worn Bible, tintype photographs, locks of children’s hair, Confederate Army memorabilia, seed packets carefully wrapped from the garden, and treasure of treasures, a marble-topped bureau.” Spikes’ family and the countless other Anglo-Texans who flooded into the region were the first of many permanent farming settlers to encounter a “wonderland – a vast prairie, flat as a bedspread with green grass waving in the wind.”<sup>105</sup>

In 1934, Spikes began writing articles to small local newspapers describing her family’s early experiences in the Llano Estacado and the transformations that she observed in rural life, and as such, providing a first-hand account of how Anglo-Texans altered the physical and cultural landscape of the region. Between 1900 and 1950, she

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<sup>104</sup> Kate Adele Hill, “Top Honors to Her: Westex Pioneer Women Was Dainty, but Tempered Steel – Courageous, Staunch, Far-Seeing,” *West Texas Today Magazine*, 1939, File 6, Box 2, Kate Adele Hill: An Inventory of Her Papers, 1861-1971, Southwest Collections, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX (hereafter cited as Hill Papers SW Collections), 2.

<sup>105</sup> Nellie Witt Spikes, *As a Farm Woman Thinks: Life and Land on the Texas High Plains, 1890-1960*, ed. by Geoff Cunfer (Lubbock: Texas Tech University, 2010), 3-8, first quote from 4, second quote from 3, third quote from 7.



she witnessed the land suffer from droughts, dust storms, and depressions and saw it transform from small family farms into large-scale commercial operations. Spikes observed the shift from horsepower to tractor power and from the use of buggies and wagons to automobiles. Farm homes changed as well, as families acquired indoor plumbing, electricity, and phone service, and farm wives produced less and less of their families' subsistence needs at home. As families began to buy more and more of their food from grocery stores, Spikes remembered embarrassingly, "The first time I ever bought lard, I apologized to the merchant. A farmer was not much who could not raise our own meat and lard."<sup>106</sup>

Spikes also recollected her activity in a home demonstration club, and like countless other Anglo-Texan women, she spoke glowingly of the results. In 1941, she described a recent advertisement aimed at selling plastic dress forms that promised to cut down clothing construction time and ensure a good fit. After detailing how the experiment with plastic dress forms ended in disaster, Spikes wrote, "No sirree, I am not letting a modern plastic form be fitted to me," and she thanked the county home demonstration agent for teaching her how to make "a dress form so that my troubles with fitting would be over." She also explained the civic pride that her home demonstration club nurtured in the spring of 1942. In a partnership between the Red Cross and the local home demonstration club, women on the Llano Estacado sewed "hanks of khaki clothing for the servicemen overseas," and "as the needles flew over the yarn where stitches were never made before," rural women's patriotism supplied their work song. As Spikes described, "They will say, knit one, purl, knit two, Pearl Harbor."<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Spikes, 12-14, quote from 13.

<sup>107</sup> Spikes, 140-142, first and second quote from 140, third and fourth quote from 142.

Spikes' accounts of early-twentieth-century life, as well as her experience with home demonstration work on the Llano Estacado, provide insights into the vast transformations that occurred on the Texas Plains in the early-to-mid twentieth century. Though Anglo settlers arrived late to the Llano Estacado, they wasted little time in altering the physical, political, economic, and cultural landscape of the region. In establishing their own counties and towns, they quickly became the dominant political faction, and as such, they marginalized various groups they saw as incompatible with their own self-interests and survival. Additionally, as more farmers developed mechanized and irrigated farms, the region transformed from an area dependent on small-scale family farming to large-scale commercial agriculture, and as a result, the region's rural population declined steadily in the years after 1930, as it did throughout the state. In many ways, the story of Anglo development of the Texas Plains is indicative of the vast transformations that occurred all over twentieth-century Texas.

The early history of home demonstration work in the region also fits into this story of larger state and national transformations. As home demonstration agents poured into the region and sought to establish Extension Service programming in its rural counties, they encountered problems they believed plagued the nation at large: systemic rural poverty, increasing rural-to-urban migration, poor nutrition, rural isolation, world wars, and economic depressions. From 1917 to 1950, their programs centered on alleviating these problems as agents sought to establish themselves as "a teacher on wheels for farm and ranch women." Like Extension Service personnel throughout the nation, they focused on food preservation and conservation, clothing and wardrobe construction, and household management. Nevertheless, their task in establishing home

demonstration work in the Llano Estacado was not an easy one. Agents in the Llano Estacado, just like home demonstration agents across the state, had to develop innovative strategies for navigating the political, economic, and social spheres of each county. Not only did they have to secure the necessary funding in which to begin their work, but they also had to appeal to the local women in the region to gain support for the work's implementation.<sup>108</sup>

Yet as much as home demonstration agents attempted to base their work in the Llano Estacado on state and national programming, rural women in the region made home demonstration work their own. Like thousands of other rural Texas women who chose to join home demonstration clubs, women in the Texas Panhandle determined what home demonstration lessons they wanted, and agents tailored their programming based on the region's unique needs and interests. For many rural women, the greatest benefit that home demonstration work provided was an opportunity to reinforce and expand already-established networks of mutual aid among their neighbors. What follows, then, is a history of the vast transformations that occurred on the Llano Estacado as well as how rural women in the region responded to and adapted home demonstration programming. As Anglo-Texans transformed the Texas Plains' physical, political, economic, and cultural environment, many women flocked to home demonstration work because it provided an opportunity to come together, to socialize, and to instigate community improvement campaigns that benefited their own families, communities, and nation. As rural life transformed in the mid-twentieth-century, however, home demonstration work declined in the region, and this story also provides insights into why it largely vanished in

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<sup>108</sup> Hill, "Top Honors to Her: Westex Pioneer Women Was Dainty, but Tempered Steel – Courageous, Staunch, Far-Seeing," quote from 2.

the years after 1950.

The Llano Estacado is the flattest part of the very flat Great Plains of the United States. Located between the Caprock Escarpment to the east and the Mescalero Escarpment to the west, the region comprises over 32,000 square miles, an area larger than all of New England. Presently, thirty-three Texas counties and four New Mexico counties encompass the Llano Estacado, which boasts of being one of the largest tablelands on the North-American continent. Yet unlike other regions of the Great Plains, the Llano Estacado is exceptionally dry. The region is so flat that no river or stream flows regularly across it, and since an average of eighteen inches or less of rain falls there annually, many refer to it as the entrance to the “Great American Desert.”<sup>109</sup>

Myth suggests that the Llano Estacado received its name from the Coronado Expedition in 1541. Searching for riches for the Spanish Crown, Francisco Vázquez de Coronado assembled a large supply train in an attempt to reach a legendary place called Quivira where alleged treasures abounded. During the expedition’s first year of wandering over the Great Plains, Coronado wrote with amazement and annoyance about the vast flatness of the region. He had never seen anything like it. As he explained in an October letter to the King,

After 9 days march I reached some plains, so vast that I did not find their limit anywhere I went...[There] were no more landmarks than if we had been swallowed up in the sea, where they [the guides] strayed about, because there was not a stone, nor a bit of rising ground, nor a tree, nor a shrub, nor anything to go by.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Art Leatherwod, “LLANO ESTACADO,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ryl02> (accessed March 30, 2013); George Cunfer, *As a Farm Woman Thinks: Life and Land on the Texas High Plains, 1890-1960* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University, 2010), 10-11, quote from 10.

<sup>110</sup> Francisco Vázquez de Coronado as quoted in David Donoghue, “The Route of the Coronado Expedition in Texas,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (January 1929): 186.

He also described that the region was too “dangerous to travel away from the camp” since “if one went out of sight of it he was most surely lost.”<sup>111</sup>

Many speculate that the region’s name was derived from Coronado’s attempt to navigate the vastness of the Llano Estacado. As guides attempted to walk a straight line across the plains, they employed a sea compass method where they would observe the rising and setting of the sun while shooting arrows one over another in the direction that they desired to go. Due to the frequency of arrowheads sticking out of the ground, “staked plains,” the English translation of Llano Estacado, may well have characterized what early explorers experienced on the Texas Plains. Others say the name referred to the prevalence of yucca plants in the region that produced a tall flower stalk every year. Regardless the origins of “staked plains,” the area has been known as the Llano Estacado ever since.<sup>112</sup>

Though permanent settlement of the region would not begin in earnest until the late-nineteenth century, indigenous populations utilized it as hunting and trading grounds for centuries. Little evidence exists of permanent Indian settlements on the Llano Estacado. As anthropologists have explained, the region was too windy, semi-arid, and subject to extreme temperature changes to attract permanent settlement. Instead, Plains and Southwest Indian tribes primarily used the region for hunting. Prior to 1880, bison and antelope dominated the region, and the Lipan Apache and Kiowa Indians depended on these animals for hides and food. In the eighteenth century, Comanche migrated from the northern to the southern Great Plains, and as they did so, they forced the Lipan Apaches and Kiowas out of their hunting grounds. By the early-nineteenth century,

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<sup>111</sup> A. Ray Stephens, *Texas: A Historical Atlas* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 38-39; Coronado as quoted in Donoghue, quote from 186-187.

<sup>112</sup> Stephens, 38-39; Spikes, 17-18.

Comanche Indian tribes dominated the southern Great Plains. After 1875, when Anglo-American settlers began to enter the region, the bison population steadily disappeared due to overhunting, and military action in the region successfully starved “these proud people” and forced them to move into New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, and Oklahoma.<sup>113</sup>

With Plains Indians largely absent from the Llano Estacado, Anglo cattle barons wasted little time in moving into the region. The area had all the necessary preconditions for cattle ranging: there were free roaming cattle and horses, large grasslands, and most significantly, available land. New cattle drive routes also began to flourish in the decades after the 1860s. Whereas previously cattle routes had followed the Rio Grande or Red River, cattle drivers began to establish new trails, such as the Goodnight-Loving Trail, the Potter-Bacon Trail, and the Mobeetie Trail. In just a few short years, the Texas Panhandle became a cattle empire, and windmills and barbed wire dotted the landscape.<sup>114</sup>

The transition of the Llano Estacado into cattle country carried significant implications for the settlement of the Texas Panhandle, particularly for farmers who began moving into the area in large numbers during the early-twentieth century. While other farmers in New Mexico, Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas acquired land from the federal government under the 1862 Homestead Act, farmers in West Texas could not. During the annexation of Texas, the state retained ownership of its unsettled western land, and in 1882, Texas sold millions of acres of land in the Texas Panhandle as

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<sup>113</sup> Michael B. Collins, “A Review of Llano Estacado Archaeology and Ethnohistory,” *Plains Anthropology* 16, no. 52 (May 1971): 85-86; Stephens, 30-32, quote from 38.

