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FARM WOMEN AS PRODUCERS & CONSUMERS
IN THE 20TH CENTURY U.S. SOUTH

by

JOSEPH KAMINSKI

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major Program in History
in the College of Arts and Humanities
and in the Burnett Honors College
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

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Thesis Chair: Dr. Connie Lester, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

The intent of this thesis is to examine white, rural women of the Southern United States who were directly affected by the federal program known as home demonstration between 1920 – 1950 and to discuss their roles as producers and consumers in the expanding market economy. Home demonstration, a three-tiered bureaucratic agency centered around providing domestic education and techniques to Southern women, played a major role in guiding women towards the expanding market economy but ultimately had to compromise with women based on capital, capability, and confidence within the program itself. By integrating these women into a more modernized, less isolated, and urbanized environment, home demonstration hoped to improve the lives of women through better focus on sanitation, nutrition, and efficiency within household production. Women, as the traditional keepers of the home, were an important threshold into the homes of atomized families in rural society.

DEDICATION

To my mother and father, Beverly and John Boggs. Thank you for giving me every opportunity for success and encouraging me every step along the way.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis chair Dr. Connie Lester helping me set the framework for this piece and helping me improve upon my writing abilities. Her superb copyediting and our weekly meetings kept me wanting to go further with this research.

My committee members, Dr. Edward Dandrow and Dr. Ezekiel Walker, both encouraged me to go above and beyond in their classes. Such encouragement led me to beginning this research, and their individual perspectives helped increase my understanding on the topic at hand.

Without help from the University of Florida's George A. Smathers and Marston Science Libraries, this piece would have been impossible. I'd like to thank Suzanne Stapleton, Peggy McBride, James Cusick, Melody Royster, and Michele Wilbanks for welcoming me into their archives and helping me with primary documentation along the way. Their hospitality and their in-depth perspectives made this work a reality.

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INTRODUCTION: Push and Pull, Give and Take

The twentieth century brought change to the U.S. South through technological innovations, ideological developments, and shifts in culture. From the perspective of white, rural women, many new opportunities came along in the first decades of the twentieth century in the form of home demonstration work. The perspective of farm women during this period of time has been largely overlooked by historians in the field. As Lu Ann Jones wrote in her book *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South*, twentieth-century farm women have largely “remained hidden in plain sight” among researchers and have been “banished to the margins” of history itself.¹ Despite this observation, it remains clear that rural women played a crucial role in the creation and expansion of a functioning market economy through their impact in both production and consumption. Home demonstration was an essential part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Cooperative Extension Service, which was established during the early twentieth century to expand adult agricultural education and influence the production and consumption values in rural states. The Cooperative Extension Service was made up of two halves – agricultural demonstration for men and home demonstration for women, the latter of this will be discussed throughout this paper.

The purpose of this research paper is to examine white, rural women in the Southern United States who were directly affected by home demonstration between 1920 – 1950 and to discuss their roles as producers and consumers in an expanding market economy. Although communities

¹ Lu Ann Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 1-2.

were able to decide whether or not they desired a Negro home demonstration agent, there exists far more primary source documentation at land grant archives for white agents, and as an extension, white families involved with the program. It will assess the primary documentation for women involved within the Home Extension Service agencies to determine how women were brought out of the more localized household economy and into the expanding market economy through demonstration work. While demonstration agents were working with rural women, advertising in magazines and newspapers began targeting the needs and desires of housewives and homemakers.

The primary focus of this piece is to highlight these women as both producers and consumers within the transitional phase between the household and market economies of the early-to-mid 20th century. These rural women had always been producers as they produced household items and foodstuffs for their families and worked alongside their husbands in the fields. Prior to their introduction to the market economy, rural lifestyles tended to be more independent than integrated. Families could have a bad growing season but were still often able to put food on the table through domestic production and hunting. The rural disconnection from larger and more urbanized society necessitated different skill-sets. These skill-sets are what kept these families functioning for so long despite the separation between rural and urban.

Programs like Cooperative Extension and the development of home demonstration came with the goal of incorporating farm women into the expanding market economy by limiting isolationism across the South. Previously independent, farm families had been mostly self-sufficient and insular when compared to urban lifestyles, began to integrate into a cosmopolitan, market-based, urbanized economy. Modernized luxuries like appliances that were dependent on

access to electricity helped bring rural families into this system. As families began doing business in cities, they required productive resources that improved efficiency and enhanced the marketability. Engaging in the expanded markets moved farm women from a traditional household economy of limited production to production for a consumer-driven market economy with enhanced demands for capital.

Inevitably, market production introduced farm women to modern consumerism and fundamental changes to farm and home life. Home demonstration played a major role in guiding women towards the expanding market economy, educating women in more efficient methods of production, and introducing them to the emerging consumer economy. Interest among women in the programs home demonstration offered was dependent on multiple factors, but several stand out: capital for investment in women's production, family support for alterations in production, and confidence in the demonstration agent and the program.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, southern women were still mostly independent of the larger industrial capitalist economy and exercised a low level of purchasing power within their households. By integrating these women into a modern, less isolated, and more urbanized environment, home demonstration agents hoped to improve the general health, sanitation, nutrition, child-rearing, and overall efficiency in household production. Women, traditionally the keepers of the home, were an important threshold into rural society.

Primary sources for research on rural women are difficult to locate. The demands of home and farm life meant that women had few opportunities to record their thoughts in diaries. Many who did write in diaries typically recorded their day to day work experience. Even when they did

record such musings, archives seldom sought out documents written by farm women. As a result, most primary sources are limited to observations recorded in Home Extension Reports and in publications from agricultural newsletters and magazines such as *The Progressive Farmer* and *The Florida Poultryman*.

The methodology of this study draws from oral interviews and the scattered archived diaries of farm women cited in monographs published by Lu Ann Jones² and Rebecca Sharpless,³ dissertations by Minoa Dawn Uffelman⁴ and Kelly Minor, and a master's thesis by Sara Morris.⁵ These secondary sources provide a broad geographic scope (North Carolina, Texas, Tennessee, Florida, and Mississippi) and support both specific examples and larger region-wide interpretations. Many of the cited diaries fill in the blanks for the perspectives left behind in reports by the aforementioned home demonstration agents and newspaper articles. The secondary sources demonstrate the compromises negotiated between county agents who wanted to implement significant changes in women's work and the families they served. The original research conducted for this thesis was conducted at the University of Florida's Special Collections and University Archives, using the annual narrative reports of Florida county home agents and a Florida-based

² Jones, *Mama Learned*, 52-53.

³ Rebecca Sharpless, *Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices: Women on Texas Cotton Farms, 1900-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

⁴ Minoa Dawn Uffelman, "'Rite Thorny Places to Go Thro': The Narratives of Identities, Southern Farm Women of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century," (Ph.D. diss. University of Mississippi, 2003), 124.

⁵ Kelly Minor, "Power in the land home demonstration in Florida, 1915-1960," (Ph.D. diss. University of Florida, 2005); Sara Elizabeth Morris, "'Good Equipment Makes a Good Homemaker Better': Promoters of Domestic Technology in Mississippi, 1930-1940," (M.A. thesis, Mississippi State University, 2004).

farm publication. These provided additional insight into the interactions of agents and women from the perspective of the three-tiered bureaucracy that characterized demonstration work.

In 1909, the *Progressive Farmer*, the most popular southern agricultural magazine, urged readers to diversify their agricultural products through the use of three C's – cotton, corn, and chickens. “Diversify, make it cotton, corn, and chickens and you will be starting on the way to easy street.”⁶ Although not funded by or related to home demonstration, the *Progressive Farmer* certainly promoted what demonstration agents were doing and endorsed many of the circulars and bulletins published by the service. Publications like the *Progressive Farmer* advertised modern methods to succeed using modern techniques and technologies, and it was up to demonstration agents to prove the success of what the programs stood behind through state fairs, school programs, and visits to family farms. Farm families, in particular the “woman of the household,” participated in a give-and-take, push-and-pull type of relationship with extension agents. Active and ‘successful’ participants of home demonstration needed three C's of their own – capital, capability, and confidence in the agents.

Family capital, personal capability, and communal confidence existed as obstacles to the programs agents promoted, but represented meaningful justifications to the women who participated in demonstration work. Women had to have some level of financial stability and the excess capital to implement both production and domestic changes encouraged by demonstration agents. Farm women also had to have the capability to make changes and take advantage of any

⁶ Jones, 87.

provided resources. The program also had to establish its reputation in each county in order to prove to rural women the effectiveness of the advice agents offered.

Home demonstration's priorities included teaching rural women new and improved methods for completing domestic tasks and encouraging them to implement labor-saving devices into their homes and efficiency into their production.⁷ Although demonstration agents recorded in state reports to supervisors that they were successfully bringing modernization to the kitchen table for southern farm women, women acted as the agents of change for their households. Many of the women on the receiving-end of these agricultural education services chose what worked well within their household structure and personal budgets. Oftentimes, this meant they rejected ideas that did not work for their subjective cases.

To demonstration agents, these subjective cases reflected the ignorance of the women they served, and they described it as such in reports to their supervisors. A closer look reveals that women had more substantial reasons for resisting demonstrator's suggestions for entering the market economy and reorganizing their households. These reasons varied from a lack of capital to institute the changes required by the home demonstration agents to a lack of sufficient labor, or skepticism about the efficacy of the suggested changes. Individual capital and capability were directly correlated to whether a woman was able to enter the market economy on her own or with the resources provided by home demonstration agents. Agents considered the demonstration programs to be a more systematic methodology for entry into the consumer-based economy, but

⁷ Uffelman, 4.

they soon learned that it required the consent of both the individuals on the farm and the agents to bring ‘modernization’ to the rural South.

Women played the role of both the consumer and the producer as the home economy began to compete in the growing market economy. They did so through their own choice, which was directly impacted by household capability and familial capital. Whether or not they listened to agents often depended on whether the agents had a good-standing record with the community and, as outsiders, early agents had a tough time developing such relationships. Home demonstration agents certainly pointed women in the right direction, yet there existed a give-and-take method of using information where women decided for themselves what worked on their own budget and in their own household. For example, home demonstration agents provided women with a list of appliances in the order they should be acquired to make their day-to-day lives easier without negatively affecting their budgets. An icebox or refrigerator, something with practical use for efficiency within the home, was seen by agents to be more of a requirement for a rural family than frivolous appliances such as a radio.

Agents frequently become frustrated as their demonstration clients rejected this expert advice and purchased radios instead. Rural men and women made the decision to purchase an appliance that tied them to the community around them and offered information and entertainment over an appliance that agents perceived as foundational for the supposedly “modern” kitchen. In reality, women decided what they wanted, and these desires were rooted in their own familial needs. Agents reported back to supervisors that rural women were resistant toward demonstration agents’ advice, yet women simply went out of order in purchasing these appliance lists as they made decisions to improve their lives on their own terms. This bottom-up style of accepting and

implementing information symbolized the interactions between southern women and home demonstration agents.

Historian Minoa Uffelman offered an explanation for the resistance to home agents' priorities. According to Uffelman, the resistance was grounded in tradition and rural social needs: "entertainment mirrored activities from decades earlier" Examples of fun on the farm at the time included "pie suppers, square dances, church revivals, lawn croquet" and other forms of communal visits among close-knit neighbors and family members. Modern entertainment began to enter the world of traditional activities and southerners rejoiced at the opportunity to join the rest of the nation in collective entertainment. Battery operated radios gave families without access to the electric grid a way to enter into the new markets of entertainment. Retailers in the South facilitated "cash poor clients" with installment plans to purchase them. Radios gave rural families a way to enter into the entertainment market, and "as electricity became available, they connected to the grids and began to acquire electric appliances that alleviated their labor".⁸

Radio in the early years was a family, and, at times, a communal, experience. Uffelman provides the example of Fredda Davis of Tar Heel, North Carolina whose family was the first in their community to attain a radio. They invited their neighbors over on Saturday nights to listen to the Grand Ole Opry. This serves as an excellent example of how traditional values of southern activities at first bled into new social activities. The "communal experience of radio listening" did not last long for the Davis family as their neighbors were soon able to purchase radios for their

⁸ Uffelman, 153-154.

own living rooms and parlors. After that, families enjoyed radio shows as a family rather than a community.⁹

In the end, radio played as important a role in the modernization of the South as the telephone, the automobile, and the household technology promoted by the home demonstration agents. Farmers and their wives welcomed the radio, and the Department of Agriculture's Extension Service eventually adopted the radio as a medium to connect with and reach out to farm-working men and women through educational programming and advertising. Political rhetoric copied from the Country Life Movement, and the radio's "ability to relieve isolation" mixed with its advertising and educational benefits.^{10 11} Women played a role in the creation of this process by picking and choosing what products worked best for their budgets, their connection to the community, and their sources of entertainment and information.

Home Demonstration Clubs became another outlet for entertainment and information in the typical rural woman's life as well. Women came together to learn improved homemaking methods while also taking a break from the "grueling routines of daily farm life" as they mingled with other women in the community.¹² Columns in *The Progressive Farmer* encouraged the value of female friendship, proclaiming that wives should overcome stress and loneliness through communication with fellow women. It becomes clear that women considered the benefits of

⁹ Ibid, 152-154.

¹⁰ Ronald Kline, *Consumers in the Country: Technology and Social Change in Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 114-116.

¹¹ L.H. Bailey and Theodore Roosevelt, United States. Country Life Commission, *Report of the Country Life Commission: Special Message from the President of the United States Transmitting the Report of the Country Life Commission* (Washington: G.P.O., 1909), 47.

https://www.fca.gov/template-fca/about/Report_of_the_Country_Life_Commission.pdf

¹² Uffelman, 153-154.

anything offered by demonstration agents and based their decisions on which benefits played a larger role in their personal homes. It became the goal of agents to advertise their plans in such a way that encouraged women to participate in a way that benefitted the agents as they filed their annual reports.

Women learned skills of production through demonstration agents and gained experience with canning, sewing, gardening, poultry and egg production, and selling. In many examples, what one woman was doing already for their household was amplified in a way so that she could sell on the market and provide an additional source of income for her family. Just as radios were used as an outlet to advertise methods of production, home demonstration clubs began using self-help columns concerning efficiency, the scientific methods of production, and sanitation in magazines such as the *Progressive Farmer* and the *Florida Poultryman*. Women displayed their skills at county fairs that promoted and advertised home demonstration values. County agents organized contests and pageants to show the farm women's skills to a larger community and rewarded the best examples of gardening, sewing, baking, and food preservation with cash awards.

Magazines, newspapers, and journals such as *The Progressive Farmer* served as comprehensive marketing tools that directly focused their attention on farm families and their participation in programs offered by the Cooperative Extension Service. The editors of *The Progressive Farmer* were separate from but worked with Agricultural Department agents and shared the same goal to improve farm life through improved methods of farming and domestic life. It presented "didactic images that promoted the policies of the USDA" and helped create stereotypical imagery of women's roles in the house that would emerge out of the culture of the 1950s.

According to Uffelman, the *Progressive Farmer* divided farm women into two broad categories: the forward-looking, rational, modernized woman who heartily adopted demonstration programs into their lives and the backward, old-fashioned, traditional woman who “rejected modernity” at all costs.¹³ It must be remembered that the *Progressive Farmer* believed in what the agents were doing, and that women were making rational choices on their own behalf. By using two broad categories, the editors of the *Progressive Farmer* were dismissing the capital, capability, and confidence of rural women who could not afford to make the changes that demonstration agents promoted. These categories stripped away the individuality of rural women and portrayed a generalized “good image” to strive for. The two categories presented by columns in agricultural journals reflect and advertise the demonstration service from the viewpoint of an ally to the agency.

