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To Create a More Contented Family and Community Life: Home Demonstration Work in Arkansas, 1912 - 1952

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To Create a More Contented Family and Community Life: Home Demonstration Work in Arkansas, 1912 - 1952

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by

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Abstract

Home demonstration work in Arkansas altered the farm woman's role within the household, community, and farm economy. By raising the standard of living in rural homes, progressive reforms sought to make domestic life more comfortable and healthy for family members, as well as reduce demands for them. However, rural women used these programs to improve their living conditions while remaining effective producers on the farm. In this respect, home demonstration programs were more than a means of social control aimed at rural America; they were a resource for rural women. Analyzing how women responded and utilized the skills learned from home demonstration clubs enables us to better understand how these programs helped families adjust to the dynamic changes taking place in the twentieth century countryside.

Women's experiences with home demonstration work provided an opportunity to learn new skills and fostered a community of multi-generational women in rural Arkansas. These experiences transformed women's sense of importance outside the home and exposed them to aspects of community uplift and the market economy revealing an increase in rural women's political consciousness. Home demonstration programs introduced middle-class ideals, household products, and a heighted consumerism into the countryside drastically altering value-systems within the rural home. At the same time, rural women's involvement in voluntary organizations such as home demonstration clubs helped them develop their talents, gain confidence, and participate more actively in local communities. Women's experiences with home demonstration work in Arkansas are another example of an indigenous movement, reflecting a continuation of rural feminism in Arkansas - one we continue to see today.

Acknowledgements

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The research and writing of this dissertation has occurred over a considerable period of time, and it could not have happened without the ongoing support of my family and friends. A special thanks to my husband, David Hogue and three children, Mackenzie, Turner, and Benson for putting up with the long nights and weekends when they would much rather that I be doing something else with them. I know that they, most of all, are glad this dissertation is finally finished. To my parents, John and Nancy Hardman who have always given me the space and encouragement to dream big, even if it did not always make much practical sense. My sisters, Emilee and Mallory, thank you for always listening to my musings and to the "porch night" girls who have a special way of offering perspective and laughter to any situation. I often needed it along the way.

I have also benefited from the historians before me who paved the way in telling the story of Southern extension work such as LuAnn Jones, Lynne Rieff, Carmen Harris, Mena Hogan, Elizabeth Griffin Hill, and Cherisse Jones-Branch. Their work was a great resource for me and I hope this dissertation builds on their research and reveals new insights into the rich history of the extension work in Arkansas.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, David who offered unwavering encouragement to finish this journey. I would not be who I am today without his love, encouragement, and support. My three children, Mackenzie, Turner, and Benson keep me energized and thankful for the many blessings I have in life. Last but not least, Jeannie Whayne who always believed in me and gave me the much needed push forward, thoughtful guidance, and continued support along the way.

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Abbreviations

AAA	Agricultural Adjustment Act
AAES	Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station
AR	Annual Report, Home
NASW	National Archives and Records Administration, Southwest Region.
REA	Rural Electrification Act
TVA	Tennessee Valley Authority
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WPA	Work Progress Administration

"I believe in the open country, and the rural life in the country. I believe that through working together in a group we can enlarge the opportunities and enrich the life of rural people. I believe that the greatest force that molds character comes from the home and I pledge myself to create a home which is morally wholesome, spiritually satisfying, and physically healthful and convenient. I believe in my work as a home maker, and accept the responsibilities it offers to be helpful to others and to create a more contented family and community life so that in the end farm life will be most satisfying."

~ Home Demonstration Club Woman's Creed
This creed was used not only in Arkansas but throughout the Nation. Most clubs repeat it at the opening or closing of each meeting.

Introduction

By the late nineteenth century, immigration and industrialization had begun to fundamentally restructure American society. Even though the majority of people still lived in rural areas, many individuals felt the future lay in the rapidly growing cities and began a virtual exodus from the countryside. Fearing that the population of the urban areas would overwhelm the ability of the countryside to maintain agricultural production sufficient to provide an affordable food supply, some political leaders turned to rural reform. At the heart of their approach was the perception that country life was far inferior to that of the city. Thus one approach progressive reformers employed and one political leaders supported was the creation of programs meant to make rural conditions better. It was under these conditions that the home demonstration program was created with a specific charge to improve the health of all family members and enhance both home and farm life. Created by the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, it was believed that home demonstration programs would target women who were uniquely positioned within the home to transform rural households. Although rural women in Arkansas embraced the home demonstration agents who were dispatched to carry out this mission, they utilized aspects of these programs and clubs on their own terms for their own purposes. Reform was not merely a matter of local people accepting or rejecting a particular agenda but a dynamic

relationship in which rural women found ways to improve their living conditions while remaining effective producers on the farm. As Arkansas women learned new skills, home demonstration programs exposed them to feminism at the grassroots level helping to further develop their talents, gain more confidence and allow women to participate actively in their local communities. These experiences enhanced women's sense of importance outside the home and exposed them to aspects of community uplift and the market economy.[1]

In addition to rural outmigration, several factors led to the passage of the Smith-Lever Act and the creation of the Cooperative Extension Service of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). In an effort to encourage farm families to stay and work the land as well as for the nation to prosper, the United States Congress determined that farmers needed exposure to improved farming methods. The effort to bring scientific agriculture to farm production in the United States began with the Morrill Land-Grant College Act of 1862, which gave federal land scrip to states to establish agricultural and mechanical colleges. Most states – including Arkansas - sold the land and used the proceeds to establish schools.[2] Complicating Arkansas's mission was the Civil War, which delayed the creation of a land grant institution required to administer the programs.[3] In 1871 the Arkansas Industrial University was founded in Fayetteville, Arkansas, but the hurdles were far from over. Many across the state were disappointed that the University would be located in the rugged northwest corner of the state but Fayetteville had a reputation for supporting education. Due to the stipulations of the Morrill Act, the school had to open by February 1872. The board of trustees secured land from the McIlroy

[1] Gary Zellar and Nancy Wyatt, *History of the Bumpers College: Evolution of Education in the Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences in Arkansas* (Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Arkansas, 1999), 1, 2, 9, 19.
[2] Wayne D. Rasmussen, *Taking the University to the People: Seventy-five Years of Cooperative Extension* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1989), 22-25.
[3] Delayed by the Civil War and political unrest and violence during Reconstruction, the Arkansas Legislature did not act until 1868. It was an additional three years before the Legislature tasked the board of trustees with finding a location for the school. Cities across the state lobbied for the university, but Fayetteville eventually secured the site.

family on which stood a farmhouse. The structure, located a mile from the city center, was fitted with seats, blackboards, and stoves to make it useable as a school. The Arkansas Industrial University of Arkansas opened its doors on January 22, 1872, with eight students.[4] For the next several decades, land-grant institutions like that in Arkansas struggled to convince young rural men, for whom land was readily available, to enter college in order to improve their agricultural methods. It was difficult to convince them that there was much to be gained from agricultural education since land was abundant and working the land required no college degree. Furthermore, schools lacked the ability to share scientific research either with farmers or with potential students. The problem was addressed by the passage of the Hatch Experiment Station Act in 1887, which made possible the creation of research stations in conjunction with each land-grant college.[5] The outreach expanded to include farmers' institutes, also known as movable schools, as well as farm trains, which provided demonstrations to farmers in distant locations. Furthermore, land grant universities also began to offer short courses at times convenient to farmers.[6]

Although farmers were initially slow to accept the advice of college-trained experts in agriculture, the efforts of the land grant institutions and the outreach programs began to appeal to them, particularly when economic and ecological exigencies placed farmers in ever precarious situations. One particularly effective manner of addressing their needs was the "demonstration" method of presenting information. By 1914, farmers were demanding more specific answers to some of their particular problems, particularly having to do with threats like the boll weevil.[7] Seaman Knapp, appointed by the Department of Agriculture as a special agent for the promotion

[4] Allen, 2.
[5] Rasmussen, 25-26. Roy V. Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer: The Rise of Agricultural Extension to 1914* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970), 28.
[6] Ramussen, 28-35.
[7] Scott, 210.

of agriculture in the South, in 1902 provided a model for future demonstration work.[8] His goal was to turn the farmer into the actual demonstrator by encouraging farmers to try his methods on a corner of their land. If the methods failed the farmer was reimbursed by funds raised from local businessmen. Knapp travelled the South showing farmers how they could improve their crops just as the boll weevil infestation swept across Texas and threatened to move eastward into the deep South. From the inception of the first demonstration program, the founders and leaders of the extension service promoted the belief that men and women should have different roles on modern farms and developed programs to support this philosophy.[9] According to historian Roy Scott, Knapp believed that separate clubs for women could address the particular problems in the home to which they devote their time. This gendered approach also influenced the idea of organizing programs focused on children – as future farmers and farmers' wives -- such as Boy's Corn Clubs and Girl's Canning clubs which began in Illinois in 1902, and the first Boy's Corn Club in Arkansas organized in 1908. The clubs were so popular that Knapp organized a special department within the USDA's Cooperative Demonstration program in 1908 to promote their activities.[10] The paralleled approached of targeting both parents and children proved successful over the years especially as boys and girls club members grew up and did not think twice before applying their years of demonstration work into their daily lives as farmers and farmers' wives.

While Knapp was working with southern farmers, a national movement was taking shape known as the Progressive Movement with Theodore Roosevelt as one of its political leaders. Rural reform generated vigorous debate. The movement emphasized eliminating deficiencies within the nation and solving social ills. In 1908, Roosevelt appointed a Country Life

[8] Joseph F. Kett, *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties: From Self-Improvement to Adult Education in America, 1750-1990* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 302.
[9] Ann Elizabeth McCleary, *Shaping a New Role for the Rural Woman: Home Demonstration Work in Augusta County, Virginia, 1917-1940*, (Ph.D. dissertation, Brown University, 1996), 6.
[10] Zellar, 32.

Commission to determine the deficiencies in rural life as well as the best methods to correct them and one way was through the home, which they described as "the center of our civilization."[11] Many reformers assumed that the impoverished region was in need of change while rural Americans did their best to ensure change fit their own needs and desires. As a result, the movement was extremely condescending in its efforts to uplift rural America.

The Smith Lever Act of 1914 was instrumental in the effort to transform the rural household for it funded both farm and home demonstration work. With the passage of the Smith-Lever Act, a national Agricultural Extension Service was created and Congress provided federal support for a Cooperative Extension Service coordinated between universities, state government, and county officials to disseminate this important information to rural communities. Arkansas Governor George W. Hays accepted the terms of the act in June 1914. The Arkansas Assembly passed an enabling act in January 1915 and appropriated $45,260 to match the federal seed money pledged for the program that went beyond the initial $10,000 appropriated by Smith-Lever. The terms of the act required a cooperative arrangement between the Extension Service of the USDA and the University of Arkansas, College of Agriculture. The College administered all local, state, and federal funds allocated for the program and agreed to cooperate in all federal extension work conducted by the USDA. The act completed the third side of the "Agricultural Triangle" of resident teaching, research, and extension created to carry out the mission of the land-grant system.[12]

Extension activities that focused on farm women was the "Home Demonstration" program taught Arkansas women self-sufficiency and empowered them as they learned new skills, became the trainers who provided demonstrations to their peers, and as they worked to

[11] Rasmussen, 41.
[12] Zellar, 35.

uplift their local communities. The earliest Arkansas home demonstration club for women and girls started in 1912, when the USDA appropriated fifteen-hundred dollars to the Arkansas Department of Education for farm home improvement. Four hundred girls aged ten through eighteen living in Mabelvale, a small town outside of Little Rock, were organized into tomato clubs laying the groundwork for over 100 years of service from clubs dedicated to bettering home management and rural farm life for women and their families in Arkansas. Although demonstration work was already taking place in Arkansas, it was not until the passage of the Smith-Lever Act that funding was allocated specifically for home demonstration work, supporting twenty-eight women agents in Arkansas; another eight receiving funding by private subscription in 1915. These thirty-six home demonstration agents organized ninety women's and girls' clubs during their first year of operation, and by 1917, the number of agents had risen to forty-seven. In 1936, despite the hardship of the Great Depression, every county in Arkansas provided funding for a home demonstration agent. The state government assumed responsibility for funding the Women's Division in 1937, making it a permanent part of the Arkansas Extension Service.[13] By looking closely at the experiences of agents but most importantly Arkansas women from the program's inception in 1912 through 1952, this dissertation will reveal the cultural dynamics of home demonstration programs and how rural families utilized these programs to adjust to the rapid changes taking place in twentieth century rural America.

Home demonstration programs were condescending for they reinforced conservative domestic values while "uplifting" rural women through professional instruction. Lessons complemented women's traditional role as economic participants in the family enterprise and worked to professionalize "house making" in rural Arkansas with the introduction of concepts of

[13] Mena Hogan, "A History of the Agricultural Extension Service in Arkansas" (MA thesis, University of Arkansas, 1940), 39-49.

modernization, consumerism, and commercialization. Arkansas farm women's responses to these programs reveal reform was a give and take between rural women who used home demonstration programs to improve their living conditions and remain effective producers on the farm and the agents who attempted to bring new techniques and conveniences into rural communities to improve living conditions. Furthermore, women's participation in home demonstration work is an example of an indigenous movement, reflecting a continuation of rural feminism. An indigenous political movement emerges when communities seek the right to self-determination and the right to preserve their culture and heritage. As it relates to feminism, farm women may not have directly challenged the patriarchy within society, but they sought to mitigate inequalities and improve the quality of their lives with the resources available to them. The resources available expanded through their interaction and participation in home demonstration work.[14] Rural women in Arkansas used home demonstration programs as they were fighting to preserve their productive role within the household and community during a time when the farm economy was transitioning to a system of agriculture transformed by mechanization. Nevertheless, home demonstration work altered the farm woman's role within the household, community, and farm economy.

Involvement in a voluntary organization helped these women foster a community of multi-generation women, develop their talents, gain confidence, and participate actively in local communities and politics. In this respect, home demonstration programs were more than a means of social control aimed at rural America; they were a resource for rural women as they fought to maintain their role as producers on the farm and began to advocate for issues important to them. In Arkansas, the popularity of women's and girls' club during this time period reflects a substantial growth of women's voluntary associations across the state – something historians

[14] See McCleary, *Shaping a New Role for the Rural Woman*.

tend to gloss over or fail to highlight the connection between the two. Analyzing women's daily lives, how they responded, and utilized the skills learned from home demonstration clubs enables us to better understand what these "reform" movements really meant to these women.

The research for this dissertation draws on the USDA literature about the home demonstration program, but focuses on documentation produced at the state and local levels. The Extension Service produced a variety of bulletins, circulars, newsletters and other publications that adapted the national prescriptions to needs at the state level. These materials, along with archival Arkansas Extension Service records held at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, AR, and the National Archives and Records Administration Southwest Region in Fort Worth, Texas were examined to provide a state-wide perspective of the home demonstration program in Arkansas. The most valuable accounts of this work are the annual reports of the home demonstration agents. Each fall, both farm and home agents wrote narrative summaries of their activities that included their successes and their challenges. They filed these annual reports with the state headquarters in Little Rock. This was followed by an extensive statistical report that documented program participation. The Extension Service had a separate program for rural blacks in the states and they were also required to submit annual reports that were then included in the overall combined annual report for all extension work in the state.[15] Many agents painted a favorable depiction of their programs. Yet despite their limitations, they remain one of the most comprehensive sources on club work at the state and local level.[16]

[15] Clayton Brown, "Prosperous Farms and Happier Homes: Arkansas Agricultural Extension Service 1911-1966," *Prologue Magazine*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Summer 1996) https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1998/summer/arkansas-extension.html (accessed April 8, 2017).

[16] In 1954 the annual reports of the Men's and Women's Divisions were combined, and the reports became more standard. Photographs and newspaper clippings appear less often, and agents tended to write their narratives as if by a preapproved formula leaving the individuality of the reports lost. However, this development reflects the shifting role of the Extension Service as the rural population had declined, and the remaining families were reasonably prosperous the agent's roles and services offered to members were very different because rural life looked considerably different by the end of the 1950s.

Geographic areas served by Arkansas home demonstration agents were often remote and primitive in the early twentieth century. The Extension Service divided the state into four districts: Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, and Southwest. The nature of Arkansas's terrain impacted the farming in each region which in turn, dictated the organization of the service's activities in each district. In the eastern half of the state, the Mississippi Alluvial Plain or Delta, cotton was the predominant crop, and it was in this region of the state were some of the poorest socioeconomic conditions existed. Delta sharecroppers lived in a state of penury unlike anywhere else in the United States.[17] The sharecropping system arose in the years immediately following the Civil War as a compromise between freedmen who wanted land and the cash-starved planters who found it difficult to pay wages. With emancipation came freedom for African Americans, but planters needed them to supply labor so they employed them through contracts to work for a share of the crop. The sharecropping arrangement allowed them to move out of the old slave quarters and work an allotment of land, they did not own, for the planter.[18] This system kept landless farmers in debt year after relentless year, with little means of advancement. In the western half, particularly the northwest, are the Ozarks. The majority of these farm families were considered mountain folk. In 1920 home demonstration agent Mattie R. Melton described the rural residents of Baxter and Stone counties as "almost pure Anglo-Saxon people whose myths and legends are relics of Old England."[19] Since Arkansas terrain was divided generally into the Delta and the mountainous areas, the Extension Service had to deal with conditions ranging from large-scale plantation agriculture to small, isolated homesteads in

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[17] Brown.
[18] Jeannie Whayne, *Delta Empire: Lee Wilson and the Transformation of Agriculture in the New South*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011), 51-52.
[19] Mattie R. Melton, Annual Report, 1930, Arkansas, Records of the Extension Service, Record Group 33, National Archives and Records Administration-Southwest Region, Fort Worth, TX (hereinafter cited as RG 33, NASW).

the Ozark hills and valleys. However, from the home demonstration agents reports it appears the majority of home demonstration club members, especially in the early years, consisted of work with small land holding families, sharecroppers, and tenant farm families.