<sup>114</sup> Stephens, 190; J.W. Williams, *The Big Ranch Country* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University, 1999), 586-587.

a means to pay for its new Capitol in Austin. One of the largest of these land transfers occurred in 1886 when a group of Chicago investors bought over 3,000,000 acres in the Texas Panhandle. By the 1890s, virtually the entire region was comprised of private ranches.<sup>115</sup>

When Anglo farmers began migrating to West Texas in the 1890s, there was little land available, and many had to find ways to purchase or rent property from large landowners. Limited access to landownership significantly influenced the growth of agriculture in West Texas. As historian Geoff Cunfer explains, “Farmers plowed up West Texas for crop agriculture later than they did in the rest of the Great Plains....Rapid conversion of ranchland to farmland began only about 1905 in West Texas, continuing into the 1930s.” The result of this, as Cunfer describes, was that the West Texas “southern plains were in many senses the last agricultural frontier in the United States, the last chance to start a new farm in the great West.”<sup>116</sup>

During West Texas’ reign as a cattle empire, there were some small scale attempts to bring agriculture to the Llano Estacado. In 1878, an Indianan Quaker elder named Paris Cox began promoting the establishment of a new colony on the Texas Plains, and by the end of 1879 he had recruited enough families to secure a land patent for 50,000 acres in Crosby County. He called this new town Estacado, and its population continued to grow over the next decade. By 1890, Estacado boasted 1,596 residents and had become the county seat of the area. Just as significantly, these Quaker immigrants introduced the Llano Estacado to crop agriculture by planting oats, corn, melons, and sorghum. As Williams wrote, “These mild spoken Easterners proved, well in advance of the big

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<sup>115</sup> Cunfer, 37-38; J.W. Williams, 76-78; The land bought by the Chicago investors would eventually become known as the XIT Ranch.

<sup>116</sup> Cunfer, 37-38, first and second quote from 37.

ranches, that the high plains country was, in a measure at least, adaptable to farming.”

Nevertheless, by 1898, the last Quaker family had left the region. After the death of Paris Cox in 1888 the town lost leadership, and drought, grasshoppers, range fires, and crop failure forced much of the Quaker population to abandon the region.<sup>117</sup>

Just as the settlement at Estacado began to disperse, a new set of immigrants migrated into the Llano Estacado. Unlike the Republican Quakers, these new arrivals streamed into the region from East Texas. Most were Baptists or Methodists, and they voted almost exclusively Democratic like the rest of the “Solid South.” Some had been slave owners prior to the Civil War, and most had relatives who were Confederate veterans. As a steady stream of East Texans trickled into the region during the 1880s and 1890s, they founded the town of Emma in Crosby County, and tensions developed quickly between the Quaker and East Texan communities. In 1891, the East Texas immigrants held a county vote that stripped Estacado of its title as county seat. It was a narrow victory, 109 to 103, but it was significant nonetheless. After the victory, more East Texans and other migrants from southern states flooded into the region, and they significantly influenced the cultural developments of the Texas Panhandle for the next fifty years. Nevertheless, the population of the Llano Estacado grew slowly. According to the 1890 census, Lubbock County contained only thirty-three residents. By the turn of the century, 293 residents, many of whom began to farm the area, lived in Lubbock.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> John Leffler, “CROSBY COUNTY,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hcc27> (accessed March 30, 2013); J.W. Williams, 74-75, quote from 76; Spikes, 53.

<sup>118</sup> Cunfer, 8, 53; Mary L. Cox, “EMMA, TX,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hve28> (accessed March 30, 2013); Lawrence L. Graves, “LUBBOCK, TX,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hdl04> (accessed March 30, 2013); Lawrence L. Graves, “LUBBOCK COUNTY,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hcl14> (accessed March 30, 2013).



The expansion of railroads in the area also contributed to a decline in rangeland. When the State of Texas mandated that all railway companies own the alternate sections next to rail tracks, ranchers felt the sting. As Williams wrote, “If, as may be the case, the practice was justified on the broader grounds of the public good, it has at least set up a problem for every ranchman.” Often, the rancher faced the challenges of securing his livestock as large sections of the land were cut up by expanding rail lines. This, in addition to increasing populations, droughts, and depressions, marked the end of large rangelands in the Llano Estacado. In 1913, the XIT’s once vast landholdings were divided and sold to local merchants, farmers, and railroad companies, and by the 1930s, the livestock business had dwindled in the region.<sup>119</sup>

The business of agriculture came to dominate the Llano Estacado by the mid-1920s. Not only had the sale of large ranch holdings opened up the possibility of land cultivation, but the building of railways made it economically viable to ship crops to distant markets. Additionally, as more and more occupants moved into the region, local markets expanded where farmers could sell their surplus goods. By far the biggest development that drove the Llano Estacado’s transition from cattle country to specialized agriculture was access to water. In a region with an average rainfall of less than eighteen inches a year, many farmers depended on windmill power in the early 1900s to 1920s to water their crops. By 1908, irrigators had successfully tapped the Ogallala Aquifer, and they began instructing farmers on how to operate and maintain a centrifugal pump’s gasoline engine. These irrigation wells had the potential to water more than ten times the acres of cropland than windmills. Nevertheless, adaptation to irrigation technology on the Llano Estacado was slow. Low crop prices in the 1920s and early 1930s made investment

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<sup>119</sup> Williams, 235-236, 121, quote from 236.

in the necessary technology risky, but with the help of federal assistance, more and more farmers were able to install irrigation wells on their land. In the mid-1930s, the “modern irrigation revolution on the southern plains began.”<sup>120</sup>

Though West Texas farmers may have also grown vegetables and fruits and cared for livestock and poultry, for the most part their profits came from the production of three main crops. Grain sorghum production could be found on almost every farm, since it tended to be drought resistant and thus more durable. As geographer W.A. Browne wrote in 1937, grain sorghum was “no doubt, for the region as the whole, its most valuable crop raised.” As irrigation wells spread through the region’s farmlands, cotton also emerged as a dominant crop in the area. In 1937, the area boasted 247.2 acres in cotton production, an area three times larger than the cotton-growing counties of Alabama. For most rural farmers in the Llano Estacado, cotton was “the chief source of cash income among the rural population.” In the five years after World War II, “King Cotton” moved “his throne to west Texas” due to increasing mechanization, irrigation, and the growing pesticide and fertilizer industries. Wheat ranked second in acreage among the farm crops of the region. Since wheat could be grown year round, winter wheat, spring wheat, and Durham wheat continuously dotted the landscape.<sup>121</sup>

Throughout the early-twentieth century, Anglo-Texans continued to migrate into the Llano Estacado. In 1890, the total population for Crosby, Floyd, Hale, and Lubbock counties amounted to little more than 1,600 residents. By 1910, the population in the region had skyrocketed to over 60,000, and it more than doubled to 173,000 by 1920.

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<sup>120</sup> W.A. Browne, “Agriculture in the Llano Estacado,” *Economic Geography* 13, no. 2 (April 1937): 155-156; Cunfer, 108-109, quote from 109.

<sup>121</sup> Browne, 157-164, first quote from 157; Cameron L. Saffell, “When Did King Cotton Move His Throne (And Has It Moved Back?)” *Agricultural History* 74, no. 2 (Spring 2000): second and third quote from 302; Browne, 157.

During this period of transition, most residents of the Llano Estacado lived in rural communities. It was only in 1920 that the city of Lubbock had enough residents to be classified as an urban center in the United States Census. Almost all of the residents who settled in the region were white. The African-American population of the region was less than one percent, and the 1920 census data contains little information on Indians, Mexican-Americans, or African-Americans living in the region. Nevertheless, Mexican-Americans were present in the Llano Estacado. In the early-twentieth century, migrant crews of Mexican laborers regularly found work in the region as either sheep shearers or workers on railroads. As King Cotton moved into the region, the labor demands increased and provided a motive for more landless Mexican-Americans to migrate to the area. Still, their numbers remained relatively low until the 1940s. Nevertheless, as historian Andres A Tijerina described, Mexican-Americans “were to be seen as aliens” in the “exclusively American culture that flourished” in the region.<sup>122</sup>

While the Llano Estacado’s population was predominately rural, the decline of the nation’s rural population worried both national and state officials, and they began investigating the factors that were encouraging country folk to migrate to the city. In 1926, the Federal Bureau of the Census conducted a report on the farm population in the United States, and what it discovered bore striking resemblance to the concerns of early-twentieth-century Country Lifers. Due to decreasing land ownership and lack of capital, rural farmers were abandoning their lands and their children were moving to the city to

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<sup>122</sup> United States Census Bureau, “Census of Population and Housing: Population Reports by States Nebraska-Wyoming,” Volume 3, 1913, <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html> (accessed March 30, 2013), 772, 832; United States Census Bureau, “Census of Population and Housing: Population 1920, Composition and Characteristics of the Population by States,” Volume 3, 1920, <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html> (accessed March 30, 2013), 386; Williams, 82-83; Andres A Tijerina, *History of Mexican Americans in Lubbock County, Texas* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University, 1979), first and second quote from 17-18.

find employment. Using language similar to Jeffersonian agrarianism, the author of the report, Leon Truesdell, worried about the growing rural-to-urban migration. In surveying the character of men and women who accepted wage work in the city, he described these city laborers as:

Those who were born to be followers rather than leaders – who work under other men’s direction, with stated income not dependent on the exercise of their own judgment or enterprise....These are happier in the city; and the country can well spare them.<sup>123</sup>

In contrast, those rural farmers whose “love of the land is so strong that he will not listen to the call of the city” were referred to as “the hope of the farming communities of the near future.” Their labor called “for energy and brains, and these land-minded men will find great reward for their initiative and their diligence.”<sup>124</sup>

Unlike those Country Life reformers who sought to curb the decline of the nation’s rural population through education and modernization, officials writing the “Farm Population of the United States” viewed the transition of rural-to-urban America as a necessity for progress. As Truesdell articulated, “It is simply restating an accepted tradition to say that the soul of the old America was rural. May we not just as certainly, however, reading the real signs of the times, say that the soul of the new America will be urban?” His solution was not to try to curb rural-to-urban migration; instead, he sought to make the farm families who stayed on their land more commercially efficient. This meant a larger investment of capital in land and technology in order to expand and compete in larger commercial markets. He also advocated that rural life should become more integrated into urban life. This meant not only farmers should have increased access to

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<sup>123</sup> Leon E. Truesdell, *Farm Population of the United States*, Department of Commerce: Census Bureau (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1926), 13-14.

<sup>124</sup> Truesdell, 13-14, first, second, and third quote from 13-14.

urban centers for trade, but also rural populations should be able to participate in the amusements that city life offered. In this sense, the “new farm population” would no longer “live apart from urban life; it must rather itself be part of one unified organization in which agriculture, manufacturing, and commerce are coordinated.”<sup>125</sup>

Truesdell’s advice that rural populations embrace modernization, expand their landholdings, and integrate into urban environments came to fruition, especially in the Llano Estacado. When the first early-twentieth-century immigrant farmers came to the region, tenant arrangements were common. In 1910, tenants occupied thirty percent of farms in and on the Llano Estacado. Ten years later, as former ranch land became available for purchase, the number of tenant farms skyrocketed to nearly sixty percent. Tenancy arrangements continued to dominate the region until well into the 1930s. It was only when farmers began incorporating mechanical harvesters and tractors that small tenant arrangements began to decline, and more and more rural folk began to move into urban centers. Additionally, the proliferation of automobiles made transportation faster, easier, and cheaper. As Cunfer writes,

People left rural villages to move to Lubbock, Dallas, and cities farther afield where jobs and economic opportunities beckoned. Even those who remained in small towns began to shop in larger cities, driving to Lubbock for weekly grocery trips, to Dallas for Christmas presents. Local merchants suffered and went out of business as consumers abandoned Main Street...Few small towns, other than county seats, held their own, and many had ceased to serve any social or economic function.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Truesdell, 16-18, 23, first quote 16, second quote 23.

<sup>126</sup> Cunfer, 70.

