

100-100-100-54

PN - 100-100-100-54

100-100-100-54

Women in Development  
Agency for International Development  
Room 3045, New State  
Washington, D.C. 20523  
(202) 652-5102

Date of Acquisition.....  
Source.....

Women in Agriculture:

American Farm Women in Global Perspective

1979

A Paper for the Office of Women in Development,  
Agency for International Development

Frances Hill  
Department of Government  
University of Texas--Austin

000164  
S

The views and interpretations  
in this publication are those  
of the author and should not  
be attributed to the Agency  
for International Development.

1

Women's roles in agriculture vary over an almost limitless range. The same may be said of the conditions in which they live and work. Yet, this diversity co-exists with some important commonalities that shape women's roles as farmers. These commonalities link American farm women with women in very different circumstances in other areas of the world. These commonalities grow out of their common femaleness. However, two other factors shape the implications of that femaleness. First, the social relations of production in agriculture are currently undergoing a transformation from relations determined by kinship to relations determined by contract. Secondly, women's roles and conditions are affected by general changes in the structure of agricultural production, especially the expansion of scale, the trend toward capital-intensive operations, and the increasing separation between ownership (or other forms of control) of land and the operation of agricultural enterprises.

These changes are global in two senses. First, similar processes are underway to varying degrees throughout the world. Secondly, these patterns of change are shaped by shared assumptions about modernity, productivity, the most appropriate roles of labor, capital and land. These assumptions have been based primarily on U. S. agriculture since World War II. It might be more accurate to describe agriculture as Americanizing rather than globalizing. Most of these technological and economic assumptions have been applied to, not tested in, the ecological, economic, and cultural conditions of other countries. American farm women are affected as profoundly by these processes as are women in the so-called "modernizing" countries. In examining women's cross-cultural experiences in agriculture, it soon becomes clear that American farm women do not represent a model for women in the rest of the world. American farm women are as vulnerable to marginality within their occupation as are women elsewhere. Only the forms of this vulnerability,

not the vulnerability itself, vary. It is always a shock for Americans to realize that they are not necessarily a model for the world. The realization that American farm women face many of the same problems as do farm women in the developing countries requires a new look at American farm women.<sup>1</sup> This paper focuses on American women in an attempt to show that women's special problems are inherent in agriculture's virtually unique blend of kinship and business.

### Women's Access to Agriculture: Kinship and Contract

Agriculture is one of the few remaining occupations to which access is monitored by kinship rather than by individual qualifications. This is not to say that most farmers -- male or female -- are unqualified for their work. Rather, it is to point out that agriculture enmeshes individuals in kin-defined groups while most urban occupations provide access to individuals. This essential difference is crucial to understanding women's roles in agriculture. Many questions of equality under law are made immeasurably more difficult by the kin-groups basis of agricultural enterprises. Since agricultural enterprises are not defined by simple individual rights, the problem of equity for women is far more complex than simply guaranteeing them the same rights that are held by men. There is much in agriculture that could be remedied by this expedient. However, there are other problems that require a new approach to defining individual roles in an enterprise previously assuming collective activity. The area of individual rights in kin-based enterprises is a virtually uncharted area of law.

Women have historically in most cultures been the least likely to have their individual rights recognized within these property-controlling, occupation-defining kin groups. This has been as true of the American "family farms" as of African clan

villages. Even when the land passed through the female kinship line, it passed to men or men were soon recognized as the "farmer-operator" of the farm.

The general situation left women with indirect access to land and thus to the occupation of agriculture. They could protect this indirect access only through informal influence operating through kinship links. There might have been a time when these kinship obligations were regarded as so binding by individuals and had such legitimacy in the larger social unit that informal influence did in fact protect women. That is no longer true. Two processes have reduced the efficacy of informal influence. First has been the legal-administrative thrust to regularize title to land. This does not always mean private ownership but it does involve designating an individual as the responsible "operator". In this way the sphere within which informal influence can operate effectively has been reduced by the necessity to make the internal operation of the agricultural unit conform to the legal-administrative expectations of the larger society. Secondly, land has been commercialized. This has been a powerful incentive to individual gain, even at the expense of the kin group that has been associated with a particular agricultural unit.<sup>2</sup> These strains are most intense in an inflationary economy when land usually appreciates more rapidly than the inflation rate and thus serves as a "safe" real asset. Struggles among kin for control of the "family farm" have become even more intense during the recent appreciation of land values in an inflationary economy.

These two changes explain why kinship and the public realm have become increasingly incompatible ways of managing access to land and of managing the operation of a business. They do not explain why women should be particularly disadvantaged relative to men during this process of change. Women's position in the agricultural economy and in the legal-administrative matrix of the larger society is conditioned not by their actual roles in labor or management nor by their kinship statuses but by general cultural assumptions about the role of women.

These assumptions have, in most cultures, including those shaped by Judaic-Christian ethics, placed women in a subservient position. This is clear when one considers the roles of American women in "family farms".

The idea of a "family farm" suggests a simple correspondence between one farm and one nuclear family. This is rarely an accurate description of actual conditions. The farm family is not always the simple nuclear unit portrayed in American Gothic. It may be any of these "families" -- the nuclear family, the stem family, or the extended family. Each form of the "family" defines a particular phase of the farm-family cycle. The nuclear family consists of a husband, wife and possibly children. The stem family consists of the parents and an adult child and his or her nuclear family joined together as a mechanism of property transfer. The extended family refers to the parents, their adult children and their families. The nuclear family is a component of the stem family, which becomes embedded in the extended family. The problem of determining which child should become the member of the stem family and thus inherit the farm is the essential problem of separating the stem family from the extended family. This in turn involves problems of separating the nuclear family from the stem family in ways that reconcile the needs of business and the ties of family affection.

3

These phases of the farm-family cycle reflect the changing blend of labor and capital characteristic of agriculture. At various phases in the farm-family cycle, particular components of the relevant form of the family tend to act either as labor or capital. In these various phases, the two generations involved will be distinguished by their degree of control over the property and their roles in actual production. In some phases, a family functions as capital and at other phases it functions as labor. The stem family thus encompasses two different functions performed by people linked together in complex

kinship relations. Kinship does not prevent the expression of capital-labor hostilities related to control of property, allocation of labor contributions, and the share of the rewards. Stem families try to resolve the difficult question of whether property, the expression of past labor and investment, should be rewarded more or less or equally with current labor. Only when the nuclear family both controls the property and provides the labor is this issue resolved. Only then is the farm that blend of capital and labor implied by the idea of the family farm.