In order to better understand how the work varied county by county, let us take a look at a 1925 study of 713 farms and farm homes conducted by the extension service in two counties in Arkansas, Hot Spring and Lee which represented different agricultural conditions yet typical of the entire state. Hot Spring County is located in the somewhat western/central part of the state. The farms were small and for the most part were operated by white farmers. Cotton was the principal cash crop. Corn the outstanding cereal crop and sweet potatoes were grown commercially on some farms. In contrast, Lee County is situated in the bottom lands of the Mississippi Valley. The country is flat and the soil heavy. Large plantations are common. White farmers were outnumbered by black farmers about four to one. Cotton was the chief money crop, although rice was important in some parts of the county. Large acreages of corn are grown for stock feed. Three hundred and fourteen farm and home records were obtained in each of the two counties. It was noted that agricultural agents had been employed in both Hot Springs and Lee Counties since 1909. Four home demonstration agents had been employed in Lee County since 1917 with one home demonstration agent in Hot Springs County.[20]

From the study, they learned that sixty-seven per cent of the 469 white farmers surveyed owned the farms they operated while the remaining 33 percent rented their farms on a cash rent or share crop basis. The average white farmer managed 113 acres, of which 61 acres were in cultivated crops. Telephones were reported in 15 percent of the farm homes. Fifty-two percent were located on improved roads while 48 percent were located on unimproved roads. The

[20] The Effectiveness of Extension in Reaching Rural People, June 1926, Extension Circular No. 221, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas, http://digitalcollections.uark.edu/cdm/ref/collection/ArkExt/id/11159 (accessed April 9, 2017).

average distance from the county Extension office was 8.0 miles for the white farmers. Thirty-eight percent of the black farmers owned their farms, while 62 percent rented, mostly on a share crop basis. The average black farmer handled 49 acres, 37 of which were in cultivated crops. Less than one percent of the black farm homes had telephones, and twenty-three percent were located on improved roads. The black farmsteads averaged 9.2 miles from the county seat. The adoption of improved farm or home practices was reported for 79 percent of the white farms and 73 percent of the black farms with home economic practices being adopted in 23 percent of the white homes and in 50 percent of the black homes.

Like farm demonstration programs, home demonstration programs sought to revitalize and modernize the rural community. However, in practice, reformers looked both backward and forward and articulated conservative and progressive views while supporting both tradition and modernization. Chapter one traces the rich history of demonstration work in Arkansas, revealing how the extension program pursued a gendered and racial division of labor in Arkansas. Male agents worked to increase farm income, which correlated with the male sphere of production, while home demonstration programs sought to improve the home life, which was considered within the female sphere of reproduction and consumption. Both programs replicated the South's racial divisions by requiring separate white and black extension staff and club organizations. Like black agents around the South, African American home demonstration agents in Arkansas had to navigate racism and segregation as they helped African Americans in rural Arkansas improve their quality of life by teaching tools for self-sufficiency. It was not until 1966 that the black and white demonstration work merged and the name was changed from home demonstration to Extension Homemakers work. However, women of different races shared somewhat common reform experiences. All club members participated in projects that reflected

the changing priorities of federal and state programs, and women of both races were encouraged to expand their roles in the family and community by adding new tasks.[21]

During the early years of the home demonstration program, the extension service focused on food production and conservation. Between WWI and the immediate post-World War II era, a main focus of demonstration work was the "Live-at-Home" program which emphasized growing food at home in order to promote self-sufficiency. Chapter two discusses how home demonstration programs promoted production in farm women's work and how these women utilized these skills to uplift their families in innovative ways while continuing to remain producers within the farm economy. These experiences directly affected the context in which women worked. Skills such as canning, sewing, and raising poultry added additional tasks to women's daily life while exposing them to the market economy through the evolution of curb markets. Curb markets, sometimes referred to as farm women's markets, were organized by demonstration agents to provide rural women with an opportunity to sell their household goods such as eggs, buttermilk, cakes, quilts, jams, preserves, etc. The markets soon provided a way for rural women to further gain respect in their families and communities as partners and producers on modern farms, a recognized productive role that they had held previously on the farm.[22] By the 1920s, the home demonstration program in Arkansas required that each club engage in remunerative work. In order to be a "standard club" at least half of the members had to have at least one profit- making project, with poultry and dairy production among the most popular and lucrative.[23] These rural women reflected a blend of the modern idea of the farm

[21] Cherisse Jones-Branch, "Empowering Families and Communities: African American Home Demonstration Agents in Arkansas, 1913-1965" in *Race and Ethnicity in Arkansas*, ed. John A. Kirk (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2014).
[22] Ann McCleary, "Seizing the Opportunity: Home Demonstration Curb Markets in Virginia," in Melissa Walker and Rebecca Sharpless, ed., *Work, Family and Faith: Rural Southern Women in Twentieth Century* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 99.
[23] McCleary, 109.

woman - as business person intertwined with a traditional perspective of the farm women as a producer.

Home demonstration programs impacted all aspects of local communities in Arkansas and chapter three reveals how these programs altered women's sense of importance outside the home, exposing them to new aspects of community uplift. Many programs taught food nutrition, domestic hygiene, and family health. Along with white agents, black agents centered their work on community uplift through promoting self-sufficiency. Once these lessons were applied at home, women were encouraged to extend them to the schools, in their churches, and throughout their community. Demonstration work provided rural women a unique opportunity to develop their talents, gain confidence, and participate more actively in local communities.

These programs taught women new skills to further develop their talents, gain more confidence, and provided opportunities for women to participate more actively outside the home and within their local communities. Farm women, like most Americans in the first half of the twentieth century, found themselves faced with uncertainties about their future. Rural families found that their familiar world was changing dramatically as the rural South modernized. For the majority of rural Arkansas women, home demonstration programs were their first exposure to community advocacy and exposed many to feminism at the grassroots level. These experiences altered women's sense of importance outside the home and demonstrated the collective power of organizing. Although the focus of home demonstration work did not include activism and public outreach initially, women utilized these new skills to meet the needs of their community. Chapter four takes a closer look at the community's embrace and support of initiatives they spearheaded such as the school lunch program and the formation of the Arkansas State Council

of Home Demonstration Clubs. The successes of these programs were a direct result of grassroots efforts by these women who quickly learned there was power in numbers.

Chapter five traces the rural South's emergence into the national consumer economy and how it shaped the focus of home demonstration work. During WWI, home demonstration work focused on food production through its rural preparedness program. Between 1920 and 1930, the focus shifted from food production and revitalization to an emphasis on efficiency and production which would eventually evolve into the "Live-At-Home" program, a major focus of the extension work until after WWII. The post-WWI agricultural depression severely limited farm families' cash incomes making the purchasing of home conveniences difficult and not an interest for rural women at the time. As the farm economy briefly recovered and rural women expressed interest in consumer goods as well as the familiarity and use of credit increased, the extension service began to participate fully in home improvement campaigns. At the same time, an expanding consumer ethic among rural women further facilitated the movement. In Arkansas, this consumer ethic appears to have been gradual in comparison to other southern states. By the 1940s, the extension program in Arkansas had completely shifted its focus to promote rural uplift with consumerism alongside side the themes of food production and self-sufficiency. Furthermore, the Arkansas demonstration projects in the 1940s were impacted by the Better Homes Movement of the 1930s which had promoted home furnishings and home improvement projects – leaving a lastly impact on rural women and their families. By stressing more middle-class and urban home maker standards, new domestic ideals were introduced into rural Arkansas homes. However, these programs were not merely a matter of local people accepting or rejecting the extension service's agenda but rather a dynamic relationship between the formal demonstration and the application of the work in women's day to day lives. How rural women

responded to demonstration agents and embraced certain programs shaped domestic reform in ways that limited its modernizing tendencies while preserved local traditions of the countryside.[24]

Chapter six outlines the impact of World War II on home demonstration work in Arkansas. Farm and home demonstration programs contributed invaluable support to the war effort. However, the changes brought on by the New Deal and the war would not only impact farm and home demonstration clubs in the post WWII area but all aspects of rural life in Arkansas. This legacy forever changed the extension programs further impacting the outlook for home demonstration work in Arkansas in the years ahead.

Traditionally, historians have taken a top-down approach to their analysis, focusing on the national or state ideology of the USDA extension program.[25] Historians typically treat the USDA extension program as a rural wing of the progressive movement.[26] Progressive reformers, similar to the country life reformers, embraced elitist attitudes and criticisms of "country ways and traditions." Many of these reform efforts were condescending and the home demonstration program was no different. Most studies have focused primarily on the ideology of the extension service, often at the national level, stressing the social control aspect of home demonstration

[24] I agree with Lynne Rieff who argues in *Hidden Histories* that home demonstration programs adopted and maintained ambiguities that characterized and weakened the larger southern progressive movement. See Virginia Bernhard, et al., *Hidden Histories of Women in the New South*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994).
[25] See Pete Daniel's *Breaking the Land: Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures since 1880*. (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986). William Link's study of southern progressivism ignores the extension movement as progressive reform; even though the programs fit the author's definition and description. See William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).
[26] Historians such as Mary Hoffschwelle use the rural reform movement as an example of the southern progressive campaign to create a better country life. See Hoffschwelle's *Rebuilding the Rural Southern Community: Reformers, Schools, Homes in Tennessee 1900-1930*. Melissa Walker reveals the programs' progressive roots which promoted the importance of separate spheres while working towards progress through the rationalization of daily life. See chapter 4 in Walker's *All We Knew Was to Farm: Rural Women in the Upcountry South, 1919-1941* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1998).

work.[27] What these studies overlook is why women participated as club members and served as county or local agents. Historians have begun to pay attention to the local character of the club movement or to the values or intentions of the women and girls who participated.[28] One question gender historians, joined by anthropologists, sociologists, and historians of technology, home economics, rural history and material culture, are exploring is how the transition to a capitalist agricultural system transformed the lives and work of rural women. This dissertation makes two major contributions to the study of home demonstration programs in Arkansas. First, it provides a glimpse into these very changes taking place in women's work and daily lives as agriculture was being transformed. Second, it shows that rural women were active participants in this work. Rural uplift was not something done to them but something they shaped and were active participants in. Women responded by establishing their own version of the modern farm women, one that drew upon local traditions and addressed the particular experiences of women in Arkansas.

[27] Rieff, "Revitalizing Southern Homes: Rural Women, the Professionalization of Home Demonstration Work, and the Limits of Reform, 1917-1945," in Melissa Walker and Rebecca Sharpless, ed., *Work, Family and Faith: Rural Southern Women in Twentieth Century*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 135.

[28] Historians who have focused on Southern extension work at the local level include LuAnn Jones, who explores how rural women in North Carolina used both traditional household production techniques and newer ones learned from agents to shape the New South's market economy; Lynne Rieffe who argues the extension service served as another paternalistic structure in Alabama; and Carmen Harris, who looks at the black home extension service in South Carolina.

Chapter One

Home Demonstration Work in Arkansas: The Early Years

Arkansas has a rich history of home demonstration work, but a close examination reveals a condescending approach, a gendered perspective, and a racial division of labor in Arkansas. Home demonstration programs, like farm demonstration work, sought to revitalize and modernize the rural community. Yet in practice, these programs looked both backwards and forwards, articulated conservative and liberal views, and supported both tradition and modernization in rural America. The USDA's home demonstration programs thrived on conventional concepts of the home as the feminine domain and the foundation of social values. However, there was nothing conventional about home demonstration work as it altered female labor patterns, promoted middle class ideals, and empowered women through collective action.

Many country lifers and progressive reformers believed that by teaching labor saving techniques to rural women, home demonstration work would make rural life more appealing for families, especially young farm women who had been leading the movement of rural people to the city. While home demonstration work promoted labor saving techniques, it also promoted the ideals of an urban housewife and emphasized domestic skills that added additional tasks to women's daily life such as gardening, canning, and cooking techniques. Overall, the program reshaped gender dynamics by redefining women's roles on the farm, the aspects of women's domestic tasks in the rural family, and most importantly, redefined women's understanding of their role within the community. Although the traditional and gendered roles these programs promoted for women in the household were not fully practiced on the farm, home demonstration programs empowered Arkansas women as they learned new skills, became the leaders who provided demonstrations to their peers, and as they worked to uplift their local communities.

In order to better understand how home demonstration work came to Arkansas; we must first familiarize ourselves with why the government felt the need to mandate these programs in the first place. By the late nineteenth century, American farmers faced a variety of economic tribulations including rising business costs, a scarcity of credit, declining productivity rates, and falling crop prices, all of which forced many farmers to organize in an effort to address these conditions politically. After the Civil War, Arkansas farmers like many southern farmers returned to growing primarily cotton, in part because bankers had insisted on farmers raising a cash crop as condition for providing them with financing. As a result, cotton acreage increased, but prices fell due to overproduction, leading farmers to compensate by planting yet more cotton, which led to even lower prices. To add insult to injury, competition had intensified during the civil war further contributing to the low prices while over production of cotton which is a soil exhaustive crop resulted in declining fertility rates and lower yields for each farm family. As farmers saw their incomes steadily decline, they realized that those who handled their product like the shippers, warehouses, buyers, and middlemen were continuing to profit from cotton while they were going into more and more debt. It was a vicious cycle, one that farmers could not seem to overcome. Arkansas farmers especially found it difficult to obtain credit. Beginning in the late 1860s and continuing into the twentieth century, this shared economic blight among farmers led many of them to join forces and form agrarian unions in an effort to advance their social, educational, economic, and political interests.[29]

Like farmers elsewhere, Arkansas farmers expressed dissatisfaction with their declining economic fortunes by joining various agrarian movements that attempted to fight against the concentrated power of bankers, merchants, railroad monopolies, and middlemen. Beginning in 1872 with the Grange, the organized farmers' movement encouraged families to band together to

[29] See Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014).

promote the economic and political well-being of the community and agriculture. The Grange even provided its members with social and educational benefits while promoting cooperative purchasing and selling enterprises. At its peak in 1876, the Arkansas State Grange claimed over 20,000 members, yet, membership rapidly declined as the organization's cooperative enterprises failed. It did not take long for two groups to follow in the Grange's footsteps in an effort to organize Arkansas farmers across the state: the *Agricultural Wheel*, formed in Prairie County in 1882, and the *Brothers of Freedom*, formed in Johnson County during that same year. Like the Grange before them, these groups condemned monopolies and trusts as sources of farm families' economic troubles, and established cooperative enterprises while refraining from being active within the political arena. By 1885, the two groups consolidated, retained the name of the Wheel and claimed some 55,000 members in Arkansas.[30] However it was not until the late nineteenth century that we see the strongest outlet for farmer-labor political protest in Arkansas through the *Union Labor Party* (ULP). Formed in Cincinnati, Ohio, in February 1887, the ULP never amounted to much nationally, but it presented the Arkansas Democratic Party with its greatest challenge of the post-Reconstruction era. The ULP's major demands foreshadowed those of the Populist Party, most notably governmental ownership of the means of communication and transportation, the free coinage of silver, and policies that would discourage land speculation. The Arkansas ULP provided stiff opposition for Democrats in state and congressional elections in 1888, buttressed by the lack of Republican nominees in the former and some of the latter. In 1890, ULP state and congressional candidates again lost close contests that were marred by fraud and violence. The ULP was formed in 1888 when the Wheel joined forces with the Knights of Labor and nominated a full slate of candidates for state and federal office including Charles

[30] Carl Moneyhon. *Arkansas and the New South, 1874-1929* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1997), 78-81.

Norwood, a member of the Farmers Alliance, for governor. At the Wheel state convention, the party declined to endorse Norwood for governor, though the state Republican Party did, after declining to nominate its own candidate. In an election that was marked by fraud and violence, Norwood lost the governorship to Democrat James P. Eagle by a close vote of 99,214 to 84,213.[31] With the Wheel/ULP alliance almost winning the governor's race, the 1888 elections marked the highest point of influence for the agrarian movement in Arkansas.