By the mid-twentieth-century, rural communities in the Llano Estacado had drastically diminished. For those that did survive, their economic opportunities became dependent on the region's larger urban centers.<sup>127</sup>

Considering the slow population growth of the Llano Estacado in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, it is surprising that home demonstration work began so early in the region. Interest was first expressed in beginning the work in October 1913. In a letter to Extension Service Director B. Youngblood, Lubbock School Superintendent V.L. Cory and Lubbock State Bank President C.L. Slaton informed Youngblood that they had held a meeting at the local commissioner court in order to inquire about the possibility of establishing farm demonstration work in the region. Unfortunately, "the Commissioners made no comment nor asked any questions. Evidently they were taken completely by surprise." A few days later, a vote on the proposition by the commissioners court ended in a tie, leaving the decision to County Judge Haines, who rejected the allocation of funds fearing that "the farmers will criticize the expenditure of the money." Youngblood pointed to a different reason why Haines failed to fund extension work in the Llano Estacado. "The only difficulty I saw," Youngblood wrote, "was that the entire county was out of money."<sup>128</sup>

It was not until 1917 that the funds necessary to establish the work were secured. Agricultural agents were appointed before home demonstration agents in the region,

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<sup>127</sup> United States Census Bureau, "Farm Tenancy in the United States: An Analysis of the Results of the 1920 Census Relative to Farm Classified by Tenure," Census Monographs, Volume IV, 1924, <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html> (accessed March 30, 2013), 242; Saffell, 303, Cunfer, 69-70.

<sup>128</sup> V.L. Cory to B. Youngblood, Lubbock, TX, October 14, 1913, File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, first quote from 1; Geo. W. Briggs to B. Youngblood, Lubbock, TX, October 17, 1913, File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, second quote from 1; B. Youngblood to William Ganzer, College Station, TX, File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, third quote from 2.

following the state trends. In January of 1917, R.O. Tackett began his work as Lubbock's first agricultural agent, and by November of that year, Millie Halsey became Lubbock's first home demonstration agent. During her three years of work in the county, she kept exceptional records of her weekly office and fieldwork. These reports offer a unique opportunity to learn about early-twentieth-century life on the Llano Estacado, and they also provide insights into the challenges that agents encountered as they attempted to "Make the Best Better" on the West Texas Plains.<sup>129</sup>

In the first year of Halsey's work, she followed closely the Extension Service's formal recommendations for gaining support for home demonstration work in Lubbock. After establishing her office next to that of R.O. Tackett, the agricultural agent, Halsey held a meeting with the commissioners court and County Judge J. H. Moore. Her district agent, Helen Stone, also came to the meeting to make sure the necessary funding was available for Halsey's salary. In exchange for working six days a week, attending church and Sunday school whenever possible, and traveling the county giving demonstrations and distributing bulletins, Halsey received fifty dollars a week. Yet as the only home demonstration agent in the Llano Estacado, she did not simply confine her work to one county. She frequently made trips to adjacent Crosby, Floyd, and Lynn counties to stress the importance of home demonstration work.<sup>130</sup>

In Halsey's meetings with local officials, plans developed for introducing home demonstration work to the citizens of the county. Not only did she meet with "the leading

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<sup>129</sup> R.O. Tackett to William Garner, May 25, 1917, File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, 1-2; Lever, "Extension the Most Universal University," File 6, Box 1, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files 7-9, quote from 7.

<sup>130</sup> Millie Halsey, "Weekly Time and Field Report: Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics," November 27, 1917, File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, 4; Dan Taylor, "HD Agent's Records Describe Life in the Good Old Days," *The Lubbock Avalanche*, April 5, 1968, File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, 2.

physicians and dentists” in the area for the purpose of evaluating “the health of Lubbock’s rural citizens,” but she also visited with local merchants to learn the county’s business operations. Additionally, she organized a private meeting with James Dow, editor of the *Lubbock Avalanche*, and after convincing him to carry her local column in the society page, Halsey “seemed very enthusiastic” that home demonstration work “would take” in Lubbock County.<sup>131</sup>

During her first year in the field, Halsey worked closely with the male agricultural agent, an indication that home and agricultural demonstration work in West Texas was not entirely as separate as other scholars have described. The two agents routinely held joint demonstrations that both men and women attended. Writing her first annual report, Halsey described her work with Tackett as “a co-operation” in which both agents benefited significantly from the partnership. She wrote, “The present farm agent is anxious to cooperate in every way possible – getting ready for the County Fair, preparing and sending exhibits to the State Fair, and planning future work.” In addition, both agents’ demonstrations traversed specific gendered tasks. For instance, in one demonstration at the Slaton Community Center, Halsey reported, “Mr. Tackett then handled, very ably, the subject ‘Beautification of the School and Home Grounds,’ and good interest was shown throughout the meeting.” Likewise, Halsey described visiting men in the county who requested her services in home demonstration work. In July 1918, Halsey received a request from a rural farmer wanting a personal canning demonstration. Recollecting on that morning, she wrote:

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<sup>131</sup> Halsey, “Weekly Time and Field Report: Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics,” November 27, 1917, File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, first quote from 4; Millie Halsey, “Weekly Time and Field Report: Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics,” January 12, 1918, File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, second and third quote from 3.



I found Mr. Morgan busy preparing to can and store the products of his two and one half acre patch. He had built a small canning house and was building a cellar. Not knowing anything about steam pressure canners, he had ordered a small hot water canner, but I convinced him that a pressure canner would be more economical and satisfactory for this work. He readily accepted my advice.<sup>132</sup>

Canning was not the only demonstration that Halsey gave to farmers. She also taught and assisted men in how to “cull out a flock of chickens.”<sup>133</sup>

In establishing the value of home demonstration work on the Llano Estacado, Halsey did not immediately begin her work with the rural women of the county. Instead, she chose to focus her attention on introducing the work to rural schools in the area. In a brief meeting in February 1918, Tackett and Halsey approached the region’s rural teachers to ask if they could be of any service. She reported, “The teachers all seemed interested and most of them promised to do as much of this work this year as possible.” At the end of the meeting, “a vote was taken on having a monthly meeting of teachers, trustees and County Agents here in the courthouse at Lubbock to discuss the different phases of school work, and everyone seemed pleased with this.”<sup>134</sup>

This was an important strategy for Halsey. In most rural environments, schools stood at the heart of community. By appealing to both the teachers and the students of the area, Halsey slowly introduced her educational programs. At the same time, she was also

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<sup>132</sup> Halsey, “Weekly Time and Field Report: Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics,” July 13, 1918, File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, 3.

<sup>133</sup> Halsey, “Annual Report of Home Demonstration Work For Women and Girls in the Calendar Year of 1919 in Lubbock County,” File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, first quote from 3; Halsey, “Weekly Time and Field Report: Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics,” February 16, File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, second quote from 3; Halsey, “Weekly Time and Field Report: Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics,” April 27, 1918, File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, third and fourth quote from 3.

<sup>134</sup> Halsey, “Weekly Time and Field Report: Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics,” February 2, 1918, File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, first and second quote from 4.

building trust with the older generations of West Texans. In September 1918, she lent a high school teacher in Slaton her steam pressure canner so “the teacher might use it in some of her course work.” The aim of this was not only to introduce the female high school students to the art of steam pressured canning, but it was also an attempt to “have the girls bring home the excitement of this new piece of technology to their mothers.”<sup>135</sup>

Halsey did not just center her work in the region’s rural schools, and she soon turned her attention to working with women’s clubs in the area. In 1913, Phebe Kerrick Warner organized the first County Federation of Women’s Clubs in the Llano Estacado. Standing at just four feet and ten inches tall, Warner was affectionately known as “the little brown wren of the Panhandle” since “somehow she reminded one a bit of a wren, tiny, and brown and with ceaseless energy.” In 1917, Warner was appointed the state chairman of the Rural Life Committee of the Texas Federation of Women’s Clubs, and in 1920, Governor William Hobby appointed her as the Texas representative to the National Congress of Farm Women. Throughout the 1920s, she worked closely with agricultural and home demonstration agents, and she went to great lengths to help Halsey establish the value of home demonstration work among the women in the Llano Estacado. In a speech delivered to the Federation of Women’s Clubs, she stated:

The greatest gift that God and the Government ever gave to country life was the county home demonstrator and the county farm agent...There are no other two government servants who pay back to the farm home and the government such high dividends for their cost as these two 20<sup>th</sup> century contributors to county life.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Halsey, “Weekly Time and Field Report: Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics,” September 21, 1918, File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, first and second quote from 3.

<sup>136</sup> Phebe Kerrick Warner, “Speech at 7<sup>th</sup> District Meeting of Federation of Women’s Clubs,” microfilm scrapbook, Phebe Kerrick Warner Papers, 1911-1948, Southwest Collections, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX (hereafter cited as Warner Papers), quote from 2.

Halsey offered several demonstrations at federated club meetings. With delight, Halsey reported that most women were “eager” for the demonstrations that she offered. Halsey also extended her services to the local club branches of the Red Cross. At a local Red Cross club meeting in 1918, Halsey reported with pride that the women had taken her food conservation advice to heart during strict wartime rationing.

I demonstrated the making of a fireless cooker to the Red Cross Auxiliary at the home of Mrs. Dave Myers. The women were very interested in this and several want help in making one of their own. These women are doing a great deal along Food Conservator lines. Each one brought refreshments. This consisted of sandwiches, three kinds of cake, one kind of cookies, and one kind of pie, served with hot chocolate...Only one thing on the table was made of white flour.<sup>137</sup>

As these two accounts indicate, Halsey wisely understood the value of appealing to present organizations of rural women in order to introduce home demonstration work to West Texas.<sup>138</sup>

Within Halsey’s first year as county home demonstration agent, she made considerable progress in introducing rural West Texans to home demonstration work. In her 1919 Annual Report to the Extension Service, Halsey reported she had distributed some 1,800 bulletins, visited local schools 423 times, held more than 200 home demonstration meetings, written approximately 120 articles for the local newspapers, and conducted over 200 home demonstrations. She traveled 1,790 miles by rail and more than 4,000 miles by automobile. In 1918 alone, Halsey estimated that the attendance of the

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<sup>137</sup> Halsey, “Weekly Time and Field Report: Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics,” April 12, 1918, File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, 2.