Linking of property transfers to kinship means that the two generations of the stem family are operating with incongruent nuclear family phases. Inter-generational strains are unavoidable. The younger couple will be ready to take over long before the older couple is ready to retire. Biological reproduction will put the business partners only twenty-five years apart when smooth business relations may well require a difference of at least thirty-five years.

These relationships between kinship and capitalism have a clear impact on women's roles in the farm. There is still a marked tendency for property to pass down to sons rather than to daughters. Therefore, a woman becomes the one member of a stem family that is linked only by contract (marriage) and not by kinship. This puts women in a peripheral position in the kinship nexus. Cultural biases that obscure perception of the important labor and management roles of women mean that their contributions to the farm will not necessarily overcome this marginality based in the lack of a kinship link. When the property is passed down through the wife, the husband will be in a stronger position because he will be seen as a "farmer" whose labor is necessary to the operation of the farm. His lack of kinship status will be offset by his actual role and by the cultural evaluation of that role.

Strains arising out of the blend of kinship and capitalism often lead to poor business arrangements. People cannot stop being relatives. They can only try to avoid the problems of relating kinship to capitalism. There is tendency to rely on kinship to organize capitalism, to rely on verbal understandings rather than on written agreements. The problems that arise by seeking to avoid problems in this manner are legend in farm communities. Unfortunately, they are legends based on fact: kinship is no substitute for capitalism in making arrangements for property transfers.

The strains growing out of the link between kinship and capitalism do not simply divide the two nuclear families along generational and capital-labor lines. They also cause problems within each nuclear family, especially the younger one. In a stem family of four people three of them constitute a previous family, a residual kin group binding the individuals by special ties of affection and shared experience. One person is included in the stem family only on the basis of contract, i.e., marriage. This is usually the young wife. At critical points in business negotiations or during the never-ending informal conversations over coffee, this contractual member of the stem family feels, and is made to feel, marginal. Patterns of kinship-based property transfers vary greatly, but sons are more commonly heirs to property than are daughters. This makes the young wife marginal to decision-making within the stem family. She is probably an "equal" partner in her own nuclear family and may well be a co-laborer on the farm with her husband. In such a situation, resentments over her decision-making marginality focused on her in-laws may also be directed toward the husband who seems reluctant to transgress the unwritten codes of the residual kinship unit to demand both a more equal role for his wife and to pursue more vigorously the business arrangements needed to protect the rights of his own nuclear family.

At the same time, a young wife may feel that she is competing with her mother-in-law for the respect and affection of her husband. Many women, even those on the verge of retirement themselves, speak bitterly of their young husband's tendency to "visit" in his mother's house on the farm rather than coming "home" for supper or to help put the children to bed or even to do his fair share of the chores. A wife who asserted the primacy of the conjugal bond risked seeming to attack the bond between parents and child. These young wives were equal in work but not in family status, family affection or decision-making.

When the property is transferred through the wife's family, similar strains become a feature of family life. The husband feels he is "the farmer" but his labor contribution does not give him control over property, the control that the culture leads him to expect on the basis of both labor and gender. Yet, the husband will not be as peripheral as the wife in the in-law role. The reasons for this difference related to both family sex role and to farm sex role. The man is always presumed to be the head of his household. The wife's tendency to put her parents in a competitive position with her husband finds less social-cultural legitimacy than the tendency for analogous behavior by the husband. Patriarchal nuclear family norms separate women from their kin-group to a greater degree than they separate the husband from his. Even though a wife is expected to follow Biblical injunctions to put her husband before her parents, she is still expected to be the peacemaker in the larger kin group.

As if the inter-generational strains involved in stem family were not enough, property transfers are made more complex and kinship-based tensions exacerbated by problems of detaching the stem family from the extended family in which it is enmeshed. Most farmers have more than one child. That child who stays on the farm and becomes part of the stem family has to define his/her relations with his/her

brothers and sisters and their nuclear families, all of whom can reasonably expect to be the parents'/grandparents' heirs to some extent. Parents feel a responsibility to all of their children and even grandchildren and seek to establish "equivalency" in the estate settlement. This is particularly difficult for farm families. The land is the major asset and this is an indivisible, non-liquid asset. The land does not earn enough in annual profits to permit farmers to make cash settlements for those children who do not inherit the land. The child who takes over the farm must usually take it all for an economically viable enterprise under current factor costs and commodity prices. The problem of compensating the other children is especially difficult. They feel they have a claim to a part of the estate due both to kinship and to their labor contributions as children. The children of these members of the extended family may also be considered to have a claim equal to that of those children actually living on the farm. These problems were never particularly easy to resolve. But, when urban occupations could provide more lucrative alternatives to agriculture, those children who left the farm did not look upon the farm as an economic resource or asset. This has changed with the dramatic inflation in land values during the past fifteen years. Now, agricultural land is valuable and control of such land can be an economic asset to any family. As inflation has reduced real income for most Americans, land becomes especially valuable. This only intensifies strains over the transfer of farm land. The nuclear family on the land resents and feels threatened by pressure to sell the farm to the highest bidder and divide the proceeds equally among the members of the extended family. They are equally bitter about demands that they purchase the farm at full market value. The family on the farm may counter with demands that they be compensated for their labor. Feelings about the illegitimacy of the claims made by the extended family are more freely expressed than feelings about the strained relations with parents.

A person's relations with brothers and sisters does not fall into the same realm of duty and fealty as does that between parents and children. Indeed, feelings against the extended family are so strong that indignation is expressed even by those with no siblings with whom they may one day compete for control of the farm property. A young woman who, with her husband, was assured of inheriting her mother's farm since there were no other children spoke passionately about people she had known who were impoverished by their brothers and sisters who had left the farm.

A farm woman has the greatest potential for a meaningful career as a farmer once the farm is linked with a nuclear family. The constraints of the stem family have been resolved and business relations with the extended family have been defined. The husband, wife and children are now free to farm as they decide. The wife may find that she does even more farm work than she did when other relatives were there to help, but she will probably feel that she plays a larger role in farm decision-making. She may also try to reduce patriarchal control within her own nuclear family, but this is usually less stressful than dealing with stem and extended families.