Nationally, the Farmers Alliance at the time developed a political agenda that called for regulation and reform in national politics, most notably an opposition to the gold standard to counter the high deflation in agricultural prices in relation to other goods such as farm implements. Initially the movement sought enactment of a "sub-treasury" plan of government-managed cooperatives and low-cost credit designed to alleviate the farmers' plight, but constant political obstruction resulted in defeat. Faced with the combined opposition of both the Democratic and Republican parties, many members sought to overcome it by forming a party of their own, the People's Party. This move towards creating a new political party arose from the belief that the two major parties were controlled by bankers, landowners, and elites hostile to the needs of the small farmer.[32]

The Agricultural Wheel and other organizations both in Arkansas and across the United States coalesced in the 1890s with the founding of the People's Party, which drew most of its national support in the West and the South.[33] The ULP became the People's Party in 1891 upon the formation of the national People's Party. The People's Party platform called for abolition of

[31] Moneyhon., 87.
[32] John Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931), 124.
[33] In Arkansas, the third-party movement actually peaked between 1888 and 1890 under the guise of the Union Labor Party (ULP), which lasted fewer years than the Populist Party but won more support, unlike in other states. See Moneyhon's *Arkansas and the New South*.

national banks, a graduated income tax, direct election of Senators, civil service reform, and government control of all railroads, telegraphs, and telephones. The party flourished most among farmers in the Southwest and Great Plains as well as made significant gains in the South where they faced an uphill battle given the firmly entrenched monopoly of the Democratic Party. For the most part, the populist movement in the South was stymied by the race issue. Democratic leaders argued that, by splitting the white vote, the populists threatened white supremacy resulting in many populists remaining within the Democratic Party. Populists hoped to gain the support of industrial workers in the big cities, who had their own complaints about big business. However, the farmers and the industrial workers were just too different in terms of religion, ethnicity, and cultural attitudes – plus the populist policy failed to radically alter every life of the industrial worker. The Populists also struggled to secure support among the prosperous farmers of the Midwest and the East, who generally had more fertile land and less debt. Therefore, success was dependent upon electoral fusion, with the Democrats outside the South, but with alliances with the Republicans in Southern states. The party began to fade when the Democrats nominated William Jennings Bryan who focused on the free silver issue as a solution to the economic depression. Populists were left with the choice of endorsing Bryan or running their own candidate. Despite securing the Democratic traditional base, sweeping the Populist strongholds in the west and the south, and adding the silverite states in the west, Bryan lost to Republican candidate William McKinley.[34]

The election of 1896 was critical not only because it determined the direction of the nation but also because of its impact on the People's Party. The 1896 election rearranged voting habits for a generation and resulted in party realignment that gave Republicans control of the presidency for the next thirty-six years, minus eight years during Woodrow Wilson's presidency.

[34] Moneyhon, 87-91.

Following the election, support for Populism further waned when economic recovery brought a measure of prosperity to the farmers and an increase in gold supply helped put an end to deflation. Although, populism left a legacy of protest against the forces of modernization, it failed to change rural America.[35] Many historians such as John Hicks in *The Populist Revolt* argue populism was "the last phase of a long and perhaps losing struggle – the struggle to save agricultural America from the devouring jaws of industrial America."[36] The populists were the victims of economic distress and although it was a losing battle, many of the reforms the Populists advocated, Hicks implied, became the basis of later progressive legislation. These reforms, particularly in the fields of political democracy, currency and credit, railroad and trust control, required government to restrain the selfish tendencies of the few who profit at the expense of the many, and that the people must control the government.[37] In Arkansas, the legacy of the Populist movement is primarily seen by its impact upon the state's Democratic Party, which entered a long period of political dominance after vanquishing a third-party challenger. Supporters of the Farm Labor or Populist Parties moved back to the Democratic Party. There they were able to continue to play a political role. Arkansas Democrats became the supporters of "free silver" and the regulation of railroads and other corporations that farmers had long decried as "trusts" and "monopolies."[38]

By 1898, prices for agricultural commodities began to slowly rise nationally, lessening economic discontent in the countryside and ushering in what is often referred to as the "golden age of agriculture" lasting until 1918. However, in Arkansas cotton prices and farm income reached their lowest post-Civil War levels in 1899 and the move from the countryside to the

[35] Gilbert C. Fite, *Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture, 1865-1980*, (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1984), 51-54.
[36] Hicks, 237.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Moneyhon, 91-92.

town continued in Arkansas. Nationally the rise in consumer prices, rural outmigration, and growing farm tenancy along with the possibility of future agricultural shortages, continued to be a concern for the nation.

Throughout the Western industrializing world, rural outmigration was taking place, but it was especially alarming in the United States for "this had always been a nation of farmers and farm people. Its institutions, government, traditions, even the very character of its people had been shaped in a rural environment…"[39] In order to keep people from leaving rural areas, reform was needed to address living conditions but reformers approached reform efforts in a condescending way. Under Theodore Roosevelt's leadership a Country Life Commission was appointed in 1908 to address the deficiencies in rural life as well as the best methods to correct them.[40] The commission proposed three objectives for improvement of rural life: a national agricultural extension program, scientific surveys of rural life, and the establishment of a national agency devoted to rural programs. One area the Country Life Commission shed light on was the South's poor living conditions pointing to sanitary and health deficiencies as contributing to the poor health of so many southerners. In an effort to combat the extreme cases of hookworm in the South, the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission for the Eradication of Hookworm Disease was organized on October 26, 1909. Although this five-year program made a significant contribution to United States public health, instilling public education, medication, field work, and modern government health departments in eleven southern states, the very nature of the program reveals the condescending nature of these progressive reforms. The Commission

[39] Wayne E. Fuller, *The Old Country School: The Story of Rural Education in the Middle West*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 219.

[40] What was unique about the County Life movement was its alliance of urban-oriented Progressive reformers and agricultural interests. However, members of this movement agreed on little more than the need for better education and scientific agriculture. See Rasmussen, 41.

found an average of 40% of school aged children infected with hookworm.[41] The findings from the commission informed more Americans than ever before about living conditions in rural America, and the response to the Country Life Commission influenced the formation of the Country Life Movement, which flourished in the United States between 1900 and 1920.[42]

The Country Life Movement with its emphasis on vocational education and home economics reinforced the professionalizing and middle-class ideas of the Progressive Movement. Both movements worked to preserve the traditional rural lifestyles while at the same time, addressing the poor living conditions and social problems perceived in rural communities. Country Lifers sought to address problems as diverse as soil erosion, rural depopulation, adult education, land settlement, and rural demoralization.[43] The country life movement's condescending adherents fell largely into three schools of thought. The first group consisted mainly of urbanites who sought to improve rural living conditions in order to prevent farmers from moving to cities and abandoning rural life. This philosophy held that rural lifestyles embodied certain moral values which were a positive influence on urbanites.[44] A second segment of country lifers sought to improve what they saw as declining rural living conditions by bringing progressive changes and technological improvements to rural areas. This group tried to institute successful urban social reforms in rural areas. The two main goals of this segment involved reforming rural schools and rural churches which they saw lagging behind their urban counterparts.[45] The third group affiliated with the Country Life movement consisted of farmers

[41] Bleakley H. "Disease and Development: Evidence from Hookworm Eradication in the American South." Q J Econ 122 (1): 73-117. (2007) https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3800113/ (accessed March 12, 2017).
[42] David B. Danbom, *The Resisted Revolution: Urban America and the Industrialization of Agriculture*, 1900-1930 (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1979), 23.
[43] Danbom, "Rural Education Reform and the Country Life Movement, 1900-1920," in *Agricultural History* Vol. 53, No. 2 (1979).
[44] Ibid.
[45] Merwin Swanson. "The Country Life Movement and the American Churches," *Church History* 46 (3), (September 1977): 358-359.

who sought to bring technological progress to their profession. This group promoted agricultural extension and attempted to bring industrial reforms to American farms. In addition, they promoted the idea that farmers should adopt business practices in their profession.[46]

Both the Country Life movement and the Progressive movement consisted of condescending political reforms that were both gendered and racial in practice. As William Bowers has pointed out, country life reformers were caught in a permanent contradiction. They wanted to resurrect a mythologized rural past, while at the same time advocate ideas that would inevitably bring urban influences into the countryside.[47] Home demonstration work in Arkansas did this. Underlying every aspect of both the Country Life and the Progressive reforms was the belief that rural depopulation threatened to drain the countryside of the required people and resources to feed the nation. By promoting "New Agriculture", reforms would increase efficiency, espoused by the third group, and ensure that farmers could still produce enough food to feed the growing population even as their own numbers declined.[48] Fears of an impending scarcity of food were linked to the perception of rural flight, as well as to the problem of flagging productivity rates. The *New Agriculture* model relied on a select portion of farmers embracing this vision; those who were prosperous and stable enough to afford new equipment, and educated enough to be able to use it effectively. With its focus on mechanization and rationalization of farm production, this vision meant that farm labor requirements would decline, freeing family members, especially farm women, to focus on the rural uplift component of the Country Life and Progressive agendas. These programs were condescending from their very foundation. Reformers assumed rural families were unhappy, wanted to be "uplifted", and did not have the

[46] Danbom, "Rural Education Reform and the Country Life Movement, 1900-1920" *Agricultural History* 53 (2): 464-466.
[47] William Bowers, *The Country Life Movement in America: 1900-1920*, (Port Washington, NY: University of Kentucky Press, 1974), 132.
[48] Katherine Jellison, *Entitled to Power*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 4.

resources to improve their own daily lives. Furthermore, these reforms projected the reformers middle class ideals onto rural America especially in regards to the appropriate gender roles within the household. As the keepers of hearth and home, envisioned by these condescending reformers, who sought to promote the urban homemaker ideal in the countryside, it was believed that women instead of men would "naturally" have responsibility for these rural uplift tasks. The problem was that many young farm women were leading the movement to the city and it was believed that reform was needed to keep these men and women in the countryside.[49] This contradicting philosophy would continue to impact rural America as it influenced both the farm and home demonstration work in the years ahead.

The effort to bring scientific agriculture to farm production in the South began long before the Country Life and Progressive Movements. As early as 1850, the Michigan Constitution called for the creation of an agricultural school though it was not until 1855 that the first agricultural college was established, the Agricultural College of the State of Michigan, known as Michigan State University, which served as a model for the Morrill Land Act. Vermont Congressman Justin Smith Morrill first introduced the Morrill Land Act in 1857 which gave federal land scrip to states to establish agricultural and mechanical colleges. The act was passed in 1859 but vetoed by President James Buchanan. In 1861, Morrill resubmitted the act with a provision that institutions would teach military tactics as well as engineering and agriculture. It was signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln on July 2, 1862.[50] However, Arkansas's decision to secede from the union and join the Confederacy in 1861 and its preoccupation with Reconstruction after the war complicated its acceptance of the Morrill Land Grant Act. In 1871, the state, then under Republican rule, founded its land grant institution, the

[49] Elizabeth Ramey, *Class, Gender, and the American Family Farm in the 20th Century*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), 2-14.
[50] Rasmussen's *Taking the University to the People*, 22-25.

Arkansas Industrial University in Fayetteville, Arkansas. The hurdles were far from over. For the next several decades, land-grant institutions like that in Arkansas struggled to convince young rural men, for whom land was readily available, to enter college in order to improve their agricultural methods. It was difficult to convince them that an agricultural education was important or valuable. Land was abundant and working the land required no college degree. Furthermore, the Arkansas Industrial University, like its counterparts in other states, lacked the ability to share scientific research either with farmers or with potential students. The passage of the Hatch Experiment Station Act in 1887 attempted to address this problem by making possible the creation of research stations in conjunction with each land-grant college.[51] Arkansas created the Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station (AAES) in 1888 located in Fayetteville. Its outreach expanded to include farmers' institutes, also known as movable schools, as well as farm trains, which provided demonstrations to farmers in distant locations. The land grant universities also began to offer short courses at times convenient to farmers.[52] Although farmers were initially slow to accept the advice of college-trained experts in agriculture, the efforts of the land grant institutions and the outreach programs began to appeal to farmers, particularly when economic and ecological exigencies placed farmers and their families in ever precarious situations. The most effective manner of presenting information was the "demonstration" method and by 1914, farmers were demanding more answers to their most challenging problems, particularly having to do with threats like the boll weevil.[53]

[51] Ibid, 25-26 and Scott, 28.
[52] Rasmussen, 28-35.
[53] Roy V. Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer: The Rise of Agricultural Extension to 1914*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970), 210. It wasn't until 1927 that three Branch Experiment Stations opened in Arkansas at Stuttgart, Hope and Marianna. See University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture Research & Extension history at http://www.uark.edu/admin/aes/history.html (accessed February 2, 2017).

The passage of the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 marked a turning point in rural reform. It was an outcome of more than five decades of agricultural reform but it also accomplished one of the Country Life Commission's recommendations – to establish a national agricultural extension program. Historians traditionally treat the USDA extension program as a rural wing of the progressive movement. Reformers argued domestic reform could hold families on their farms, revitalize rural communities, and enhance rural life.[54] Better homes could produce better farms only if rural women adopted new practices and consumer goods. The Smith-Lever Act sought to produce "better farms" by mandating home economics programs, like home demonstration programs, for the USDA Extension Service.

The organization of the USDA program was gendered in that the very structure of the program promoted the "proper" gender roles within southern society, and home demonstration work reinforced and supported the concept of separate spheres for rural women. Agents were there to teach women time saving resources for their work within the home, not in the fields, and how to take better care of their families, yet at the same time, many agents were single, better educated than their members, and all of them were professionally employed. The very structure of the program was a permanent contradiction. Although the extension program pursued a gendered division of labor, very few households were organized in such mutually exclusive gender categories.

Like farm demonstration, home demonstration promised a modernizing route for rural homes, one that many reformers condescendingly assumed rural families wanted and needed. The methods and tasks demonstrated by farm and home agents reflected the USDA's determination to revolutionize agriculture in the south while maintaining the status quo in regards to gender and racial relations within rural society. The program was designed to only

[54] Hoffschwelle, 104.

address the material conditions in which the farm family lived not to challenge the racially charged system of tenancy and sharecropping. Furthermore, the Smith-Lever Act institutionalized the idea of separate spheres of work, at least on the government level, by establishing two branches of extension service. Federal extension service administrators articulated the USDA's fundamentally condescending and conservative public policy goals which were to revolutionize agriculture in the south while maintaining male control of gender relations within rural society. Farming and homemaking were described as discrete occupations coinciding with public and private realms of activity. Not only were these separate, but they were unequal and the USDA insisted on determining which tasks were appropriate and demanded agents remain mindful of the sphere of women's proper influence on the farm. Southern farm women rejected the gendered division of labor, leading extension officials and agents in the South to encourage the continuation of productive and income-earning work for farm women – roles that many of these women had always fulfilled prior to the introduction of home demonstration work.[55] As a result, Arkansas women found home demonstration programs to be useful in their efforts to find new ways to remain effective producers on the family farm, especially in the early years of demonstration work as they learned new skills and techniques in canning, poultry and dairying that allowed them to expand their contributions to the farm household economy.

Arkansas is unique in that even before the passage of the Smith-Lever Act in 1914, rural Arkansas had access to the Agricultural Extension Service (AES), which had been established in Arkansas in 1905 with J.A. Evans serving as state agent. Prior to the Smith-Lever Act, the

[55] The gendered division of labor in extension service programs and rural women's responses are analyzed in Deborah Fink, *Open Country, Iowa: Rural Women, Tradition and Change* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986); Jane Adams, *Transformation of Rural Life*: *Southern Illinois, 1890-1990,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), and Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agriculture, 1900-1940,* (John Hopkins University Press, 1998).

Agricultural Extension Service (AES) linked the USDA, land-grant institutions, and the states' rural citizens through cooperative demonstration work. Two years later, four districts and seven county agents were in place.[56] In addition to farm demonstration work, AES established its first 4-H club, which was the youth program of the Cooperative Extension Service, in 1908 in White County, located in West Central Arkansas.[57] The first girls canning club was established in 1912 in the small town of Mabelvale outside of Little Rock, the state capital.[58] With the help of the Pulaski County agricultural agent George Pry, Emma Archer organized that first canning club even though she was teaching in the Mabelvale School. The program was geared towards young girls living in Mabelvale (Pulaski County) but Pry and Archer allowed girls older than eighteen to enroll with the requirement that they could participate but not receive prizes. In the first year, four hundred girls aged ten through eighteen were organized into the first tomato club in Arkansas. From the very beginning, young girls were exposed to leadership and older girls even acted as leaders to the younger ones while each member learned to grow a one-tenth acre of tomatoes and can them. The fact that the girls were engaged in growing the tomatoes recognized common practices within the farm: women cultivating vegetables. During that first year, canning club work spread quickly with 400 girls enrolled in canning clubs in ten counties across Arkansas.[59] Funding from the General Education Board through the Secretary of Agriculture supported agents, mostly rural school teachers who agreed to serve two-month positions in these

[56] See University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture Research & Extension Cooperative Extension history at https://www.uaex.edu/about-extension/history.aspx (accessed February 2, 2017).
[57] The 4-H youth development program provided opportunities for youth to acquire knowledge, develop skills, form attitudes, and practice behavior that will enable them to become self-directing, productive, and contributing members of society. The name represents four personal development areas of focus for the organization: head, heart, hands, and health. For more information about the history of 4-H clubs see Gabriel N. Rosenberg, *The 4-H Harvest: Sexuality and the State in Rural America: Sexuality and the State in Rural America*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).
[58] See University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture Research & Extension Cooperative Extension history at https://www.uaex.edu/about-extension/history.aspx (accessed February 2, 2017).
[59] Hogan, 39-49.

ten counties. This early canning club work is of utmost importance for it laid a solid foundation for vocational training to continue for years to come throughout the state. The "Tomato Girls" of Pulaski County laid the groundwork for over 100 years of service from clubs focused on bettering home management and rural farm life for women and their families in Arkansas.