The business structure of *The Progressive Farmer* under the leadership of editor Clarence Poe allowed for the agricultural journal to bolster a large readership across the southern states. Poe knew and understood his target audience, and the *Progressive Farmer* did not exist as one regional entity. Instead, the magazine split up the states into regions in a way that allowed it to target specific groups of farmers based on their agricultural needs. Land-owning families across the rural South were able to read primarily about the crops and problems felt in their local area. During the 1930s, circulation for the *Progressive Farmer* was roughly around 920,000. By 1959, the magazine was supported by over 1,400,000 annual subscriptions.¹⁴ The overall theme of efficiency goes hand in hand with the *Progressive Farmer’s* definition of modernization within the household. One regular column titled “The Home Circle” told female readers how to build and paint fences, offered

¹³ Ibid, vi – vii.

¹⁴ Ibid, 67.

advice on purchasing higher-end furniture and appliances, and relayed recipes that saved time and money.¹⁵

Magazines like the *Progressive Farmer* regularly dispensed advice on how to be a better wife and mother, and one of the main goals of the paper was to educate women on health and homemaking. Methods of sanitation, health advice, and other forms of physical standards were brought to the attention of female readers across the South. The *Progressive Farmer* oftentimes included lists of recommended books that the farm family should read to “properly educate the entire family.” Comfort and beauty in the forms of consumption went hand in hand with the accessibility and efficiency of production in the domestic sphere of southern living. From the very beginning, the *Progressive Farmer* depicted the ideal farm wife as an active participant in farm production. Although the domestic sphere remained relatively separate from male-dominated farm work in the eyes of agents, male and female involvement on the farm remained equally important and valuable.

On the consumer-side of advertising, marketing *towards* a specific group became key. Where better to advertise to rural farm women than in home demonstration newsletters and agricultural publications such as *The Progressive Farmer*? Feed and seed companies advertised the qualities of the product bag as a way to build customer loyalty. Women used the patterned cloth bags to create dresses, sleepwear, and aprons. The waste not, want not mentality of women in the rural South opened new entryways for advertising. Men bought the feed and seed, but their

¹⁵ Ibid, 67 – 68, 79-80.

wives oftentimes sent their husbands into town with swatches of specific fabric patterns as a way to request certain brands.

As the Percy Kent Bag Company once claimed, “smart packaging is vital in the successful marketing” of the product, and “as a premium” their bag was a no-added expense to the purchase.¹⁶ Many of the advertisements related to smart packaging were aimed at female readers, and the early decades of the twentieth century were marked by the influence of a growing consumer culture that intermingled with said advertisements.¹⁷ Magazines such as the *Progressive Farmer* penned advice columns, paired advertisements for products alongside self-help articles, and connected to women on both levels of production (eg. incubators for chicks, better methods of growing) and consumption (eg. better quality bags) to “help women achieve respectability” in their community.¹⁸ Respectability was directly tied to their success in both production and consumption.

Agents used advertising as a crucial element in nudging women out of the household economy and into the market economy, but it was ultimately up to the women themselves to determine how much they participated in the growing market. Products were targeted directly to women through radio, catalogues, and magazines, and rural women began to enter a system as consumers where they had more choice as to *what* and *where* they made their purchases; what differed from person to person remained the *why*. Historically, women seldom went to town to shop for a multitude of reasons. Going to town was an all-day affair that required dressing up and proved troublesome when bored children were brought along with their mothers. Southern women

¹⁶ Jones, 177-179.

¹⁷ Uffelman, 72.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 92.

relied on the convenience of peddlers and salesmen who travelled door-to-door to offer goods, trades, and entertainment as it was far easier and less troublesome.

Travelling merchants such as the peddlers became a rarer sight as the result of better modes of transportation and the growth of the corporatized market economy in the American. In 1896, the Sears, Roebuck Company published its first specialty catalogue, influencing the way women shopped for the next century. Consumer-friendly methods led to more outlets of consumerism that in turn infiltrated the common woman's lifestyle.¹⁹ The Sears catalogue and rural free delivery brought shopping to the doorstep, and ladies' rest room movements gave women specific locations to take breaks from the endeavor of shopping in town.

The twentieth-century *rest rooms* for women had an entirely different purpose than the modern compound word *restroom*. Kristen Britanik described ladies' rest rooms as "a designated room where women" could rest in male-dominated towns and cities.²⁰ They served to give women a chance to tend to their children, socialize with other women, and take a break from shopping. While taking breaks, rural women spent their time flipping through catalogues and magazines chock full of advertisements targeted towards them. Ladies' rest rooms were commonly located in public buildings such as "courthouses, city halls, and state capitols" and were operated by women's clubs.²¹ In the mid-twentieth century, banks and other financial institutions used ladies' rooms as "designated spaced where women could rest and wait while their husbands took care of the

¹⁹ Kristen L. Britanik, "Where Are the Ladies' Rest Rooms?: The Evolution of Women-Only Resting Rooms Amid Social Changes of the Early Twentieth Century" (M.A. thesis, University of Maryland, 2012).

²⁰ Ibid, 1-2.

²¹ Ibid, 61.

family's finances."²² The stress of going into town that had discouraged women was alleviated over time as transportation improved and more outlets began to open for consumers. These new outlets created a foundation for women to enter the market as producers as well.

Home demonstration agents and proponents of the extension service oftentimes encouraged the growth of community curb markets for women in their local communities.²³ Curb markets were sites where farm women could sell the goods they had produced to customers in the area. Women in rural America found themselves in an interesting situation where they had to advertise themselves as producers through these markets. Agents assisted women in adopting "new standards for cleanliness and appearance of goods" and other forms of regulation came from this increasingly interconnected and well-organized system. These standards were created not out of the quest for modernization on an institutional level but rather out of demand on a consumer level, one that expanded quickly as more options for purchase became readily available. Regional networks of these markets grew at a steady pace across the South between the late 1920s and early 1930s. This was one major method demonstration used to solve the problem of isolation in rural communities. Women's curb markets organized women throughout the community while training them in sales tactics and presenting new avenues of production and consumerism. It truly served as a market for personal growth as well as production, as many successful women moved on from the markets to seek permanent space.²⁴

²² Jones, 73.

²³ Ibid, 52-63.

²⁴ Ibid, 63-65

The factors identified thus far symbolize the push and pull mechanics of home demonstration work. As portrayed through numerous primary sources throughout this piece, many of the women on the receiving-end of these agricultural education services initially rejected the idea that these new ideas presented by agents were any better than what they were already doing on their own. What this thesis serves to prove is that demonstration work was happening across the South and had similar implications to women across various states. Previous secondary literature on the topic of home demonstration have chosen specific states to focus on as case studies – Lu Ann Jones focuses on North Carolina, Rebecca Sharpless focuses on Texas, and Sarah Morris focuses on Mississippi.

They imply that what was happening in their specific states was also occurring in other state, but they lack definitive examples for each of their own main points. Home demonstration proves to be much larger than individual states and does not happen in a historical vacuum. This piece ties primary and secondary evidence together to show how demonstration worked as a well-oiled, bureaucratic machine across the entire South. The struggles of these agents and the compromises they made with women exist in every place that demonstration operated. The research has been divided into three major sections: the first will discuss the history of demonstration work and give the perspective of agents, the second will discuss white, female producers of the South, and the third will discuss white, female consumers of the South.

As portrayed through numerous primary sources, many of the women on the receiving-end of these agricultural education services initially rejected the idea that what agents were presenting to them were any better than what they were doing on their own. Resistance was ultimately perceived by agents as evidence of ignorance in their reports to their supervisors. However, a more

analytical look reveals that women had more substantial reasons – capital, capability, and confidence – rather than ignorance for initially resisting demonstrators’ suggestions for entering the market economy and improving their impact as consumers. Even when women could or did not follow the exact methodology agents wanted them to, they began to “modernize” in ways that worked for their individual conditions. Demonstration worked across generations of women, and each generation of women after its introduction in 1914 began to see more and more change.

CHAPTER ONE:

From an Agent's Perspective: The History of Home Demonstration

One of the most gratifying results in the work is the increased interest of farmers and the general public. The county agents are in a better position than ever to do efficient work, in that they are receiving encouragement from bankers and business men of their respective counties. Most of them now have cars, which facilitate their work. The year began with promise of achievements greater than any previous year. That promise has been fulfilled. Twenty-six agents reported for the year. A few counties have fallen out, owing to the failure of commissioners and other local sources to make the supplementary appropriations to continue the work.²⁵

The University of Florida's Division of Agricultural Extension published its first Report for the Fiscal Year titled *Cooperative Demonstration Work in Agriculture and Home Economics* in 1915. The above quote came from C. K. McQuarrie, a state agent who summarized the reports sent to him through various county agents across the state of Florida. From an agent's perspective, the demonstration services found that the "most gratifying results in the work" came from the interest and acceptance of farmers and their families. As the agency cemented itself as an institution over the next few decades of demonstration work, it quickly discovered the importance of 'the next generation' through its educational practices. Many of the top-performing agents were products of the agency – highly educated women who entered the realm of home demonstration to continue its legacy of instructional performance.

4-H youth organizations facilitated this experiential learning experience among rural children whose families participated in demonstration programs. Home demonstration as an

²⁵C. K. McQuarrie, "Report of State Agent," in Rolf, P. H., editor, *Cooperative Demonstration Work in Agriculture and Home Economics* (University of Florida, 1915) 19.
<http://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00075775/00001/20> Accessed on August 15th, 2018.

institution relied on the resources provided to them by investors and those in the community who had the capital and capability to support the goals of agents. The reports are littered with gratification given to county “bankers and business men,” those who were able to support the vision of demonstration agents. In 1916, the “number of visits by county agents to business men” in the state of Florida was recorded as 2,681.²⁶ When compared to the number of county agents to actual club members at 3,423, it becomes clear that county agents relied on the support provided by businessmen early on during the development of the program.²⁷

The Country Life Movement is what ultimately brought home demonstration through the eventual Smith-Lever Act and into regional public policy. The Country Life Movement sought to improve rural living conditions in a way that balanced traditional ways of life and modernization efforts to address social and economic dilemmas. In 1909, members of the Theodore Roosevelt administration’s Country Life Commission published their two-year “investigation of rural life” which focused on the lives of rural communities, farmers, and farm women. As mentioned by Lu Ann Jones, farm women were identified as being “overworked and unappreciated” and left untouched by middle-class concepts of modernization such as electricity and running water.²⁸ After the Country Life Commission completed its work, the United States Department of Agriculture launched their own investigation to identify “social, labor, domestic, and economic

²⁶ C. K. McQuarrie, “Report of State Agent,” in Rolf, P. H., editor, *Cooperative Demonstration Work in Agriculture and Home Economics* (University of Florida, 1916) 20.

<http://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00075775/00002/21> Accessed on August 20th, 2018.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Jones, 14-15.

needs.” The 63rd United States Congress saw this federalized effort to better understand rural problems and passed the Smith-Lever Act on May 8th, 1914.²⁹

Home extension and demonstration can trace their roots back to the agricultural societies that developed in the late 19th and early centuries. Dr. Seaman Knapp, the proclaimed founding father of demonstration work, established the foundation for demonstration as a way to combat the boll weevil infestation of Texas in 1904 – an entire decade before the development of the Smith-Lever Act in 1914. Prior to this, the Farmers’ Alliance and Farmers’ Union had conducted two-to-three-day institutes with similar messages as early demonstration work. The Smith-Lever Act established the relationship between the United States Department of Agriculture and the land-grant universities that provided and applied agricultural education and research, allowing the institution to begin and spread further than before. This partnership established a unique system of cooperative extension services with the goal of informing rural, farm-working families about the latest developments in agricultural production and home economics.

The first two decades of the twentieth century brought a multitude of reforms that produced many pro-women programs such as the United States Women’s Bureau which was established in 1920 to formulate policies and standards for women in the labor force. Public policy towards women began to emphasize the societal and economic changes of the time. In 1909, President Roosevelt organized the first White House Conference on Child Welfare. By 1912, the United

²⁹ Smith-Lever Act, Stat. 372, 7 U.S.C. § 341 (1914). <https://ifas.ufl.edu/land-grant-sea-grant-the-smith-lever-act-79/>

States Children Bureau had been established. The program, which was directed and staffed almost entirely by women, had the following purpose and duties:

[The Children's Bureau] shall investigate and report to said department [of Commerce and Labor] upon all matters pertaining to the welfare of children and child life among all classes of our people, and shall especially investigate the questions of infant mortality, the birth-rate, orphanage, juvenile courts, desertion, dangerous occupations, accidents and diseases of children, employment, legislation affecting children in the several states and territories.³⁰

The creation of these Bureaus helped establish the societal change in public policy towards both women and children in the early twentieth century, paving the path for programs for women such as home demonstration. In 1914, the United States officially adopted Mother's Day as a federal holiday and passed the Smith-Lever Act which provided funding for "two thousand home demonstration agents" with the goal of training housewives and introducing them to the "proper methods of house making, budget management, and child rearing."³¹

Even though the first recorded official state agent report was not published in Florida until 1915, home demonstration work and similar programs had been hard at work setting up foundations in the state of Florida as early as 1909. Historian Kelly Minor noted that home demonstration evolved "from a mission to a service" as it had started as a "relatively grassroots initiative" and quickly transformed into "an enabling bureaucracy" with the passing of the Smith-Lever Act.³² This early formation period was crucial in the state of Florida, as home demonstration had no way of succeeding without local support from individuals – both the women involved with

³⁰ The Children's Bureau, Stat. 252, U.S.C. § 192 (1912.)

<http://uscode.house.gov/statviewer.htm?volume=37&page=79>

³¹ Steven Mintz, Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 124-125.

³² Minor, 9.

the program and the “bankers and business men” who provided resources to agents. The Smith-Lever Act, along with new social agendas such as the Women’s Bureau and Children’s Bureau, were established due to the influence of reform movements that it had birthed across the rural South.

Extension services were structured in a three-tiered format in which three public institutions played a role in the work of the service. The United States Department of Agriculture or USDA oversaw the function of farm and home demonstration. The programs were housed at state land grant universities that were responsible for the research and educational policies that informed demonstration agents. Each county that participated with demonstration, those that were entitled to demonstration agents based on their agricultural needs, oversaw the local individual agents and had a major voice in how they were funded. Most counties had a home demonstration agent as well as a farm demonstration agent, but it was left to the county to decide whether or not they had a Negro agent.

The three bureaucracies served as the institutional framework for demonstration. Kelly Minor properly referred to this structure as “a network of information and authority flowing between the [USDA], state colleges of agriculture, county school boards, boards of commissioners, and others of local influence.”³³ Brad Bauerly referred to the policies which came out of this structure as making “two blades of grass grow where one grew before.”³⁴ Individual county agents were answerable to three separate agencies in a web of bureaucracy that needed to see annual

³³ Ibid, 69.

³⁴ Brad Bauerly, *The Agrarian Seeds of Empire: The Political Economy of Agriculture in US State Building* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017), 154.

progress to keep resources flowing— and at the end of each year, their reports went to the state who compiled the data and stories into a cumulative report to send to the USDA.