<sup>138</sup> “Mrs. Warned of Claude,” Warner Papers, first and second quote from 1; H. Allen Anderson, “WARNER, PHEBE KERRICK,” *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fwa56>), accessed April 07, 2013; Halsey, “Annual Report of Home Demonstration Work For Women and Girls in the Calendar Year of 1919 in Lubbock County,” 2-3; Halsey, “Weekly Time and Field Report: Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics,” December 12, 1921, File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, second quote from 3.

meetings she held amounted to more than 6,000 residents, a considerable number considering that Lubbock County's total population size slightly exceeded 20,000 at the time. Nevertheless, Halsey often expressed discontent with what she believed was slow progress. In December 1921, she wrote of a canning and drying demonstration in which no one came until the late afternoon. As she reported, "Needless to say that I was greatly disappointed in the size of the crowd but I have the assurance of more than one that it was not from lack of interest."<sup>139</sup>

Halsey's frustration in her early reports also reveals some of the challenges residents encountered living on the Llano Estacado in the early-twentieth century. For many of the rural counties she visited, she expressed dismay that some of "our neighborhoods here are so thinly settled that it is seldom possible to meet at all, even in our own clubs that tried hardest to stay together through the summer." The environmental conditions of the region were also a deterrent for meetings. After many home demonstration club members neglected to attend her program in July 1918, Halsey wrote as an afterthought, "And another thing, the drought and sandstorms discouraged a great many from meeting." In her first year of the work in the county, she spoke of another barrier which prohibited people from meeting together – influenza. In 1918, the flu hit the Llano Estacado hard, as it did the rest of the nation. Halsey wrote, "More than half of the rural schools are closed now on account of influenza....No religious services on account of the outbreak too." The disease seemed to hit hardest in the region's rural districts, where calls for physicians steadily increased, but it was difficult for them to render their

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<sup>139</sup> Halsey, "Annual Report of Home Demonstration Work For Women and Girls in the Calendar Year of 1919 in Lubbock County," 3; Halsey, "Weekly Time and Field Report: Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics," July 20, 1918, File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, quote from 3.

services. For a month she reported, "All the residents were afraid to go outside their own homes for fear they would contract the disease." Confined to office work, Halsey's optimism for home demonstration work continued as she worked feverishly to mail out Extension Service bulletins. On December 21, 1918, she wrote, "Whatever effect my efforts have, my aim has been to preserve the bond between the people and the work through this season when the personal contact must necessarily be lost for a while."<sup>140</sup>

Also evident in Halsey's reports is that home demonstration agents had to carefully navigate the political and economic spheres of the county under which they served. In her first year, the county judge and commissioners court officials closely supervised her work, and often they accompanied her during her demonstrations. Since these elected officials managed the funds that allowed home demonstration work to continue in the county and were crucial for establishing networks with the region's citizens, she had to carefully manage her interactions with them. Halsey also interacted with the leading merchants in the Llano Estacado, and occasionally she confronted them in order to help the rural population that she served. As she related in her annual report in 1919:

In May, I saw every retail grocer in Lubbock and in Slaton, also practically every other one in the county and asked them to pay better prices for infertile eggs. I suggested and advised the production of infertile eggs in every community meeting and through the local paper and by distribution of literature throughout the County. With the full cooperation

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<sup>140</sup> Halsey, "Weekly Time and Field Report: Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics," July 20, 1918, File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, first quote from 3; Halsey, "Weekly Time and Field Report: Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics," December 14, 1918, File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, second and third quote from 3; Dan Taylor, "HD Agent's Records Describe Life in the Good Old Days," fourth quote from 2; Halsey, "Weekly Time and Field Report: Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics," December 21, 1918, File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, fifth quote from 3.

of the people along this, hundreds of dollars could be saved in this county each year.<sup>141</sup>

In bartering with merchants or interacting with elected officials, Halsey serves as an example of how early-twentieth-century home demonstration agents frequently traversed the boundaries of separate spheres. She entered both the private, domestic realm of rural women's households and navigated the public, civic, and economic realms of commerce and politics.<sup>142</sup>

These negotiations could be difficult, and tensions often developed between home demonstration agents and their county officials, especially when it came to funding. Halsey experienced this firsthand in 1920. In February, she reported that her salary had remained the same since starting her work on the Llano Estacado. She wrote that this was particularly problematic, "Since the cost of living for me has more than doubled since that time and since it was necessary for me to buy a new car with my own means." After receiving this news from Halsey, District Agent Dora Barnes met with the local officials to discuss raising funds to supplement Halsey's salary. A promise was made that they would raise her salary to three hundred dollars, a sum Halsey was "very grateful to receive." Yet a few months later, Halsey still had not received her raise, and when Barnes and Halsey inquired about the money, they set off a chain of events that eventually led to Halsey's resignation as Lubbock County home demonstration agent. On July 31, 1920, County Judge J.H. Moore and the four members of the commissioners court sent a letter to Extension Service Director T.O. Walton urging the immediate removal of Halsey and Barnes from the Extension Service. Judge Moore wrote:

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<sup>141</sup> Halsey, "Annual Report of Home Demonstration Work For Women and Girls in the Calendar Year of 1919 in Lubbock County," quote from 2.

<sup>142</sup> Halsey, "Weekly Time and Field Report: Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics," December 21, 1918, File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, 3-4.

Mrs. Barnes, the district agent, and Miss Halsey, the county agent for the Home Demonstration work in the county, have pursued a course of agitation here, against the wishes of the court, that will make a continuation of the work in the county almost an impossibility.<sup>143</sup>

According to Judge Moore, “It grew out of an attempt on the part of Mrs. Barnes to get the salary of Miss Halsey raised when the court having renewed the contract last fall with the distinct understanding that the salary would not be raised this year.” He went on to claim that “Their efforts have had the effect of being political,” and he demanded that “if you deem the work you do in this county worth saving, immediate action is the only thing that will meet this situation.”<sup>144</sup>

Director Walton was immediately suspicious of Judge Moore and the commissioners’ assertion that Barnes and Halsey were political agitators. While continuing correspondence with Judge Moore, Walton ordered an official statement recorded from Halsey and Barnes about the situation. Yet as tensions escalated, it became apparent that the damage had been done, and Halsey could no longer continue to work with these Lubbock officials. Since Halsey was working hard at organizing the county fair in Lubbock, Walton delayed her immediate transfer but promised the judge that she would be removed from the county on November 1, 1920. He explained, “It seems to us the best course to pursue would be to permit Miss Halsey to complete her

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<sup>143</sup> Judge J.H. Moore to T.O. Walton, July 31, 1920, File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, 1.

<sup>144</sup> Halsey, “Weekly Time and Field Report: Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics,” February 7, 1920, File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, first and second quote from 3-4; Judge J.H. Moore to T.O. Walton, July 31, 1920, third, fourth, and fifth quote from 1-2.

undertaking....Then we may be able to secure a woman to take Miss Halsey's place that will be entirely satisfactory to you and your people."<sup>145</sup>

Judge Moore was outraged. On August 30, 1920, he wrote a scathing letter to Walton saying, "The Commissioners' Court and myself feel that she has done us a great injustice, and we will not hear of her staying here till November and then renew a contract for the work. We have tried to make this plain." His next move sent shockwaves through the Extension Service. In a special session, the judge and the court passed a resolution ending all Extension Service activity in the county. The resolution stated:

Having said request been ignored, therefore, be it resolved by the commissioners court in special session, August 30, 1920, that notice be given the Extension Department that on and after Nov. 1, all extension work in Lubbock County, shall be terminated....Voting Aye, B.W. Casey, H.D. Talley, L.O. Burford, P. Von Rosenberg.<sup>146</sup>

In the concluding sentence of his letter to Martin, Judge Moore wrote, "We regret exceedingly that seemingly your course is what it is....My honest, frank and confidential judgment in the matter is that the work in the state would be much better off without either of them."<sup>147</sup>

Walton rejected Moore's assertion. After reading Barnes' statement, Walton learned the judge's actions were motivated by a desire for political revenge. During the March primaries, Judge Moore held a meeting with Halsey asking her help in his reelection campaign. Halsey refused, saying that "she did not have the time and that the College regulations forbade her from taking part in partisan politics." In the next few

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<sup>145</sup> TO Walton to Judge J.H. Moore, August 28, 1920, File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, 1-3, quote from 3.

<sup>146</sup> Judge J.H. Moore to T.O. Walton, August 30, 1930, File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, 4.

<sup>147</sup> Judge J.H. Moore to T.O. Walton, August 30, 1930, 1-4, first quote from 1, second quote from 2.



weeks, Judge Moore lost his reelection. When Walton learned this, he wrote Judge Moore, and frankly pointed out to him, "I feel that you represent the farmers and farm women of your county, and that in trying to square, what you regard as a political debt, you are willing to stand in the way of their progress." He also advised the judge, "You have carried your bluff so far, that it is now incumbent upon you to make good." Nevertheless, this advice came with a warning not to slander the Extension Service in the process. If he did, Walton assured him that "I will place all facts in the hands of every farmer and farm women in Lubbock County, and this I shall do if you insist upon maintaining the attitude that you exhibited."<sup>148</sup>

Angry letters from both sides continued throughout the month of October. Moore charged Walton with being "pretty severe" and displaying "quite a bit of acrimony." He vowed that if Walton made good on his threat "to expose the court on this ground," all the facts "shall be laid before the State Department of Agriculture so that the facts may go broadcast over the state and reach the farmers." Walton fired back by describing the judge's actions as "the result of obstinacy and hardheadedness," and refused to let county agricultural or home demonstration agents "to work as leverage to force us to accede to your demands." In the end, Judge Moore lost more than just his reelection. The commissioners court refused to back his proposal to discontinue all Extension Service's activity in Lubbock County. Though Halsey relocated to Baylor County in January 1920,

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<sup>148</sup> Dora Barnes, "Official Statement of Lubbock Affairs," File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, 1-8, first quote from 2; T.O. Walton to J.H Moore, October 7, 1920, File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, 1-2, second, third, and fourth quote from 2.

a new home demonstration agent took her place, and Lubbock County continued to fund and support home demonstration work throughout the next forty years.<sup>149</sup>

The tensions and scandal that befell home demonstration work in Lubbock in 1920 indicate the precarious situation in which many home demonstration agents found themselves. Despite their best efforts to remain neutral, they could easily be entangled in political controversies and used as leverage to settle political debts. This story also illuminates the political tensions that emerged between state, federal, and local authorities. When Judge Moore could not control this outside agent of the federal government, he attacked not only the agent herself but also the Extension Service and the United States Department of Agriculture.

Judge Moore's attack on Halsey's unwillingness to participate in his reelection campaign also reveals how local officials responded to women's suffrage. On June 28, 1919, Texas ratified the Nineteenth Amendment, prohibiting efforts to prevent any United States citizen the right to vote based on sex. The timing of the controversy between Moore, Halsey, and the Extension Service is hardly coincidental. Noting new voting demographics in the county, Moore approached Halsey for the purpose of gaining women's political support. Her refusal to assist him threatened his local political power. After losing the election, Moore retaliated and abused his authority by banning Halsey from the county and by cutting off the Extension Service's funding. Clearly, the reasons for Moore's actions were more than financial. As Rebecca S. Montgomery describes,

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<sup>149</sup> Judge Moore to T.O. Walton, October 11, 1920, File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, first and second quote from 1-2; T.O. Walton to Judge Moore, October 14, 1920, File 48, Box 14, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, third quote from 2.

suffrage and “female activism challenged [white male political leaders’] private and public authority as men as well as their economic interests.”<sup>150</sup>

Despite the political tensions that sometimes emerged between home demonstration agents and local officials, the rhetoric frequently employed by agents in their home demonstration work was almost universally optimistic, selfless, and progressive. Agents truly felt the work they were doing was instrumental and beneficial to the progress of their counties. In an oral history with Kate Adele Hill, district agent for the Llano Estacado in the 1930s, she recounted that home demonstration agents “didn’t spend [their] energy telling [their] troubles.” She explained, “You don’t complain. You may analyze and ask what you can do to help. Then you get to it and work at it.” She instructed her county home demonstration agents that their “first interest should be in the people of the county.” This emphasis for agents was particularly important since “the sole needs of the people of the county as they express them” determined what programs Extension Service personnel would offer. Agents were encouraged to analyze the county as to “its people, its industries, its places of interest, its history, its progress, its needs and its future.” She concluded, “We having nothing to sell, no requirements to enforce – our sole interest is the people, their wants and needs in practical information.”<sup>151</sup>

Even though agents were encouraged to structure their demonstrations according to the people’s unique needs, the content of Extension Service programs tended to

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<sup>150</sup>Montgomery, 230-235, quote from 233.