The state's population in 1914 was around 1.6 million people and the number of farms exceeded 200,000, consisting of over 17 million acres. The Agricultural Extension Service in Arkansas sought to provide health and agricultural information to all rural families of the state. By 1914, demonstration work was led by a state agent, state home demonstration agent, a state 4-H Club leader, three district agents, 52 county agents, 15 home demonstration agents, and some clerical employees. All of these would become Extension workers and employees of the University of Arkansas in 1914 upon the agreement of the terms of the Smith-Lever Act by Governor George W. Hays.[60] Two years after the first tomato club was established in Arkansas, the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 was passed by the United States Congress mandating federal support for a national agricultural extension program, coordinated between universities, state government, and county officials to disseminate information about modern agriculture and home economics to rural communities. The result was further replication of farm, home, and "tomato girl" programs throughout the state but most importantly, an increase in designated funding for both male and female agents. In January 1915, the Arkansas General Assembly appropriated $42,000 to match the federal program funds. Furthermore, the act also established the cooperative arrangement between the newly-created Extension Service and the College of Agriculture at the University of Arkansas, the land-grant institution in the state.[61] In 1915

[60] Harrison Hale, *University of Arkansas: 1871-1948*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Alumni Association, 1948), 195.
[61] Gary Zeller and Nancy Wyatt, *History of the Bumpers College: Evolution of Education in the Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences in Arkansas*, (Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Arkansas, 1999), 35.

funding was furnished for twenty-eight women agents in Arkansas; another eight by private subscription. These thirty-six home demonstration agents organized ninety women's and girls' clubs during their first formal year of operation tied to the Cooperative Extension Service. By 1917, the number of agents rose to forty-seven, and in 1936, despite the hardship of the Great Depression, every county in Arkansas provided funding for a home demonstration agent. In 1937, the Women's Division was made a permanent part of the Arkansas Extension Service when the state government assumed responsibility for its funding.[62]

By 1923, demonstration work in Arkansas had made significant progress since the passage of the Smith-Level Act. Forty-six counties had secured the benefit of either county farm demonstration work or county home demonstration work, or both, by the end of the year. Home demonstration work was conducted in 38 counties in Arkansas under the supervision of Miss Connie J. Bonslagel, State home demonstration agent. Under Bonslagel's leadership there were four district agents, three specialists (foods and nutrition; food preservation; and textiles and clothing), 42 county home demonstration agents (with Logan and Sebastian counties had two agents each); ten local home demonstration agents; one black district home demonstration agent and ten black local home demonstration agents. It was noted that where demonstration work was conducted that various clubs organized into county councils or county federations. More importantly, in the counties where there was an interest in home demonstration activities there was also a county council or county federation of women's clubs that expressed an interest in promoting the work.[63]

[62] Connie Bonslagel, State Agent, "Historical Appraisal of Home Demonstration Work in Arkansas, 1939," 1939 Specialist Reports, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[63] Annual Report: July 1, 1923, to June 30, 1924, Extension circular no. 193, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas. http://digitalcollections.uark.edu/cdm/ref/collection/ArkExt/id/11113 (access April 6, 2017).

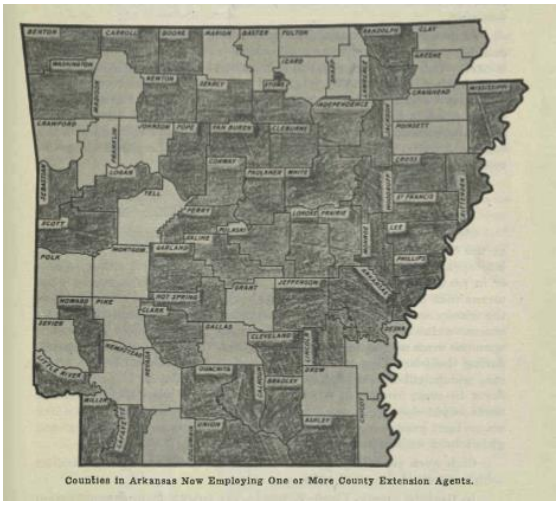

Figure 1. Summary of counties in Arkansas employing one or more county extension agents included in the Summary of Extension Service Activities 1923: Extension Circular No. 164, March 1924.

Like in many other southern states, the Arkansas extension program pursued both a racial and gendered division of labor yet in reality the members did not always adhere to these boundaries. The idea was that male agents worked to increase farm income which correlated with the male sphere of production while home demonstration programs sought to improve the home life which was considered within the female sphere of reproduction and consumption. Farm women of both races initially resisted the "female sphere" approach to division of labor, it is not until the 1940s when you begin to see a shift in this response as a direct result of the first generation of 4-H youth, boys and girls club members coming of age, but women's programs did replicate the South's racial divisions by requiring separate white and black extension staff and club organizations.

The first black male county agent, Harvey C. Ray was appointed in Arkansas on February 1, 1915. In December of that year, he married Mary McCrary, who was at that time in charge of

the home economics department of Langston University in Langston, Oklahoma.[64] Mary Ray became the first black home demonstration agent for Arkansas on March 16, 1916, serving Phillips, Pulaski, and St. Francis counties. On July 1, 1918, Ray was made the district home demonstration agent and stayed in this position until her death in 1934.[65] The number of black agents both for farm and home demonstration quickly increased. In 1917, there were six men and six women employed as agents. By 1918, there were twelve men and six women employed. In 1919, there were ten men and twenty women employed. The funding available for the black programs increased during this same time. During the years 1915-1916, the funding was $240. Only two years later during the 1918-1919 fiscal year, funding had increased to $9,281.35. The next year, the 1919-1920 fiscal year it increased to $22,330.81. For the 1923-24 fiscal year funding increased to $46,996.93. Demonstration work was carried on in 11 counties of the State with eleven local home demonstration agents and nine local farm agents working in these counties. The twenty local agents were supervised by two district agents for black work. Much of the work was done through the boys' and girls' club work, known as Farm and Homemakers clubs organizing more than 1,400 girls and 1,250 boys.[66] However, the majority of the 1920s and 1930s funding drastically fluctuated with the overall extension program being severely impacted in the 1920s. The black farm extension work was often the first to be cut when county finances were bad, and was even discontinued in a number of counties.[67]

The limited number of black agents charged with serving the black population resulted in some cross-over with the white agents, though not frequently. Walker Cooper of the AES

[64] Jones-Branch, 86.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Summary of Extension Service activities, Extension Circular No. 165, March 1924, Arkansas Extension Circular, University of Arkansas digital collection, Fayetteville, AR. http://digitalcollections.uark.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/ArkExt/id/11061/rec/18 (accessed February 3, 2017).
[67] Hogan, 146.

conducted a study around 1938 which showed that there were 27,898 black families living in counties without a black extension agent. The study revealed that the black men were more likely to use the services of the farm agent by visiting the white agent's office or attending general meetings. Regarding home demonstration work, the study showed that the white home demonstration agents were less likely to have interaction with the black women as these women came to town less frequently than men, and the white home demonstration agents rarely visited black homes. Of the home demonstration agents answering this survey, nine white agents answered that they never received visits from black women, twenty-eight answered to occasionally receiving visits, and eight answered that they frequent visits. What is most telling about this survey, is that it asked black farm women how often they were influenced by the white home demonstration agent on matters relating to gardening, poultry, nutrition, food preservation, live-at-home program, home improvement, clothing and renovation, handicraft, and health and education. The averages were 12 who said not at all, five said frequently, and 24 occasionally.[68]

Outside of Arkansas, historians have found that black home demonstration agents focused on teaching industrial skills which aligned with the lower class status such as basket, rug and mattress making programs while white agents typically did not embrace these programs until later in the 1920s as a result of the market-oriented handicraft revival.[69] However, in Arkansas the focus of both the white and black programs reveal club members were interested in similar lessons and skills. Arkansas was a rural and poor state. Home demonstration work for black families started much the same way as it did for white farm families – canning tomatoes.[70] The home demonstration agent would set up a demonstration at a community gathering place, such as

[68] The Effectiveness of Extension in Reaching Rural People. Arkansas Extension Circular No. 221, June 1926, University of Arkansas digital collection http://digitalcollections.uark.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/ArkExt/id/11159/rec/1 (accessed April 5, 2017).
[69] Rieff, 135.
[70] Jones-Branch, 87.

a school or church, and families brought their tomatoes to preserve. In 1920, there were 196 home demonstration clubs for black women with 2,557 members. By 1932, although the number of clubs declined to 1880, the membership rose to 3,776.[71] Both white and black families suffered from many of the same hardships. As a result, both white and black home demonstration programs taught food nutrition, domestic hygiene, and family health. Because of the dire poverty facing rural Arkansas, most black programs and many of the white programs focused as much on community uplift through self-sufficiency. It became more and more important for programs to impress the importance of food preservation upon rural women, especially during times of war and economic depressions.[72] Regardless of race, women were encouraged to extend their new learned skills to the schools, in their churches, and throughout their community.

Like the white home demonstration clubs, black clubs served many purposes in a rural community. They provided women with a forum to ask questions and to discuss health and child care concerns. Clubs combined educational programs with the AES agenda but also provided opportunities for women to socialize.[73] It was not until 1966 when the black and white demonstration work merged. This same year the name was changed from home demonstration to Extension Homemakers work which further reflects the changes taking place across the country and in agriculture at that time. Regardless, women of different races shared common reform experiences in Arkansas related to home demonstration work. The main difference was the financial and staff support provided to the effort was not equal which limited the reach of the formal program, and the complicated community racial boundaries agents had to navigate in and out of. Overall, all club members regardless of race participated in similar projects. A closer

[71] Hogan, 150-152.
[72] Jones-Branch, 88.
[73] Ibid, 89.

look at these programs reveal the shifting and changing priorities of federal and state programs as rural families were adjusting to the changing demands and needs of the agriculture sector.

During the early years, agents of the Women's Division of the Extension Service traveled across the state to bring the latest information about household management, agriculture, nutrition, and child-rearing to thousands of mothers, wives, and future farmers through the creation of girls canning and home demonstration clubs in local communities. Agents utilized "demonstrations" to teach women and girls new practices or techniques such as how to can fruit and vegetables. As outlined by the USDA, a "demonstration" was to be given by an extension worker or other trained leader for the purpose of showing how to carry out a practice.[74] A "result demonstration" was conducted by a farmer, home maker, boy or girl under the direct supervision of the extension worker, to demonstrate locally the value of a recommended practice. This type of demonstration involved a substantial period of time where results and comparison were recorded. "Result demonstrations" were designed to teach others in addition to the person conducting the demonstration. For example, farm demonstration agents would use a "result demonstration" to reveal how the application of fertilizer to cotton would yield more profitable results. Home demonstration agents used "result demonstrations" to show how a proper diet could correct the underweight of certain children.[75]

The very first home demonstration agents in the state were chosen from rural school teachers. In 1918, there was a six week training course held for all county home demonstration agents at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. It was not until 1923 that it became required that home demonstration agents held a Bachelor of Science degree in home economics. A home demonstration agent was supposed to possess a number of other qualities, including practical

[74] Elizabeth Griffin Hill, *A Splendid Piece of Work: One hundred years of Arkansas's Home Demonstration and Extension Homemakers Clubs* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), 16-17.
[75] Hill, 16-17.

farm experience or experience in rural school teaching and practical knowledge of homemaking. She was also to have attained leadership in her community, possess tact and good judgment, and be neat in appearance and appropriately dressed.[76] In 1917, the University of Arkansas granted the first home economics degrees. These graduates became a frequent source for the extension service to recruit for open home demonstration agent positions in the state. By 1940, 49% of the Arkansas home demonstration agents were graduates of the University of Arkansas. However, the USDA did encourage that some agents from other states should be employed in order to infuse new ideas into the program.[77]

The history of home demonstration work in Arkansas is unique compared to other states because the program employed a number of women who served the extension program for decades, leaving a lasting legacy on the work. One of these women is Connie Bonslagel. Bonslagel was born in Mississippi and served as the assistant to the state home demonstration agent before moving to Arkansas to become the state home demonstration agent in 1917. Except for an eighteen month period in the 1930s, Bonslagel served as the state agent from 1917 until her death in 1950. Under her tenure, Bonslagel saw membership grow from 2,083 in 1917 to a high of 64,863 in 1941.[78] Another long-time home demonstrator was Mary L. Ray, who pioneered black home demonstration clubs in Arkansas. She came to Arkansas in 1916 as the wife of Harvey Ray, the first black county agent. May Ray became the first black district home demonstration agent, serving from 1916 until her death in 1934.[79]

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[76] Hogan, 69.
[77] Amy Leigh Allen and Timothy Nutt, *Improving the Lives of Women & Children: Extension Homemaker and 4-H Clubs in Arkansas, 1914-1964*, Scholarly Symposium & Extension Exhibition on the Centennial of the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, http://smithlever.wvu.edu/r/download/199833 (access March 13, 2017).
[78] Elizabeth Griffin Hill, "Constance (Connie) Josephine Bonslagel (1885-1950), Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture, March 26, 2014. http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=7769 (accessed December 3, 2016).
[79] Jones-Branch, 86.

The life of a Home Demonstration agent was not one of luxury, especially in the early years. Agents received low salaries and generally travelled all week over poor road conditions from one rural community to another. The agents frequently had to stay overnight in a member's home, if offered, and eat whatever food was available. Because of the difficult travel conditions and low salaries, many Arkansas home demonstration agents were often the wives of county farm agents. This was the case in at least 21 instances from 1915-1920. There were also a few father and daughter teams traveling together as the county agent and home demonstration agent.[80] Odessa Holt, the daughter of a white county agent wrote an account of some of her personal experiences traveling with her father in 1916-1917. Holt was the home demonstration agent in Montgomery County for a three-year period. Travel that first year was mostly in a "buggy" or in a wagon drawn by mules and the work was long. Odessa and her father would leave on Monday morning and did not return until Friday night. They had to rely on the hospitality of the farm families for food and lodging. After one of their first assignments, she and her father started for home one evening but were invited to stay with a young couple in the home they were building, which was not yet finished. Holt writes that the next morning they had breakfast of kraut, canned apples, and cornbread made without milk or eggs, and there was no coffee, sugar, cream or meat. During the second and third years of Holt's work, they travelled in a Ford Model T and explain that she spent hours wading through mud holes or pushing from behind while her father drove. There were few bridges and many times they would get stuck in a creek trying to cross. During these early years, the majority of her work was not performed at community meetings or in clubs but rather through personal conduct and home visits with interested citizens. This reveals how the acceptance of this work was dependent on the local women embracing the programs and finding value in participating in home demonstration

[80] Allen, http://smithlever.wvu.edu/r/download/199833 (accessed March 13, 2017).

programs. These local women had agency and were not being "reformed" by the agent's demonstrations brought to their communities. Instead, a closer look at home demonstration work in Arkansas reveals it was a dynamic relationship between the agents and the women participating which explains why most of Miss Holt's demonstrations were canning, preserving, and bread making because these were the programs women found useful.

The majority of local women were often skeptical of the home demonstration agents who they did not know especially if the agent did not live in their community. Remember, agents covered an entire county and at times, their work could overlap into a surrounding county that did not have a county agent. In response to skepticism from adults, many agents focused their efforts first on children. Boys and girls were often early adopters when it came to trying methods set forth by demonstration agents. Before the Smith-Lever Act, there were clubs organized for both boys and girls which concentrated on a specific farm task, with the males concentrating on projects considered masculine, such as crop and livestock pursuits. The girls, as was the attitude of the day, were expected to participate in more feminine activities such as canning and sewing. The first boys club in Arkansas was a Corn Club in White County, beginning in 1908 with each member planting and cultivating an acre of corn. As previously noted, the first girls club was the Tomato Club of Mabelvale, AR in 1912. As girls programs spread and evolved over the years, local women were more receptive to the agent's work and women's and girls' clubs were often intertwined, where mothers and daughters could participate together. Some clubs were girls only or women only, but there were also mother/daughter groups and groups that involved the whole family.