Perhaps one of the most informative of these agent reports comes from Jane Simpson McKimmon, the leader of North Carolina’s home demonstration program, and county agents and organizers that reported directly to her. Jane McKimmon is an example of a person who shaped the institution as much as the institution shaped her as a person. She took her first paid job in 1909 with the Farmers’ Institutes for Women lecture circuit, and within two years she was the top administrator of the program. As an agent with a specialty in bread making, McKimmon made a name for herself through her record as a great administrator and hardworking agent who put her work and educational programs above all else. McKimmon oversaw the first rural girls’ club in the state after the funding was donated by the General Education Board (GEB), and due to her involvement in the program, she became “one of five pioneering home demonstration agents” in the United States.³⁵ The GEB, chartered by John D. Rockefeller, was a philanthropic organization that promoted practical farming, the establishment of public high schools and higher education institutions, and schools for Negroes across the South. The GEB had a special interest in home management, poultry work, canning and preservation methods, and other forms of domestic education. During economic hardship, the GEB sometimes funded demonstration agents’ salaries.

Pauline Smith, a successful demonstration agent under McKimmon, worked at such a fast and steady pace that she was unable to “practice the gospel that she preached.” Despite introducing women to the latest home appliances that allowed mothers and wives to live happier and healthier

³⁵ Jones, 110.

lives, Smith herself suffered from “fatigue and illness.” As she helped her clients decorate beautiful homes with wallpaper and new furniture, she travelled across the state living in rented room after rented room that she was able to afford with her rather low and mostly donated salary. While she encouraged and helped women find and prepare healthier recipes for their families, Smith found she was too busy to cook for herself and repeatedly skipped meals.³⁶

As home extension materialized and popularized as an institutional service, the agents found themselves in a difficult situation where they were stuck between a rock and a hard place. As agents, they had to carefully balance between traditional ways of rural living and the modernized methods that the program expected to help women in their day-to-day lives. Agents had been educated to accept modernity, but not every program that was advocated by demonstration produced positive results in rural communities. Ruth Evans Dozier, a schoolteacher and Tomato Club organizer under Jane McKimmon’s early program, recalled that the formal education and program training helped bolster a sense of confidence and knowledge among female agents. Tomato Clubs played an essential role in home demonstration agents’ method of educating young girls. Young girls and women went to community centers to learn domestic skills that brought more money into the household. Skills from gardening and canning produce like tomatoes and citrus to sewing and patching clothing that could either be used by the family or sold for additional cash were encouraged by volunteers and demonstration agents.

However, she also recalled how this sense of confidence – even when supported by the latest research and agricultural education – “put them at odds” with rural women who did not

³⁶ Ibid, 154.

necessarily agree with what was being promoted. In one case, after demonstrating sterilization while canning tomatoes, one volunteer assistant whispered to a young woman that she didn't "need to do all that".³⁷ From the perspective of an agent, this felt like a constant battle between traditionalism and modernization. Records suggest that women were hearing demonstration advice but were in a difficult situation where they had to prioritize what their families accomplished based on their own means. Something as simple as improved sanitation may have been a blow to the budget and explaining new and improved methods of completing an age-old task did not often go well among older generations who were used to completing tasks in their own way.

These well-educated, on-the-ground agents found their work to be increasingly time-consuming and physically demanding. With little pay, very little recognition from above (and in some cases below), and horrible working conditions, only the most dedicated and strong-willed agents were able to keep up with everything that the job demanded. The idea of bringing modernization to small, rural communities and helping the next generation connect to the values preached by extension services through services like the girls' Tomato Clubs encouraged demonstration agents to continue with their work. At the end of each year, when the three overseeing organizations wanted to know each county agent's progress, agents wrote their reports in a way that put at least some of the blame for their lack of success onto the women who made their jobs harder by failing to implement the advice the agents had provided. This was a completely conscious decision as funding relied on how the three major institutions and outside donors such

³⁷ Ibid, 111.

as bankers, businessmen, and third-party, philanthropic programs such as the General Education Board perceived the progress accomplished by agents each year.

To the agents, there existed a schism between their role as demonstration experts and the role of the rural women in the program. There existed a clear and generalized disconnect between the higher standards of educated agents and farm-residing women who had to work with what they had to make ends meet. With three institutions to satisfy, individual county agents needed a way to show progress while also encouraging the continuation of the program itself. In many cases, and especially during the Great Depression, private donations were necessary to continue the educational practices. The lobbying of businessmen and local politicians was a necessary way to increase or even hold onto funding. In 1933, for example, Beaufort County demonstration agent Violet Alexander had her salary covered by private donations when funding fell short. Many agents suffered salary cuts of upwards to twenty percent.³⁸ In many cases, the salaries of the agents along with their expenses were paid for entirely by the General Education Board while the USDA sent \$1.00 per year.³⁹ Although these efforts were short-lived and put into place in times of need, the safety net that existed between private donors and demonstration work remained.

Virginia Pearl Moore, the state agent of Tennessee, served as another stronghold for demonstration work. Much like McKimmon in North Carolina, Moore had a sincere passion for educating any individual who showed interest in demonstration work. Early in her career as a Canning Club state leader she worked hard days without a salary and without much financial support from the institutions above her. A “young girl” by the name of Mary Presswood once

³⁸ Ibid, 127-128

³⁹ Uffelman, 112.

contacted Virginia Moore with an interest in learning how to grow tomato plants properly. Moore, restricted in her travels due to a short budget but never the one to turn down an opportunity to educate, sent heavily detailed letters showing Presswood and her family how to set up a 1/10-acre plot and gave insight into how to grow and can her future tomato products.⁴⁰

At the end of the growing season, Moore followed up with the Presswood family and travelled by train to their county to see the results. Even though her initial messages with the girl were limited by long-distance mail, the family was able to succeed. The family proudly showed the demonstration agent just how successful her instructions had been – they were able to can over five hundred jars of produce! In Virginia Moore’s eyes, however, she was far from done with the Presswood family. Moore was invited to stay in the family’s household for breakfast to celebrate Mary’s success as a young grower and canner. When breakfast was served, she was disappointed with the family’s “yellow, thick, doughy biscuits”.

There were several things I wanted to correct; one was the yellow, thick, 'doughy' biscuits that we had for breakfast. So I made cream of tomato soup, I told Mary that crackers should be served with the soup. I told her to bring me some cold biscuit and I would show her how to make croutons. I mostly wanted to get her interested in making better biscuits. . . I talked to her, but the mother and neighbors were standing around...a biscuit should be thin and thoroughly done. Mary was pleased and tried out my recipe, and her biscuits turned out quite nice.⁴¹

In this moment, a strong-willed and duty-focused agent was placed in a difficult situation. Virginia Moore had to balance her education-based demonstration work with the traditional values of the family. She had to quickly find a way to educate Mary Presswood without discouraging her

⁴⁰ Ibid, 109.

⁴¹ Ibid, 110.

or offending her family. Her fast thinking allowed her to teach the young girl a new and improved recipe for biscuits in a way that did not appear condescending. According to Moore, most of the family appeared impressed with the newer and flakier biscuits. The father, however, seemed disgruntled and commented that he “preferred the thick and yellow ones” that he was used to. Even if the family went back to the old recipe to appease the father of the family, Moore walked away with a sense of accomplishment having helped a young girl in the garden and in the kitchen without overstepping her boundaries. Virginia Moore’s recollection of the Presswood family identifies another barrier that farm women faced when implementing the modern methods and equipment that demonstration agents wished for them to use into their daily lives – a patriarchal society gives the father the last word in household decisions.⁴²

Virginia Moore witnessed the development of the program’s policies as her career as a demonstration agent and pragmatic educator lasted for nearly forty years. As an active agent in this transitional age of progressive reformation, Moore’s influence went beyond the state borders of Tennessee. In 1928, Moore turned her attention to rural women in Florida with a bulletin focused on her specialization of home sanitation. She picked up and moved to the state of Florida to work under state agent H.P. Rolf, the head of Florida demonstration work. Her demonstration research and education showed Florida women the horrors and dangers of contaminated home and farm conditions for the first time. From “manure piles, privies, and wells” to the presence of flies at the kitchen table and during the canning process, Moore’s bulletins increased in popularity due to their provocative nature. Many of her circulars were reprinted for years in *Cooperative Extension Work*

⁴² Sultana, Abeda. "Patriarchy and Women's Subordination: A Theoretical Analysis," *Arts Faculty Journal* (2012), 15-16.

in Agriculture and Home Economics state reports. Her piece “Questions on Home Sanitations to Make You Think,” also known as “Circular No. 987,” was helpful as the state of Florida changed sanitation practices in canning and prepared for new regulations.⁴³

The progressive nature coupled with limited resources within home demonstration work led to highly educated women feeling as if there was a greater benefit than money or social change within the work. Pauline Smith, the agent under McKimmon in North Carolina, had written to her future ex-fiancé Alford that the “social recognition [and the] power to make people recognize” her within her career as an agent had replaced any desire for “home, friends, and recreation.” She went on to proclaim that she could never be divorced from her opportunity to be “of service to people,” and that the work made her feel independent in an educational, financial, and social way.⁴⁴ Practical involvement merged with substantial improvement in the eyes of the agents. Radio speeches, volunteering at demonstration events, and printed bulletins were excellent ways to connect with farming families. Agents had to go above and beyond in their respective fields as the women they worked with were seen through the progress of production.

The University of Florida and the Florida College for Women both expanded and supported higher learning and educational practices for females in the field, perpetuating and advocating for the program they played a crucial role in. Although the University of Florida wouldn’t become co-ed until the 1946-47 school year, demonstration work at women’s colleges allowed female agents to receive higher education in specializations desired by demonstration work. Less than four years

⁴³ Circular No. 987, September 1929, Box 9, Florida Cooperative Extension Service Home Demonstration Records, University of Florida Special Collections, University of Florida Libraries.

⁴⁴ Jones, 130.

after home demonstration officially began in the state of Florida, the state legislature approved an extension system that had common features across the various counties. However, this ‘regionalized’ concept for the extension system did not always flow as smoothly as the legislature had hoped. The three-tiered bureaucratic structure of demonstration led to differences in what was expected from the budget. Local politics intermingled with and interjected itself into the state reforms, and county agents reported to county officials and politicians prior to moving up the chain of command.⁴⁵

Kelly Minor wrote that “negotiation, compromise, and solidarity” were the most essential tools for hard-working demonstration agents like McKimmon, Smith, and Moore.⁴⁶ Demonstration agents served as the face for the front of the business of home extension. As they were far away from research facilities and superiors in the chain of command, they had to rely on their own reputation within their respective rural communities in order to make a difference. Many of these women, as shown with the examples of Pauline Smith and Virginia Moore, worked with what they had and pushed themselves in order to make their reputations among rural families. It was not as simple as giving women educational resources and lists of appliances. It was a constant give-and-take method of working with what resources both the agent and the farm-working women had access to.

A poor, farm mother faced difficulties purchasing a refrigerator or building a chicken coop with the small amount of money that could be spared from other obligations in the family budget. A tenant farmer’s wife found it difficult to repair the draft in their cabin with aesthetically-pleasing

⁴⁵ Uffelman, 62-63.

⁴⁶ Minor, 63.

wallpaper if the crops did not produce enough income to keep the family afloat. In many cases, demonstration agents worked with what resources were at their disposal they had to show some progress with families to continue funding for the program at the state and county level. Some agents became frustrated, and many left the field for better opportunities or marriage. Flexibility was an important quality for demonstration agents if they desired the program to have long-term impacts on rural society – which it ultimately did. This is not to say that any majority of agents were quick to give up, but state reports published at the end of each fiscal year made note of agents who left for various personal reasons.

Due to its inherent three-tiered bureaucratic structure, home demonstration under the umbrella of the Cooperative Extension Service had to “develop standardized evaluation techniques, secure local financial and social backing, and maintain” support from all levels of government – local, regional, and national.⁴⁷ Because of this, agents on the state level were in charge of keeping an eye on the operations within their districts and making sure the program worked as smoothly as possible. With such a responsibility, the educational nature of demonstration work took a backburner to appealing to the political and economic roadblocks that stood between county agents and proper resources. To state agents like C. K. McQuarrie, there existed a fine balance between receiving the support of “bankers and business men” and grabbing the interest of farmers and their wives within “the general public.”⁴⁸

The interest of the general public was necessary for the continuation of the program, and Florida agent C. K. McQuarrie’s reports to Director P. H. Rolfs continue the rhetoric of increased

⁴⁷ Minor, 68.

⁴⁸ McQuarrie, “Report of State Agent” (1915), 19 – 22.

interest and progress in terms of support. In 1915, McQuarrie began his Report of the State Agent with a message exclaiming that the most gratifying part of the job was seeing the increased interest in the program with farmers and their families. A year later, in his 1916 report, he began with a similar message of solidarity between agents and participants of the program. He stated that “this report shows that the interest in farmers’ cooperative demonstration work is being maintained and, in large measurement, increased.”⁴⁹ In fact, without the generation of public interest, there were no long-term effects of the program. In 1916, McQuarrie discussed the staff changes that had occurred among his home demonstration staff. Two had resigned due to “ill health,” one resigned because she was being forced to work far away from home, *five* resigned due to marriage, two were promoted to district agents, two more resigned because they were “unprepared” for the work, and one failed because her county did not fund the project appropriately. Sixteen county agents out of twenty-eight remained throughout the year to continue their demonstration work.⁵⁰

Agents understood that Cooperative Demonstration and Extension work relied on the cooperation of rural families. McQuarrie’s Florida reports specifically focused on agents who were “unprepared” for the work: an agent who did not like working far from home, and one county that failed to make the necessary appropriation for the agency to continue working there. In many cases, demonstration work was not the job for every agent. In North Carolina, state agent McKimmon frequently dealt with agents who were not fit for the job because they were “very slow in making friends” and thus found it hard to network with the community. Kate Hill discussed Edna Trigg, a

⁴⁹ McQuarrie, “Report of State Agent” (1916), 16.

⁵⁰ McQuarrie, C. K. “Report of State Home Demonstration Agent”, in Rolf, P. H., editor *Cooperative Demonstration Work in Agriculture and Home Economics* (University of Florida, 1916), 47. <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00075775/00002/48> Accessed on October 28th, 2018.

Texan home demonstration agent, who found the hardest part of her job to be gaining the trust of the community. The idea of having a priggish outsider come into the community to spread knowledge on canning food or raising a child seemed unneeded and unwanted by the majority of the early Texans who initially participated in the program.⁵¹ According to Kelly Minor, it was hard for the “high ideals” of agents to stay afloat in farm communities that were ultimately “distrustful of strangers toting books which were not the Bible or an encyclopedia” – the two books that were more familiar to farm-working families.⁵²

Edna Trigg was an early trailblazer for home demonstration in Texas and had very little background information to work with to establish her reputation. As a pioneer in the field within the state, she had little to no institutional framework to support her work among rural families. In 1911, she was asked to introduce demonstration work in Milam County through Tomato Clubs so that young girls could learn gardening, canning, and preservation skills. Girls’ Tomato Clubs encouraged participants to learn ways to contribute to the family budget and acquire skills for the domestic life. Trigg was asked to engage in the work due to her extensive educational background as a principal and teacher at a primarily rural school. Although her ability as a demonstration agent was proven by her girls’ exhibits at the 1913 Rockdale fair and the 1914 State Fair of Texas, lack of county funding cancelled the program in Milam County the next year. In 1916, she moved to Denton County to reestablish her career as a demonstration agent.⁵³ As an outsider and a “government woman,” she faced major disadvantages while trying to advance her reputation

⁵¹ Minor, 63.

⁵² Ibid, 61-63.