<sup>151</sup> Kate Adele Hill, interview by Paul Carlson, April 22, 1977, Southwest Collections’ Oral History Collection, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX, (hereafter cited as Hill Oral History), first and second quote; Kate Adele Hill, “The Challenge of Home Demonstration Work as a Profession,” speech given at Texas Women’s University, May 15, 1954, File 10, Box 1, Hill Papers SW Collection, 1-14, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth quote 13-14.

influence what agents believed was in the best interest of the rural populations that they served. In describing the women of the Llano Estacado, Hill wrote:

Most of them are past 9<sup>th</sup> grade schooling... There is nothing unusual to see a woman at dawn driving a truck delivering a load of grain sorghum in the morning, and meeting that same woman in a long dress, corsage, and beauty shop coiffure, doing both jobs with equal ease. She wants to know how to buy food, prepare food, store food, make clothes, feed her family, recreate with her family, furnish her house, make an income tax form, make a will, keep farm records, how to make a speech, preside at a meeting, hold an election, or do anything else that is needed to be done.<sup>152</sup>

Hill's remarks could very well sum up the development of Texas home demonstration programming in the two decades from 1920 to 1940. With the Extension Service's emphases on food preservation and conservation, clothing and wardrobe construction, interior and exterior improvements, and household management, it was convenient for Hill to describe the needs of women in the Llano Estacado along the same lines as already established home demonstration programs. In doing so, she found the means to not only legitimize the importance of home demonstration work on the Texas Plains, but she also discovered the means through which to advocate for its expansion.

This, in part, helps explain why home demonstration work on the Llano Estacado so closely mirrored state trends. In the 1920s, home demonstration agents on the Texas Plains primarily concentrated their efforts on food production and conservation. Pressure canners and tin cans were frequent demonstrations for rural women as were planning and planting gardens for increasing farm families' nutrition. By the late 1920s, the Extension Service's popular Live-At-Home campaign was launched for the purpose of releasing "cash income hitherto spent for food for the use of purchasing other home conveniences

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<sup>152</sup> Hill, "The Challenge of Home Demonstration Work as a Profession," 8-9.

and savings.” Nevertheless, it was not until the Great Depression that the Live-At-Home campaign really took off with West Texas women.<sup>153</sup>

In 1934, the Extension Service and Texas Relief Commission established community canneries throughout the state in order to mitigate the hardships brought on by the Great Depression and state-wide drought. The U.S. Agricultural Adjustment Administration bought over two million head of cattle to distribute to these community canning plants, and local residents were encouraged to bring their surplus meat and vegetables from their farms and ranches. In exchange, these rural families would receive 45 percent of the cans of meat and 55 percent of the cans of vegetables, and the rest was distributed to families on the county relief rolls. Additionally, these plants hired more than 20,000 relief workers who operated the plant twenty-four hours a day in eight-hour shifts.<sup>154</sup>

For Extension Service officials, the benefits of these community canning plants extended beyond simply helping those who were on county relief rolls. They correctly foresaw that the establishment of community canneries would show the state’s rural population the value of food preservation and conservation. With the help of federal assistance, many of the isolated counties throughout the state secured the necessary equipment to begin canning vegetables, fruits, and meat, and once the equipment was in

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<sup>153</sup> Hill, “Top Honors to Her: Westex Pioneer Women Was Dainty, but Tempered Steel – Courageous, Staunch, Far-Seeing,” File 6, Box 2, Hill Papers SW Collections, quote from 2-3.

<sup>154</sup> Lola Blair, “The Twenty Federal Relief Meat Canning Plants,” 1934, Box 2, File 34 TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, 1-3; Jennie Camp, “General Canning in Community Relief Canning Centers,” 1934, Box 2, File 34, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, 1-2.

place, it was much easier for home demonstration agents to organize their canning demonstrations and programs.<sup>155</sup>

In the Llano Estacado, several community canning plants were established, and the local home demonstration agents were instrumental in organizing and teaching canning demonstrations. Castro County home demonstration agent Mayesie Malone wrote about the significance of these plants for the region's rural women. Armed with the knowledge and equipment necessary to learn how to can, she explained:

The products that have gone on the pantry shelves of the owners, together with those canned by farm women in their own kitchens, will be a mighty factor in keeping the wolf from the door in the coming winter, thus serving as a testament to the work we can do in this county.<sup>156</sup>

This new emphasis on canning also helped rural women in the region market their surplus goods and bring in additional income. After receiving health certificates from home demonstration agents, women were allowed to market their canned products to wider audiences with the "Texas Better 4-H Products Label and the motto 'To Make the Best Better.'" For rural women concerned with producing marketable products that were not only pleasing to the eye but that also met Texas sanitation and food preservation standards, the use of these labels was particularly valuable.<sup>157</sup>

During the Great Depression, wardrobe and clothing demonstrations also became popular throughout the state. Hundreds of women in the Llano Estacado participated in demonstrations aimed at showing "that one can be well dressed even on a small amount of money." Typically, the demonstrations started with making a foundation pattern. As

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<sup>155</sup> Mayesie Malone, "Canning Plant Here Approved by Relief Body," Scrapbook I, Mayesie Malone Papers, 1912-1967, Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX (hereafter cited as Malone Papers), 1.

<sup>156</sup> Malone, "Club Women Selling Canned Products," 4.

<sup>157</sup> Malone, "Club Women Selling Canned Products," quote from 4.

Mrs. Earl D. Byrd of Lubbock County reported, “The foundation pattern is fool proof. With a well-fitted foundation pattern and a little ingenuity, anyone, even an amateur, can sew successfully.” Often, home demonstration agents held contests in wardrobe and clothing demonstrations that enticed club participation. Prizes ranged from “a trip to A&M’s short course to silver serving trays to sleeve processing boards.”<sup>158</sup>

The Extension Service’s “Better Mattress Campaign” also appealed to rural families in the Llano Estacado. Faced with a surplus of cotton and little “prospect of selling very much of it in any foreign country,” Extension Service officials offered to supply farm families who made less than 400 dollars a year with enough cotton to make their own mattresses. The aim of this campaign was to remove surplus cotton, improve rural health, and give “farm folk a sense of accomplishment.” As U.S. Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Grover B. Hill explained, “Maybe a mattress isn’t very big – but when a family makes it, they get a sense of accomplishment that may be the stepping stone to other improvements in family living.” This “desire for accomplishment,” he reported, “is the thing that drove pioneers west and brought civilization to the wilderness.” Hill’s sentiments not only characterize how Extension Service officials conceived of their roles in improving the lives of rural Americans, but they also echo similar narratives of progress that have characterized the history of Anglo-European settlement.<sup>159</sup>

When the USDA nationally broadcast “From Bales to Beds” on television in 1940, a family from the Llano Estacado was chosen to explain how to make a cotton mattress. Mr. and Mrs. Charles Jones, along with their daughter Dorothy and son

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<sup>158</sup> Mrs. Earl D. Byrd, “Complete Wardrobe Requires a Large But Wise Expenditure,” June 30, 1934, Scrapbook I, Malone Papers, first, second, and third quote from 5.

<sup>159</sup> USDA, “From Bales to Beds,” May 1940 Script, Scrapbook I, Malone Papers, 1-8, first and second quote from 2, third and fourth quote from 8.

Malcolm, had a 204-acre farm in Brown County that specialized in growing cotton. The Joneses learned how to make their first cotton mattress from their county home demonstration agent, Mayesie Malone. Malone had been the only agent the county ever had, and Mrs. Jones described her by saying, “There’s none better – anywhere.” After making their first mattress, the family worked with countless neighbors in Brown County making mattresses, and the USDA offered the family a paid trip to Washington, D.C. for the purpose of appearing on national television. This was a big treat for this family of Brown County, and they reported with glee, “We’ve had a chance to see almost everything I guess – the capitol and the White House – the Smithsonian Institution – and a great many other places.” During the broadcast, all members of the family discussed their role in making mattresses. While Mr. Jones held the cotton in place, Mrs. Jones and Dorothy sewed the cotton ticketing, and Malcolm had the important job of “beating the mattress with a broomstick.” When asked how long to beat the cotton, Malcolm, typical of an eleven-year-old boy, replied, “Oh, well – until you get tired!”<sup>160</sup>

Rural women in the Llano Estacado also participated in the national Victory Garden program during World War II. By 1942, 4,482 women in the region had signed Victory Demonstration cards and pledged to “produce food, feed and fiber for home use and for distribution to meet war needs.” Being Victory Demonstrators encompassed more than just growing and canning their own food. Women pledged to make repairs and take good care of farm and home equipment, buildings, machinery, and clothes. They were encouraged to purchase defense stamps and bonds and to engage in other wartime activities, such as “collecting scrap iron and junk, assisting in air raid warning systems, and guarding water supplies and other public resources.” Women also pledged to assist in

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<sup>160</sup> USDA, “From Bales to Beds,” 4-8, first and second quote 4-5, third and fourth quote 6-7.



relieving farm labor shortages through shifting family responsibilities. Finally, they were responsible for building “the kind of family, community, and national life which is worth defending, which will maintain morals and which can meet the difficulties of postwar reconstruction.”<sup>161</sup>

Yet as much as home demonstration work on the Llano Estacado mirrored these national trends and programs, it nevertheless was unique on the Texas Plains. One of the major challenges that home demonstration agents faced in the early-twentieth century was the great distances that agents were required to travel. Many had to buy their own vehicles, and due to poor road conditions, buying and maintaining vehicles were expensive. As district agent Kate Hill recounted, “I often say that over my career, I wore out seven different cars, but all that accumulated mileage was on me.” She surmised that in her time in West Texas, she drove over 2,000 miles a month. After she was transferred to work with nineteen counties in East Texas, she found “the work was a picnic compared to the thirty-nine counties she supervised in West Texas.” Mary Jones, home demonstration agent for Crosby County in the late 1920s, also reported the difficulties of serving in West Texas. She recollected, “We didn’t have any budget. We had no mileage, no allowances. Everything came – We did it ourselves.”<sup>162</sup>

Some agents also reported disappointment with the state and federal Extension Service officials because they believed West Texas received less attention than other regions of the state. Jones described how “West Texas was ignored by the state agencies.

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<sup>161</sup>Kate Adele Hill, “The Homemaker’s Responsibility to Be Thrifty in the Present Emergency,” speech given to the District Meeting of the Texas Home Demonstration Association in Lubbock, Texas, April 11, 1942, File 10, Box 1, Hill Papers SW Collection, 2-3, first quote from 2, second and third quote from 3.

<sup>162</sup>First and second quote from Hill Oral History; third quote from Mrs. Don L. Jones, Interview, April 15, 1945, Lubbock, TX, Southwest Collections’ Oral History Collections, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX (hereafter cited as Jones Oral History).

We just might not have existed in those early years.” Additionally, she expressed discontentment with many of the federally funded New Deal policies during the Great Depression. As she related:

During the Depression, when farmers really needed help, they [county agricultural agents] started the federal program, and farm agents started spending all their time in the office working actually for the federal government.<sup>163</sup>

The problem with this, Jones explained, was that their time was spent “filling out forms for aid to the farmer rather than doing and teaching,” something that she felt was more productive than simply doing paperwork.<sup>164</sup>

Additionally, since the Llano Estacado was settled later than other parts of the state, early agents had to contend not only with a relatively sparse population, but also with high tenancy rates. When Leona Bruce arrived in the Llano Estacado in the 1920s, she observed that “very few farmers lived on their own farms at that time. Everyone was poor. Nobody was any poorer than anybody else.” Nevertheless, she recalled that tenant farmers were “as a group, fine men of integrity, honor, just as fine of men as I have ever known.” Bruce developed an affinity for tenant farmers after observing the conditions at the one-room schoolhouse, and she decided to offer her services as a teacher. She explained, “I felt such pity for the children of tenant farmers...At that time, the farmers had to buy their books, and that was bad because in many homes, there were no books...The children couldn’t even afford fruit.”<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Jones Oral History.