As early as 1915 agents noted in the state canning report that women were as eager to learn the same canning methods as girls who participated in the canning clubs. [81] During that year, agents reported holding 286 canning schools for women with an average of twenty in attendance for a total of 5,720 who received instructions.[82] These canning demonstrations often started out very crude with an outdoor stove. Canning demonstrations usually started with tomatoes but other vegetables were soon encouraged. The AES would publish circulars outlining instructions for the demonstration or program. For example, the 1919 Extension Circular 76 "Table of Instructions for Canning 4-H Products," lists 14 different vegetables, including carrots, sweet potatoes, spinach, okra, and corn. In 1924, the Cooperative Extension recorded that 1,258 women canned 255,962 quarts and 606 4-H girls canned 20,369 quarts of fruits, pickles, preserves, jellies, fruit juices, and vegetables across 10 counties.[83] Once the families saw the benefits to their family, canning quickly spread across the state. However, this new skill would only prove to further reinforce the Extension's view of the appropriate gender roles within the household. Although this new skill would allow women to better provide and uplift their family, it was not saving them time but rather added another labor intensive task to farm women's daily lives and a task that aligned with the more "proper" gender roles for female household labor.

Another main focus of early demonstration work was the introduction of diverse cooking techniques which further aligned with the appropriate gendered division of labor within the household. Cooking schools were used as a way to help create interest in home demonstration work. In 1916, cooking specialists, Miss Marcella Arther and Miss Isabella Thursby, held 76

[81] 1915 Arkansas State Canning Report, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Extension Activities During Twenty Year Period in Southeast Arkansas. University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service Records (MC 1145), series 7, box 6, file 5. Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.

two-day cooking schools and three-day schools in 45 counties. Although there were only twenty home demonstration agents in the state at this time, interest in the work was not stagnating. In many of the areas with small schools, which were financially unable to have home economic departments, regular teachers or local club women taught the cooking lessons based on the home demonstration cooking specialists' plans.[84] The home demonstration agent provided the tools for local women to utilize and share with their peers such as Circular 108, "Working Direction in Cookery" which included recipes for quick breads, simple desserts, and school lunches.[85] Women used these circulars as guides in individual demonstrations or programs offered in their own community.

Especially in the beginning, the initial acceptance or buy-in of home demonstration work depended heavily on the individual agent. Each agent had to visit the girls or women as often as possible or it was believed that the club members would become discouraged and quit. Girls as well as their parents struggled to understand why a stranger would show interest in their well-being and were often skeptical. One agent noted, "Tact and patience must be exercised and many explanations made. In my experience I found one little girl who, as well as her parents, would not believe that I could not charge them for the help I gave…It was only after the year's work was done and I had helped her finish her record book that I at last gained her confidence."[86] Gaining the trust of rural women and girls required persistence and patience. Agents found rural women were reluctant to accept their advice unless agents addressed local needs and interests first. At the same time, the USDA was heavily involved in the selection of the programs offered. Yet, the reality of needing to address local needs first shaped domestic reform in ways that

[84] 1916 Annual Narrative Report, Arkansas State Home Demonstration Agent. Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[85] Gertrude E. Conant, June 1926, Working Directions in Cookery for Second Year Club Girls, Extension Circular No. 108, Records of the Arkansas Extension Service, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR, http://digitalcollections.uark.edu/cdm/ref/collection/ArkExt/id/10853, (accessed March 11, 2017) .
[86] Emma Archer, "History of Home Demonstration Work for 1912," 2, as quoted in Hogan, 48-49.

limited its modernizing tendencies and preserved local traditions. Demonstration work did not transform these rural communities overnight. Rather it was only after decades of interaction with extension work, the agents, and their demonstrations that new techniques, conveniences, and modernization would be embraced by Arkansas women. It was not until rural women expressed interest in specific techniques that agents choose to include those items in the program.

One significant obstacle to the success of the program involved access. The reality of the program was that one agent was charged with reaching rural women throughout an entire county in spite of rather primitive transportation and communication systems. As a result, the number of individual women demonstrating exceeded the number of women who were formal members of organized clubs and this continued for several years only further revealing the ripple effect demonstration work was having across the state.[87] One demonstration agent in Arkansas described her work in the classroom being "bound by the confines of her county; her pupils are all the girls and women she enrolls. Following the example of the great teacher, she, by percept and example, aids the poor, encourages the weak, teaches industry and thrift, educates the mind, instills beauty, purity, and love in the heart, trains the hands to labor efficiently and intelligently…"[88] Agents believed they were doing the much needed work in the communities to educate women about new techniques to uplift rural families. These women felt empowered yet were promoting a paternalistic program centered on a gendered division of labor, one that was not the reality for many families at the time. This reveals how the extension program was a permanent contradiction and that rural reform was not merely a matter of local people accepting these programs or demonstrations but a dynamic relationship where rural women themselves had

[87] 1917 Annual Narrative Report for Independence, Ouachita, Phillips (or Prairie), Saline, Sevier, and Union County Home Demonstration Agents, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[88] Emma Archer, "History of Home Demonstration Work for 1912," 2, as quoted in Hogan, 48-49.

agency as they selected which skills or techniques they found most valuable. Then applied them to their daily lives as a tool to remain effective producers on the farm in response to the transformation of agriculture taking place at the same time.

Among some rural women, home demonstration agents represented elitist attitudes and criticisms of "country ways and traditions." The home demonstration district agents spent a great deal of their time in the early years training new employees who had just graduated from college. Many new agents came with advanced degrees and all with a special interest in a particular line of work. However, they rarely were adequately prepared for the more fundamental but necessary categories of food production, poultry, gardening, and home dairy work.[89] The state home demonstration agent, Connie Bonslagel noted in her annual report that a "restraining, guiding hand has been necessary to bring about a balance" between what the new graduates wanted to do and what the women needed. Another contradicting aspect of the program was that agents taught women resources for their work within the home and how to take better care of their families yet, many home demonstration agents were better educated, and all of them were professionally employed. Even though the women with whom they worked were married, women agents were not allowed to marry if they wanted to retain their job. This USDA policy impacted the retention rate of agents and proved to be one of the greatest challenges for the Arkansas program. Not only did Bonslagel struggle with hiring well-qualified home demonstration agents but retaining experienced, seasoned ones proved the most challenging. In the 1929 report, it was noted that eight young women had resigned to be married, with two or three having no intention of staying throughout the year when they came to the position.[90] The USDA policy restricting agents from being married reflected the concerns of the time regarding

[89] Bonslagel, 1929 Annual Narrative Report, Arkansas State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[90] Ibid.

gender dynamics within the community and the importance of reinforcing conservative domestic values. Historians such as Lynne Rieff argue women agents were not allowed to marry because the extension agency feared husbands and children would distract the female agents from their work.[91] However, married women who had been working prior to the USDA policy change were grandfathered in and allowed to remain employed.[92] This contradicts Rieff's argument and instead further reiterates the challenges the agency faced in retention of experienced and knowledgeable agents, especially in Arkansas. Once again, the Extension's gendered and paternalistic approach limited its ability to modernize the south.

Even though the number of women and clubs remained small in 1917 with 21 clubs and 5,217 women participating, women's work had evolved quickly from simply canning tomatoes. It was not long before members were expressing interest in a variety of topics such as bread making, canning, cooking techniques, drying, and fireless cookers.[93] Bread making appears to have been incorporated into canning club agendas early on. Of the close to 4,000 loaves made in 1916, Drew County led the state with 2,000 loaves of white bread made.[94] Home demonstration agents encouraged the making of white bread in lieu of corn bread to fight Pellagra, a vitamin B3 deficiency found in individuals who subsisted on corn. Labor saving devices were another topic of discussion and devices were installed in homes as early as 1917, including fireless cookers, iceless refrigerators, fly traps, fly screens, ironing boards, kitchen cabinets and water systems. These "labor saving devices" were in fact not labor saving but rather more convenient and added

[91] Rieff, in *Hidden Histories of Women in the New South*, 135.
[92] Rieff, "Rousing the People of the Land: Home Demonstration Work in the Deep South, 1914-1950," (PhD diss., Auburn University, 1995), 228.
[93] 1917 Annual Narrative Reports for Independence, Ouachita, Phillips (or Prairie), Saline, Sevier, and Union County Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[94] 1916 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

modernizing elements within the family home.[95] With each new device came additional tasks for Arkansas women, which were often overlooked by the agents and even the women themselves as new programs were being delivered.

Although the responses and acceptance of various progressive reform efforts in the South demonstrate that race and gender were integral within southern society, the southern farmer and farm wife individually evaluated reform on their own needs and aspirations. Women who participated in these programs regardless of race determined its success or failure and in doing so, articulated their own visions of what it meant to be a farm woman. In Arkansas, club women significantly shaped the agenda and skills the home demonstration agents were teaching. As Bonslagel reveals, "They [Agents] were early taught the fundamental principle of Extension's work, namely, that the farm women's real needs and not the new agent's likes are to determine the program."[96] As the program expanded each year, it was apparent one agent per county was not enough because the work was too varied for one new college graduate to successfully navigate. By the late 1920s and early 1930s, new college graduates were often placed as assistant agents in order to gain the much needed experience from their peers.[97] By 1933, forty-nine counties supported home demonstration agents and by that next year, college graduates were not among those hired to fill most of the positions.[98] The heavy focus on meeting the local needs of each club and the diverse training of home demonstration agents in Arkansas significantly impacted the interest, participation, and support at the local level and across the state. Overall, the early years of home demonstration work began to transform and add to the

[95] 1917 Annual Narrative Reports for Independence, Ouachita, Phillips (or Prairie), Saline, Sevier, and Union County, County Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[96] 1929 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Record Group 33, Records of the Arkansas Extension Service, The National Archives and Records Administration Southwestern Branch, Fort Worth, Texas.
[97] Bonslagel, 1929 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[98] Hill, *A Splendid Piece of Work*, 103.

farm woman's role within the household, community, and farm economy. Arkansas farm women regardless of race used these programs on their own terms further altering female labor patterns as well as exposing themselves to aspects of community uplift and the market economy which will be further discussed in the following chapters.

"…It is important that we develop speed and skill in our work."

Chapter Two:
Promoting Production & Self-Sufficiency

As farming underwent significant changes in the early twentieth century, the household economy served as an engine of economic change and reconfigured gender relations in rural communities. Home demonstration work was at the heart of this change as it modified rural women's daily tasks and labor patterns. These programs taught self-sufficiency, promoted production in farm women's work, and provided women an opportunity to utilize their new skills to uplift their families in new and innovative ways. Although the extension program pursued a gendered division of labor, very few households had previously been organized this way. In order to understand how home demonstration work transformed rural women's lives; we must first recognize the historical context of women's work within the rural household.

One of the most complicated aspects of southern farm women's work was that of field work, which carried great social and emotional significance for many rural people. Farming involved enormous amounts of labor due to the endless hours required to cultivate cash crops for the market. Because of this all but the wealthiest farmers relied on family labor, including the work of women and children. As a result, field work held a prominent place within southern farm women's lives.[99] During the first half of the twentieth century, in rural Arkansas as in other rural communities, the practical need for women's labor in the fields collided with a social norm that dictated separate spheres for men and women. The notion of separate spheres is the belief that men naturally inhabit the public sphere of society such as the world of politics, economy, commerce, and law. Women's "proper sphere," is the private realm which includes domestic

[99] Walker, *Work, Family, and Faith*, 6-10.

life, childrearing, housekeeping, and religious education.[100] In reality, very few households functioned this way due to the nature of the demands of rural America and the household economy.

It is important to acknowledge that both white and black farm families struggled to balance this desire to free their family's women from the arduous conditions of field work with the need for their labor in order to make ends meet. The complicated yet racial dilemma of women's field work has its roots in the antebellum American South, where slave owners commonly assumed that enslaved women would perform the same jobs as men. The type of work performed by women became a key marker of racial difference.[101] Historian Stephanie McCurry has argued, white women's work in the fields, although customary, was customarily ignored and even denied. The idea of white women picking cotton was too threatening to the southern ideal of the role of women within the family to even be acknowledged. For several decades, women and labor historians have sought to better understand how women domestic and workplace lives interacted, how they complemented or competed with one another. Further complicating an already complex picture of women's work in the early twentieth century was that the reality of the southern farm woman's physical location of her work could not be easily classified as either "public" or "private." In order to provide for their families, women worked, for the most part, in the place where they lived as well as in the fields.

Another important aspect to understand before going further into our discussion of home demonstration work is the distinction between farm and town life. Farm life was significantly

[100] The separate spheres ideology presumes that women and men are inherently different and that distinctive gender roles are natural. See Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Women Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835*, (Yale University Press, 1997).
[101] Stephanie McCurry, *Master of Small Worlds: Yeomen Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 62, 72, 74, 79, 80, 81-82.

different from town life: on the farm all members of a family labored together to produce a single wage known as the farm economy. For the woman, family income impacted her world in two ways. First, it meant that her work was on behalf of her family and so might be socially acceptable. Second, she had no money to call her own, and in many families the wife negotiated with the husband for spending money. However, it is important to note that the farm economy included much more than the cash crop.[102] Long before home demonstration work, rural women marshaled the resources of the farm, particularly food and clothing, and their contributions in doing so made a notable difference in their family's well-being. The labor of southern farm women in the home, in the garden, and for the market was essential to their families' well-being, and it played a major role in the economy of the region. As county farm agents taught men how to improve farm work for better efficiency, not contemplating women laboring in the fields, women were searching for ways to continue to remain active producers on the farm. Home demonstration work provided women new techniques to support their family as well as highlighted the powerful role women could continue to play within the household economy. Overall, home demonstration work modified labor patterns and added new tasks to rural women's daily lives that would eventually transform gender relations within the household as agriculture changed over time and women were pulled out of the fields.

Farm women performed their work in the context of the southern agricultural economy, which swung wildly between 1900 and 1920 depending on the markets, weather, and disease. After World War I, the farm economy began its inexorable slide toward the Great Depression. Poverty shaped women's lives, and the land-tenure status of a woman's male relatives determined much about the nature of her work. Much historiographical debate still surrounds the rise of the land-tenure system after the Civil War, but by 1900 it was so well developed that its

[102] Walker,10.

rules had attained the status of common wisdom. A landowner or nearby merchant supplied the landless farmer with credit during the growing season and at harvest totaled up the credit plus interest and subtracted that amount from the tenant's or sharecropper's portion of the harvest. This system worked to keep landless farmers in debt year after relentless year, with little means of advancement. A few landless farmers were able to accumulate some savings as well as work stock and tools; these farmers often became cash renters, paying a regular rent for the use of the land and keeping all of the proceeds from their crop. But these cash renters could also easily slip into sharecropping or tenant-farming status if they suffered a bad year due to drought, blight, insects or low commodity prices. As a result, very few southern farmers were wealthy, some were comfortable and many lived in fairly deep poverty. Most farm families lived on thin margins of sufficiency.[103]

Figure 2. Image from the home demonstration section in the Arkansas Extension Service Annual Report, Extension Circular No. 280, February 1930.

Home demonstration programs provided avenues for women to continue to contribute to the farm economy as agriculture was undergoing significant changes across the state. Beginning in the mid-twentieth century, crop diversification and mechanization began to slowly transform

[103] Walker, 9 and 10.

the countryside, accelerating in the 1930s until the end of World War II continuing into post-war America. These changes impacted the patterns of farm life, tasks performed, and expectations and demands placed on rural farm women. The USDA utilized farm and home demonstration programs to assist rural families in adjusting to these changes and as a way to introduce new farming and household techniques throughout rural America. When compared to its northern counterpart, the Southern agricultural extension program took a very different strategy regarding the focus of their home demonstration work. According to J.A. Evan's *Recollections of Extension History*, home economists at colleges and extension divisions outside the South opposed the emphasis on productive work for income which was heavily encouraged by southern agents.[104] Rather than a mere dissemination of professional expertise from agents to rural women, southern agents' work responded to the local needs and interest of the communities they served which reveals the importance southern farm women placed on remaining active producers on the farm. As a result, the AES like as in many other southern states choose to focus their efforts on food production and self-sufficiency in an effort to emphasize growing food at home which was of great concern for many rural women. Exposure to and participating in home demonstration programs directly affected the context in which women worked. New skills such as gardening, canning, sewing, and raising poultry learned from home demonstration agents added new tasks to women's daily life, allowed them to remain producers on the farm yet further reinforced the gendered labor division of labor promoted by the extension program.

The First World War was extremely important for the expansion and acceptance of farm and home demonstration work. The importance of food production and self-sufficiency during the war made both the home and farm agents more essential and more readily accepted in rural

[104] J.A. Evans was chief of the federal Office of Extension, South, at the time of its merger in 1921 with the Office of Extension, North and West. Evans, *Recollections of Extension History*, 24-29.

communities than ever before. As a result, the extension staff and rural women's club membership were temporarily expanded while the demonstration program was collapsed into a single focus - to support the war effort through food production. In order to increase food production, the "Live-at-Home" program became the home demonstration agents' chief means of assisting the Food Administration with the objective to teach farm families self-sufficiency. These programs sought to increase food production for the war effort, gave home demonstration agents visibility and heightened public awareness of their work and programs, while providing an opportunity to prove to elected officials why home demonstration work mattered and that this work had economic value.[105] At the same time, the opportunities and challenges created by World War I revealed the complexities of reforming rural life.