⁵³ Katie Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas* (San Antonio: Naylor, 1958).

among Denton families. It was hard work, but her friendly personality and “energetic demonstrations of her expertise” eventually allowed her to feel more welcome as she worked.⁵⁴

Agents worked with what they were given. They handled the push of institutional overseers and donators to the program and the pull of compromising and negotiating with the individual women they served. Women accepted and rejected the advice, education, and information provided by home demonstration agents based on their own needs and resources. Although this may have frustrated agents who were already pressed for time, funding, and resources, one thing remains clear: women who participated in the home demonstration programs found themselves in a situation where they were brought into a rapidly expanding market economy. The overall legacy of home demonstration and extension services lay in the groundwork created among the next generation of farm women in Tomato Clubs, state fairs, curbside markets, and at the countless kitchen tables throughout the South. By applying information as it related to their capability and capital, rural, farm women were able to become more active producers and consumers across the American South.

⁵⁴ Lynda Bowers, "Texas' First Home Demonstration Agent," *Texas Agricultural Progress* 17 (Winter 1971).

CHAPTER TWO: *Women as Producers*

Twenty-five years ago, as a little girl, living in a small rural community, I had the privilege of joining a Tomato Club. The Home Agent visited our community and told us how we could grow 1/10 acre of tomatoes and learn to can them. She furnished us with seed and instructions for growing. We were happy about our new enterprise and were very proud to have some one [sic] interested in our efforts, for our agent came to visit our gardens and taught us how to prune and stake our tomatoes. At canning time she came and stayed with us for several days and taught us to use tin cans that sealed with hot soldering irons and tipping coppers. This was our first attempt at canning in tin and wer [sic] were so successfull [sic] that we easily found a market for our surplus. These were sold to the local merchants.⁵⁵

In the summer of 1937, Floridian Ethel Pagett Riddle went on a local radio station to discuss the impact that home demonstration had on her and her community. Worried that her friend Virginia P. Moore “never got to hear” her autobiographical radio talk, she typed the transcripts and sent them to her in a letter on June 26th, 1937. Tomato Clubs were created as a girl’s equivalent to the popular Boys’ Corn Clubs and served to educate young women on ways they could enhance domestic life while adding to the family economy through learned domestic skills. It was through exposure to demonstration activities that Riddle, as a young girl, learned crucial skills such as growing, canning, and sewing. Her story manages to hit many of the points of interest that home demonstration had for young women – from the use of radio shows as a means of delivering information to the impact of home demonstration on the production of goods by women.

⁵⁵ Letter from Ethel Pagett Riddle, June 26, 1937, Box 7, Florida Cooperative Extension Service Home Demonstration Records, University of Florida Special Collections, University of Florida Libraries.

Riddle and her cohorts proved to be hardworking girls, as she and “the other girls and boys of Florida” 4-H and Tomato Clubs were rewarded for their club work with a train ride to Columbia, South Carolina, to participate in demonstration events. The experience rang in her memory as it was her first time on a train and the first time leaving the state of Florida. Riddle recalled her infatuation with a newfangled ‘milking machine’ that was showcased at the fair grounds and wrote that she spent much of her time watching the agents “milk the cows with this machine” thinking about “how it would make the milking so easy.” Another demonstration that interested her was an old fashioned, hand-operated cotton gin which to her seemed so much more inefficient than the new gadgets that were presented at the fair. Afterwards, the girls were given “helpful lectures and lessons in sewing and other farm tasks.”⁵⁶

Riddle wrote that the following day, she and her friends had the honor of meeting the Governor of South Carolina and Miss Virginia P. Moore, then an agent in Tennessee. Little did young Riddle know at the time that Virginia Moore was soon to be the Home Improvement Specialist in Florida, where she later published sanitation and nutrition bulletins and circulars under the supervision of director H.P. Rolf. In her transcripts, Riddle proclaimed that the “first moving pictures ever made of club boys and girls” were made at this event. This shows just how important this event was for demonstration history.⁵⁷

Ethel Pagett Riddle’s experience as a Florida Tomato Club girl at the South Carolina event was important to her own future. She continued her club work after becoming a homemaker herself in 1916 and became a member of the Home Demonstration Club in Walton County, Florida. Her

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

two daughters, to the delight of their mother, also became club members within the same county. Riddle wrote her segment for the radio show while enjoying her “first vacation in twenty-two years” as a guest of the 4-H girls at the Florida State College for Women in Tallahassee in 1937. She concluded her story by saying that she was “getting just as big a thrill out of this trip” as she did some twenty-four years prior.⁵⁸

Undoubtedly, Riddle’s experience in her local Tomato Club led her to resources that she never could have dreamed possible. She became infatuated with the latest farming technologies and demonstration techniques, and many of her ‘first experiences’ came from the trip that rewarded her for her hard work. What is important to note is how home demonstration and extension work, especially in its early years, relied on its influence among the younger generation in order to continue as a successful institution. The Report of the Country Life Commission also noted that the best way to change the farming practices of adults was to engage children in scientific agriculture at school.⁵⁹ Demonstration work continued that line of thinking as a way to boost communal confidence in the program and in agents. The process of setting up home demonstration work for girls at rural schools and community centers was described in report titled *Home Demonstration Division of Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics for the State of Florida*. When home demonstration clubs were first brought into counties across Florida, agents placed an emphasis on younger girls’ work. Demonstration work in counties began with younger

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ *Report of the Country Life Commission: Special Message from the President of the United States Transmitting the Report of the Country Life Commission*, 8-10.

girls so that county agents could gain confidence of older women by working through their daughters.⁶⁰ It was only after this work was filtered towards older women as well.

Just as Texas agent Edna Trigg fought with cautious families and eventually gained the confidence of the Milam and Denton communities through her success with young girls at state fairs, agents in Florida used Tomato Clubs as a way to perpetuate the programs upwards. Tomato Clubs were organized as a win-win system where younger girls grew up learning the new and improved techniques. As older generations saw progress and initiative through their daughters it became easier to ‘infiltrate’ the home life of already established farm houses in rural communities. Participants in Girls’ Tomato Clubs could go to county and state funded community centers that were closely allied with demonstration work or receive visits from agents. With access to demonstration resources and research that had been implemented into the family unit, each following generation had less of an issue with capital, capability, and confidence when it came to demonstration agents. Scientific methods and newer appliances led to more efficient labor, and overtime families were able to improve upon their livelihoods.

Family capital, personal capability, and communal confidence in demonstration work were obstacles that home demonstration agents had to overcome when addressing ways to improve upon rural sanitation, nutrition, and other elements of domestic life. As these new methods often cost money, county communities were often in a position to want evidence as to how it could benefit

⁶⁰ Home Demonstration Division of Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics for the State of Florida, c. 1930-131, Box 1, Folder 5, Florida Cooperative Extension Service Home Demonstration Records, University of Florida Special Collections, University of Florida Libraries.

them to tighten their already shortened budgets. Tomato Clubs were a way to organize the younger generation to ‘get them while they were young’ and show mothers and fathers just how productive and beneficial it was to read the bulletins and circulars and implement the advice offered by demonstration agents. Ethel Pagett Riddle’s 1934 recollection of her youth in a Pensacola-based Tomato Club references two key points: the implication of the radio in promoting the benefits of demonstration work and the importance of farm youth in advancing agricultural modernization.

As a member of her local demonstration club and a guest of Tallahassee’s 4-H society, Riddle told her story to a rural radio audience. The radio, something that was initially frustrating to agents as rural families spent their limited funds on radios before appliances deemed more necessary by the agency, became an important and mainstream way to disseminate information. The Department of Agriculture’s Extension Service adopted radio talk shows as a medium to establish an information-based connection with rural families and opted to broadcast reports alongside publishing circulars, flyers, and bulletins. Riddle’s transcripts describe a tell-all tale of how home demonstration affected the lives of a group of star-eyed young girls. What can be read between the lines is the perpetuation of the institution of home demonstration.⁶¹

When Riddle became a homemaker in her own right, she continued to rely on her local demonstration clubs and gave back to her community through the clubs’ civic centers. The perpetuation of the institution continued as she revealed that her own daughters joined the clubs as young girls and later, when they became homemakers themselves, continued the new family tradition of remaining within demonstration. Five years earlier, in 1932, Florida reported that

⁶¹ Sharpless, 196.

county demonstration agents had adopted radio as a viable technique to communicate with rural families. According to the 1932 report, Florida agents conducted 174 “radio talks” that year alone.⁶² Other federal agencies took advantage of the radio as well. The USDA sent out weather reports and breaking news to disconnected communities throughout the South.⁶³

The perpetuation of home demonstration as an institution created an educational industry for women who, as Riddle stated, “had the privilege” of joining Tomato Clubs and working with demonstration agents and volunteers while growing up. These women became producers who entered the growing market economy while also benefitting their local communities and families through the items they manufactured. The skills they acquired, including the act of marketing one’s self, transcended demonstration work. As stated by Riddle, the Tomato Club girls did such a fine job in Florida that they rarely had problems selling to local merchants. This was not always the case, and some women had to market themselves beyond the boundaries of their own community.

Lu Ann Jones tells the story of a farm wife, Mrs. W. H. Alexander, who learned how to make better profits from her homemade butter through the use of the parcel post and reputable out-of-state connections. Based in Tennessee, Alexander recalled the days before learning to market as unprofitable as her household business was limited to “neighbors and peddlers who came around each week never paying over fifteen cents a pound.”⁶⁴ After convincing her husband to buy a Jersey heifer, Alexander spent time at demonstration clubs learning the craft of butter making. She

⁶² Summary of Accomplishes Through Home Demonstration Work in Florida, 1932, Florida Cooperative Extension Service Home Demonstration Records, University of Florida Special Collections, University of Florida Libraries, 5.

⁶³ Kline, 119.

⁶⁴ Jones, 62.

studied “how to churn, mold, and sell superior butter” and then turned to a close friend in Birmingham, Alabama, to find wealthier clients for her trade. Soon, Alexander was unable to keep up with the demand, even after raising her price to thirty-five cents a pound. She and her husband purchased three more cows and began mailing out “twenty-five pounds of butter every Tuesday morning.”⁶⁵

Alexander was clever at self-marketing and advertising the quality of her product through packaging. According to a column in *The Progressive Farmer*, Alexander sealed each pound of her butter in a pretty and proper box that she had crafted as she believed that “fixing up things” meant brought repeat customers to her business. One Alabama patron wrote to her that they could easily purchase butter for far cheaper a price, but that it would not have been “fixed up” as nicely as the quality butter sold by the Tennessee farm wife.⁶⁶ Smart packaging often encouraged the sale of one woman’s product over another.

The record of Alexander’s butter production illustrates the expanding market economy across the rural South and substantial financial contributions to family budgets made by women. Had her business not been prosperous, a lack of financial and moral support from her husband might have prevented her own innovation. In her own words, Alexander had to beg for the first cow to be purchased for her new endeavor – but once she began bringing in the money her husband had no problem buying *three* additional cows so that his wife could keep up with demand. The impact her sales were having on the family budget must have been worth it. Women contributing to the family budget did not begin with home demonstration, and evidence provided through rural

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ *Progressive Farmer*, February 20, 1915, p. 15

family success before demonstration was enacted in 1914 shows that the framework for women's products were already in motion across the South.

According to Lu Ann Jones, "agrarian progressives who envisioned more prosperous farms and homes sought to harness women's productive enterprise and developed institutional outlets for their goods" in around 1910.⁶⁷ This means rural communities organized women's production on a small scale prior to the government's role in home demonstration and cooperative extension. Once home demonstration became commonplace, these communal outlets for women's products and goods began to adapt to the goals and desires of home agents. Jones states that demonstration agents had pushed for "new standards of cleanliness," and that these new government-style regulations either "assisted" or "thwarted" rural women.⁶⁸

Those who adapted and incorporated these new standards and regulations thrived and had less difficulties selling their products to consumers. As Alexander enhanced the quality of her merchandise, rural woman across the South soon learned that consumers paid attention to the quality of goods and that good quality led to loyal repeat customers. Sanitation and nutrition were also crucial components to home agents and there was no shortage of bulletins, newspaper columns, and radio shows on the topics – both within the home (ie. attractiveness and cleanliness of the household) and for production value (ie. attractiveness and sterilization of the product). In Florida, state agents Flavia Gleason and Virginia P. Moore – a specialist on sanitation herself – published circulars on home sanitation through a series titled *Questions on Living Room To Make You Think*. In each of these circulars, a score card contained rubrics on how women could better

⁶⁷ Jones, 62.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

their home life. In these, home sanitation is described as “no cobwebs or dust on the walls, free of insects, bedbugs and moths, clean everywhere.”^{69 70 71} According to North Carolina demonstration agent Jane Simpson, “beauty ha[d] entered hitherto dreary, uninviting homes, and color is making its cheerful contribution in the shape of paint, curtains, wall paper, slip covers for furniture and pillows.” Simpson argued that the attractiveness of one’s home directly correlated with communal and “neighborly gatherings” that would help solve the problem of isolation in rural society. The sale of such attractive goods also helped the “marketing community”.⁷²

The Progressive Era emphasized public health and cleanliness, so home demonstration pushed for the adoption of better home appliances and sanitation as part of its agenda. Modern water systems are an example of public health revolutionizing the home while adding more work for women to learn. The introduction of modern water systems allowed “taps to replace pumps and hot water heaters to replace kettles” but such new systems gave women new chores in the domestic sphere. As stated by Cowan, women had to “*produce* clean toilets, bathtubs, and sinks” – thus creating new standards and new chores for homemakers in the early twentieth century.⁷³ Standards of cleanliness affected women as both producers and consumers, as what they produced

⁶⁹ Circular No. 927, July 1925, Box 9, Florida Cooperative Extension Service Home Demonstration Records, University of Florida Special Collections, University of Florida Libraries, 4.

⁷⁰ Circular No. 985, April 1929, Box 9, Florida Cooperative Extension Service Home Demonstration Records, University of Florida Special Collections, University of Florida Libraries, 4.

⁷¹ Circular No. 986, September 1929, Box 9 Florida Cooperative Extension Service Home Demonstration Records, University of Florida Special Collections, University of Florida Libraries, 3.

⁷² Jane Simpson, *When We’re Green We Grow: The Story of Home Demonstration Work in North Carolina* (University of North Carolina Press, 1945), 173.

⁷³ Ruth Cowan, *More Work For Mother* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 88-89.

for the market had to conform to market standards and familial life at home had begun to demand more menial labor from homemakers. Home agents counteracted this influx of work by providing more efficient cleaning strategies that reflected the new appliances and standards peddled by the agency.

Sanitation went further than rural homes and found its way to the market as consumers began expecting more out of their farm-made products. In an end of the year state report for North Carolina, Jane Simpson McKimmon reported that the home agent in Transylvania County was requested to serve as an inspector of sorts for the local college. The local college had “refused to purchase butter from anyone until the agent had visited the home, approved the sanitary conditions and demonstrated how to pack butter” properly.⁷⁴ Modernized regulations for products came from the Pure Food and Drug Act, also known as the Wiley Act, which helped establish the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). These regulations created standards for products on the market, and in turn consumer consensus began to use their purchasing power to buy products that conformed to these new standards. If women’s products were going to enter the market economy, they had to conform to the growing consensus on the standards of both the cleanliness and appearance of goods.