<sup>164</sup> First and second quote from Jones Oral History.

<sup>165</sup> First, second, and third quote from Leona Bruce, Interview by Richard Mason, May 2, 1983, Santa Anna, Texas, Southwest Collections’ Oral History Collection, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX (hereafter cited as Bruce Oral History).

As indicated in the second chapter, many of these families lacked the disposable income required to begin the more specialized home demonstration programs, and agents had to adjust their programming to meet the needs of this poor population. As Bruce recalled,

Home demonstration clubs did a great deal for these people because they got the women together, taught them to clean out the hen houses and pour kerosene on the mesquite trees where the chickens roosted so they would kill the lice and bed bugs and things like that. They taught them – Their motto was to make something out of nothing. They used feed sacks and sugar sacks and even tobacco sacks at three inches a square for quilt lining. They taught them something about nutrition and a great deal of other work.<sup>166</sup>

Home demonstration agent Mary Jones also described her early work in Castro County working with tenant farmers' wives. "There were still some people who lived in dugouts," Jones remembered. Still, she explained, "The women were enthusiastic. They would meet in each other's homes but the problem was the equipment there. Lots of homes had no electricity, and you just had to adopt your program so that you could present to the women in these homes."<sup>167</sup>

From 1920 to the late 1930s, home demonstration agents worked routinely with tenant farmers in the Llano Estacado, and for many of these families, the agent served as both a resource for better agricultural and homemaking practices and as a social outlet for the newly arrived farm families. Wanda Martin and her family moved to Lubbock in the early 1930s, and after she graduated from high school in 1945, she met a "strapping young man" named Robbie Gill who had just come back from World War II. Robbie's family was originally from Jones County, and Wanda remembered that "they were very,

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<sup>166</sup> Bruce Oral History.

<sup>167</sup> First and second quotes from Jones Oral History.

very poor people.” Due to limited economic opportunities in Jones County, the family moved to Floyd County in the Llano Estacado. There, they rented a small farm, and after Robbie returned from the war, he came back to help his parents and to attend Texas Tech with the help of the GI Bill. After dating for two years, Wanda and Robbie married in 1947.<sup>168</sup>

Wanda’s mother-in-law was highly involved in the Joe Stokes’ Home Demonstration Club in Woodrow, which served an important function for this newly migrated farm wife. Not only did she make friends, but she also became engaged in the building and improving of the community. The Joe Stokes’ Club was unique for another reason as well. As Wanda recalled, “It was always a couples meeting even though they called it the home demonstration club....Men would sit around with one another and talk politics, and the women would share stories about their families.” When Wanda and Robbie married, her mother-in-law’s club threw a memorable bridal shower. She recollected, “It was at a member’s house. At our shower, all those neighbors invited the county commissioners who were running for office. They made talks – Trying to get votes. I never will forget that.” Clearly, typical of every local politician, those seeking election utilized every opportunity to campaign, even at home demonstration clubs.<sup>169</sup>

After the two married, Robbie decided he wanted to be a farmer. Wanda was raised a city girl and knew little about farm life. Still, she remembered, “It just seemed like the thing he wanted to do, and I was willing to do what he wanted to do. He loved agriculture, all the time.” Robbie found out about a little farm he could rent on Highway 87, just a few miles down the road from his father’s tenant farm. Robbie and his father

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<sup>168</sup> First and second quote from Wanda Gill, interview by author, July 12, 2012, Lubbock, TX (hereafter cited as Gill Oral History).

<sup>169</sup> First and second quote from Gill Oral History.

pulled their resources together and rented their first mechanical equipment that year. The two planted mostly cotton, but they also grew wheat as a backup crop. Indicative of standard tenant agreements during this time, they promised to pay a third of what they made at harvest. After the first year, Robbie experienced good luck with his cotton crop, enough to buy his own tractor, and he began the process of securing more and more land.<sup>170</sup>

As soon as Robbie and Wanda moved to the country, Wanda joined the local home demonstration club at New Home. Club members met once a month in one another's homes where they would either "play 42 or bring someone to give talks." She described the speakers who came to the club as being from "bible classes mostly. The ones that mostly did lectures for the ladies did Bible work." Monthly dues were "not very much," and the funds were mostly used for "flowers for somebody or something like that." Lola Smith was president of the New Home Home Demonstration Club. Wanda recalled a typical meeting:

First, Lola called the meeting to order. Then they would respond. Maybe they brought a recipe or something they had done craft wise or something like that. Everybody would have an input. Then, they would always eat. There was a meal or snacks, and everyone would talk about their family. What the crops were doing. That we should stay in cotton and so forth. That's what they did.<sup>171</sup>

As indicated by Wanda's remarks, her home demonstration club offered not only a social outlet for farmwomen in the county, but it also served as an avenue for sharing tips and advice. Similarly, her recollections reveal that though farmwomen engaged in topics typically assigned as women's work, such as cooking or crafting, they also discussed

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<sup>170</sup> Gill Oral History.

<sup>171</sup> Gill Oral History.

crop production. After all, these farmwives were just as affected by crop yield as their farming husbands were.<sup>172</sup>

From Gill's oral history it is also evident that the farming community of New Home in the Llano Estacado had a good relationship with the county Extension Service agents. She remembered, "They came around a lot and helped with any questions that any of us had on the farm. We were good friends with the county agents, and they played a big part in all of our farming." The questions brought to the county agents predominately centered on agriculture production. Farmers inquired about what the prices for crops were going to be, what the market was like, and what and when to plant. Interactions with the home demonstration agent were somewhat different. Usually, the home demonstration agent would try to attend their club meetings, but oddly, Gill did not remember a specific demonstration that the agent ever gave at a meeting. "It was mostly conversation and talk," she recollected. "She always made a lot of suggestions about how things should be done but that was all it was – suggestions." Without specific accounts from the agent herself, it is difficult to know why the home demonstration agent interacted with the New Home Home Demonstration Club the way she did. Perhaps her personality influenced how she engaged with club members. Or, maybe it was a keen strategy on her part to mitigate the tensions that could emerge between agents and club women. By simply offering suggestions, she may have been minimizing her role as a professional outsider in order to establish a more personal and intimate relationship.<sup>173</sup>

In the Llano Estacado, many rural women joined or created their own neighborhood home demonstration clubs. In 1939, there were more than thirty different

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<sup>172</sup> First, second, third, and fourth quote from Gill Oral History.

<sup>173</sup> First, second, and third quote from Gill Oral History.

home demonstration clubs in the region that boasted a membership of more than 4,200 members. Some locations had more than one club since many neighborhoods or rural communities preferred to form their own club rather than join a large, already established one. For instance, in Floyd County, there were sixteen different home demonstration clubs with a total membership of just forty-two women. What this may suggest is that women who organized their own home demonstration clubs chose to do so within already established community networks of mutual aid. For many rural women, home demonstration clubs provided the only opportunity for rural women to engage in social relationships, and most wanted to be sure they would enjoy each other's company.<sup>174</sup>

This was certainly evident for the New Home Club President, Lola Smith. When Smith and her husband moved to New Home in the 1930s, Smith began teaching at the rural school. "When I retired," Smith recollected, "the only civic activity in the community was the home demonstration club." Eighteen women were in the home demonstration club at that time, and they represented "the established and wholesome families of the region." Recalling her decision to join the club, Lola explained, "That is where I put my efforts because I have always been interested in trying to do the best I could to develop a wholesome atmosphere and develop the community...I also liked the women already in the club."<sup>175</sup>

Though socialization was an important reason to join home demonstration clubs, the emphasis on community improvement also drove their decisions. Wanda Gill and

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<sup>174</sup> "Texas County Extension Agents and Club Members," August 1939, Folder 44, Box 58, George Mahon Papers, Southwest Collections, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX (hereafter cited as Mahon Papers).

<sup>175</sup> First, second, and third quote from Mrs. Wilmer Smith, interview by Mike Hooks, July 1, 1976, New Home, Texas, Southwest Collections' Oral History Collections, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX (hereafter cited as Smith Oral History).

Lola Smith both described their club's efforts to establish a New Home community center, a building that Gill was proud to support and is still standing. Additionally, home demonstration clubs in Lubbock and Lynn counties organized hot lunch programs for school children and worked to distribute the Texas Food Standards nutritional survey to rural schools throughout the region. In accordance with other home demonstration clubs throughout the state, club members in the Llano Estacado also raised funds for scholarships for young girls and boys, and they organized community trash pick-up campaigns.<sup>176</sup>

Yet as the oral histories from Gill and Smith reveal, women in the Llano Estacado made their home demonstration clubs unique despite the segregated structure advocated in some Extension Service programming. As Smith described, "One of the main things we were organized for was to help support an agricultural club that was operating in New Home at that time. Most of the farmers belonged to this club, and we supported them by arranging meeting places for them and serving them meals." Gill recalled a similar experience with the Woodrow Home Demonstration Club where both men and women attended meetings regularly. These integrated clubs indicate a larger sense of cooperation among farm families and their roles in improving the community. As rural women drew on their traditional role in maintaining community networks of mutual aid, they traversed the gender-segregated activities promoted by some Extension Service personnel. Nancy Grey Osterud also found this to be the case in her study of early-twentieth-century farming communities in New York. As she describes, "Customary gender-integrated modes of neighborly association proved the base for powerful economic and political

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<sup>176</sup> Gill Oral History.



organizations... Women as well as men were enlisted in securing the unity of action on which... cooperation [and their survival] depended.”<sup>177</sup>

Home demonstration clubs in the Llano Estacado also stressed the importance of civic participation both locally and nationally. In most of the clubs, a special education committee was created “whose business it is to be informed on matters of local government.” These committees were composed of four or five women who visited county commissioners “for the purpose of helping to keep the commissioners’ court informed on home demonstration work.” Additionally, education committees were established to keep rural women updated on local and national elections and policies. In 1949, three Lubbock County home demonstration clubs attended and served refreshments at the meeting of local politicians debating a new soil and water conservation law. For these women, it was “important to participate” in these local policy debates since the outcome of these elections affected “their children and their children’s children.” Women in the Llano Estacado also turned their attention to national and worldwide commemorations. In 1947, the Brown County Home Demonstration Club made a United Nations’ flag that was flown in front of the Brown County Courthouse. Additionally, they distributed flags to local schools in the area and presented a program where the National Anthem and the United Nations’ song of peace were presented to local children.<sup>178</sup>

Yet by the 1950s, home demonstration club membership in the Llano Estacado began to decline, as it did throughout the state. As wealthy farmers acquired more

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<sup>177</sup> First quote from Smith Oral History; Gill Oral History; Nancy Grey Osterud, *Putting the Barn Before the House*, second quote from 14.