The nuclear family phase is likely to be brief if a farm couple has a child who wants to farm. They will form a new stem family.

This new phase combines, for the hypothetical farm family, the first two. The woman will no longer be marginal in the new stem family but will be perhaps the emotional core of the residual kin group within the stem and extended families. The woman who began her life as a daughter-in-law in a stem family, will end it, or that portion of it linked to the farm, as a mother and mother-in-law. Given the longer life expectancy of women, the farm wife may not have the business and emotional support of her husband in this phase. Either as wife or widow, she will again experience, but from a different perspective, the strains of doing business with

relatives. If anything, the emotional strains may be intensified by negotiating with her own children. When she was a daughter-in-law, she feared being left destitute, of having her family labor exploited with no guarantee of the property transfer. As a mother-in-law, she is less concerned about being left destitute because she controls the property but the emotional strains may be even greater. In the earlier phase, her kin-based marginality was also an emotional buffer.

Women's longer life expectancy means many farm women will be widowed during this second stem family phase. If she can pay the "widow's tax" and retain control of the farm, her heir will again have to pay inheritance tax at her death, unless the mother has sold the farm during her lifetime to her heir. Few farms are so profitable that they can support such a tax burden. Families have begun to circumvent these costs by transferring the property directly from the father to the next generation, leaving the mother in the position of never having owned the farm. The land contract in such cases usually specifies the type and level of support due each parent for life. "Businesslike" as this sounds in the abstract, it leaves some women concerned about their old age. They are forced to trust in kinship in a world run on the assumptions of capitalism. What, they ask, will be their recourse if their children do not take care of them? Could a seventy-year old woman sue her child? Why should she have to be dependent until her dying day? The cruel dilemma of farm families is that each generation feels that it should trust the other implicitly, but each knows that there are limits to family duty and trust.

The increasing size and increasing capital costs of even a modest commercial farm mean that the pure nuclear family farm is becoming increasingly less common. These larger land units are not necessarily more efficient or more profitable. They exist primarily to support the increased costs of production -- especially machinery and the petro-chemical herbicides, fertilizers, and fuels that are the basis of

contemporary production techniques. In the Middle West, most partnerships seem to be among brothers. In such arrangements, the extended family replaces the stem family and thus one nuclear family will never control the farm. Even if the wife is very interested in agriculture, she will be marginal to the farm's operation. She cannot interfere in relations among the partners even though she is married to one of them. As a partner's wife, she will be expected to show the same involvement in the farm as her sisters-in-law so that other components of the extended family do not begin to fear that one nuclear family is trying to increase its relative role. An "overly interested" wife would disequilibrate a partnership based on kinship.

The American "family farm" is a kinship unit through which women have had only indirect access to land. Women have been forced to rely on kinship and on informal influence. This relationship to property does not necessarily reflect women's contributions to their farms.

#### Women and Farm Work

Women's roles as food producers have been hidden from history by a screen of cultural myths about male gallantry and female delicacy. Even when it is acknowledged that women have roles in agriculture, it is usual to say that men farm and women only help. This help has been estimated to produce 44 % of the world's food.<sup>4</sup> Such an estimate can be suggestive only. But, in the current state of lack of reliable research on women's roles, such estimates are valuable. They are the beginning of replacing the assumed certainty that women do not farm with, at the very least, uncertainty.

There are several reasons for the failure to recognize women's contributions to food production as work. Women have farmed within kin groups, not as individuals.

Within these kin groups, there was no perceived need to document, or even to recognize, contributions of particular individuals. Secondly, women have not been paid as individuals for their labor, so there was little impetus to think in terms of their individual contributions. Third, the farm and the house are usually close together. In such circumstances, it is difficult to distinguish farm work from housework. There is little reason to make this distinction. Fourth, there is not necessarily a rigid sexual division of labor associated with farm work. Much of what women do, such as caring for young animals or cleaning milking utensils or growing food for the family, can be seen as extensions of their nurturing roles as wives and mothers.

The consequences of the non-recognition of women's work are grave. Because women traditionally have not been property owners and have not been included among the farm "operators", the problem of having their contributions recognized intensifies the difficulties in asserting their rights as farm operators. Men do not have to buttress their claim to being farmers with proof of their actual labor contribution. Women still do because of the prevailing cultural assumptions that they contribute little or nothing to production and to the actual operation of the farms themselves. Work is likely to be women's main claim to legal recognition as a farmer outside of the sphere of kinship and informal influence.

The experience of American farm women suggests that the cultural barriers to the recognition of women's work are difficult to overcome. These barriers do not arise from the actual situation on farms. The non-recognition of women's work in agriculture persists contrary to fact and is likely to persist unless the larger cultural setting of these myths is recognized and confronted.

Pioneer women were expected to work simply because the work needed to be done. The labors they routinely performed excited comments only from visitors. Tales of male indolence and female drudgery are the common fare of travellers' tales of the early Middle West.<sup>5</sup> Eliza Farnham's encounter with a newly married couple is

typical of these accounts. The author, a teacher from New England going West to visit her sister, chided the groom for his failure to help his bride move a heavy trunk. The new husband replied: "I don't think a woman's of much account anyhow, if she can't help herself a little and me too."<sup>6</sup> In the portrait of farm life that emerges from the travellers' tales, this might be taken as the credo of the male farmer. Specifications for such a wife were summed up by the same man, who entered the marriage market guided by the idea that "women are some like horses and oxen, the biggest can do the most work, and that's what I want one for."<sup>7</sup> No one knows whether most pioneer men would have expressed themselves quite so candidly, but it is clear that farm women were expected to work.

At one time such toil conferred a certain dignity upon farm women. In both home and fields, they were valuable and valued artisans. Their husbands exercised absolute control over property and the return from women's labor, but the women themselves were, at the very least, awarded status and respect for conforming to a social ideal. The same was true of women in towns whose household responsibilities were similar to those of their sisters on the farms. Farm and city women alike were conforming to the role defined in the "cult of domesticity".<sup>8</sup> This was an ideal of useful work performed within the home on behalf of the family. As both farmers and housekeepers, farm women conformed to this larger social ideal.