The “farm skills” of rural women and the “civic know-how” of demonstration agents found crossroads at the foundations of curb markets.⁷⁵ Curb markets, sometimes referred to as roadside or truck-farming markets, continued the social engineering of home demonstration. To county agents, curb markets were seen as useful tools to lift rural women into the market economy while

⁷⁴ Jones, 62.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 64.

continuing several of the program's goals. By bringing women together to sell produce on a larger scale, the agents believed they were presenting an answer to the 'isolation' of rural society while also 'refining' women through business manners and personal appearance. In 1931, Virginia Sloan, the home demonstration agent for Carteret County, North Carolina, wrote that one woman at the market had a particularly difficult time selling her produce because of how she interacted with customers. The woman plead with customers that she had not sold anything and needed help. After quite a few negative experiences, the woman "changed her pitch." She smiled and asked potential customers if they needed help in making selections. According to Sloan, the woman's change in behavior positively affected her sales and was thus seen as a win by demonstration.⁷⁶

Minoa Uffelman wrote on the experience of Nellie Langley, a Tennessee woman, who had to quit school in order to help her father farm tobacco and keep up the family household after the untimely death of her mother. Sometime after returning home, she married and became a homemaker in her own right. During her marriage, she had a son and a daughter. In the 1950s, a home demonstration agent visited the Langley family and encouraged Nellie to take her surplus snap-beans and eggs to the local curb market. Twice a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays, Langley could be found selling at her little stand in town. The home demonstration agent "provided [her] prices so [that] she would know the market value of her products." She chose to charge the same price as the local grocery stores.⁷⁷

From cleaned hens and processed pork to baked goods made fresh from the pecans harvested from trees in her own backyard, Langley pocketed more money than she ever thought

⁷⁶ Ibid, 67-68.

⁷⁷ Uffelman, 180-181.

possible. “That’s the first real money I ever really had. That’s the way I sent my son to college,”⁷⁸ Langley enthused. Her family changed for the better after the budget was padded by the matriarch’s sales. Even though Langley herself had to give up higher education, her children did not. Her son became a certified public accountant and her daughter became a pharmacist thanks to the money their mother was able to set aside from curbside sales. Nellie herself eventually became an Extension program aide shortly after the death of her husband. For twelve years, she “helped low income families who received commodity food.”⁷⁹ As an individual farm woman, Nellie Langley was able to become a successful producer in a market economy that was linked to agricultural extension. Though she sacrificed her education for her family, her two children graduated from college due to the help that curbside markets and their own mother’s ingenuity provided. As Uffelman wrote, “If Virginia P. Moore were still alive to write her annual report, she would have touted Nellie Langley as proof that Home Demonstration could improve lives.”⁸⁰

As women began adding to their family economies through their entry into the market economy as producers, industries that were traditionally female-oriented began to be noticed by the male figureheads of the families, most notably the lucrative business of chicken and egg production. An article in the May 1939 issue of the *Florida Poultryman* titled “Extension Service Will Celebrate It’s [sic] Silver Anniversary” May 8th” discusses the success of demonstration work in livestock, youth direction, and, in particular, poultry. A segment of the article simply subtitled

⁷⁸ Ibid, 182.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 183.

as “Poultry” discusses a brief history of eggs in the state and serves as evidence as how the industry had its roots in women’s work.

Primarily a woman’s game in 1914, poultry has emerged into the class of big business so far as the farm is concerned. A state poultry agent was employed first in 1916, to work mostly with girls and women. Their work seemed to center around community egg circles, where the group was instructed in better poultry methods and plans were developed to market eggs. A little later special ‘rooster days’ were held when the unfortunate males were sold for chicken pie, thus assuring the production of only infertile eggs during hot weather months. Standardization, improvement of breeds, better feeding and marketing were fostered. With the development of commercial production in the 1920s, poultry associations were formed and still functioning. The Florida National Egg-Laying Test was inaugurated at Chipley in 1926 and has served to keep trap nest records for poultry breeders, demonstrate that high egg production is as possible in Florida as elsewhere, and center attention on the industry. Record keeping and campaigns for the production of healthy chickens have been among more recent activities, as have culling, pox vaccination, sanitation, and problems of turkey production.⁸¹

Prior to and during the early days of home demonstration, poultry was indeed considered an industry for women producers. Poultry, along with dairy, served as a staple industry for women of the household and held a similar social role comparative to “weaving, knitting, darning, quilting, and sewing”. Men were believed to be responsible for the cash crops while women were placed in charge of “raising food for consumption” for the household. The interest in Tomato Clubs and other canning clubs for women came from a necessary aspect of these industries as “food not consumed immediately” had to have been preserved for future use. The idea of selling the surplus of these cans came from practicality and the push of the growing market economy.⁸²

⁸¹ “Extension Service Will Celebrate Its Silver Anniversary.” *The Florida Poultryman*, May 8, 1939, 9-11.

⁸² Uffelman, 16-17.

To some men, working with chicken and eggs was far too degrading and not financially stable enough to trouble with – let alone dedicate a farmhouse to its needs. Farms often used chicken and chicken byproducts to feed the family, and only a small percentage was sent off to the market to be used as a method of bartering for candies and other small manufactured items. Progressive movements across the South alongside home demonstration realized the potential eggs and poultry could have on the market, and extension work in the South had pushed for the development of poultry work on a family level.

The growing success and value in poultry work were evident by the 1920s. Farmers had embraced the new source of income that derived from women’s “egg money” and recognized the rewards that, on occasion competed with industries of farm life.⁸³ In 1926, nutrition work established by demonstration agents noted the link between “the gardening, dairying, and poultry work with the family table.”⁸⁴ That same year, the director of Florida extension reported that poultry production increased thanks in part to county and home demonstration agents who were “giving more encouragement” to families in the rural, southern-most part of the state.⁸⁵ Stories similar to that of Mrs. W. H. Alexander appeared the columns of magazines such as *The Progressive Farmer* and *The Florida Poultryman*.

⁸³ Jones, 90-91.

⁸⁴ Summarized Report of 25 Years Food Nutrition and Health Work Agricultural Extension Service, 1939, Box 7, Florida Cooperative Extension Service Home Demonstration Records, University of Florida Special Collections, University of Florida Libraries.

⁸⁵ Report of the Director of Extension State of Florida, 1926, Box 1, Florida Cooperative Extension Service Home Demonstration Records, University of Florida Special Collections, University of Florida Libraries, 11.

A decade later, an outline titled *The Florida Home Demonstration Work Program for 1937* identified the development of home poultry as a surefire way to “improve the family nutrition” while also “increasing the family income,” encouraging family health while also targeting the family budget. Home demonstration’s goals were often double-sided in a sense where they desired to help families become healthier or more efficient while also incorporating them into the market economy. The previous year, in 1936, the University of Florida’s College of Agriculture expanded its poultry breeding and research plant in order to further both “research and teaching” of poultry work for the College of Agriculture, the Extension Service, and the Florida Experiment Station. The amount of money coming from poultry and eggs in the state of Florida was estimated to be \$174,499.68 at the time of the enlargement – roughly over three million dollars today.⁸⁶ The land grant college and experiment station saw the value in poultry work.

Once poultry became established as a viable and respectable way to increase farm income, the more traditional male opinion towards the industry began to change. What had once been women’s “egg money” soon evolved into an industry. Poultry products, in time, added “billions of dollars to the farm economy of the South” and yet it began with farm women who had the capability, capital, and confidence through demonstration to listen to the encouragement of their local agents and invest into ways to increase the family income.⁸⁷

Southern families began to see the value in poultry thanks in part to a failing economy for male-dominated industries such as tobacco and corn throughout the early-to-mid 1930s. A “topsy-turvy economy” came out of the depression in North Carolina in which farm-wives “maintained

⁸⁶ “Poultry Research Plant at College Will Be Enlarged.” *The Florida Poultryman*, May 1936, 11.

⁸⁷ Jones, 83.

farms and families” with their chickens and eggs. In 1931, a farm agent in Carteret County, North Carolina, reported that a tenant woman “paid the family fertilizer bill and grocery bill for her husband to produce five cent tobacco” with her own turkey sales.⁸⁸ In Durham County, agents reported on a Mrs. E. A. Perry who was making “three times as much money from her chickens” as her husband made from his tobacco. In North Carolina agent W. I. Smith’s 1931 *County Agent Report*, it was conveyed that “both Mr. and Mrs. Perry will raise chickens next year.”⁸⁹ Mrs. E. A. Perry’s luck with poultry was not an isolated case of the family budget relying on ‘women’s work’ in the South. Between 1933 and 1938, the number of poultry farms in the state of Florida alone went from 56,000 to 62,000.⁹⁰

During the Great Depression, cash crops became less profitable for poor, rural families. Poultry offered food on the table at breakfast among other solid benefits and transcended the domestic sphere into the market economy. The typical daily uses of poultry byproducts are described by Rebecca Sharpless in her book on Texas farm women. “Families saved feathers, especially from geese,” Sharpless wrote, “for making pillows and feather beds and for sale.”⁹¹ The meat and eggs from poultry were just as important. Chickens were deemed “small, inexpensive, easy to feed, and highly portable,” making them a great choice for any family regardless of financial status.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 98.

⁸⁹ W. I. Smith, County Agent Annual Report for Durnham County, 1931, Box 1, Florida Cooperative Extension Service Home Demonstration Records, University of Florida Special Collections, University of Florida Libraries, 57.

⁹⁰ “Florida Poultry Industry is Developing Rapidly.” *The Florida Poultryman*, June 1939, 3.

⁹¹ Sharpless, 82-83.

Capital and capability worked in favor of poultry for women of the household, and after one or two bad seasons the man of the household often realized the potential and expanded his wife's production.⁹² Sharpless also targeted the nutrition of the typical "prairie families" that often settled for pork as their only source of meat. Chickens and chicken eggs added a new "high-quality protein" to the meal that certainly provided more to home consumption. Any surplus that could not have been eaten in time by the family could easily had been used for "cash sales or trade," expanding the family budget and creating a cycle in which families placed more emphasis on it in order to increase the budget even further.⁹³

In terms of marketing, magazine references to poultry as a womanly industry began to fade as men entered the market for chickens and eggs. As Uffelman noted, "assumptions of female control of poultry began to disappear" as mixed messages towards the industry turned into male-dominated articles and journals such as the *Florida Poultryman*. Uffelman wrote that "the goal of maximum efficiency as preached by the home demonstration agent was gospel. However, consumerism appeared through increased advertising."⁹⁴ To the *Progressive Farmer* and other agricultural journals, the ideal farm wife involved herself in farm production *and* household labor, and the 'womanly nature' of poultry began to fade as more husbands found their way into the business of producing chickens and eggs, thanks in part to demonstration work and clear-cut profits during the late 1920s and the 1930s.

⁹² Ibid, 131.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Uffelman, 91-92.

Some women such as Ethel Pagett Riddle of Florida found themselves brought up in the system that home demonstration agents were attempting to create while other women such as Mrs. W. H. Alexander of Tennessee and Mrs. E. A. Perry of North Carolina went above and beyond the expectations of demonstration agents through hard-work, dedication, and of course the Three C's of capital, capability, and confidence. Women of the rural South, particularly those who had the ability to establish themselves in a growing market, found themselves learning from the circulars published through demonstration work. It should be mentioned that "learning" is different than "applying" said information in the way that agents would hope. Not every woman could follow the circular score-cards for sanitation or purchase the high-end appliances on agents' lists, but they could incorporate information in ways that were suitable for their own situation through her own experiences. Women producers of the South were different – each having her own obstacles: lack of capital, lack of capability, and lack of confidence in the information provided by home demonstration.

The push and pull factors between women of the South and county agents certainly had attractive pros and disabling cons. From Lu Ann Jones' perspective, regulations certainly thwarted women whom were either unable or unwilling to work with demonstration standards of cleanliness and appearance of products.⁹⁵ The market economy, however, did not feel pity for women who could not provide products that worked with the growing consumer consensus on standards. Women's curbside markets, either established or sponsored by home demonstration agents, sought to encourage women to establish themselves as "proper" producers while also giving them a place

⁹⁵ Jones, 62-63.

to sell their products – thus introducing them to the rapidly expanding market economy and sewing the disconnect between rural and urban methods of sales.

CHAPTER THREE: Women as Consumers

Get out of the rut! The average housewife has so many, many things to engage her attention that it is not surprising that she sometimes gets into a rut. But there really isn't any excuse for it in this day of radio, free recipe books, women's pages in the magazines and newspapers, county demonstration agents, and cooking classes. By just a few minutes of daily reading, any housewife with even a moderate income can have meals that will be a constant delight. [...] Many housewives, myself included, are confirmed coupon savers. And why not! If the manufacturers want to use their advertising budget for premiums, why not take advantage of them? Coupons come on cream, margarine, soap, washing powders, matches, and what not. They do not cost anything, and many of the premiums are really lovely.⁹⁶

Twentieth century consumerism developed as numerous "social groups" began working with each other. According to David Blanke's article "Consumer Choice, Agency, and New Directions in Rural History" in the journal *Agricultural History*, "modern consumerism exists by choice: preferences are made daily by market providers, designers, and manufacturers, as well as advertisers, distributors, and of course, individual consumers."⁹⁷ These examples are some of many "social groups" that played key roles in pushing consumerism into rural society. Numerous organizations came together to form various "social groups" that had stakes in bringing modernization to the rural South. Home demonstration agents, the Cooperative Extension Service, agricultural magazines such as *The Progressive Farmer*, and large-scale corporations such as the Tennessee Valley Authority exist as evidence of such institutions that advertised new appliances and techniques to women across the South.⁹⁸ Scholars Trevor Pinch, Wiebe Bijker, and Ruth

⁹⁶ Payne, Helen. "The Homemakers Corner." *The Florida Poultryman*, January 1939, 6.

⁹⁷ Blanke, David. "Consumer Choice, Agency, and New Directions in Rural History." *Agricultural History* 81, no. 2 (2007): 182.

⁹⁸ Morris, 135.

Cowan write extensively on these social groups and how they worked together to create the “consumption junction.” Ruth Cowan identifies the “consumption junction” as being “the time and place at which the consumers make choices between competing technologies.”⁹⁹¹⁰⁰

Blanke identified the relationship between urban institutions and rural consumers through what he defines as “four periods of consumerism” that led up to the solidified twentieth-century consumerism. Each new period was a culmination of what the previous periods had brought to the table beforehand. The third period, which he wrote began at the end of the Civil War and lasted through the onset of the Roaring Twenties, brought forth a new “consumer republic” through industrial revolutions pertaining to “technological, transportation, manufacturing, credit, and marketing infrastructure maturation.”¹⁰¹ Male-dominated farming work improved through the invention and adoption of new mechanized tools that came out of this era. New technologies in the form of tractors were demonstrated by farm agents as being more efficient for the farmers while allowing them to generate more profit. The adoption of these technologies was not made overnight, but the impact was noticeable to farmers that had the capital and capability to make the switch.

On the other hand, rural women “faced a double responsibility” in the rural South. They were expected to help out with farm labor while also tending to the family homestead. Farm tasks such as gardening, poultry, and dairy were generally assigned to women. These tasks helped feed

⁹⁹ Ibid, 12-13.

¹⁰⁰ Ruth Schwartz Cowan, “The Consumption Junction: A Proposal for Research Strategies in the Sociology of Technology,” Wiebe E. Bijker, Thomas P. Hughes, and Trevor Pinch, eds., *The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 263.

¹⁰¹ Blanke, 185-187.

the family while also generating cash for the family economy. When these tasks were compared to household chores like cooking and cleaning that generally “generated no income,” farm labor came out on top and was viewed as more profitable and valuable for rural families. A typical rural family did not have the budget to adopt every advancement that was advertised to them, so they would often buy what their capital and capability could work best with. For most families in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, buying new equipment for the farm proved to be a useful investment. “For this reason,” according to Morris, “farm families first purchased technologies such as tractors as opposed to washing machines.”¹⁰² Until major social groups began to see women’s household needs and took reports on women’s daily lives into consideration, the woman of the house was left behind as the farm began to modernize.