<sup>178</sup> Kate Adele Hill, “The Place of Home Demonstration Agents, Councils, and Clubs,” 1949, File 10, Box 1, Hill Papers SW Collection, 1-12; first and second quote 10-11, third and fourth quote 7-8; “UN and American Flags Fly Today at Court House,” *The Brown County Bulletin*, October 27, 1947, Scrapbook I, Malone Papers, 2.

acreage and machinery, commercial agriculture pushed more and more rural families to move into larger towns and cities. In 1940, the population of the city of Lubbock was just over 31,000, but by 1950 the number had skyrocketed to over 71,000. Though Kate Hill described the changes she observed during her work as district agent as an indication of progress, she nevertheless expressed some concern for the fate of rural Texas. As she articulated in a speech:

These changes include a change from a rural to urban population, a change from simple and independent life like that of the country to the complex and racing life of the city, from a system where wealth was fairly well-distributed to one which it is fairly well-concentrated, from a country of tenant farmers to one of farm owners and from slave to free and then machine labor. Town people are moving to the country and country people are moving to town. As they move, social roots are torn up.<sup>179</sup>

This shift had profound implications for home demonstration work, particularly as more and more women began to enter the workforce. As Hill described, “There are so many women now who are doing two jobs: their own and as homemakers. Of course, their plan of home management has to be entirely different, that their extension programs and publications must be entirely different too.” While there was certainly “a demand and need for HD work in urban areas,” agents were unsure what their programs should contain. Though food preservation had always been the focal point of home demonstration work, frozen food and prepared food diminished its importance. Similarly, as clothing became easier and cheaper to buy than to make, the emphasis on clothing and wardrobe demonstrations also diminished.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Kate Adele Hill, “The Modern Rural Homemaker,” speech at banquet in Galveston, 1932, File 4, Box 2, Hill Papers SW Collection, 6-7.

<sup>180</sup> United States Bureau of Census, “1940 Census Population: Characteristics of the Population – Texas” <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html> (accessed March 30, 2013), 43-30; First, second, and third quote from Hill Oral History.

The oral histories of Gill and Smith point to more personal reasons why home demonstration club membership started to decline. As Gill recollected, “We all had our own families...And, as our children started to get older, they joined other clubs. The people started doing different things, and the [home demonstration club] just started to peter out.” Additionally, she described how other clubs “spun out of the home demonstration club” based on club members’ specific interests. Quilting, needlework, and gardening clubs began to take the place of home demonstration clubs. Gill speculated, “I think that a lot of the other clubs were really spin offs of home demonstration work. I really do.” Smith, on the other hand, argued that the region’s aging population was to blame for the demise of the New Home Home Demonstration Club in 1973. She stated, “All of us were getting to the age where we didn’t have the time to meet. Some of our members were in poor health and couldn’t come. So, we just disbanded.”<sup>181</sup>

Whatever the reasons for its decline, Gill and Smith show how the home demonstration club movement met important needs for some women in the Llano Estacado. It provided them with a social network of like-minded women that served to alleviate the isolation brought on by rural life, and it also encouraged them to engage in community and national improvement campaigns. Both found value in participating in home demonstration work, and both expressed gratitude for the establishment of home demonstration clubs.

Nevertheless, the story of early home demonstration work on the Llano Estacado is one dominated by the experiences of Anglo-Texans. Due to the rather sparse population of African-Americans in the region, no official African-American home

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<sup>181</sup> First, second, and third quote from Gill Oral History; Fourth quote from Smith Oral History.

demonstration agent was ever appointed in the region, and there is little evidence that white home demonstration agents worked with the few African-Americans living there. As Wanda Gill recalled growing up in Lubbock in the 1930s, “There was an African-American community called Dunbar, but it was entirely separate. We didn’t know anything going on there.” The silence of African-American experiences in the region is also evident in the Southwest Collections at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, where no archival evidence of the Dunbar community exists. Its absence reminds historians of what anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot wrote happens when historical production “silences the past.” Rather than viewing the absence of African-American perspectives as an unfortunate circumstance, Trouillot challenges historians to view these silences as indications or constructions of power. As he wrote, “Power is constitutive to the story....[It] begins at the source,” and the process of “silencing or remembering” certain historical experiences over others serves as “Janus-faced articulations of power embedded in the production of the past.” In the Llano Estacado, Anglo-Texans dominate the history, a testament of who held the political and economic power in the region.<sup>182</sup>

Largely absent also in the story of home demonstration work on the Llano Estacado are the experiences of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. Unlike other counties in far West Texas, there is no evidence of Mexican-American women joining home demonstration clubs. This is most likely due to the labor demands in the region. Most of the Mexican-Americans performed seasonal labor on farms in the Llano Estacado. As Wanda Gill recalled, “July was hoe time, and we would hire Spanish people with women

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<sup>182</sup> First quote from Gill Oral History; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), first and second quote from 28-29; Richard Flores, *Remembering the Alamo: Memory, Modernity, & the Master Symbol* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), third quote from xvi.

and children, probably about ten total. We paid them minimum wage, and they lived in a shack by the farm.” Understandably, home demonstration work hardly appealed to these women who did not have their own homes to live in or to improve.<sup>183</sup>

While home demonstration agents largely excluded these migrant workers in their programs, county agricultural agents did engage with them in special farm-labor programs designed to “improve working conditions and farmer-worker relations.” Due to labor shortages during World War II, the Extension Service established forty-two reception centers throughout the state in order to guide migrant workers to places where their labors were most needed, while also providing a safe and sanitary place for these families to temporarily live. Though these reception centers were funded with state and local county commissioners funds, securing support for the establishment of reception centers in the Llano Estacado was a daunting task for agents who encountered farmers’ prejudice toward Mexican-Americans. For instance, when Ceasar Hohn, an Extension Service agent in charge of establishing reception centers in West Texas, held a local meeting in Big Spring, a local farmer grumbled, “If this means we’ve got to live with ‘em, I’m agin it. They’re so filthy they stink.” Hohn responded, “Look, I’m not taking up for the migrants. But if you and I were jammed in trucks all day or were out dragging cotton sacks and had no place to take a bath, we probably wouldn’t smell like baby talcum either.” Hohn received the support of local residents for establishing a reception center in the county, but only after advocating for “the exclusion of migrants from cafes and other places.” In the Llano Estacado, about ten reception stations were established between 1942 and 1948 that provided not only a safe place to sleep and bathe, but also

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<sup>183</sup> Quote from Gill Oral History. As local newspapers reveal, there were Mexican-American Home Demonstration Clubs in far West Texas counties, such as El Paso and Brewster.

offered “missionary work” with Bible classes, health care, and burial expenses for migrant agricultural laborers.<sup>184</sup>

Examining the transformation of the Llano Estacado in the early-twentieth century provides an ideal case study through which to explore the larger agricultural and population transformations in Texas. Like the rest of the state, the region transformed as Anglo settlers pressed ever westward, altering not only the physical environment of the region but also its cultural landscape. Where once large herds of cattle and bison wandered the land in the late-nineteenth century, specialized agriculture came to dominate the region by the mid-twentieth century. Indians disappeared, as did large cattle barons, who were replaced by East Texas farmers bent and determined to turn the dry plains into an agricultural Eden. This transformation occurred rather rapidly on the Llano Estacado as farmers increased their landholdings, embraced modernization and the irrigation revolution, and exploited cheap labor. By the mid-1940s, large-scale commercial agriculture dominated the region, pushing many poorer rural families out of the country and into the city where more job opportunities awaited. All of these transformations speak to larger trends experienced by early-twentieth century Texans.

The emergence of home demonstration work on the Llano Estacado also reveals the challenges and benefits that many home demonstration agents encountered in establishing their work. As in other counties, they had to navigate several critical spheres, whether political, economic, or cultural. Agents interacted with local and state officials,

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<sup>184</sup> Lewis Nordyke, “Texas Cleans Up Mess: After Mistreating Its Sorely Needed Army of Migrant Workers for Generations, Texans Have at Last Erased This Smudge on the Record of Their State,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, July 27, 1946, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, File 29, Box 5, 2-5, first quote from 2, second and third quote from 4-5, fourth quote from 2-3; J.D. Prewit, “Memorandum to Mr. W.N. Williamson,” January 30, 1948, File 19, Box 6, TAMU Extension Service Historical Files, statistics of West Texas reception centers from 4.

teachers, merchants, and influential clubwomen of the county, and they encountered problems that were sometimes out of their control, such as raging dust and snowstorms, droughts, epidemics, and economic depressions. Nevertheless, throughout all of this, most agents remained optimistic about the work they were doing, trying to “Make the Best Better” for women on the Texas Plains.

Just as rural women did throughout the state, many women living on the Llano Estacado took to the lessons offered in home demonstration work. They learned to can and preserve fruits, vegetables, and meat to improve their families’ nutrition, and they discovered techniques on how to market and sell surplus items to increase cash expenditures. Rural women discovered tricks to transform a drab wardrobe into something that they and their family could be proud of, and they found innovative ways to improve both interior and exterior conditions in their homes. For many rural women, the greatest benefit that home demonstration work offered them was a temporary break from the isolation of rural life and a means through which to improve their communities and nation.

The story of early home demonstration work on the Llano Estacado also shows how agents and rural women made Extension Service programming their own. On occasion, both male agricultural agents and female home demonstration agents necessarily rejected segregated gender programming, and they traversed the boundaries of what many Extension Service personnel attempted to designate as either men’s or women’s work. As agents worked to gain the support of rural women, they drew on already established networks of mutual aid among rural women, such as rural schools, churches, and clubs, and in some cases, they downplayed their role as professionals in

order to develop personal relationships with women in the county. Rural women picked and chose what programs were of particular value to them, based on their conception of the value of their labor and their agency. As economic partners crucial to the farm families' survival, they selectively tailored the lessons of home demonstration work in order to improve the conditions under which their families lived and to contribute to the progress of their communities and nation.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

On February 5, 2013, 108.4 million Americans turned on their television sets to watch Super Bowl XLVII, making it the third most-watched show in United States history. It was not just the game that attracted viewers. Millions also tuned in for the advertisements. Whether witty, absurd, or touching, Super Bowl commercials are just as likely to feature in Monday morning water-cooler conversations as the outcome of the game. Audiences waste little time in rating their favorites, and like the past, this year's top five certainly varied. Advertisements for beer, junk food, and laundry detergent made the list, but so too did a Dodge commercial about farmers. The advertisement featured images of sod-busting American farmers while Paul Harvey's famous 1978 speech, "So God Made a Farmer," played in the background. After airing at the Super Bowl, the commercial went viral within hours. In its first twenty-four hours on Youtube.com, it received over 4.6 million views, and Americans all across the nation applauded its "earnestness." As one commentator on Youtube explained, "It was a wonderful tribute to farmers and to agriculture and the work ethic that you gain growing up on the farm." Another simply stated, "Dodge stuns everyone. Best Super Bowl commercial EVER!"<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> James Hibberd, "Super Bowl XLVII Falls Short of Viewship Record," *InsiderTV.com*, February 4, 2013, <http://insidetv.ew.com/2013/02/04/super-bowl-xlvii-ratings/> (accessed April 28, 2013); Dan Piller, "What Actual Farmers Thought of Chrysler's 'So God Made a Farmer' Super Bowl Ad," *USAToday.com*, February 5, 2013, <http://www.businessinsider.com/what-actual-farmers-thought-of-chryslers-so-god-made-a-farmer-super-bowl-ad-2013-2> (accessed April 28, 2013), Chrysler, "Official Ram Trucks Super Bowl Commercial 'Farmer,'" Youtube.com February 3, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AMpZ0TGjbWE> (accessed April 28, 2013), first and second quote from comments on Youtube.com.