This began to change as American industrialized, urbanized, and commercialized. All of these changes led to increased differentiation among Americans. These differences related not simply to how people made their living nor even to the amount of money they accumulated, but to their way of life and attitudes toward work. These attitudes toward work began to separate home and workplace, male and female. The cult of domesticity gave way to the cult of the lady. Women were no longer supposed to work and were no longer respected for doing so.<sup>9</sup>

Farm women could not adjust their lives to fit the new ideal of the "lady". As hired men moved to the cities for jobs in factories, women worked even harder on the farms. Yet, women's work was devalued. It became a source of shame to farm families.

One of the first serious attempts to study women's roles in farming came in a 1919 survey of approximately 10,000 farms in 33 Northern and Western states. The data reflected "conditions rather above the average"<sup>10</sup> and the period itself was one of general agricultural prosperity compared to the agricultural depression of the 1920's and 1930's. Yet, even for this relatively prosperous strata during a period of reasonable farm prices, the study concluded:

In industries, where love and service are not the ruling motives, a walkout might be foreshadowed by conditions brought out in Table I, which shows that the average working day, summer and winter, for over 9,000 farm women is 11.3 hours, and that 87 % of 8,773 women report no regular vacation during the year, although a large percentage tell of scattered 'days off' in the family automobile.<sup>11</sup>

This long work day involved women in farm production. The survey found that 36 % of all the women responding helped milk, 81 % cared for chickens, 25 % helped in other ways with livestock, and 24 % worked in the fields an average of 6.7 weeks per year.<sup>12</sup> Middle Western women equalled or exceeded these aggregate figures.

Forty-five percent of Middle Western women helped milk, 93 % of the Middle Western respondents washed the milking utensils, 89 % of the Middle Western respondents reported that they regularly cared for poultry.<sup>13</sup>

This high level of participation did not give women a commensurate share in the economic rewards of their labors. In the Middle West, 66 % of the women made butter, 33 % sold butter, 30 % kept records of the butter money, but only 9 % kept the money that they had earned.<sup>14</sup> The same was true of the egg money. While 89 % of the Middle Western women kept an average flock of 102 hens and 51 % kept records of the egg money, only 16 % controlled the egg money.<sup>15</sup> Women's labor did not

provide "luxuries" for themselves but was an integral part of the farm enterprise and the family economy. A Minnesota woman said of her egg money:

When we were married, five years ago, it was distinctly understood I was to have all the income from the eggs if I took care of the chickens, and, as a result, my husband hardly knows that there is such a thing as a grocery bill, or that he has a wife and baby to dress.<sup>16</sup>

The scarcity of data on women's actual roles in farm production is matched by the paucity of data on women's assessments of their roles. Few people thought of asking farm women what they felt about their lives since the pioneer pattern of family-oriented toil seemed such a natural part of the rural American landscape. One of the first sources of questions was, surprisingly enough, the Department of Agriculture. In 1913, when the prospect of increased funds for the Department under the Smith Lever Act stimulated an interest in farm women, the Department sent a letter to the wives of USDA's 55,000 crop correspondents. The letter to these women, wives of farmers considered to rank "among the most progressive farmers in their communities",<sup>17</sup> asked women to comment on all aspects of their lives and their feelings about them, what they would change if they could, and how the Department could assist them. The letter elicited 2,241 replies, which formed the basis of four reports on farm women's perception of their own lives.<sup>18</sup> The replies shocked the Department and the agricultural press. Farm women were not content with overwork and low rewards. However much they might enjoy farming, the joy was diminished by the loneliness and isolation, lack of understanding and appreciation by their husbands as well as by the larger society. Farm women were fed up with unrewarded goodness.

Most women wanted respect for the vital work that they performed. An Iowa woman wrote that "Women have an innate longing for appreciation and a feeling that they are partners in fact with their husbands and not looked upon as subordinates."<sup>19</sup>

From the USDA reports, few farm women felt that their husbands appreciated, or even really noticed, their contributions. A Missouri woman suggested that "The men needed to be educated up, as so many men think women's work does not amount to much and consequently has no commercial valuation."<sup>20</sup> A New York farm wife wrote that "Most farmers' wives have no share in anything on the farm but the labor. They are expected to do their own work and as much of the out-of-door work as they can, but none of the income is theirs."<sup>21</sup> Another New York woman concluded that "The men don't care how hard the women work to do their tasks if only they themselves are provided with food regularly and their own comfort is looked after."<sup>22</sup>

Women noticed that in many cases they were not treated as well as the hired men. As an Oregon woman observed, "The hired man gets paid for his work, but the tired housewife on the farm merely gets her board and clothing, the same as the farmer's work animals."<sup>23</sup>

The presence of hired men did not relieve women of farm work in addition to their housework. Hired men were hired to help the farmer, not the farm wife, even with her farm chores.

This situation was seen by several women as not simply burdensome but as inequitable. Women complained that this male callousness did not simply make their work more burdensome but actually denied women and children essentials. A Massachusetts farm woman declared:

I would work to have a law passed whereby no man should be allowed to own a farm unless he would provide for his wife as well as he did for his stock -- plenty of water, and easy to get, good drainage, and other sanitary conditions about the farmhouse which go to make life healthy and comfortable.<sup>24</sup>

A Kansas woman urged USDA to "Make it illegal for a man to make his wife work like a slave to cook for from two to ten regular workmen."<sup>25</sup> A Missouri farm wife urged USDA to "Put a bill before Congress to allow the farmer's wife \$1 per day for her own money, to be used by her for her own expenses."<sup>26</sup>

No similar record of farm women's views of their work has been made for the current era. My research among Middle Western farm women suggests that a larger percentage of women is doing more actual farm work now than during the early twentieth century.

Census data on contemporary women's labor roles are almost as scarce as data on the roles of their ancestresses. The 1964 Census included a sample survey of farm women's labor contributions to their farms. The almost two million women surveyed nationally contributed 16 % of the total hours worked by all members of farm-operator households. While husbands in this sample averaged forty-one hours of farm work per week, wives averaged twenty hours. This did not include housework. Virtually all of this was unpaid labor.