In 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt authorized the creation of the Commission on Country Life to write an extensive report on the “general, economic, social, educational, and sanitary conditions of the open country.”¹⁰³ It was through this report that the federal government witnessed the isolation and monotony that the typical woman worked through on a daily basis. Unlike the farm, which had been developing “helping tools [for] outdoor work,” women’s daily chores lacked the modernized conveniences and standards of efficiency.¹⁰⁴ Even with the predicament that rural women found themselves in, they were far from ignorant when it came to their situation. Mail-order catalogs from companies like Sears and print advertisements in

¹⁰² Morris, 5-6.

¹⁰³ Theodore Roosevelt to Henry Wallace, 9 November 1908, in *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, Vol. 6, 1338-1340; William L. Bowers, *The Country Life Movement in America, 1900-1920* (Port Washington, New York; National University Publications, Kennikat Press, 1974), 43.

¹⁰⁴ Morris, 3-4.

agricultural magazines like *The Florida Poultryman* and *The Progressive Farmer* served as modern methods of presenting urban lifestyles to rural environments. Mail-order catalogues took advantage of rural free delivery and created a new method for rural families to adopt consumerism in a way that worked for their living arrangements. One of the aforementioned problems perceived by Roosevelt's Commission on Country Life had been the isolation of rural families, and mail-order catalogues saw a way inside rural households without burdening the people that lived inside them.

Until rural free delivery became popularized, families living out in the country had to make special accommodations in order to pick up their mail. Many families went into town to visit urbanized post offices in order to pick up their mail or paid private companies an exorbitant fee to pick it up for them. By the turn of the century, the United States Post Office expanded its service into the countryside through the use of petitions sent in to congress. Around the same time, companies like Sears took advantage of the new readily accessible consumer base in rural communities through the use of mail-order catalogues. Rural free delivery saved families a trip into town and allowed for them to receive products on their doorstep. The introduction of rural free delivery and mail-order catalogs forced the hand of companies that feared that they were losing business to more convenient avenues for consumerism.

The Ladies' Rest Room Movement came from this urbanized desire to compete with rural free delivery and the impact that the Sears catalogue had on twentieth-century shopping habits. Ladies' rest rooms were placed in public buildings to encourage women to come into town to do

their shopping.¹⁰⁵ Previously, women had turned to peddlers rather than intown corner-stores due to the convenience of not being able to stay home. Going into town required quite a bit of work on the woman's behalf, especially if they were bringing along the kids. These rooms existed as public spaces where women could take breaks from shopping but also had additional benefits that drew women in.

These rooms were conveniently located inside retail stores, civic buildings like court rooms, community buildings like local demonstration buildings, banks, and theatres. In many cases, such as with banks, urban businesses opened ladies' rest rooms as a way to entice rural families to bring the whole family along and do business at that particular branch. These rooms became critical to the expansion of consumerism among women throughout the twenties and thirties.¹⁰⁶ In a sense, they became popularized to facilitate people in urbanized environments to combat the convenience of catalogues. While inside these rest rooms, women could flip through the latest edition of the Sears catalogue or the local agricultural newspapers. As they became indulged with articles and advertisements dedicated towards appliances, many women were also introduced to electricity and other urban wonders. The interactions that women had with articles and advertisements targeted directly towards their own needs helped establish women as a consumer base that was one to be reckoned with. Some magazines were quick to pick up on this new source of income.

¹⁰⁵ Britanik, 73-74.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 6-8.

The Progressive Farmer was quick to realize the potential market in women and set aside roughly a third of the magazine specifically dedicated to them in as early as 1910.¹⁰⁷ The magazine's "Home Department" used relatable and knowledgeable women to present and provide domestic education to female readers. According to Minoa Dawn Uffelman in her dissertation "Rite thorny places to go thro," this was the first time that someone trained and educated in domestic science was put in charge of a major newspaper's women's division.¹⁰⁸ In 1913, the magazine hired its "first full time woman editor," Mrs. W. N. Hunt, who targeted the problem isolation in rural society by encouraging women to join Home Demonstration and Tomato Clubs in order to "exchange knowledge and support."¹⁰⁹ Under the direction of Mrs. W. N. Hunt, the "Home Department" was rebranded as the "Progressive Farmer and Farm Women" in 1923. The title change emphasized "the attention [women like Hunt] were giving to the farm family and the farm home and in doing so help [the magazine] develop more consumer advertising."¹¹⁰

Trained experts like Hunt distributed advice, information, and product placements that helped female readers be better and more efficient in the home. Women identified with these women writers and editors, and they had the formal education (often through demonstration) that allowed them to back up their articles and encourage the adoption of new techniques and appliances. Although *The Progressive Farmer* was not owned or operated by demonstration agents, the magazine sympathized with agents and shared several of the institution's goals for women in the South. The "Home Department" became so popular that it eventually received a

¹⁰⁷ Morris, 17.

¹⁰⁸ Uffelman, 67-69.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 69.

¹¹⁰ Morris, 23-25.

colored front page and expanded to such a length that it was recognized as a magazine within a magazine. *The Progressive Farmer* also used clever marketing strategies to pair advertisements with seemingly related articles. For instance, an article about a woman discussing the quality of her garden soil could have shared a page with an advertisement for a branded fertilizer without any correlation between the two.

Morris discussed the marketing strategies of *The Progressive Farmer* in her 2004 dissertation. In order to present the most relevant information to rural families across the South, the magazine published various editions based on the region readers were located in. According to Morris, the Mississippi Valley Edition of *The Progressive Farmer* “covered Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana.”¹¹¹ The editors of the agricultural magazine saw these three states as similar in growing season and rural needs. To many families, *The Progressive Farmer* and other agriculture magazines were the easiest method of acquiring agricultural education and being introduced to new ideas like innovations such as electric appliances. Looking at how *The Progressive Farmer* showcased urban life, it becomes clear that the magazine encouraged the use of modern appliances as a way to advertise a specific way of life.

Women were aware of the new, urban-styled methods of consumerism and how they were being advertised to them. For some time, however, rural families did very little with the advertisements presented to them as they did not have the capital or capability of adopting such new appliances, many of which ran on electricity. When compared to their super consumer urban counterparts, farm women were far more careful with their consumer choices and had to work with

¹¹¹ Ibid, 17.

what they had. Although this was frustrating to demonstration agents at first, it soon became clear that obstacles transcended the individual homestead.

Electricity became an obstacle for rural families and demonstration agents to overcome through the introduction of these appliances. Many of the appliances and techniques presented through these methods required electricity which, throughout most of the South, took some time to reach rural communities. Monetary struggles prevented women from acquiring early domestic technology. Agricultural magazines, particularly *The Progressive Farmer*, knew that women had interacted with electricity through ladies' rest rooms and trips into town but had difficulties rallying cooperatives to bring electricity out to their own homes. Major utility companies did not initially see the need to "pay the \$2,000 per mile cost to run high wires" into isolated, rural communities in the South.¹¹² That did not stop *The Progressive Farmer* from advertising and invoking the dreams of urbanization among rural families.

In November 1936, *The Progressive Farmer* published an article titled "Electricity, the New Farm Hand." This article introduced rural women to the household of Mr. and Mrs. J. M. Hughes of Sterling, Virginia "just outside the nation's capital on the REA Electric Farm." Air-conditioning, a dishwasher, a refrigerator, and sufficient lighting were some of the many modern appliances that the article described as great additions the Hughes family had in their household. It was specifically mentioned that sufficient lighting allowed the family to be more productive at night. Efficiency and productivity were used as reasons to install something as economically-simple as *lighting* into the home. At the time, editors of the magazine knew that "this life would

¹¹² Ibid, 6.

be unobtainable to most of Mississippi's rural families", but it did provide rural families an image of modernization and something "to strive" for. By writing about the Hughes' modernized farm, *The Progressive Farmer* painted a picture of the future for all of the rural South to see. It was advertising certain products and appliances while also advertising a more urbanized, consumerist way of life.¹¹³

Demonstration agents and agricultural newspapers were quick to realize that electricity was a major obstacle that separated urban and rural society, as was the federal government. Women were asking questions about electricity at local demonstration meetings, but demonstration agents found themselves untrained and unknowledgeable in the new utilities that their patrons were interested in. In 1933, President Franklin Roosevelt asked Congress to create legislation that would allow for the birth of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). A federally owned corporation, the TVA embodied the idea of public ownership of utilities like hydroelectric power facilities. One of the major goals of the TVA was to "modernize" the Tennessee Valley region through the development and introduction of new farming strategies, fertilizers, and productive appliances through generated electricity. The Tennessee Valley Authority and the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) sold electricity to cooperatives in rural communities. These cooperatives allowed rural users to be both users and builders in the electrification process. The rural consumers in these communities had a say in the profits and investments of these cooperatives.¹¹⁴

The Tennessee Valley Authority and Rural Electrification Administration altered the way that demonstration interacted with women. Home Demonstration agents found that they knew

¹¹³ Ibid, 15-16.

¹¹⁴ Kline, 137-139.

about as much on the subject of electricity as the families they were helping, and new educational opportunities began to “teach the teachers.” Tennessee Valley Authority administrators quickly established training rooms for demonstration agents and home economics professors at the University of Tennessee. The resources and training offered at this laboratory became so valuable that agents from other states like Mississippi requested to have their own. In 1935, the TVA created a training room on the Mississippi State College’s Starkville campus. Each of these training facilities contained “two kitchens and one laundry, each using a different type of wiring.”¹¹⁵ The following year in 1936, Mississippi State College and the Tennessee Valley Authority agreed to the “Tennessee Valley Authority Contract for Cooperative Agricultural Research and Demonstration Work” which promoted the use of electricity in rural areas through the instruction of “wiring, lighting, appliances for the farm and house, and community refrigeration.”¹¹⁶ The profession of home economics began to intertwine with electrification as new appliances and techniques were introduced to demonstration agents in rural communities. In 1935, North Carolina state demonstration agent Jane Simpson was appointed to the first Rural Electrification Committee which helped introduce electrical appliances into rural homes while also overseeing the installment and training of said tools. Simpson recalled seeing “women attaching an electric iron, lights, and the refrigerator or churn to one small inadequate drop cord” and receiving complaints from dissatisfied women who did not understand why none of their new appliances were running properly.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Morris, 75-79.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 74.

¹¹⁷ Simpson, 256.

Not all states were quick to train agents and families. Mississippi was considered “the least electrified state in the nation” in the thirties, and it remained the least electrified state through the following decade despite the progress done by the power programs initiated by Roosevelt and the state colleges.¹¹⁸ This progress was still significant and crucial to the “modernization” of rural areas in the state. In Central Texas, the process was even slower. The Rural Electrification Administration was slow to enter the Blacklands despite congressional support from Texan politician Sam Rayburn. The utilities were present, but the information was not properly utilized as agents lacked the “teaching” element that was available in states such as Tennessee and Mississippi. On the eve of World War II, roughly 76% of rural homes in Bell County, Texas still *lacked* electricity. In comparison, nearly 100% of urban dwellers had access to electricity and, in response, electrical appliances.¹¹⁹

Rural women were continuously subject to comparison with their urban counterparts, however. Demonstration agents and authorities from agencies such as the TVA had encouraged women to modernize through the adoption of new home appliances and techniques. Agricultural magazines shared similar goals with demonstration, and published ads and self-help columns promoting an urban lifestyle. Having “the same pleasures of city folk” became a common theme in advertisements during the early-to-mid twentieth century. Rural women were encouraged by advertisements in newspapers and magazines to become more like their less isolated, more modernized cousins. New consumer values and changing social roles were used within the market to help blur the line between rural and urban women. By making rural women more urban, they

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 132.

¹¹⁹ Sharpless, 90.

fundamentally became more consumerist. Only two decades prior, industries like poultry and egg production were widely considered women's work. Such production was seen as degrading for men to be a part of throughout the previous century. Only after the family pocket change became a staple in the family economy did men realize the potential that women's work had to offer, and once they entered these industries they promptly took them over.

Industries once considered "women's work" became joint-endeavors between husband and wife once they began making money. An example of this comes from Mr. and Mrs. E. A. Perry of North Carolina. The demonstration agent in Durham County reported that once Mrs. Perry began making more money than her husband's tobacco crop, her husband abandoned the tobacco industry to turn his attention to poultry. Agent W. I. Smith reported that "both Mr. and Mrs. Perry will raise chickens next year [1932]." As new industries began replacing family chores, men found themselves with more free time than ever before. As men's work became more streamlined in modern manufacturing, the chores that had been associated with them became a thing of the past.

For women, the opposite occurred. Stoves and other appliances had been advertised by agricultural magazines and demonstration bulletins as being necessary for a modernized rural home. As electricity became more and more available, women began adopting these appliances as they were advertised to make chores easier. The shift from hearth to stove allowed for multitasking when cooking. Different kinds of cooking such as "fast boiling, slow simmering, and baking" were demonstrated as possible to accomplish at the same time, allowing for homemakers to get more done at once.¹²⁰ As cooking became more complex, the role of the woman outside the household

¹²⁰ Cowan, 62.

began to diminish. “Women’s activities became less varied” as these new appliances were marketed as time-saving. Not only were women expected to keep up with the more varied methods of cooking, they were also expected to clean the stove at the end of each day to avoid cracks and rust. More complex dishes and the fact that more dishes could be prepared at the same time required women to clean more plates and silverware. Stoves also required women to “gauge the level of heat through trial and error.”¹²¹ As stated by Cowan, “cleaning, like cooking, was one of the jobs that was stereotypically allocated to women” in the household. As women picked up more chores around the house, the time that they had once spent helping their husbands outside and expanding their influence as producers disappeared.

Women were prescribed pre-determined social roles, and twentieth-century advertisements directed towards women recognized the needs and wants of these traditional feminine roles – those of housekeepers, wives, and mothers. As women were brought into the market economy as producers to balance or increase the family budget, women found new gateways into consumerism through targeted advertisements and columns that addressed their needs. Consumerism grew out of the influence of successful marketing tactics done both in person and in print. This new role for women added to the push and pull of home demonstration as technology on both the farm and within the home began to change. Technology and other scientific advances led home demonstration agents to recommend new methods to encourage “women to cook and clean with greater frequency and more attention in detail.”¹²² Self-help columns like *The Florida*

¹²¹ Sharpless, Rebecca. *Cooking in Other Womens Kitchens: Domestic Workers in the South, 1865-1960*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.)

¹²² Lindsey Turnbull, “White and Black Womanhoods and Their Representations in 1920s American Advertising,” (MA thesis, University of Central Florida, 2012), 137.

Poultryman's "The Homemakers [sic] Corner" also aimed to guide women into their new consumerist roles.

In January of 1939, *The Florida Poultryman* launched its debut of "The Homemakers Corner" which served as an advice column for the magazine's "feminine readers" and offered tips on cooking, cleaning, and consumerism.¹²³ Mrs. Helen Carr Payne, a self-described "everyday woman" who participated in the targeted marketing of female readers of *The Florida Poultryman*, wrote suggestions on recipes, cleaning habits, gardening, and other odds and ends centered around housework. Thanks in part to the growing influence and accessibility of "radio, free recipe books, women's pages in the magazines and newspapers, county demonstration agents, and cooking classes," women were able to include themselves into the expanding market economy and develop as rural consumers.¹²⁴ These methods of connecting with rural families and readers helped the spread of information that home demonstration and producers alike benefited from as institutions. These articles encouraged women to work hard as homemakers and to gain satisfaction from what they did for the family, essentially creating a social role where the woman is dependent on their function within the house.