Not everyone agreed. The commercial received criticism for its depiction of the American farmer as almost exclusively male and white. Of the more than a dozen images shown of contemporary hardworking farmers and ranchers, only a few women were featured in the advertisement. Women's role on the farm was mentioned only once. After stating that God needed "somebody to call hogs, tame cantankerous machinery," the narrator noted that the farmer "necessarily came home hungry," but had to wait for "lunch until his wife's done feeding visiting ladies." Even the value of women's reproductive labor was stolen from her. As Harvey articulated, "God said, I need somebody with arms strong enough to rustle a calf and yet gentle enough to deliver *his* own grandchild." Understandably, farmwomen across the nation condemned the commercial for ignoring their labor on America's farms. As Denise O'Brien, a woman farmer in Iowa, explained, "That image of [a man] is so imbedded in all of us that it's hard to imagine that women were part of farming when they show an ad like that... They're missing more than half the population that's involved with it." The advertisement also largely excludes another significant demographic of America's agricultural workers – Mexican-Americans. As Alexis Madrigal wrote, "The Department of Labor's National Agriculture Worker Survey has found that over the last decade, around 70 percent of farmworkers in America" were of Mexican descent. What this illuminates is that gender and racial biases toward America's agrarian populations continue to be deeply-embedded in the nation's collective memory. Even in 2013, America still thinks of and celebrates its farmers as almost universally white and male.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> First and second quote from Garance Franke-Ruta, "Paul Harvey's 1978 'So God Made a Farmer' Speech," *The Atlantic*, February 3, 2013, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/02/paul-harveys-1978-so-god-made-a-farmer-speech/272816/> (accessed April 28, 2013); Third quote from Christopher Doering, "Women Putting New Face on U.S. Agriculture Production: As Demographics Shift,

This thesis has attempted to reveal that rural women played a crucial role in the survival of early-twentieth-century farms in Texas, focusing largely on the Llano Estacado. Not only did they labor both inside and outside of the farmhouse, but they also sold surplus eggs, fruits, vegetables, and homemade goods to supplement the families' cash expenditures. Rural women consciously and cautiously managed household budgets, and they utilized innovative strategies to "make do" when times were particularly tough. By forming and sustaining networks of mutual aid among their neighbors, women created a means of support that improved not only their own families' lives, but also their communities. For these reasons, women did not think of their labor on the family farm or ranch as separate from that of their husbands'. Instead, they worked side-by-side with men and viewed their labors on the land as a co-operation.

Though the origins of the Cooperative Extension Service were rooted in an effort to save the American farmer, it did provide significant benefits for some rural women. Many rural women flocked to home demonstration programming because it provided lessons that they desperately wanted. By teaching them how to can and preserve fruits and vegetables, home demonstration work improved the nutrition of many rural families and provided a means to minimize cash expenditures. Additionally, rural women learned how to construct well-fitting clothing for their family and discovered ways to stretch clothing budgets. Though Extension Service programs designed to beautify and improve the interior of rural homes were predicated on an urban, middle-class ideal of female domesticity, some rural women took many of the lessons to heart and reported with pride

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They're More Likely to be Farmers than Farmer's Wives," *USA Today*, 8b, March 22, 2013; Fourth quote from Alexis C. Madrigal, "The Whitewashing of the American Farmer: Dodge Ram Super Bowl Ad Edition," *The Atlantic*, February 4, 2013, <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2013/02/the-whitewashing-of-the-american-farmer-dodge-ram-super-bowl-ad-edition/272825/> (accessed April 28, 2013).

how their living conditions greatly improved. In all, the success of home demonstration work in Texas was due mostly to the fact that its lessons were left up to rural women, who could either take them or reject them.

Nevertheless, gender and racial biases restricted Extension Service programming, and they severely limited who could benefit from its activities. African-American and Mexican-American women received little attention from officials, and many poor white women lacked the financial resources necessary to engage in some of its programs. Additionally, white women who could engage in home demonstration work disagreed with the agents' insistence on separating men's and women's work on the farm. Officials often failed to acknowledge that farming entailed cooperation between a man and woman, a recognition that rural women continue to fight for even today.

Also largely ignored in popular conceptions of women in agriculture is the growing rate of female landowners and farm operators. In the U.S. Agriculture Department's 2007 Census of Agriculture report, officials found that female farm operators "increased 19% from 2002, far outpacing the 7% increase in the number of farmers overall." Moreover, as more farmland changes hands, that number is expected to grow. Researchers "have estimated more than 200 million acres of farm land in the U.S. will change hands by 2027, with women potentially owning a majority of the land." USDA funding and programs continue to ignore these farmwomen. In April of 2013 at the USDA's annual outlook conference, Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Kathleen Merrigan "saw firsthand evidence that while women are making progress in agriculture, many don't feel they are receiving the attention that reflects the more active role they are

playing.” In short, women in agriculture still are fighting to break through a “grass ceiling.”<sup>187</sup>

One hundred and fifty years after its establishment, the USDA continues the struggle of dismantling its legacy of gender and racial discrimination. Due to widespread discrimination in allocating credit and farm loans to women and Hispanics, a lawsuit was filed against the USDA nearly a decade ago. The settlement allotted \$1.33 billion for cash assistance and debt relief to those who can document USDA gender and racial discrimination from 1981 to 2001. As of April 2013, claims are still being collected. To date, more than 24,000 women and 1,900 Hispanics have filed claims, and though funds have yet to be distributed, many USDA officials believe this is an important recognition that times are changing. As Agricultural Secretary Tom Vilsack described, this begins “a new chapter of civil rights at the USDA....We celebrate diversity instead of discriminating against it.” Nevertheless, the lawsuit has received criticism from some lawyers in the Justice Department, who claim “there was no evidence that women and Hispanic farmers had suffered widespread discrimination in government aid.” Other critics of the lawsuit argue that the process “became a runaway train, driven by racial politics, pressure from influential members of Congress and law firms that stand to gain more than \$130 million in fees.” Fearing widespread fraud in the claims’ filing processes, many of these women and Hispanics may not receive the compensation they deserve for years to come. Clearly, the struggle for equality for women and Hispanics in the allocation of USDA funding is far from over.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> First, second, and third quote from Doering, “Women Putting New Face on U.S. Agriculture Production.”

<sup>188</sup> Cindy George, “Houston Workshop Will Help Farmers Collection On Discrimination Claims,” *TheChron.com*, April 25, 2013, <http://blog.chron.com/advocate/2013/04/saturday-workshop-in-houston-to->

For rural women in the early-to-mid twentieth century whose roles as landowners and farm producers were ignored, the most significant benefit that Extension Service programming offered to them was the origination of the home demonstration club movement. Thousands of rural women flocked to home demonstration clubs for a variety of reasons. Not only did club meetings help to combat the rural isolation experienced by women, but they also provided a forum for women to come together and to improve the living conditions in their communities and nation. Women encouraged one another to participate in local political campaigns and stay informed on policies that affected their farming families. They also learned tips and tricks from one another to improve food preparation, clothing construction, and gardening that eased the burdens of their labor and enriched their standards of living.

While home demonstration work and clubs declined after 1950, a resurgence of the lessons that they offered has occurred in the last decade. Today, the internet is rife with blogs and websites devoted to making and growing food, practicing sustainable living, sewing and knitting homemade clothing and textiles, and do-it-yourself craft projects. Millions of men and women have inspired a do-it-yourself revolution all across the nation that cherishes lessons eerily similar to the programs offered by home demonstration agents.

Emily Matchar, author of the soon-to-be published book *Homeward Bound: Why Women Are Embracing the New Domesticity*, describes this turn to food preservation,

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help-farmers-collect-on-discrimination-claims/ (accessed April 28,2013); First and second quote from "Report: Some gov't lawyers opposed bias pay for women, Hispanics," *United Press International*, April 26, 2013, [http://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/US/2013/04/26/Report-Some-govt-lawyers-opposed-bias-pay-for-women-Hispanics/UPI-19221367005978/](http://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2013/04/26/Report-Some-govt-lawyers-opposed-bias-pay-for-women-Hispanics/UPI-19221367005978/) (accessed April 26, 2013); Third quote from Joel B. Pollack, "NYTIMES CONFIRMS: Massive Fraud in USDA in Pigford; Breitbart Vindicated," *The New York Times.com*, April 26, 2013, <http://www.breitbart.com/Big-Government/2013/04/26/NYTimes-Confirms-Massive-Fraud-at-USDA-in-Pigford-Settlements-Breitbart-Vindicated> (accessed April 28, 2013).

conservation, and do-it-yourself crafting as a social movement of “smart, educated, progressive-minded people...People who in other eras would have been marching for abortion rights or against apartheid are now immersed in grassroots food organizing, planting community gardens and turning their own homes into minifarms complete with chicken coops.” This “return to domesticity by young, intelligent, educated women,” Matchar writes, is a rallying against a variety of social ills: a broken food system, growing childhood obesity, global warming, and increasing corporate greed. For many, this revolution is also a way to counteract our increasingly consumerist lifestyle that has become progressively disconnected from nature and manual skills.<sup>189</sup>

Some women are also redefining their concepts of feminism by reclaiming domesticity. Whereas second-wave feminists encouraged American women to regard housework and cooking as forms of drudgery and oppression, twenty-first-century feminists are rejecting this message and empowering women to see their domestic roles as essential to maintaining a healthy and morally progressive society. Peggy Orenstein coined this new feminist mantra as “Femivorism” in 2010. As she described,

Femivore is an infelicitous-sounding term (do they eat women?!) but an on-target concept. Femivores use food as an unexpected out from the feminist predicament, a way for women to embrace homemaking without becoming Betty Draper...Femivorism is grounded in the very principles of self-sufficiency, autonomy and personal fulfillment that drove women into the work force in the first place...Rather than embodying the limits of one movement, femivores expand those of another: feeding their families clean, flavorful food; reducing their carbon footprints, producing sustainably instead of consuming rampantly. What could be more vital, more gratifying, more morally defensible?<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> First and second quote from Emily Matcher, “Is Michael Pollan a Sexist Pig? ‘Femivores’ have made DIY domesticity cool. But critics who blame feminism for obesity and fast food have it wrong.” *Salon.com*, April 27, 2013, [http://www.salon.com/2013/04/28/is\\_michael\\_pollan\\_a\\_sexist\\_pig/](http://www.salon.com/2013/04/28/is_michael_pollan_a_sexist_pig/) (last accessed April 28, 2013).

<sup>190</sup> Quote from Peggy Orenstein in Matcher, “Is Michael Pollan a Sexist Pig?”

Nevertheless, not all women may find this message empowering as it represents once again women's double burden of work. For those urban or rural women who do not have the time or the financial resources to engage in this "New Domesticity," many may feel inadequate if they cannot feed their families homemade, organic meals.

What is interesting in these new developments, however, is that they bear a striking similarity to early-twentieth-century home demonstration work. As agents worked to "Make the Best Better" in the Llano Estacado, they taught women how to enrich the nutrition of their family through growing and canning fresh fruits and vegetables and how to minimize household budgets by finding innovative ways to "make do." Women learned strategies to improve the inside and outside of their homes which increased sanitation and boosted the family's morale. Home demonstration work on the Llano Estacado also empowered women by providing opportunities for them to address their communities' specific needs. The benefits of these programs were certainly not lost to rural women in the early-to-mid twentieth century. As evident in these new social movements, they are clearly not lost to twenty-first-century women either.



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## **VITA**

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