In Arkansas, both home demonstration agents and women participated in war efforts focused on production and efficiency, often women organizing these at the local level. Annual reports during the war years even included a page entitled "Emergency Work in Food Production and Conservation" outlining the extensive work undertaken by home demonstration members throughout the state. By 1918 it was reported that sixteen demonstration kitchens and twelve school laboratories had been established in Southwest Arkansas. These were used by local women and girls for demonstrations in war cookery and food conservation.[106]

One important technique for food conservation was canning. Nearly every family was interested in canning and not just canning fruits which had been traditionally passed down from generation to generation. The average club member felt that the canning of fruit was one subject she knew the most about but the idea of canning vegetables and meats had an unthinkable value to them especially during trying times. Applying this technique to vegetables and meats allowed

[105] Rieff, 147.
[106] Bonslagel, 1918 Annual Narrative Report, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

families to expand their food conservation efforts both for their own families but for emergency relief efforts as well. Demonstrations were given on how to make sure to not waste any part of an animal. As a result, the steam pressure canner was introduced to farm families through home demonstration work as early as 1920 in order to carry out this line of canning.[107] In the 1920 annual report, 13 whole beeves were reported canned in Crawford County, five in Cleveland County in addition to every kind of meat that was edible such as chicken, mutton, pork, goat, rabbit and squirrel.[108] Women learned how to make use of all that they had by canning a whole beef, roast, stew, steak, kidney, ox tail soup, heart, tongue, soup stock, and even how to use the bones for chicken feed.[109]


A Community Demonstration in Canning a whole Beef.

Figure 3. Image from the black demonstration section under black home demonstration work in the Arkansas Extension Service Annual Report, Extension Circular No. 193, February 1930.

Getting women to can at home was a way of relieving pressure on the canning industry that was needed to preserve food for soldiers. During wartime, American citizens were encouraged to start "victory gardens," reducing their reliance on limited food rations. The

[107] 1920 Annual Narrative Report, North Central District Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[108] Bonslagel, 1920 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[109] Ibid.

natural next step was to can their newly grown produce. To maximize the utility of these war gardens, the Federal Government emphasized a number of food preservation methods, namely canning, as patriotic ventures. Naturally, the government called on artists to help it encourage this practice through propaganda poster campaign to make canning more "patriotic." The commissioned posters featured brightly colored artwork and slogans like "Can All You Can" and "Of Course I Can". The posters were used like most wartime rhetoric – to bring the public together around the common need to support the armed forces. Home demonstration clubs played a significant role in spreading and supporting home canning initiatives across the country throughout World War I and later during World War II.[110] These agents and club members held community meetings and also met with individual families to teach a variety of skills including safe canning practices of the period. Club members were leading demonstrations not only within their individual clubs but in larger community settings where they were able to share their expertise about canning with all members of the community.

Many small canning centers soon began to organize in response to the relief efforts. These centers operated successfully with home-size equipment or homemade devices, but the larger the scale of the operation the greater the need for specialized equipment. Directions for canning at home were provided in Farmer's Bulletin No. 1471, "Canning fruits and vegetables at home," published by the Bureau of Home Economics of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and available free on request to the Department.[111] In addition, the extension service created pamphlets to supplement that bulletin with suggestions for meeting problems that arose in

[110] Canning Through the World Wars, United States Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Library, https://www.nal.usda.gov/exhibits/ipd/canning/exhibits/show/wartime-canning/world-war-i, (accessed December 10, 2016).
[111] Community canning centers, May 1935, Mabel Stienbarger, Bureau of Home Economics, and Miriam Birdeye, Office of Cooperative Extension Work, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Internet Archive, https://archive.org/details/CAT31038847 (accessed March 2, 2017).

canning centers including the large scale canning by relief centers. The first canning centers were often the result of neighborhood arrangements for use of the same canning equipment at a saving of time, labor and fuel. Others were set up by the local agencies under the direction of extension workers to help conserve food after periods of emergency resulting from drought, flood, unemployment, or falling prices for food.[112] Canning was a very labor intensive job and took place over multiple days. This lengthy process added to women's daily tasks and redirected women's time and energy from the fields and inside the home – which was perceived as a more acceptable role for women.

During WWI, the shortage of meat in Europe was also a concern in the United States which explains why the topic of making cottage cheese was of great discussion in every home demonstration agent's annual report at this time. Cottage cheese provided families an alternative to meat when meat was not readily available or affordable. Agents diligently tracked the number of women and girls making cottage cheese and the number of pounds of cottage cheese sold through curb markets which were organized by demonstration agents to provide rural women with an opportunity to sell their household goods. In 1918, there were close to 500 demonstrators enrolled in cottage cheese making. In response to the interest of home demonstration members across the state, a cottage cheese specialist was added to the state staff, along with a canning specialist and child nutrition specialist in 1918.[113] By hiring a designated extension "specialist", the state demonstration program was able to train more clubwomen at the county and local level. The timing of each new specialist added to the extension work is very telling as it reveals the interest of the club women regarding the skills they were inquiring more

[112] Community canning centers, May 1935, Mabel Stienbarger, Bureau of Home Economics, and Miriam Birdeye, Office of Cooperative Extension Work, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Internet Archive, https://archive.org/details/CAT31038847 (accessed March 2, 2017.

[113] 1918 Annual Narrative Reports for State, Northwest District, and Northeast District Home Demonstration Agents, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

and more about. The specialists were trained by the USDA and devoted their time to educating as many clubwomen as possible in their specialized topic. They conducted all their work in cooperation with the county extension agents in counties. In counties where there are no county agents, the specialists did some work at the request of the district agent in charge of that territory. It was the first duty of the specialist to train the county workers and prepare to carry on the special lines of work considered without further aid from to specialist.[114] But like every aspect of home demonstration programs, their success was dependent on the rural women's response and interest in the demonstrations the specialist provided local communities.

It was increasingly important for members to find ways to improve efficiencies in their daily work while also finding ways as a club to contribute to the war effort. In Pike County, girls and women sold war bread sandwiches and gave a program at the picture show to secure funds in order to purchase equipment for their war kitchen. [115] Members utilized what was at their disposal to contribute such as club member; Mrs. Howard who sold $3,000 of Liberty Bonds, $6,000 of War Saving stamps and collected $2,796 for the United War Fund drive.[116] It was not only club members who stepped up, agents held war leadership roles outside the structure of home demonstration clubs further pushing the notion of the role women played within the public sphere. Agents served as County Chairmen of the War Savings Stamp Drives and also of the Junior Red Cross Association.[117] In Crawford County club women pledged to grow fall chickens in order to save meat. As a result, 700 club women raised an average of one hundred fall

[114] Annual Report: July 1, 1923, to June 30, 1924, Extension circular no. 193, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas. http://digitalcollections.uark.edu/cdm/ref/collection/ArkExt/id/11113
[115] 1918 Annual Narrative Reports for State, Northwest District, and Northeast District Home Demonstration Agents, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[116] 1918 Annual Narrative Report, Northwest District Home Demonstration Agent, Record Group 33, Records for the Arkansas Extension Service, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[117] 1918 Annual Narrative Report, Southwest District Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

chickens each, releasing a large amount of smoked meat for other uses.[118] Overall, home demonstration work repeatedly promoted production and efficiency in every aspect of women's work while exposing these women indirectly to opportunities outside their homes, outside the proper sphere of influence.

With the end of WWI, thousands of soldiers returned to Arkansas, many who had seen violence and mayhem and who had become familiar with other parts of the world. Colleges and universities welcomed new and returning students. Prices fell for cotton, lead, and zinc. Furthermore, a surplus of food caused agricultural prices to drop and contributed to a devastating depression for farm families, nine years prior to the stock market crash of October 25, 1929. At the same time, federal funding for home demonstration agents was significantly reduced now that the war effort was over and the need for food production and efficiency was not of national concern. This directly threatened and altered home demonstration work in the South. However, the lessons Arkansas women learned from the Live-at-Home program came in handy more than ever before for these news skills assisted women in keeping their families fed, clothed and sheltered in the years ahead despite the lack of resources allocated to the program.[119]

With a decrease in federal funding following WWI, State Extension staff were forced to reevaluate both the farm and home demonstration programs. In 1921, district and county agricultural and home demonstration agents met with specialists and state agents to access the critical needs of the farmstead. From that meeting new priorities were adopted for both Arkansas programs. The new state extension priorities included: 1) community organization for men, women, boys and girls; 2) boys' and girls' club work; 3) field crop demonstrations; 4)

[118] 1918 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[119] Rieff, 154. During WWII, the program participants increased but war jobs attracted people away from the farms and by 1945 the extension service retired the Live At Home program. Rieff finds the success of this program was at its height in the 1920s and 1930s during "business progressivism." George Tindall argues business progressivism emphasized production, efficiency, and profitability.

horticulture; 5) soil improvement; 6) cooperative marketing; 7) livestock demonstrations; 8) food production (garden, family cow, poultry, bees); 9) food conservation - canning, drying, meat curing; 10) food preparation and utilization; and 11) textiles and clothing.[120] The seven new priorities outlined specifically for home demonstration work included: 1) poultry raising; 2) gardening; 3) home dairy work; 4) canning; 5) nutrition and cookery; 6) textiles and clothing; and 7) improvement of house and yard.[121] Although these were new priorities, home programs continued to promote self-sufficiency and production in farm women's work yet with a more specialized focused in these seven prioritized areas. The programs responded to the needs of the local farm families who were struggling to find ways to contribute to the farm economy and provide for their families. For home demonstration work, textiles and clothing; and improvement of house and yard were not of greatest concern. Unlike the northern counterparts, the home demonstration programs in Arkansas, as in other southern states, were responding to local women's interest in remaining effective producers on their farm.

With a new focus on "poultry raising," club women were taught how to improve on something they had long been doing: contribute to the household economy and remain producers on the farm. The home demonstration agent in Polk County with the help of the local banks put on a "Swat the Scrub Rooster" campaign where 200 mongrel roosters were disposed of and the standard breed were purchased instead.[122] In Clay County, a special culling flock drive was made to get rid of hens that were poor layers.[123] Agents throughout Arkansas began focusing their demonstrations on teaching farm women to cull their flocks in order to show how to retain a higher rate of profit on their laying hens. Quality egg production is the primary goal for keeping

[120] Bonslagel, 1921 Annual Narrative Report, State Extension Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid.

layers. For a good layer, women were taught what to look for which was clean-cut, strong, refined heads while poor layers had coarse, thin, blocky, weak looking head. Culling enabled women to increase growth rate per bird and overall egg lay per hen ration. It also ensured that resources were not wasted on unproductive flocks. Most chickens that were culled could be sold as meat. By understanding how to maximize the productivity of a flock, these farm women learned how to handle the eventual decline in egg production of their flock and how to maximize egg production. Maximizing egg production not only provided protein for their families but a valuable commodity women could sell at curb markets.

Women incorporated the knowledge gained from home demonstration agents to improve their poultry productivity and attract buyers, making eggs one of women's most valuable commodities of exchange with merchants and within the neighborhood. For example, at an all-day meeting held in Newport, Jackson County, which brought together women from all over the county, the Chamber of Commerce provided lunch for the 75 guests and the work focused on self-sufficiency through the food preparation. In addition to sharing information about managing finances for their selling of eggs and other commodities, the program included how to cook an old roosters in the steam pressure cooker, how to make a pot roast in the fireless cooker as well as how to make meat and lettuce sandwiches, chicken salad, deviled eggs, oatmeal and honey cookies and lemonade were discussed.[124] The food women raised provided a margin of safety that cushioned families when times were rough or commodity prices fell during the winter months.[125] Women's commodity production allowed families to hold onto what they had. These experiences formed the first link in the supply chain that connected home producers, country

[124] 1921 Annual Narrative Report, North Central District Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[125] In *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South*, Lu Ann Jones finds farm women's production for the market, specifically the butter and egg trade, central to the family farm economy. Lu Ann Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 12.

stores, and wholesale markets.[126] Women began to learn family finances, control money they earned, and exercise control over production and manage profitable relationships with customers.

Figure 4. Image from the home demonstration section of the Arkansas Extension Service Annual Report, Extension Circular No. 193, February 1925.

With the heightened focus on poultry, gardening, dairy and canning, many home demonstration programs began to require that each club member engage in remunerative work. It was even formalized and mentioned in the state by-laws, that in order to be a "standard club" at least half of the members had to have at least one profit making project.[127] Poultry and dairy production were among the most popular and lucrative profit making projects by members. These opportunities for exposure and understanding of the market economy provided club women with a chance to utilize their "homemaking" skills to uplift their families in new and innovative ways. The focus on production and profit-making work reveals how the reality of home demonstration work was a permanent contradiction. Although poultry, gardening, dairy, and canning were gendered female, the more these women learned about how to become more self-sufficient, the more exposure women had to market economy which was gendered male. As

[126] Jones, 57.
[127] McCleary, 09.

a result, rural Arkansas women responded to progressive reform in their own way – blending their notion of the modern farm woman as a business person intertwined with a traditional perspective of the farm women as a producer.[128]

With each new skill learned, increased efficiency in women's work became more and more important. Regardless of the subject matter, the goal of each demonstration program or lesson was to teach a skill in the manipulative process as well as to teach the necessity of doing all house work in as short a time as possible. These two points were reiterated in every lesson and in every club whether the demonstration was taught by a district, county agent, or even local club members. Agents believed "it is [was] important that we [women] develop speed and skill in all of our [their] work; and we [agents] must plan for sufficient repetition to enable club members to do things rapidly."[129]

Similar to poultry-raising, textile and clothing demonstrations increased as a result of the Extension staff reevaluating the program in 1921.[130] Although it was not one of the top priorities, a textiles and clothing specialist in Arkansas was added to the staff. Clothing was a necessity for women and was a skill passed down from generation to generation. Dating as far back as colonial America, women made the cloth they used for their families. By the second half of the nineteenth century, Elias Howe's patent for a sewing machine in 1846 became the prototype for many later models. However, sewing machines cost too much for many rural

[128] As a result of the lucrative poultry demand following WWII, the extension agency shifted its poultry focus from women to men. Although this defeminization of agriculture is similar to earlier patterns for other crops such as dairying in the northeast, Jones argues that such a view ignores the critical period of transition when women were principal innovators in the development of the new industry. Southern women initially shaped these new modes of production because southern men continued to regard chickens as women's work and refused to enter the hen house until increased demand occurred.

[129] Mary Ray, 1922 Annual Narrative Report, Negro District Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

[130] 1921 Annual Narrative Report, State Extension Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

women and instead these women sewed by hand or would eventually pull their resources together and purchase a sewing machine to be used by the home demonstration club members.

Rural women in Arkansas used the skills learned through home demonstration work to more economically clothed themselves and their families. Through the textile and clothing home demonstration work middle class ideals of what was perceived as "acceptable dress and fashion" began to enter the countryside and further reiterate the expectation that this responsibility fell to the female matriarch of the household. One of the greatest obstacles in 1922 perceived by the newly hired clothing specialist was the "poor taste in the selection and buying of materials in appropriate dress for various occasions, waste of both new and old materials, and a lack of knowledge of color and design as adapted to the different types of individuals. To teach proper selection of clothing both as to color and occasion has demanded much time especially among the school girls."[131] It appears that agents were often surprised by the lack of knowledge of the proper use of materials. The very nature of the textile and clothing programs were underlined with condescending notions toward rural families and brought urban and middle class ideals into the countryside. In response, women influenced the programs that were provided by those that they showed interest in. These programs focused on textiles and clothing demonstrations teaching women enough about textiles to maximize the value of their purchases in hopes that every garment or piece of material would be used over and over until there was nothing left to use. Although this work reveals a condescending mentality toward rural women, many club members utilized this new textile knowledge in a way to provide for their families as well as contribute to the household economy. As early as 1918, state agent Connie Bonslagel found that throughout Arkansas approximately one thousand home demonstration women were engaged in the conservation of clothing. Clothing work consisted of teaching good workmanship as well as

[131] 1922 Annual Narrative Report, State Clothing Specialist, Home Demonstration Agent, Record Group 33.

the details of correct cutting and fitting in order for women and girls to make their own clothes.[132] Based on the particular home demonstration or club in which women were enrolled, pattern guidelines were given to club members. Often the demonstration would be repeated the same day by the club members. The mistakes would be pointed out by the agent and they would be ready to practice the lesson until the agent came for the next public demonstration.[133] Demonstrations eventually included clothing, in which the specialist demonstrated cleaning, pressing and making over a garment. Another early example of a clothing demonstration was the making of children's garments. The county agent often brought leaders from numerous communities together at a central location. The specialist provided samples of suitable children's clothing based on color, design, material and cost. She also provided stencils and patterns for the women, who each would make a garment. Each one then took the stencil and pattern back and shared the process with fellow club members, spreading the knowledge throughout the county.[134] Overall the success of programs such as these depended heavily on the club women who attended the demonstrations who would then have to take their new knowledge and share it with other women in their communities. This approach also empowered women to make informed decisions that would best provide for themselves and their families.