These themes of womanhood in the rural South are present within advertisements and advice columns for feminine readers. Once women were given these new expectations through the social roles applied to them, men were free to take over the now-lucrative industries that had once been considered women's work. By making rural women more urban, they fundamentally became more of a consumer base which drastically affected the market economy. Although poultry and

¹²³ "Just Between Us." *The Florida Poultryman*, January 1939, 4.

¹²⁴ Payne, Helen. "The Homemakers Corner." *The Florida Poultryman*, January 1939, 6.

egg production had been women's work less than two decades prior, newspapers such as *The Florida Poultryman* became big players in educating and advertising poultry-relating products in rural communities. Although these magazines had self-help columns for "feminine readers", many were not the centerpiece to the foundation of the papers and only came as an afterthought. Helen Carr Payne's aforementioned "The Homemakers Corner" was limited to just that – a corner of a page in the monthly, twenty-plus page magazine.

From the very first issue of "The Homemakers Corner" in 1939, the advice focused on women as consumers. When discussing recipes, Payne would make sure to recommend specific brands that she felt worked best. Although *The Florida Poultryman* was filled with paid advertisements that helped fund the magazine, it is unclear if Payne genuinely preferred the recommended brands or if the magazine was paid to write about them. If specific brand names were not being recognized, Payne's tips and tricks often swayed purchasing decisions based on marketing techniques such as couponing.

Get out of the rut! The average housewife has so many, many things to engage her attention that it is not surprising that she sometimes gets into a rut. But there really isn't any excuse for it in this day of radio, free recipe books, women's pages in the magazines and newspapers, county demonstration agents, and cooking classes. By just a few minutes of daily reading, any housewife with even a moderate income can have meals that will be a constant delight. [...] Many housewives, myself included, are confirmed coupon savers. And why not! If the manufacturers want to use their advertising budget for premiums, why not take advantage of them? Coupons come on cream, margarine, soap, washing powders, matches, and what not. They do not cost anything, and many of the premiums are really lovely.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Ibid.

Just as home demonstration agents printed circulars, ran articles, and took advantage of radio shows to spread the word and boost confidence in their programs, companies advertised their products in ways to produce brand loyalists and repeat customers. Companies encouraged repeat buyers through the use of coupons and other premiums. Many print advertisements for goods such as chick feed informed readers to clip out the ad and mail it in as a coupon. Payne spent an entire section of her inaugural column of “The Homemakers Corner” discussing the art of couponing and how proper housewives should take advantage of premiums provided by manufacturers and other producers. “If the manufacturers want to use their advertising budget for premiums, why not take advantage of them?” asked Payne before listing off samples of products that occasionally came with coupons for thrifty consumers. She then turned to a more anecdotal story to connect with her readers. She wrote that when her son visited home on a break from college, he asked her if he could throw away an empty paper carton as he knew his mother was not able to “throw away anything [...], for fear of letting a coupon get away.”¹²⁶

These anecdotal stories are peppered throughout later issues of “The Homemakers Corner” and are written alongside recipes, suggestions, and other meaningful advice to connect with readers. In a sense, Helen Carr Payne advertised herself as a connectable expert so that her column gained as many readers as possible. After giving a recipe for vegetable croquettes and poinsettia salad, discussing the importance of couponing, and giving a brief suggestion for improving homemade pie crusts, Payne ended her first article by asking women to write in suggestions on what they wanted more information on. “We hope you like our new department, ladies,” she wrote,

¹²⁶ Ibid.

“but if you don’t, please don’t tell the editor, but drop us a hint as to what you do like. WE AIM TO PLEASE.”¹²⁷ Future editions of the column were centered around invitations for “suggestions and criticisms, and letters addressed to” herself to connect with readers on a personal level.¹²⁸ She aimed to present her column as one based on the interests of homemakers who benefited the most from reading about and implementing her tips and tricks in their households.

The April 1940 edition of “The Homemakers Corner” was dedicated to the importance of spring cleaning, which fell under the purview of wives. In April 1940, Mrs. Payne discussed one of the stereotypical domestic chores that women supposedly adored:

Spring is and always has been house-cleaning time, lots of hard work, but women adore it. Nothing gives a woman as much real satisfaction in life as turning all the dresser drawers and cupboards upside down, and wearing herself completely out scrubbing and mopping. The house even has a scrubbed and shining smell after the ordeal, and if you have to spend the next week in bed recuperating, it is worth it.¹²⁹

By stating that “women adore” spring cleaning and going as far to encourage women to wear themselves down even “if [they] have to spend the next week in bed recuperating,” Mrs. Payne directly correlated housewives’ self-worth and satisfaction to productivity within the home.¹³⁰ Articles similar to this were published alongside more positive advice concerning thrifty shopping tips, recipes, and advertisements featuring items that women were to find helpful in their day to day lives. Advice concerning cleaning and overall sanitation of the house in these articles are very similar to the goals of score cards published through demonstration circulars. These

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ “Just Between Us.” *The Florida Poultryman*, March 1939, 15.

¹²⁹ Payne, Helen. “The Homemakers Corner.” *The Florida Poultryman and Stockman*, April 1940, 8.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

columns also introduced name-brands that women were encouraged to adopt into the household due to quality, efficiency through couponing, and personal preferences.

Magazines like *The Progressive Farmer* and *The Florida Poultryman* were full of product placements to keep the magazines afloat and fund printing costs. Product placements and industry ads were marketed towards women and men alike through these newspapers and magazines. According to an article in the May 1940 edition of *The Florida Poultryman* titled “Are Eggs Bought or Sold?,” eggs were considered by industry professionals to be *bought by* rather than *sold to* the public. The marketing of eggs differed from textile bags and farm equipment through this behavior. “It is true that the individual producer shops around and does as good a job as possible to get the maximum the market affords for his eggs,” the article stated, “but this contributes little or nothing to selling the housewife the idea of buying more eggs.”¹³¹ As more products such as oatmeal, corn, and trademarked cereals poured into the market, farming magazines began to worry that the egg was “gradually being shoved into the background as a breakfast food” and that consumers were picking simpler and more filling foods due to new marketing materials. To combat this, the World’s Poultry Congress voted to “organize a planning committee” to capitalize upon poultry publicity through the use of a state-represented ‘nest egg.’¹³²

The ‘nest egg,’ aptly named, was made from the surplus funds of the Congress and served to “stimulate greater consumption of eggs” without blowing the marketing budget for the industry itself. Ideas for egg-consumption campaigns included the attention-getting phrases “Eat Eggs for

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

Vitality” and ‘Eat Eggs for Health.’”¹³³ This campaign for egg consumption served as a form of advertisement for the product on both paper and in demonstration work. One of the marketing ideas to utilize the ‘nest egg’ in a way to increase egg consumption presented by *The Florida Poultryman* was as follows:

Stage egg educational days or weeks in the public schools at regular intervals, and utilize the services of domestic science teachers and home demonstration agents in telling and showing the school children the food value of eggs and their necessity in the diet. Arrange to carry similar messages on placards, charts, and vocally to women’s clubs throughout the state.¹³⁴

The plan to use public schools to educate school children continued the bottom-up style of changing home and farm life through the next generation. The decades-old Report of the Country Life Commission had noted that the best way to change an adult mindset was to engage their children with scientific research at the school-level. Demonstration agents and agricultural industries had adopted that mentality and continued it with full-strength well into the mid-twentieth century. Home demonstration agents were called upon to encourage the purchase and consumption of eggs in the state of Florida, creating a bridge between the whims of the market economy and housewives in rural communities. The push and pull factors of home demonstration existed on this level of consumption as families certainly had the purchasing power as consumers. If the ‘better deal’ was with another product and demonstration’s efforts to persuade them otherwise were not strong enough, then families went with what bettered their wallet and their effectiveness.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

Eggs were up against agricultural commodities from new-age manufacturers. “Oatmeal, corn, wheat and rice flakes, and a dozen or more other kinds of trademarked cereals” had aggressively marketed themselves as the staple for the American breakfast. To stay competitive, the egg industry had to resort to clever marketing to incite the purchase of eggs over other agricultural products. This brings back the point that eggs were “bought by rather than sold to the consuming public.” With a limited family budget, home demonstration programs and the industry itself worked with what families had in order to provide recommendations within the realm of possibilities. A year later, in November of 1941, *The Florida Poultryman* reported that demonstration clubs helped organize egg shows and demonstration clubs to “show that eggs, though high, are still economical and of high food value” when compared to other products in order to incite purchase.¹³⁵ Eggs were also more likely to be produced in the home than the foodstuffs of newer breakfast food industries. Advertisements for eggs began to change, going above and beyond the traditional methods of print, and became commonplace at state fairs, curb markets, demonstration meetings, and women’s clubs across the South.

Many ads and product placements in articles within agricultural magazines focused on the benefits that women received from purchasing specific brands. Eggs were marketed as being a healthy and cheap alternative to trademarked cereals, often inciting traditional themes belonging to household. Efficiency, just as it had been effective in marketing the stove, was central to similar in-print marketing campaigns and in-person demonstrations. An example of efficiency in advertising comes from the rise of popularity in print bags. Previously, corn, grain, and chick feed

¹³⁵ “Poultry Products Featured at West Florida County Fairs.” *The Florida Poultryman and Stockman*, November 1941, 5.

companies did not focus entirely on the duality of farm and home life within their farm-based products. As it was men who initially bought the feed and seed from stores in town, early advertisements focused on the quality of the products themselves.

Women became integral in the purchase of one brand over another, however. Wives would often request specific fabric patterns so that they could use the material of the textile bags that the feed and corn came in. Some sent their husbands off into town carrying swatches from previous bags so that they could better identify which one matched their handiwork. Once ladies' rest room movements and other incentives brought women into town, they began to have a more public role in deciding which feed bag came back home with the family. Once these companies caught on that women were an active participant in which brand came home, they began to see them as active consumers in the growing market and thus the bags themselves – and the print ads for them – became targeted towards a new consumer base.

Throughout the 1930s, the process of removing markings and brand iconography from textile bags proved to be quite difficult as it was time consuming and required dedication. In Lu Ann Jones' *Mama Learned Us To Work*, an entire chapter is dedicated to the multiple functions that feed bags had for women. Her chapter "From Feed Bags to Fashion" highlights the importance that feed bags had on women as producers. The process of repurposing old textile bags as clothing and other fabrics is described as follows:

In the 1930s, manufacturers packaged their products in white cotton sacks and used durable inks to emblazon them with colorful brand names and company logos. Women had to scrub out these designs before the material could be used. The inks, one North Carolina woman recalled, "could be removed if you had lots of patience and elbow grease." First, she dissolved Octagon soap and Red Devil lye in warm water and soaked the bags overnight. The next day she rinsed the bags, rubbed them on a washboard, and

then boiled them in a wash pot to remove the obstinate dyes. After a final soaking in Clorox and several more rinsings to remove the strong bleach, she dried and ironed the bags and turned them into fabric that resembled muslin. [...] Once they had bleached the bags, women altered them with natural dyes or embroidery. A north Georgia woman recalled that she boiled black walnut hulls and oak bark and then dipped white sacks in the water to absorb the brown color. Some of her neighbors boiled sumac berries and dyed sacks a reddish tint. Women with a talent for fancy stitching embellished the bags with flowers and other designs and fashioned them into curtains, dresser scarves, or aprons.¹³⁶

Jones then wrote that “print sacks had clearly joined plain cotton ones by 1940” to appeal to the thriftiness and resourcefulness of women consumers in the market economy.¹³⁷ In February of 1940, *The Florida Poultryman* published its first print ad for print sacks. The advertisement was created by The Early & Daniel Co., a company based in Cincinnati, Ohio that had done business with the magazine in the past. The Early & Daniel Co. manufactured the branded “Tuxedo” feed. “Tuxedo S&G Allmash” was advertised to help young chicks stay healthy and grow up to be “well developed pullets with the capability for high egg production.”¹³⁸ Previous advertisements for the brand had focused on the benefits it could have on the farm, but in February of 1940 the company began to test marketing the product towards women consumers.

The first female-targeted advertisement was designed to be safe, as it included the farming benefits of using the branded feed alongside the additional “good reason” to purchase the Tuxedo

¹³⁶ Jones, 174.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 175.

¹³⁸ “Tuxedo S&G All Mash Advertisement.” *The Florida Poultryman and Stockman*, February 1940, 7.

brand over another. It showcased the “attractive dress print material” that came “free of extra cost” for those that acted fast and made the purchase in time.¹³⁹ The dress print bags could be used to make “lovely” dresses, aprons, children’s frocks, slip covers for furniture, draperies and curtains, romper suits, and other types of clothing and household materials.

The Percy Kent Bag Company once claimed that “smart packaging is vital in the successful marketing of any product.” The Tuxedo Allmash brand employed the same mentality, expecting farmers to buy the chick feed for the overall quality of the product and for housewives to *want* their husbands to buy the chick feed so that they could receive the dress print bag as a no-added expense. The Early & Daniel Co. also advertised the new bag as being free from all markings and read to go with an attractive print. Considering the amount of time companies knew women spent scrubbing out brand names on white cotton sacks, this decision was a subtle nod to the growing trend of efficiency.

Nine months later, in December of 1940, The Early & Daniel Co. published another women-targeted advertisement for one of their products, this time for the “Tuxedo Eggmash.” The safe advertisement that had been published earlier that year was such a

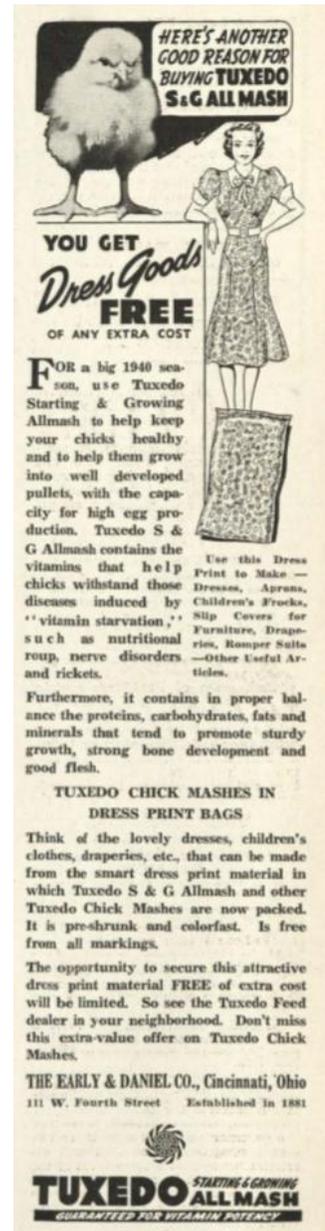


Figure 1 Tuxedo S&G All Mash Advertisement, February 1940.

¹³⁹ Ibid.