The survey suggested that most farm women worked steadily on the farms. They were not simply "helpers". Their contributions were crucial to the operation of family farms. As one analyst of these 1964 data concluded: "farm work by farm wives contributes significantly to farm output."<sup>28</sup>

A 1948 study in Wisconsin presents much the same picture.<sup>29</sup> The farms were primarily diversified dairy farms with year-round work with animals plus a heavy season of field work. Long concluded that these farms operated more efficiently when husband and wife worked together. His data show that the wife's work decreased if the husband were disabled because the scale and/or intensity of the farm operation would be reduced. Likewise, a husband's work decreased if his wife held a job off the farm. Long concluded that the wife's labor was not likely to be either episodic or peripheral. The work performed by farm women was seen as an integral part of the farm operation.

Survey data give the same picture of farm women's devoting much of their time to farm work and making significant contributions to the farm by doing so.<sup>30</sup>

It is impossible to determine how the work done by contemporary farm women compares with that done by their ancestresses. Many of the women interviewed felt that they did more actual farm work than had their mothers. They also tended to feel that their overall burdens were less because of smaller families, more conveniences in the home, and mechanization of many aspects of farm production. Wallace Huffman conjectured after analyzing the data from the 1964 Census of Agriculture:

Data on the participation of farm wives in farm work for other years are unavailable. Thus, a trend cannot be established. But one could hypothesize that the long-term trend in wives' participation in farm work has been upward, although not as rapid as the labor force participation for all women, with cycles about the trend caused by disturbances -- major wars, business cycles, and cycles in farm profits -- in the farm and non-farm labor markets. The increasing mechanization of agriculture -- especially size, versatility, and power accessories of tractors -- and

mechanization of livestock feeding have made physical strength less important for many farming activities. Tractors with radios and air-conditioned cabs have improved the quality of working conditions, especially in crop production. The steadily falling number of hired workers and teenage children in farm households leaves only wives on many farms to provide human assistance with two person farming activities.<sup>31</sup>

Long, writing in 1948, noted the same lack of data but suggested the same hypothesis.<sup>32</sup>

For contemporary farm women, the satisfaction of farm work is linked with the opportunity for individual accomplishment within the family enterprise. Women have responded with overwhelming interest and enthusiasm to opportunities to increase their technical knowledge of farming. The University of Wisconsin's dairy production seminars for women and the University of Missouri's hog production seminars always have more applicants than places. Women also report that they read the farm magazines and mark relevant articles for their husbands. For most women, equality means not just equality in work but equal recognition and respect for it.

#### Women and Farm Management

Women's roles as farm managers are, if anything, even less well-perceived than their roles in farm labor. Decision-making is a less observable activity than weeding or harvesting. Again, women's contributions are obscured by the group-family nature of agricultural enterprises.

It has been estimated that one-third of the world's rural households are headed by women.<sup>33</sup> It is difficult to estimate the number of viable agricultural enterprises headed by women, given the tendency of most censuses to give information for urban and rural and not to separate rural-farm from non-farm-rural. Nevertheless, there are significant numbers of farms headed by women throughout the world. Many of these seem to be widows or women whose husbands have moved to the urban areas for their entire working lives. In most cultures, including the United States,

divorce seems to deprive women of their occupations in agriculture. Single women also seem to have difficulty gaining access to land and capital on their own to begin their own farms. Inheritance patterns in most cultures seem to leave the land to a son rather than to a daughter.

Available data suggest that farms operated by women tend to be smaller, on average, than those "operated" by men. There is also evidence that women's farms are as well-run and as economically successful as comparable male "operated" units. Sta<sup>u</sup>dt found in Kenya that women farmers had farms as successful as those operated by men even without the same level of aid from the national extension service or similar levels of credit. <sup>34</sup>

The lack of information about women who operate their own farms arises from the culturally-based assumption that such farms are few in number or insignificant in their contribution to overall agricultural production. It also reflects the urban bias of much research on women and the concomitant assumption that agriculture is an occupation that offers women only a drudgery that they seek to flee at the first opportunity.

These same assumptions help explain why women's role in managing "family farms" is so little studied or recognized. Farming is assumed to be a burden imposed by men upon their families. The idea that women see themselves as professional farmers and their self-images are linked to this occupational identification is new. It is emerging only slowly for the United States and even more slowly for women in other parts of the world. Certainly, not all women who farm see agriculture as a meaningful occupation. Yet, many probably do. In the United States, the tendency to identify as a "farmer" and to find self-gratification through this occupational identification are linked with the opportunity to play a role in farm decision-making. American farm women now tend to be the farm bookkeepers. This control of information gives

them a role in decision-making not enjoyed by their mothers and grandmothers. However, access to information and actual influence over decisions are two different things.

Survey research can give data only on articulated perceptions at that time. Any study of male-female decision-making roles confronts the difficulty of saying who makes decisions when roles are as undifferentiated and as enmeshed in family relations as they are on farms. The more important point may be that women want to be considered both wives and farmers. In response to a question about how they list their occupation, 19 % said they write "farmer", 47 % list themselves as "housewife", but 30 % checked both or wrote in something like "farm housewife". 4 % checked "other" and listed non-farm occupation -- like teacher. Even among more active farm women, those sufficiently interested in agriculture to attend a meeting of a farm women's organization, both the family role and the occupational designation are important. This blend of work and family attracts people to farming and is an aspect of life they wish to preserve.

Contemporary farm women have much greater access to the economic rewards of their labor than did earlier generations of farm women. Joint checking accounts are the norm. Yet, the income, in the form of checks for the farm commodities, are made out to the husband only in 62 % of cases surveyed. Women who have arranged for joint payment have done so for recognition of their contribution by both their husbands and the legal system. One wife told her husband if he did not agree to having both their names on the milk checks she would stop doing chores. Her husband decided she had a valid point.

Farm women emphasize the family focus of agriculture but it is clear that they are not referring to an unreformed patriarchal family. Women want a consensual decision-making process about their families and farms. Responses to survey

questions show that women claim that they already play such a role. Sixty-one per cent of the respondents said that major farm decisions like the purchase of machinery or land were made jointly, 81 % characterized decisions about major investments for the house as consensual, and 78 % said decisions about raising the children were consensual. It is impossible to tell if the responses represent actuality or aspirations. In either case, patriarchal rule is neither seen as a norm nor simply accepted as fact.