By the late-1920s, the clothing program had become an important part of home demonstration work. Time and time again, agents reported club members learned to remodel worn clothing to make new garments for their families. One St. Francis County member was able to increase their families' income by remodeling clothing. One agent reported that Mrs. Mattie Wade remodeled 22 wool and silk dresses for women, changing them into dresses that looked like new. In addition, she remodeled 34 children's dresses and coats from adult clothing.

[132] 1918 Annual Narrative Report, State Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[133] Ray, 1922 Annual Narrative Report, Negro District Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[134] 1922 Annual Narrative Report, State Clothing Specialist, Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

Her husband, who was a practicing physician in Forrest City, estimated that his wife's remodeling and renovating clothing for himself and wife, and children saved him more than $200 that year.[135] Because of the knowledge learned from demonstration work, Wade was able to provide clothing for all members of her family while at the same time, saved money that could be used for other purposes. With each new lesson, home demonstration work modified women's daily tasks and labor patterns within the household. Women had always been resourceful in providing for their families. However, learning new skills or other techniques for repurposing textiles allowed these women to continue contributing to the family economy while at the same time, providing for and uplifting their families.

Home demonstration programs also taught rural women, who often were not able to afford store-bought cloth, how to use seed and flour bags to make patterned cloth. Women with surplus feed sacks were able to turn them into a commodity. As historian LuAnn Jones suggests, the introduction of print feed bags indicated that feed dealers recognized women as farm decision makers and energized women's trade in bags. At the same time, the very fact that rural women began to use feed bags to make patterned cloth illustrates the changing dynamics within rural America as it relates to participation in a consumer culture and the emergence of middle class ideals in the countryside. Agricultural reforms such as home demonstration programs encouraged farm women to continue efforts in domestic manufacture but at the same time urged patterns of middle class consumption. As Jones suggests, women's purchasing of seed and floor bags are an example of middle class consumption which was gendered female. Farm women initially shunned extension programs that urged them to modernize but the agent's annual accounts reveal that these women did embrace programs that enhanced the domestic production of sewing and food preservation. In other words, rural women shaped the programs the agents

[135] 1929 Annual Narrative Report, St. Francis County Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

were providing in their local communities and in turn limited the elements of modernization on the countryside.

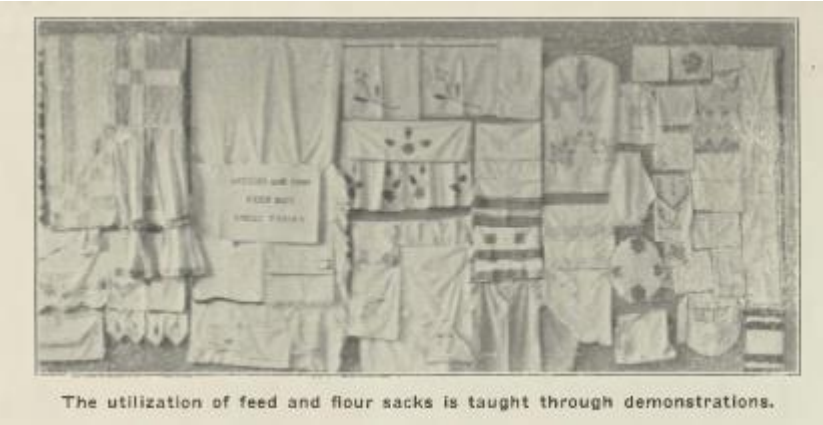


Figure 5. Image included in clothing and textile section of home demonstration section of the Arkansas Extension Service Annual Report, Extension Circular No. 280, February 1930.

One agent reported that women considered it a pleasure to make garments from sugar, meal, salt, and flour sacks. First, a demonstration was offered in bleaching and cleaning the sacks. Then agents would teach women how to make items from the sacks such as scarves, pillowcases, towels, curtains, aprons and children's underwear.[136] Although women were learning additional tools for repurposing textiles, they were also being introduced and encouraged to accept middle class ideals tied to color and fashion of garments. These programs were embraced by both white and black club members. The black district home demonstration agent, Mary Ray reported that as tenant 4-H girls made their gardens," not an empty sack was allowed to be thrown away but was used to make sewing bags, caps and aprons, uniform dresses."[137] Standard patterns and colors were encouraged for club members especially for members to wear when selling their products at curb markets or during community-wide

[136] 1932 Annual Narrative Report, Mississippi County Local Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[137] Ray, 1920 Annual Narrative Report, Negro District Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

demonstrations. Regardless of the audience – girls, women, black or white, the work always centered on promoting production in women's work and self-sufficiency for farm families.

Promoting production and self-sufficiency through home demonstration clubs became more and more accepted as club women increased sewing demonstrations and continued to discuss their work with each other making it an important feature of the club meetings. New stitches were learned and ideas exchanged.[138] Agents and members quickly realized that the materials did not look as cheap when dyed in colors as they did in white or cream. Club women and young girls were enthusiastic about the possibilities for clothing and home furnishings in dying.[139] By 1924, it was reported that women in Washington County were more interested in clothing and textiles than in previous years. Demonstrations in testing of materials, color combinations, choice and selection of materials, remodeling and millinery in addition to sewing were soon required in girls' and women's clubs. This was viewed as evidence that great progress had been made in the clothing and textile work during this time period. This further reinforced the condescending mentality of the progressive reforms as reforms sought to uplift rural America through modernizing the country side by encouraging the rural America to incorporate urban elements of fashion and design.

Bonslagel indicated in her 1927 report that local agents were training local leaders and there was a growing interest from both girls and women for opportunities to showcase their newly learned skills. Clothing contests became very popular during this time and the girls entering the contests were required to choose the materials and patterns then were graded on the suitability to the wearer of the color and design of the garments made.[140] A cotton dress contest for farm women was even added to the annual Farmers' Week held for farmers and wives at the

[138] 1927 Annual Narrative Report, Union County Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Bonslagel, 1927 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. This contest proved an excellent teaching tool and demonstration for the principal of dress design, garment construction and pattern alteration. In many communities, it was reported to be one of the most anticipated events of the club year and at times, the entire home demonstration club membership would enter. In Carroll County 150 farm women entered the county contest. A total of 1418, representing an increase of 1000 over the previous year's entries, took active part in the contest. Of this number, 64 women attended Farmers' Week and were entered in the finals there. In many counties the winning women were awarded a free trip to Farmers' Week.[141]

As agricultural mechanization was taking place, labor relations in the home were shifting and home demonstration work served as a resource for Arkansas women as they were adjusting to the changes taking place. During the early years of home demonstration, the work focused on food production and self-sufficiency which emphasized growing food at home. These experiences directly affected the context in which women worked. Canning, sewing, and raising poultry added new tasks to women's daily life yet women found that these new skills provided them with an opportunity to contribute to the farm economy outside the fields. Farm women, like other women, often associated their identities with home and family, seeing their work as primarily directed at the welfare of their families. Home demonstration clubs were used by these women to uplift their own families. The ability to preserve food provided a varied diet for their family, and the ability to sew feed sacks into clothing and repurpose textiles allowed them to provide clothing for her family. A women's commodity production significantly widened her family's options as consumers as she traded eggs, butter, and other goods for everything from medicine to curtain fabric. As transportation increased, a woman could travel farther to sell her goods. Even in some instances, she might receive cash. The family economy depended heavily

[141] Bonslagel, 1927 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

on the input of women, whether or not other family members acknowledged it. Southern farm women's labor – in the house, in the garden, and for the market – was absolutely crucial for it was essential to the family's well-being while at the same time, played a critical role in the economy of the region.

"… I believe in my work as a home maker, and accept the responsibilities it offers to be helpful to others and to create a more contented family and community life so that in the end farm life will be most satisfying."

Chapter 3
Uplifting the Community through Nutrition & Family Health

From the very beginning, local communities throughout Arkansas benefited from home demonstration work. This work altered women's sense of their own importance outside the home and exposed them to new aspects of community uplift. Programs taught food nutrition, domestic hygiene, family health, community beautification, and recreation. Once these lessons were applied at home, women extended their reach into the community. Demonstration work provided rural women a unique opportunity to develop their talents, gain confidence, and participate more actively in local communities. For the majority of Arkansas women, home demonstration programs built on women's previous experience with women clubs and further exposed these women to feminism at the grassroots level. The programs thus altered women's sense of importance outside the home and exposed many to the collective power of organizing. Although the focus of home demonstration work did not include activism, women utilized their new skills to meet the growing needs in their community. Women educated their community about nutrition and family health. Through food preservation they provided for those in need in times of hardship.

As Arkansans were facing endless challenges and trying times in the period between World I and World War II, uplifting local communities was of great importance to home demonstration club members. Although World War I brought some economic opportunity, the postwar period brought many social and economic challenges to families across the state. In Arkansas, racial tensions were high during this time period as seen by the number of lynchings,

the revival of the Ku Klux Klan, and the Elaine Massacre. Some historians point to the Elaine Massacre as one manifestation of postwar readjustment as both labor and race riots escalated across the nation in 1919 and 1920.[142] Further acerbating tensions in the state was the decline in the agricultural market in the post-war period. Prices recovered somewhat in the 1920s yet natural disasters followed in 1927 and again in 1930. The Flood of 1927 affected more than 2 million acres in Arkansas along the Mississippi River. Compiled with the impact of the Great Depression, another flood in 1930 and a severe drought shortly after exposed the poverty of rural Arkansas to the nation. Arkansans were experiencing trying times and home demonstration programs often provided the resources and knowledge needed for families to get by. At the same time, New Deal programs like FERA, AAA, and the WPA brought significant amounts of federal money into the state, and electrical service began expanding in Arkansas, yet it was not until after World War II that electricity reached many rural areas in the state. Regardless, the state was lagging behind in a number of ways compared to the rest of the nation, which proved to only further complicate the realities of life on the farm.

One of the greatest challenges facing Arkansans in the twentieth century was their poor health. Arkansas has a long history of poor health conditions, something that was starkly exposed by the high rate of medically-related rejections from military service that occurred during World War I. Modern medicine, a largely nineteenth-century creation, arrived late to Arkansas, and throughout the twentieth century diseases eradicated elsewhere continued to flourish. Although the Delta region lagged behind, sharp improvements in health in Arkansas began after World War II. Elsewhere in the state, public health took a giant leap forward in the early twentieth century when hookworms became the subject of a Rockefeller Sanitary

[142] Whayne, "Early Twentieth Century, 1901 through 1940," Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture, June 8, 2016. http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=403 (accessed November 12, 2016).

Commission study. Hookworm infection in the state's school children was extremely high in Arkansas, with estimates claiming up to twenty percent of the entire population of the state suffered from hookworm infestation, and in some counties in the southern part of the state the number was as great as 50 percent.[143] Hookworm is an intestinal parasite that grows and reproduces in the intestines of its hosts. When infected people deposit feces containing hookworm eggs in warm, moist, shaded soil, the eggs hatch and develop into larvae. Within five to ten days, the hookworm larvae are ready to burrow into the skin of a new host, usually between bare toes, and then travel up through the veins into the heart and lungs. The host develops a cough that expels the hookworm from the lungs, allowing it to be swallowed and then the hookworm attaches itself to the lining of the intestines and the life cycle begins anew. Hookworm immediately became a public health issue in Arkansas following the Rockefeller Commission study and between 1910 and 1914 a public health and education campaign sought to eradicate the disease.[144]

Two other diseases plagued Arkansas in this period. The worldwide influenza pandemic reached Arkansas in 1918, killing, 7000 of the 35,000 people in the state who contracted the disease. And Arkansas lost fewer men in World War I than it did during the pandemic.[145] Malaria constituted another malady although one that was endemic rather than episodic. During the time of the Hookworm program, science had finally proven that the mosquito was the carrier for malaria parasite. In 1915, as the connection between malaria and mosquitoes was recognized, an outbreak of malaria occurred in Crossett, Arkansas. The disease spread across the

[143] Moneyhon, 71-72.
[144] Sarah Hudson Scholle, *The Pain in Prevention: A History of Public Health in Arkansas*, (Little Rock: Arkansas Department of Health, 1990), 4-6.
[145] Nancy Hendricks, "Flu Epidemic of 1918," The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture, May 13, 2015, http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=2229 (accessed April 6, 2017). See Hendricks, Nancy, "PLAGUE!: The 1918 Influenza Epidemic in Arkansas," In To Can the Kaiser: Arkansas and the Great War, edited by Michael D. Polston and Guy Lancaster, (Little Rock: Butler Center Books, 2015).

state and the Arkansas Board of Health set to rid Crossett of malaria by eliminating or controlling the breeding sites of mosquitoes through a better drainage system in the town.[146]

In addition to infectious or parasitic diseases, pellagra, caused by a nutritional deficiency, affected thousands of Arkansans and other Southerners in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Pellagra is caused by a severe deficiency of niacin in the diet. Niacin naturally exists in a wide variety of food including yeast, eggs, fish, green vegetables, and cereal grains. Many in rural areas of the state were on the verge of pellagra toward the end of every winter as supplies of fresh vegetables dwindled.[147] When the Flood of 1927 struck and delayed the harvest that year, the state experience a heightened pellagra awareness as food viability worsened and tens of thousands of people abandoned their homes. Cases of pellagra rippled across the region affecting more than 50,000 as malnutrition worsened. In Arkansas alone, 657 died from pellagra in 1927.[148] The extent of pellagra, in the state was revealed during the Great Flood of 1927 as tenant families were removed from their homes and housed in Red Cross camps. Programs like the Red Cross distributing vegetable seeds to sharecroppers and tenant farmers or U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Arkansas Department of Agriculture's nutrition and agricultural diversification programs the cases of pellagra were greatly reduced. In 1927, Arkansas's governor even called a state-wide conference to work toward the eradication of the

[146] 100 Years of Service: Arkansas Department of Health 1913-2013," Arkansas Department of Health website, http://www.healthy.arkansas.gov/aboutADH/100Years/Documents/100yearsBooklet.pdf, page 6 (accessed March 2, 2017).
[147] Whayne, *Delta Empire: Lee Wilson and the Transformation of Agriculture in the New South*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011), 155.
[148] Kenneth Bridges, "Pellagra," The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture, February 7, 2014, http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=2230 (accessed April 6, 2017).

disease during the floods. By 1938, the number of pellagra deaths in Arkansas had dropped to 184 and continued to drop in the following years.[149]

Early demonstration work in Arkansas reveals a gradual growth in the understanding of nutrition and how foods affected health. As more and more women understood the importance of nutrition, communities were better prepared to address the health concerns and needs in their community. Many agents were overwhelmed by the poverty and need they found in the counties across the state. In 1921 Sallie Lindsey, the St. Francis County home demonstration agent filed in her annual report that upon arriving at Gum Grove School there were sixty dirty, poorly nourished children and a teacher who looked no better than the poorest child. She described the school building as fifteen feet square and containing only three little windows. Lindsey concluded that the teacher and children were suffering from malnutrition and well developed cases of itch also known as hookworm. In the same report, she describes her efforts on behalf of the residents at Hill School about seventeen miles from Forrest City. In conjunction with the County Charity Board, she had organized a club of rural women there and reported sending "sick people to hospitals, bought cork legs for cripples, clothed and fed the poor and unfortunate."[150] A deeper look at home demonstration work reveals that many lives were saved and debilitating conditions were alleviated through garden, canning, and nutrition programs.

Through home demonstration clubs, women quickly became aware of ways in which certain foods could improve their families' health.[151] Home demonstration work centered on nutrition promoted by gardening, canning, and cooking. The diet of the farm family was often poor when fresh produce was not available. One way agents worked to improve the farm family

[149] 1927 Annual Narrative Report, State Nutrition Specialist, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW. See also Whayne, *New Plantation South,* 64; and Whayne, *Delta Empire,* 154-157.
[150] Sallie Lindsey, Annual Report 1921, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[151] 1927 Annual Narrative Report, State Nutrition Specialist, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

diet was by encouraging each member to grow a year round garden. In addition to the home garden, agents taught women how to tend to an orchard to supply different fruits as well as produce poultry and dairy products for consumption and profit. It was believed that if a woman could preserve fruits, vegetables, and meats, she would be able to take care of all her family's needs. The skills taught by agents further reinforced the extension program's gendered approach to the division of labor within the farm household and further supported the middle class ideals of the role of a "housewife."[152] However, better understanding nutrition and family health would prove to not only benefit individual families but meet the broader needs of their community, county, and at times, the state.