Figure 2 Tuxedo S&G Egg Mash Advertisement, December 1940.

making purposes.¹⁴⁰

Both advertisements touch on the thriftiness and time-saving benefits of purchasing the print material bags. Some companies realized that farmers were going to need mash for their animals regardless of what their advertisements said about the quality of the product itself. They then turned their marketing budget to farmers' wives as to give a "no expense added" reason to buy their brand over another. When looking at the two advertisements – both posted within a few months of each other in 1940 – it becomes clear that the focus of the print of the bag shifted from being "another good reason" to purchase the product to becoming a sole reason for the purchase

huge success that they abandoned mentioning the reasons why farmers would benefit from using the product. Once again, the advertisement focuses on the multi-functionality of the attractive print pattern bags. This time, however, the advertisement was completely dedicated to the patterned fabric without mentioning or focusing on the product within the bag. "No advertising to mar the design" was highlighted as an important part of the bag, and of course the company made it clear that the material was "free of extra cost" and "pre-shrunk" for clothing-

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

itself.¹⁴¹ The importance of the Tuxedo-branded bag was more emphasized in this ad than ever before. Print bags began to be more popular than the non-printed bags, and advertisements like those published for The Early & Daniel Co. within *The Florida Poultryman* show how marketing helped establish women as a consumer base. Advertisements like these began recognizing women's impact and valued their purchasing power higher than before. The style of bags certainly evolved over time based on the consensus of the consumers, setting a trend for industry marketing budgets.

Advertisements in magazines used the evolving household as a way to target advertisements to a family through the impact they had on the wives. Stoves and other household appliances took advantage of the womanly duties of cooking and cleaning and used imagery of efficiency to make a sale. As stated by Jones, bag companies went from focusing on “food stuffs” to “fashion” and began funding advertisements that targeted how print bags would make women look and feel appealing. The Percy Bag Company published an advertisement in the 1947 edition of *Feedstuffs* showcasing a shapely girl in an “eye appealing package.”¹⁴² This encouraged women to buy the product in order to look good while also encouraging men to purchase the product for their wives so that they *could* look good. Social appearance began mattering much more as rural women started conducting business in town. Women were also expected to dress a certain way to play their specified role and to look good for their husbands. This represents the categorization of women through the social roles and norms that were manufactured for and built of them during

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Jones, 180

this time. Acceptable clothing and fashion senses were crafted by advertisers like The Percy Bag Company and The Early & Daniel Co. that were looking to make a sale.

Appearance also became a staple in the production and sale of goods through consumer consensus. Regulations of attractiveness and cleanliness of products worked hand in hand with the staples of successful marketing. This can be seen in the record of Mrs. W. H. Alexander, who successfully marketed her butter through the appearance of the product and the packaging it came in. Housewives like Nellie Langley who took advantage of curbside markets also found their appearance and personality to be just as important as the appearance and quality of their goods. Women producers had an easier time making sales when they made note of appearance, and women consumers made easier decisions on what to buy when taking note of appearance.

As time went on, both industry interests and the goals of demonstration both began to find use in large-scale community events. The Extension Service assisted county and home demonstration agents “in staging the county events” for communities across the rural South. 4-H Club work and other demonstration-backed events connected “splendid girls and boys” with the interests of the market economy.¹⁴³ The push and pull factors between home demonstration agents and rural women continued, as communal and familial capital and capability directly correlated with the success of any program. In April of 1941, Miss Elsie Varney of Lake County, Florida’s 4-H Club was photographed for *The Florida Poultryman* after winning “twenty-three prizes” at the Central Florida Exposition’s egg and poultry exhibit. Pictured smiling with her chickens, Varney won a total of \$36.10 for her entries.¹⁴⁴ Community clubs – 4-H and Demonstration alike

¹⁴³ O’Steen, A.W., “Poultry Yard Pick-Ups” *The Florida Poultryman and Stockman*, June 1942, 3.

¹⁴⁴ *The Florida Poultryman and Stockman*, April 1941, 5.

– encouraged girls to sign up for such fairs and contests in order to boost both producer and consumer confidentiality in the programs. Monetary prizes often served as encouragement for young girls to do their best to reach to the top. Recalling Ethel Pagett Riddle’s radio show transcripts, the skills she learned and applied during her time as a Tomato Club girl ultimately led her to the State Fair in South Carolina.

Women played as much of a role as consumers in the early-to-mid twentieth century as they did as producers in the expanding market economy. A document titled “Progress in Home Demonstration Work in Florida 1952 – 1953” stated that “health education” and “consumer education” were major parts of home demonstration’s 1952 program.¹⁴⁵ That year, it was reported that roughly 11,793 Florida families were “helped with consumer buying problems” and that 6,993 families had been “assisted with using timely economic information to make buying decisions or other adjustments in family living.”¹⁴⁶ Consumer spending habits and purchase ability were crucial to home demonstration agents who were applying their own research and ideas to rural communities. By the mid-twentieth century, home demonstration agents had molded themselves as middle-women for rural producers and consumers that had the capital and capability to adapt to the scientific and technological advancements and the firmly established market economy.

With new regulations coming from the production-end of the market economy came consumer consensus on what products were deemed acceptable through attractiveness, cleanliness and, ultimately, price and function. Industries such as egg manufacturers and grain companies that

¹⁴⁵ Progress in Home Demonstration Work in Florida 1952 – 1953, Box 12, Florida Cooperative Extension Service Scrapbooks Relating to Home Demonstration and 4-H, University of Florida Special Collections, University of Florida Libraries, 2.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 4.

used textile bags found themselves adapting and evolving alongside the rapidly forming market that accepted and encouraged women involvement. Advertisements for products that were targeted directly towards women through social function became more commonplace in agricultural newspapers, magazines, and bulletins as they became more successful among “feminine readers” and consumers. Home demonstration agents and other trained professionals in domestic science encouraged women to work with what they had to have a better and easier time completing household tasks. Capital, capability, and confidence may have stood in the way for some families during this transitional phase of production and consumerism, but ultimately as communities and industries began to expand so did the family budget.

The progression into consumerism led to a continuation of female social roles for rural-living, farm-working housewives. The ideas of wifehood and motherhood remained prominent in targeted marketing campaigns and self-help articles. Being thrifty continued to help the family budget and being even more efficient led to an even more productive day within the domestic sphere. As time went on, the “old traditions” found it difficult to combat the “overpowering weight of advertising” done in agricultural journals and rural newspapers.¹⁴⁷ Products that helped save time, money, or effort began being seen as commonplace by those who could afford them – and demonstration agents did all they could to implement such a change so far as families could. Consumer products advertised in their local papers made rural communities to question why they couldn’t enjoy “the same pleasures as city folk.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Uffelman, 15.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

The introduction of radio shows helped mend the isolation that had plagued rural communities by giving families access to information and entertainment. Federally owned corporate enterprises like the Tennessee Valley Authority “taught the teachers” by demonstrating wiring, lighting, and the use of appliances to home economics professors and demonstration agents. The Rural Electrification Administration created cooperatives as a way to introduce electricity to rural communities as many major companies were not yet ready to foot the bill to build powerlines to areas that weren’t economically valuable enough. As rural families were brought into the market economy as consumers, women found their previous roles as producers more and more limited.

Women adopted social roles advertised by newspapers and magazines and picked up more domestic chores with the adoption of electric appliances like the stove. Rural women began to see and take advantage of print advertisements for fashion, beginning with print bags. Women began to take advantage of public rest rooms during their trips into town, making their consumer experience more enjoyable and worthwhile. Much like home demonstration, advertisements had to work with the consumer consensus and stay ahead of the curve in order to work with consumer consensus and interests. By the end of the thirties and throughout the forties, rural women had been categorized as a consumer group by industries and had started to fit into the social roles crafted for their urban counterparts.

CONCLUSION

Women in the South have always been producers and consumers. Women assisted their husbands in the fields and produced domestic products for their family through a household economy. Women peddled or traded their surplus goods to traveling merchants and neighbors. However, this level of production and consumption was not seen as viable by the modernized market economy. Rural lifestyle had been largely independent from urbanized society, and isolation played a big role in the separation between urbanized and rural areas within the South. Once women began to integrate into the market economy, their previous levels of production had to adapt and evolve to fit in with a consumer structure. Establishing rural women in the market economy was not a swift process. Demonstration agents developed programs to address the lack of capital, capability, and confidence among women in rural areas. Demonstration exerted a positive impact over several generations.

The pioneers of home demonstration worked with a generation of rural families that lacked the capital, capability, and confidence to make the changes seen within agents' pamphlets and circulars. Demonstration agent Edna Trigg in rural Texas, for example, was at first turned away from several doorsteps by the men of the households she tried visiting. According to Kelly Minor,

“many farm communities were isolated” and families were “distrustful of strangers toting books which were not the Bible or an encyclopedia.”¹⁴⁹

The people of Denton County, Texas were quick to label her a “government woman” and distrusted her until she was able to prove the value of demonstration work.¹⁵⁰ Gaining the trust and respect of these communities was a major obstacle in the early years of providing domestic education to rural women and their families. In 1912, one farm owner become angry at Trigg’s attempted home visit where she began to explain new procedures for keeping food. He proclaimed:

Lady, I know the government is sending you here to help folks, and don’t think I don’t appreciate it. But I’ve got \$5 here and I’ll give it to you not to come back to this farm anymore!¹⁵¹

Edna Trigg faced an uphill battle to implement demonstration in rural Texas, and she slowly began to win over the trust and respect of families across the county by working with their children at schools and county fairs. After parents witnessed the positive changes done by their children, they themselves began to adopt the newer techniques. As time went on, demonstration no longer had to prove itself to generations as the “outsider” information became insider practice.

With each generation, women received more empowerment through the resources provided by home demonstration through the impact that domestic education had on their lives. Urban society had referred to rural communities as isolated from the cultural norms, and as that disconnect was minimized through demonstration work more public opportunities became

¹⁴⁹ Minor, 62-63.

¹⁵⁰ Lynass, Kathryn, *Edna Westbrook Trigg in Denton County, 1868-1946* (Texas Historical Commission, 2015), 5.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, 5-6.

available for each subsequent generation. Women in 1914 were able to improve contributions in the household, and these new changes paved the way for following generations to leave the household to go to school and gain employment inside the market economy. Women had always been producers on a small-scale in rural society. As they learned proper sanitation methods through demonstration meetings and Tomato Clubs, their production led to new avenues of life. Their daughters were able to increase their education by going to high school, and their granddaughters were able to go to college. By the 1950s, women were able to enter public work through insurance firms, factories, schools, and even demonstration itself. These supplementary wages were brought back into the household and allowed rural men to spend more time working and improving the farm. Women gained empowerment through these changes, but at the same time lost their previous disconnections from urban society as they began to become more intertwined with the web of interconnection of twentieth-century urban lifestyle.

By the 1950s, women were entering public work through insurance firms, factories, public schools, and demonstration work. These women were bringing in a supplementary wage for the family, adding to the family budget and allowing men to focus more on cash crops and what had once been women's industries like poultry work. As early as 1930, in the state of Mississippi factories hired farm women as a way to help save the family farm. The monthly incomes brought in by working women contributed to the family and maintained the farm. Demonstration work also helped empower agents that managed to stay within the field.

Demonstration workers had to be sociable and connectable, and because of this not every agent made it in the field. Employee turnover was high, and many agents quit because of the amount of work placed in their hands. Jane Simpson McKimmon attempted to solve this turnover

rate in her state by requiring her agents to be twenty-seven or older, as they as they were seen to be more committed to the career.¹⁵² One agent in North Carolina quit after realizing she was “slow at making friends,” practically a death sentence in rural society. Many quit after marriage as the work was time-consuming for any dedicated housewife or mother.¹⁵³ Some agents, however, took advantage of their work. Pauline Smith, an agent under McKimmon, refused to get married for most of her life. Her career certainly came before anything else, and she herself proclaimed that the best benefit of being an agent was “social recognition [and] the power to make people recognize” her within the community.¹⁵⁴ Smith proclaimed to her lover Frank Alford, who desperately wished for her to change careers:

A man does not give up a career for a woman. She would not fill his life. A man will not fill mine. [...] I want to make my own money so long as I do live, I had rather die than be dependent. Dependence is one of the great dreads of my life.¹⁵⁵

Smith felt power through independence and autonomy as a demonstration agent. She, as an individual, was able to break out of stereotypical roles of womanhood. She enjoyed her freedom. Her relationship with Frank Alford did not last, as they separated in 1936. Ultimately, however, Pauline Smith did leave her position for marriage in the end. She retired in 1949 after a thirty-six-year career in demonstration.¹⁵⁶

Demonstration was as interconnected as the urban society that agents desired to connect rural women into. Tomato Clubs, women’s curb side markets, ladies’ rest rooms, public high

¹⁵² Jones, 124.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Jones, 130.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 130-131.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 133, 138.

schools, and agricultural magazines that were sympathetic towards the goals of demonstration were all interconnected and played crucial roles in helping solve the crisis of isolation depicted by Roosevelt's Country Life Commission. As a result of these interconnected elements, rural families were connected into the expanding market economy and thus became a part of the urban way of life. Once individual rural families had access to urban appliances like the radio, the values of community gave way to individual families. Once women were removed from industries like poultry, which had once been considered women's work, they were able to receive more domestic education and enter to workforce to bring a supplementary income into the family. This supplementary income allowed them to fully adopt consumerist values that had been long advertised in magazines like *The Progressive Farmer* and *The Florida Poultryman*.

Women were introduced to urbanized appliances and lifestyles through resources provided by demonstration agents and targeted advertisements in agricultural magazines like *The Florida Poultryman*. Product placement was an important part of introducing women to new ideas and appliances. Print advertisements for products like the Tuxedo S&G Allmash textile bag targeted women. Ladies rest rooms also took advantage of product placement and had "samples of electrical products" for women to interact with. In a sense, these rest rooms served as a clever and effective marketing tool that allowed representatives to boost sales while also allowing rural women to have firsthand experience with the latest aspects of modern, urban life.¹⁵⁷

Nearby towns did everything in their power to encourage rural families to travel into town to shop. Ladies rest rooms were established in stores, banks, courtrooms, and stand-alone

¹⁵⁷ Britanik, 56-57.

demonstration centers as a way to incentivize women to go into town. These rest rooms introduced women to urban concepts like electricity and were often women's first interaction with appliances like stoves and refrigerators. Interaction was not limited to appliances within these rest rooms, however. Rural women and urban women seldom interacted due to the disconnect between the two. Just like women curb side markets, these rest rooms "promoted social interaction between urban and rural women."¹⁵⁸ On top of this, women were able to flip through agricultural magazines filled with ads and Sears catalogues that encouraged them to bring these new technologies back home with them.

The overall goal of this research was to compliment and expand upon the work of previous researches in regard to home demonstration agents and white, rural families across the South. Previous dissertations and books serve as individual case-studies for separate states. For example, Lu Ann Jones focused on North Carolina and Rebecca Sharpless focused on Texas. Home demonstration did not exist in pockets across the South. It was a three-tiered, bureaucratic, and highly organized federal program that served across the South with the same core goals that were shaped around the needs of individual families and communities. There is evidence and implications that the program can be applied to the South as a whole, and that these individual states are connected in more ways than previous research has explained. Agents like Pauline Smith may have seen themselves as great disciples of modernization, but demonstration agents had a push-and-pull relationship with the families that they worked with. Women had always been producers and consumers in the household economy and within their respective communities, but

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 19.

resources concerning domestic education and advertising provided through demonstration and similar programs helped assimilate women into the rapidly expanding market economy.

Even though these white, rural women were disconnected from urban life and did not have connection to the early market economy, they did have networks of supportive and important networks within their own communities. Rural families were seen as separated and isolated from urban areas as they did not make the trip into town unless it was necessary. Ladies rest rooms and community demonstrations run primarily by agents gave these families motivation to take the trip into town, but at the cost of losing the traditional values that had once existed in rural communities.

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