



Farm Talk

By
Jerry Webb

There are few occupations where the wife is anymore important to the success of the business than farming. It's just that kind of business. And it's rare to see a successful farmer whose spouse is not deeply involved with the farm. In days past, that involvement may have been a clearly defined role of housekeeper, and the one who tended the garden and took care of the chickens. But all that has changed. Lines of responsibility are not so easily drawn, and wives are now involved at every point in the farm production spectrum

Department of Agriculture data show many of them as full-time

farm operators while their spouses work off-farm jobs. And more and more of them take active roles in other farm enterprises, including dairying, swine production and vegetable crop farming. Here on the Delmarva peninsula, it's quite common for a husband to work an off-farm job while his wife carries sole responsibility for a large broiler operation.

But even in today's modern society, it's rare to find a farm woman operating the farm while her house-husband takes care of the cleaning and cooking, runs errands, and minds the garden. For all of the advances women have made into the production side

of farming, they still remain a virtual monopoly when it comes to the responsibilities of the home

Researchers at Iowa State University surveyed almost 1,000 farm households to find out more about "home economics" on the farm. They wanted data that would help farmers make decisions on having children, pursuing outside jobs, or going back to school. Here are some of their findings:

- The average farm wife will spend an additional 430 hours a year doing household chores for every child under six years of age

- Rearing three children of various ages means more than an eight-hour workday for a farm wife

- With a 10 percent pay raise from an outside job, a farm wife will spend \$32 more that year for household services.

- Each child under the age of six increases the probability of a woman not working at a wage-paying job by 11 percent.

The Iowa researchers used an economic model and a computer to determine values for household work. They found that 60 percent of the wives worked at least an hour or more a day in farm-related duties, including tractor driving, keeping records, or handling

livestock. More than one-fourth worked off the farm for wages

They also found that of the 430 extra hours each year required for a child under six, 315 of those hours came from what was previously classed as leisure time. The 430 hours is an average. Obviously, young children take more time, older ones take less. Children between the ages of six and 11 need only 130 hours a year, and those between 12 and 18 require about 45 more hours a year, according to the study. That means a farm wife rearing a child in each of these age groups would work at household activities about 2,700 hours a year, or more than 50 hours a week. That does not include any farm activities or off-farm employment

Using the tools of economic analysis, the Iowa researchers concluded that it is a lot easier to substitute capital in basic farm production, such as crops and livestock, than it is in basic household production. They found such things as appliances, maids, housing and nursery school, were relatively poor substitutes for a mother's household time in caring

for younger children. "The capital labor ratio is 10 times larger for farm production than for household production," according to the report.

About a fourth of the husbands in the survey reported some off-farm work, and four-fifths of them said they did some work around the house. The report did not spell out how much

The researchers concluded that as family sizes decline the demand for household capital goods, such as durables and housing, will decline also. And the reduction in family size will also give wives more leisure time. They figure three-fourths of the time released from household labor will then be available for leisure time. Or, depending on the situation, available for farm production.

In some ways, farm families are more traditional in the way they face the task of household management and child rearing, with the wife bearing the bulk of the responsibility with very little outside support. On the other hand, farm wives have been liberated for

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