Responses to attitudinal questions reveal a similar propensity to non-patriarchal, or perhaps modified patriarchal, families. Sixty-nine per cent agreed with the proposition that "A farm husband should help with the housework if his wife helps with the farm work." Fifty-three per cent agreed and 45 % disagreed with the idea that "If a wife is going to be away at a meeting, she should fix meals for her family before she goes." Sixty-three per cent disagreed with the idea that "A farm husband active in farm organizations should feel entitled to leave the chores for his wife whenever he feels it is necessary." Contemporary American farm women see themselves as managers and decision-makers, not as "unpaid family labor".

#### Access to Agricultural Organizations

In every region of the world most agricultural organizations are men's clubs. This has an adverse effect on women's position as food producers since these organizations shape government policies and are often the mechanism through which farmers gain access to national markets and to government credit.

Women realize the importance of these organizations and often seek to join but are denied membership. For example, a dairy co-operative in Peru admitted women only if they were single heads of households even though Peruvian women do most of the work in dairying.

Women often have their own associations through which they exchange agricultural information. However, these informal groups do not give women access to government programs.

North American women have become so frustrated at being ignored by government and denied meaningful roles in agricultural organizations that they have formed their own groups focused on policy issues.

Instead of staying home and doing the work as the husband decides, 94 % of the respondents agreed that "Women should play a more active role in farm organizations." Seventy-three per cent disagreed with the assertion that "Woman's place is in the home."

These attitudes have found concrete expression in increased activism in farm organizations. Women are demanding an equal role in the established farm organizations. Sixty per cent of the women surveyed agreed that current voting rules in farm organizations are unfair to women. Rather than concentrating exclusively on a long-term strategy of reforming these organizations, farm women are revitalizing auxiliaries or founding new organizations. American Agri-women and Women Involved in Farm Economics are the leading examples of the new, policy-focused organizations.

#### Farm Women and Public Policies

The cultural biases against recognizing women as farmers, especially as farmers with their own distinctive problems and needs, have repercussions in public policies that affect agriculture. These cultural biases shape public policies that, in turn, intensify women's marginality in agriculture. Public policies with the most direct impact on women include the provision of agricultural credit, the availability of technical advice from the extension service, and discriminatory tax policies.

Credit available through public agencies goes to the recognized owner or operator of the farm. Women's ambiguous positions in kin-defined enterprises often disqualifies them from applying for such credit. In the United States the myriad forms of property ownership compounded by the different laws in each of the fifty states on women's individual rights associated with each form of property ownership mean that no one is sure when women are or are not eligible under law for participation in various public programs that provide credit for agricultural production. There is little evidence that the intricacies of the property laws are the major factor in determining access to such credit. Although there has never been a study of women's participation in agricultural credit programs, there are numerous reports of individual situations suggesting that such agencies as Farmers' Home Administration prefer to deal with men and that they make this preference abundantly clear to women who seek to apply for credit. Even some single women farmers report that they are told to bring their fathers along to sign the application forms. In Kenya, women with large, successful farms are less likely than men with smaller farms to receive credit.<sup>36</sup>

Women are not the only food producers poorly served by the extension services they pay for. Despite the less-than-impressive performances of many extension services in all regions of the world, women are put at a relative disadvantage by being denied access to potentially useful information. There is considerable evidence that women are denied access to extension assistance primarily because they are women. In Kenya, even the large and successful women farmers had less contact with the extension agents than did men with smaller and less productive farms.<sup>37</sup> In Liberia, the government paid men to attend a demonstration of new techniques of rice production. Unemployed, landless men came, but the women rice producers remained at work in their fields.<sup>38</sup>

Denial of access to extension service to women also impoverishes the quality of the advice that extension agents can offer. Women have rich practical experiences in various techniques of food production. This practical experience could usefully be incorporated into national research and extension efforts. Since women have been denied access to credit, their techniques are more likely to be efficient in terms of capital and energy. They are also likely to be techniques that manage risks so that food is almost always available even if this means foregoing the high-cost, high-risk strategies for maximum production.

When women are not consolidated about their experiences and their needs, much research and extension effort may be wasted. One West African country devoted time and resources to developing a maize sheller that worked more slowly than women could shell maize by hand.<sup>39</sup>

Women may be more highly motivated to participate in programs than are men. For example, women responsible for collecting household water would be interested in maintaining water pumps. With some 80 % of the water pumps in Less Developed Countries (LDC's) out of order, it would seem to be in the general interest to train women to maintain them.<sup>40</sup> Currently, men are given such training. But, if the pumps break down, the man will not have to walk for water.<sup>41</sup>

When extension services do hire female officers or design programs for women, it is usually in the unproductive field of home economics. These programs put women at an even greater disadvantage relative to men.

The experiences of American farm women with home economics should caution women in countries just beginning to fund a home economics "establishment".

Through the home economists, Taylorism invaded American farm homes. Farm women were told that good management would solve their problems. Undoubtedly, there was

a great deal to be learned from home economists about better methods of housekeeping. However, the home economics movement offered not so much technical assistance as an ideology. Women were told that human fulfillment lay in making lace curtains for the home of the nuclear family presided over by a wise and beneficent patriarch. Home economics taught women to serve their husbands and families within the home. It did not even tell women to serve their husbands and families by doing economically productive farm work or supplementing the meager cash earning of most farms through off-farm jobs. Women were to be separated from both the larger economy and from their own businesses by the new duties of full-time domestic busy work.

This home economics ideology was, of course, curious. It came at a time when women's work in the homes was becoming increasingly trivial, when the cash economy was supplying many of the services previously performed by the homemaking artisan. In the face of this fundamental change, the women's larger socio-economic and political subservience could only be maintained by an ideology of the womanliness of domestic triviality. At the same time that more and more women were entering the cash economy as factory workers, office workers, teachers, the home economists were perpetuating the patriarchal family by offering a vision of housekeeping as a career.

This did not, of course, mean that women should be left to do their housework either as they had done it in the past or as they preferred to do it in light of their own values. Rather, housework was to become domestic science. Home economists built an ideology of their own indispensability in guiding women into this new age of scientific servitude. The home economists quickly moved into the agricultural extension service and helped segregate women's issues from agriculture. In the process they perpetuated the myths that women did not farm and should be shielded from the physical burdens and managerial strains of farming.

One of the first products of these publicly-supported devotees of Taylorism in the home was a series of time-use studies designed to show that better management of time was a critical need of farm women. These studies were funded under the 1925 Purnell Act, which provided federal support for research on a number of topics, including home economics. With this money, the home economists organized a National Committee on Rural Home Management Studies. The study in Idaho showed a marked hostility to women who worked outside the home and who sought alternatives to the "career" of housekeeping. The report argued:

The statement is often heard that women keep house not from choice, but because they can do nothing else. The answers obtained in this investigation do not confirm such a statement. . . . On the other hand, there are a few women who would prefer going back to their old positions, leaving a maid to take care of and cook for the family. These women have not been trained to look upon homemaking as a profession. One of the main objectives in the present methods of teaching Home Economics is to instill into the minds of girls that idea that no nobler profession exists than that of the homemaker. There are the chosen few who have a special talent but are not gifted or trained in the art of homemaking, who prefer to leave the household responsibilities to servants and render their services to the family by continuing in their former professions.

Any idea of working for self-fulfillment could have been unthinkable within the ideology of domestic science. Anything but home economics indicated a fundamental failure of womanhood and wifeliness.

The emphasis on management in the house never transferred to helping women assume a role in managing the farm. The time spent on farm work was glossed over in these studies or treated as an unfortunate diversion from housekeeping. The Oregon time-use study noted that women generally tended to do more farm work as their household and family responsibilities decreased. This study even noted that

Most farm women find outdoor work interesting. It is likely that the time which they give to farm work will increase as homemaking time is set free by the extension of community utilities and commercial services into rural districts.

Women were given no ideology of their role as farmers. Farm work was tolerated because it was, in a sense, within the home. This same study said of the trade-off between farm work and housework:

The increase in living standards enjoyed by members of other occupations had had the effect of increasing the desired standard among farm people. The width of the gap is in a sense a measure of the farm homemaker's problem. She cannot usually have the full benefit of modern facilities for cutting time costs in the household. She is more apt to give part of her working time to adding to family income. 14

The domestic science ideology spread through the farms of America partly through the farm press. The Country Gentlemen carried a regular column between 1912 and 1916 from Nellie Kedzie Jones, founder of the domestic economy department at Kansas State University, and later a resident of Wisconsin. "Aunt Nellies" letters to her "niece" Janet, a young wife on a Wisconsin farm, were at least leavened by common sense and humor. Her Taylorism was restrained by the understanding that she was writing about human beings in homes, not about extensions of machines in factories. Nevertheless, hers was a message of planning for greater efficiency on behalf of the <sup>45</sup> patriarchal family.

The problem posed for farm women by the ideology of domestic economy was that it imposed new burdens without providing realistic means of coping with them. The betterment of farm women's lot as both farmers and as housekeepers came not through the home economists but through advantageous farm prices, the extension of rural electrification, and the rebellion of urban middle class women against the feminine mystique. The ideology of domestic science was another product of the land grant colleges and the extension service. Women's tax money was used to try to convince them that they were homemakers, not farmers. The colleges of agriculture were giving men professional training in agriculture, while the women were segregated into home economics courses. The logic of the ideology of domestic science contained a central

flaw: if homemaking were indeed such a challenging, fulfilling career, why did women have to be warned against and excluded from management in other fields, even their own farms, the farms on which their houses were located? The ideology of domestic science wanted women in the house and men in charge of the farm. This meant that women were to be cut off from the larger worlds of politics and economics. They could understand economics only when that related to the home. They could manage kitchens but not farms.

The problem with domestic science was not that it tried to provide useful methods of housekeeping but that it raised this advice to the level of an ideology that denied women's capacity for work and management in any setting other than the home. Women were not encouraged to learn about and participate in that business which supported their home. This was unfair to both men and women. It was inconsistent with the realities of family farms. On these counts, one can paraphrase John Kenneth Galbraith's remark about agricultural economists: "If all domestic scientists were laid end to end, it would be a good thing."

Discriminatory taxation seems a particular problem of United States women. The current controversy over the estate tax, or widow's tax, has shown women the grave economic consequences of the prevailing cultural assumptions that men farm and women merely help. Under current state and federal laws, women's labor on the farm does not constitute a claim to ownership. When the husband dies, the wife has to pay inheritance tax on the farm even if she can prove that she operated the farm while her husband held an off-farm job. Women whose husbands were invalids have been similarly confronted with the law that says they have no claim to the farms they have run. This issue became critical in the early 1970s as the rapid appreciation in land values due to speculative pressures meant that many more farms now exceeded the exemption limits. A number of widows have been forced to sell their farms in

order to pay the estate taxes; women now say that men pay for a farm once, but a widow has to pay for it twice.

This issue mobilized farm women to political action. This was a perfect issue for farm women because it was seen as family maintaining. Women could show that discrimination against women was a threat to the entire family.

### Women and Rural Development

Changes in the structure of agricultural production together with the increasingly marginal position of women in agriculture make women seekers of non-farm employment. This is as true of the United States as of the less developed countries. In this quest women are a disadvantaged group of job seekers for several reasons. First, they are less likely than men to have had any previous work experience. Second, they are less likely than men to have had any vocational training or as much relevant formal education. Third, few women have any arrangements for child care. The need for a job away from the home does not guarantee that either the employer or the kin group will help in this area. Fourth, rural women, like rural men, are a captive labor force. Their ownership of small amounts of property limits their mobility without at the same time providing an adequate standard of living. The rural labor force is constrained from being a class-conscious proletariat by its character as a marginal petit bourgeoisie. These rural workers will be less inclined to demand the minimum wage or to organize labor unions. They rely on their small amounts of property to grow food to support themselves and to supplement their meager wages. These rural laborers are marginal in both sectors of the economy.

Examples of women in this situation of dual marginality are legion. Women do most of the work in the food processing industry in the United States. Since this

is seasonal work, they receive no health or retirement benefits and rarely earn the minimum wage. Unionization is out of the question. Women sort and pack cranberries in Wisconsin and Massachusetts, they pluck turkeys and pack vegetables in Minnesota. Women rarely fill the much better paying jobs in packing houses in the United States. These are reserved for men.

The main issue is not simply one of equal access for women to jobs in slaughter houses. It is rather the set of market and policy constraints that force women to seek such jobs in addition to their work on their own farms. This is a question of the structure of agricultural production and the meaning of "rural development". In many areas of the world, including the United States, it is also a question of a private sector that takes advantage of this situation of the rural labor force, particularly women. The Sunbelt success story in the United States is built on this combination of public financing of a private sector that operates through the subemployment of a large part of the rural work force.

This is a virtually neglected area of inquiry. It raises questions about the adequacy of equal access as a framework for the analysis of women's positions as well as for the preparation of policy recommendations. It is not clear that anything but a demand for equal access is politically possible. On the other hand, there is always the risk that demands for equal access will retard the emergence of more fundamental change of even greater benefit to women.

#### Policy Recommendations

Women's roles in agriculture, like those of men, are increasingly determined by public policies. These policies have had an adverse impact on many farmers during the past thirty years. Small farmers have been put at an increasing disadvantage relative to large farmers in many regions of the world. Women have suffered from the

additional burdens of cultural assumptions and explicit policies that have indirectly or directly discriminated against them as women and intensified their marginality as farmers. Even if all the problems of the small and medium sized farmer were to be solved, farm women would still face problems as women. The following policy recommendations address this special position of women in agriculture. These recommendations reflect the conviction that equal access is insufficient.

1. Women's individual rights within kinship-linked enterprises must be clarified in law and administrative procedure if women are to derive benefits from the incorporation of agriculture into the legal-bureaucratic realm represented by agricultural policies and development programs around the world. Without explicit recognition of this issue, the present tendency to exclude women from access to land and thus to all other associated rights will be intensified. There is no reason that the delimitation of individual rights should exclude any member of a kin group. The present situation results from a lack of insight, not from any inherent or necessary rigidity in law or administrative practice.

2. All publicly funded programs, whether from national government resources or from external sources, should be examined for their direct or indirect impact on women. Efforts to include women as project co-operators and project staff should be intensified.

3. Educational opportunities in agriculture should be extended to women. The current tendency to train men in agricultural and women in home economics should be stopped. The entire role of home economics training in developing countries should be re-evaluated to ensure that home economics programs are not used to separate women from meaningful roles in agriculture.

4. Policies that encourage large-scale, capital-intensive agriculture should be carefully examined for their impact on both farmers and consumers. Women are likely to be even more adversely affected than men by a change from agricultural systems based on small-holders to an agriculture based on government or corporate control of land. Women might well be at a disadvantage in seeking jobs as agricultural workers. Separating women from even a marginal role in the production of their own food might well increase hunger for themselves and their children.

5. Policies that link "rural development" to a publically-financed private sector that depends on sub-employment, especially of women, for maximum profits should be carefully studied. At the very least if such policies are to continue, they might be endorsed less enthusiastically and less uncritically as a positive benefit to rural people, including women.

6. Governments and agricultural organizations should facilitate contact among farm women from many parts of the world. New policy options might well be generated by a sharing of experiences, successes, problems, failures, and aspirations. In such sharing, American farm women have much to contribute and much to gain.

FOOTNOTES

1. Unless otherwise cited, data on American farm women are based on my research in the Middle West during 1976-8. This research involved taped recorded, semi-structured interviews with 103 diverse farm women. Support was provided by the Rockefeller Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities.
2. Samuel L. Popkin, The Rational Peasant (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).
3. These definitions are derived from Frederic LePlay, L'organisation de la famille (Paris:Dentu, 1870) and Lutz K. Berkner, "The Stem Family and the developmental Cycle of the Peasant Household: an 18th-Century Austrian Example," in Michael Gordon (ed.), The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973).
4. Joel Arnoff and William D. Crane, "A Re-examination of the Cross-Cultural Principles of Task Segregation and Sex-Role Differentiation in the Family," American Sociological Review, Vol. 40 (1975).
5. William Sprague, Women in the West: A Short Social History (Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1942).
6. Eliza W. Farnham, Life in Prairie Land (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1846), p. 41.
7. Ibid., p. 38.
8. Nancy Cott, The Bonds of Womanhood (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).
9. Thorstein Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions (New York: The Modern Library, 1934), pp. 138-54 analyzes this change in the roles of women.
10. Florence Ward, The Farm Woman's Problems (United States Department of Agriculture, Department Circular 148, November 1920), p. 4.
11. Ibid., p. 7.
12. Ibid., p. 10.
13. Ibid., p. 11.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. G.A. Lundquist, "What Farm Women Are Thinking," University of Minnesota Agriculture Extension Division Special Bulletin No. 7 (May 1923), p. 5.
17. United States Department of Agriculture, Social and Labor Needs of Farm Women (Report No. 103) (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1915), p. 6.
18. These four reports, all published in 1915, are: Social and Labor Needs of Farm Women (Report 103); Domestic Needs of Farm Women (Report 104); Educational Needs of Farm Women (Report 105); Economic Needs of Farm Women (Report 106).
19. Social and Labor Needs, p. 17.

20. Ibid.
21. Domestic Needs, p. 45.
22. Ibid., p. 9.
23. Social and Labor Needs, p. 8.
24. Economic Needs, p. 8.
25. Ibid. p. 15.
26. Ibid., p. 18.
27. US Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 1964 Census of Agriculture, Table 5.
28. Wallace Hoffman, "The Value of the Productive Time of Farm Wives: Iowa, North Carolina, and Oklahoma," Journal of Agricultural Economics, Vol. 58, No. 5 (December 1976), p. 836).
29. Ervin J. Long and Kenneth Parsons, "How Family Labor Affects Wisconsin Farming," University of Wisconsin Agricultural Experiment Station Research Bulletin 167 (1950).
30. A pilot survey conducted among members of American Agri-Women at their National Convnetion in Green Bay, Wisconsin, in November 1977 and the members of the Mid-States Regional AMPI Auxillary Convention in June 1977 gives strong evidence for women's work on farms. all subsequent references to survey data refer to this survey.
31. Hoffman, op. cit., p. 837.
32. Long, op. cit.
33. Irene Tinker, "The Adverse Impact of Development on Women," in Irene Tinker and Michele Bo Bramsen (eds.), Women and World Development (Washington: Overseas Development Council, 1976).
34. Kathleen A. Staudt, "Women Farmers and Inequities in Agricultural Services," Rural Africana, No. 2 (Winter 1975-6).
35. Carmen D. Deere, "The Agricultural Division of Labor by Sex: Myths and Facts and Contradictions In the Northern Peruvian Sierra," Paper presented at the Joint Meetings of the Latin American Studies Association and African Studies Association, Houston, November 1977.
36. Staudt, op. cit.
37. Ibid.
38. Tinker, op. cit.