In addition to gardening, demonstration work taught food preservation techniques often consisted of drying, brining or preserving with large amounts of sugar. These early clubs and meetings focused on growing home gardens and canning the fruits and vegetables produced along with lessons on cooking and nutritional balance. Canning demonstrations often started out over an outdoor stove. Once the families saw the benefits, canning quickly grew around the state. In 1924, the Cooperative Extension Service recorded that 1,258 women canned 255,962 quarts and 606 4-H girls canned 20,369 quarts of fruits, pickles, preserves, jellies, fruit juices, and vegetables across ten counties.[153] The women's and girls' clubs were often intertwined where mothers and daughters participated together. The Extension Circular number 65, "Food and Health for Arkansas," published in February 1919 detailed a year of lessons for Home Demonstration Clubs. Lessons included nutrition, meal planning, and cooking/recipes with the majority focusing on breakfast. The first lesson was about food groups. The six food groups

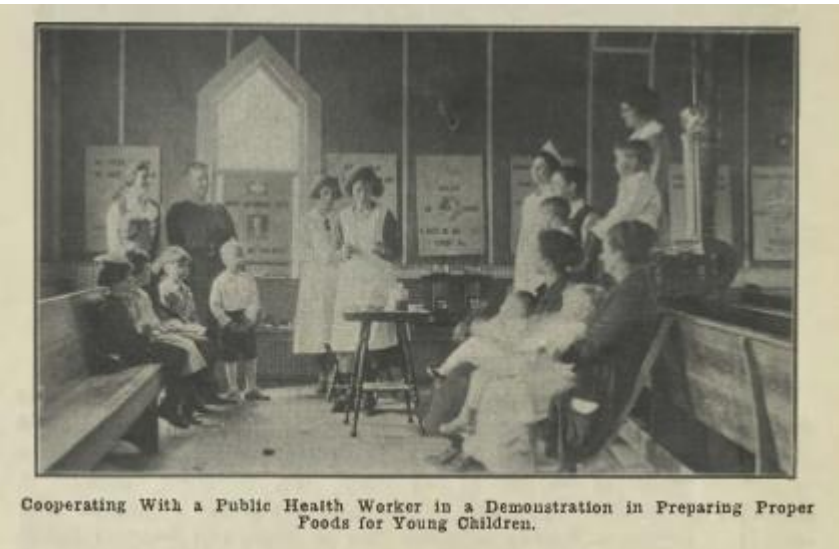
[152] 1927 Annual Narrative Report, State Nutrition Specialist, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[153] Extension Activities During Twenty Year Period in Southeast Arkansas. University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service Records (MC 1145), series 7, box 6, file 5. Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.

listed were fruits and vegetables; milk; meat and meat savers; cereals and their products; sugar and sugar substitutes; fats and fatty food; and vitamins. Despite the nutrition information being different compared to modern nutrition standards, the sample breakfast menus remain familiar – featuring meals of baked apples, peaches, toast, griddle cakes, muffins, milk, tea, and coffee. Although home demonstration work focused mainly on nutrition education in order to address poor health, the circulars also addressed issues of cleanliness and, thus, the spread of infectious diseases. For example, the circulars provided information to families about the relation of dirt to germs and the importance of brushing teeth, washing hair, hands and nails and covering hair when cooking and canning, was outlined in the personal hygiene section. Additionally, the circular covered home sanitation with the importance of a clean kitchen and the dangers of spoiled food.[154]

As nutrition education evolved so did the lessons and demonstrations being offered to rural women. Reports prior to 1920 discuss white bread making under the "nutrition" category. Eventually these nutrition discussions would include the benefits of whole wheat and bran breads but ultimately vegetables and salads were the primary topics of "nutrition" demonstrations. In 1920, Miss Gertrude Conant, state foods and nutrition specialist noted that three years prior, the words salads and cream soups were hardly known on the farms in her district and now these articles were on every table.[155] By 1927 in Nevada County, it was reported that the foods and nutrition specialist demonstrated ways to incorporate leafy vegetables into the diet. Spinach, rhubarb, celery, head lettuce, parsley were just some of the new vegetables showcased.[156] From these demonstrations, two women grew endive for the first time; four grew celery; three grew

[154]Gertrude E. Conant, February 1919, Food and Health for Arkansas: First Year Lessons for Home Demonstration Clubs, Circular No. 655, Records of the Arkansas Extension Service, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR http://digitalcollections.uark.edu/cdm/ref/collection/ArkExt/id/10941 (accessed March 11, 2017).
[155] 1920 Annual Narrative Report, North Central District Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[156] 1927 Annual Narrative Report, Union County Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

parsnips; six women grew asparagus; ten grew spinach; twelve grew carrots; ten women grew pimentos; six grew parsley; three grew eggplant; one grew bush beans; one woman grew Chinese cabbage and three women grew rhubarb. The interest in gardening was steadily increasing throughout the states but most specifically in Ouachita County where 155 women had fall gardens that year.[157] By increasing women's familiarity with a variety of vegetables, women were able to diversify the food they were feeding their families which increased their family's intake of niacin and lowered their risk of pellagra and other forms of malnutrition.



Cooperating With a Public Health Worker in a Demonstration in Preparing Proper Foods for Young Children.

Figure 6. Image from the nutrition section of home demonstration work in the Summary of Extension Service Activities 1923: Extension Circular No. 164, March 1924.

It was not long until home demonstrations began to include additional topics, one of which was the care and feeding of children. Women quickly began to apply their new knowledge outside the walls of their household by caring for the children in their communities. Arkansas historically had one of the highest infant mortality rates in the United States. Across the state in 1880, seventy-four out of every one thousand newborn children died before they

[157] Bonslagel, 1927 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

reached the age of one, a death rate of nearly 10 percent.[158] By the early 1900s, for every 1,000 live births, approximately 100 infants died before age one and nine women died of pregnancy-related complications.[159] The Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Act signed by President Warren Harding in 1921 was the first federal social welfare program created explicitly for women and children. It provided a $5,000 grant to each state and Arkansas was one of 41 states that enacted enabling legislation and implementation plans in 1922. The initial $5,000 grant opened the Bureau of Child Hygiene and hired two nurses to investigate the practice of midwifery and the under-registration of births. With matching funds from the state, several counties eventually participated in maternal and child health programs. Jefferson County was the first, joined by Phillips, Ashley, Jackson, and Pulaski counties all by 1925. There were limited health programs available to Arkansans at the time. This is, in part, a reflection of trends in health clinics and nurses at the time but also was directly tied to state resources. By 1935, the number of local health clinics dwindled from 30 to 18 and the number of public health nurses from 286 to five.[160] As a result, the demand for information on feeding babies and children was so great in some communities that training schools were set up in 1931 in Logan, Sebastian, and Washington Counties. These groups known as Better Babies Clubs were often coordinated by home demonstration club members as an outgrowth of nutrition projects. In 1931, there were 429 mothers with 1,076 children utilizing these clubs. By1934, home demonstration work placed a major nutrition emphasis on child care and feeding especially for clubs that had a large number of preschool children. Under the direction of Miss Gertrude E. Conant, extension nutritionist, this work was treated as an outgrowth of nutrition projects of home demonstration

[158] Moneyhon, 72.
[159] "100 Years of Service: Arkansas Department of Health 1913-2013," Arkansas Department of Health http://www.healthy.arkansas.gov/aboutADH/100Years/Documents/100yearsBooklet.pdf , 26 (accessed April 6, 2017).
[160] Ibid, 27.

clubs.[161] In Logan County, Conant reported that their child nutrition work had culminated in a Better Babies Club, with 145 babies enrolled in 1934. Two baby clinics were held in the county for non-club members' children and resulted in additional mothers joining the Better Babies club. By 1935, thirty-one counties had Better Babies Clubs reaching 2,581 babies through work with 1,820 mothers in 167 clubs.[162] In Searcy County it was even reported that one baby's life was saved because the mother followed Extension recommendations for child feeding.[163] By 1940, there were 5,698 families with 8,076 children enrolled in Better Babies Clubs.[164] Women were empowered through collective action and sharing their new knowledge about nutrition with fellow women in their community.

The Better Babies Clubs grew in popularity as programs continued to be added that were relevant, helping mothers cope with virtually every aspect of a child's life. "Being a Better Baby called for the right kind of clothes, the right kind of toys, low shelves and books in the closet, and the very best of manners, as well as milk and cod liver oil."[165] By 1938, 74 percent of the counties boasted having these clubs, with 4,341 "healthy and happy youngsters" on the rolls of 357 clubs.[166] Homemade toys and play equipment were included in the Better Babies program and were a part of the responsibility of home industries leaders under direction of Miss Sybil Bates, specialist in home industries. Stuffed dogs and cats, plan pens and teeter-totters are encouraged to have available at home to keep the baby busy and happy.[167] Child development in the way of manners and general behavior was also the responsibility of home management leaders and Mrs. Ida A. Fenton, home management specialist. Low hooks and shelves were

[161] Gertrude E. Conant, 1934 Annual Narrative Report, State Nutrition Specialist, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Allen, page 6.
[165] Bonslagel, 1938 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid.

recommended so the child could put away his own clothing which would teach habits of orderliness and helpfulness. Young parents were also encouraged to teach unselfishness, kindness to pets, courtesy and obedience from the very first day, by example as well as precept.[168]

Arkansas also was suffering from high infant mortality rates. In an effort to address these rates, leaders in the home demonstration clubs proactively enlisted mothers to participate in their club or topic specific programs, often times while the mother was still pregnant. Literature concerning prenatal care, proper feeding and general care of the baby was supplied to the mother. In homes where the Baby Canning Budget was followed, a special shelf in the pantry could be found full of tiny jars of purees and fruit juices canned especially for the baby. A canning plan or "budget" was provided for every family. This was important for women in order to plan accordingly as the amount of food that could be canned depends on the amount of vegetables stored as well as on the amount that would have to be grown in the winter garden, such as kale, spinach, etc. The nutrition leader in the home demonstration club provided information on what the baby should eat from the time he gets his first drop of milk until he trudges off to school with a lunch box full of healthy contents.[169] In 1938, 266 baby clinics were sponsored by home demonstration clubs and the county health service gave mothers in 35 counties an opportunity to check up on the physical progress of their babies.[170] Home demonstration members were doing all that they could to meet the health care needs of their local community through collective action and spearhead efforts to meet the unmet needs of their neighbors. Better Babies leaders did not stop with the mothers in their home demonstration clubs. Whenever there was a baby, or one on the way in the community, the local leaders

[168] Bonslagel, 1938 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Ibid.

offered advice and counsel. County training schools were even held for the leaders in order to keep them up to date in child development information.[171] Home demonstration work was not only about educating club members but also about educating the entire community about nutrition and family health.

As women began to better understand nutrition, disease and malnutrition more broadly these areas became of even great concern for them, especially among children. Combined with poor sanitary conditions, malnutrition provided a perfect setting for tuberculosis, pneumonia and other respiratory illnesses in children. Diseases caused by inadequate diets such as weaning diarrhea also resulted from protein malnutrition in children taken off breast milk and placed on amino acid-deficient foods. In these early years there was no mention of corrective feeding for dietary deficiency disease. However, by 1934 agents from thirty-seven counties reported 5,123 individuals adopted diets for health issues like pellagra, constipation, anemia and rickets. Furthermore, the number of women reported that were serving balanced family meals in 1934 totaled 14,174.[172]

Women participating in home extension were not only encouraged to uplift their own homes, but the clubs were encouraged to take pride in their community. Food preservation continued to be extremely important for home demonstration work as interest in gardening grew and women saw the community benefitting from canning. This was one crucial way these women were able to support their community in times of need and there was a greater need for more canning centers especially during the years of the Depression and in response to various droughts. The devastating Flood of 1927 and killer tornadoes preceded Arkansas' worst drought in 1930 and 1931. Twenty-three states across the Mississippi and Ohio River valleys were

[171] Bonslagel, 1938 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW .
[172] Bonslagel, 1934 Annual Narrative Report, State Nutrition Specialist, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

impacted. The severest drought centered upon eight Southern states, with Arkansas sixteen percent worse than the other states based on weather statistics. President Herbert Hoover called upon the Red Cross to meet the disaster relief need instead of federal food relief funding. One of the first available Red Cross relief programs provided a four-pound box of seed for garden and pastures even though unfavorable circumstances existed. The University of Arkansas and the Extension Service instituted a "self sufficiency" farm campaign promoting multiple ways to achieve food autonomy – one of which was canning. In January 1931, thirty-five percent of the state was on relief and in three days, 165,518 signed up for Red Cross assistance. Missing from food rations were meat, milk, sugar and fresh vegetables further demonstrating the value canning provided individualized households and communities as a whole.

During these devastating times, home demonstration agents often served as nutritionists or food service supervisors. According to the 1933 Annual State Home Demonstration Agent's report, the State Relief Agency purchased a limited amount of canning equipment to be allocated where and as the county home demonstration agents recommended. By December 1933, 1,207 canning centers were equipped, and four field canning kitchens were ready for use. Canning schools were held to train supervisors for these kitchens. These were often local club leaders. In turn, these supervisors then taught 13,220 men, women, boys and girls the canning process.[173] In 1935, the canning work emphasized budgets and quality. Often times a budget was predetermined and included a number of jars or tins of food that the member put up for her family in order to meet its needs during the entire year. As a result of this effort, farm women collected 9,452,357 quarts of fruits, meat and vegetables, at a value of $5,675,608.[174] In addition, demonstrations on low cost, adequate diets took place in nine counties, and hot lunches

[173] Bonslagel, 1933 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[174] Bonslagel, 1935 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

were planned and supervised in 270 schools, affecting 11,077 children. Furthermore, members assisted in widely distributing the Arkansas Food Supply Plan which was a circular distributed among people on or near the relief rolls.[175] The more these home demonstration women learned, the more efficient they became in their planning, execution, and outreach efforts to share their nutrition education and food preservation knowledge.

The Depression Era relief programs in Arkansas were significantly impacted by the contributions of the home demonstration women, both the agents and clubwomen. The Great Depression came to Arkansas long before the stock market crash of 1929. The 1920s had not been promising for many of the state's citizens. By the end of the decade, many Arkansans were in severe debt and the drought of 1930 merely delivered a final crippling blow. By 1932, the price of cotton had dropped to six cents a pound, far below the cost of production. By the time that Governor Futrell took office in 1933, nearly forty percent of the state's labor force was unemployed. At the same time, President Franklin D. Roosevelt promised "a new deal for the American people" centered on "relief, recovery, and reform." The cornerstone of the New Deal agenda included the experimental Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) steered through the U.S. Senate by Joe T. Robinson, Arkansas's senior senator which provided subsidies to farmers to reduce production of certain crops, diversify crops, dairy produce, hogs, and lambs. The extension service agents oversaw the new program. For farm women, home demonstration work helped farm people survive, especially through their garden demonstrations and the government-provided community canning centers. Relief activities of all home demonstration agents and women was noticed by neighboring counties who did not have home demonstration work taking place in their counties. Even the state director of relief recognized the importance of this work and often times "influenced sentiment for home demonstration appropriations in all counties. He

[175] Bonslagel, 933 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

found that the home demonstration agent was invaluable in certain live-at-home phases of the relief program in helping families [from] becoming subject to relief."[176]

Figure 8. Image from the black demonstration section under black home demonstration work in the Arkansas Extension Service Annual Report, Extension Circular No. 280, February 1930.

Women's generosity within their communities was seen time and time again. As the state home demonstration agent noted in her 1932 annual report, "because of general poverty and because of the large amounts of unemployed families who are being moved into the country, the thrifty farm families find themselves with an unaccustomed responsibility in taking care of the needy. Home demonstration clubs began to embrace more social, economic, and educational welfare work. Where ever these women were, they taught new comers to garden and can. Where they proved un-teachable, club women canned for them; many clubs included one or more hundred quarts [of canned goods] for charity in their budgets."[177] It was not only in times of drought or floods that home demonstration clubs responded to their community's needs. In

[176] Bonslagel, 1933 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW. See Whayne's Delta Empire, 178-179, and Don Holly, *Uncle Sam's Farmers: The New Deal Communities in the Lower Mississippi Valley*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 134-135.
[177] Bonslagel, 1932 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

Carroll County, it was reported that community charities were given by 24 clubs. Club women helped 12 storm victim families in West Concord, Shady Grove, and Berryville communities replenish their bedding and linen supplies and gave them some clothing. They helped families who had lost their homes through fire with bedding, household linens, rugs, food supplies and even furniture. They sent gifts and gave special programs to inmates of the County Home, provided funds to send the sick to hospitals, supplied clothing to needy school children and sent Christmas baskets to those in need.[178]

Club women extended their reach outside their homes in many ways, directly challenging the very nature of the original purpose of home demonstration work outlined by the USDA. Women were in fact being exposed to aspects of grassroots feminism. Women who joined home demonstration clubs believed that they could accomplish some of their own agenda and the clubs often provided an organizational framework for this process. As Anne Firor Scott argues, women's participation in voluntary organizations helped women to develop their talents, gain confidence, and participate more actively in local communities and politics.[179] Annually, contributions were made by individual clubs to help provide for people living in their communities and even foreign countries. These efforts were not formal aspects of the extension lead work but rather directed by the membership and reflected initiatives most important to those women. The Luna Landing Home Demonstration Club in Chicot County reported their community efforts included: $1 to the cemetery fund; $1 to the Red Cross; four pairs of children pajamas were sent to the State Tuberculosis Sanitarium; fruit juices, baskets of food, linens and soft cloths to the sick and needy; one woman gave six weeks lodging to a woman in search of work; 30 dozen fruit jars, cans and extra jar tops and rubbers to canning kitchen for school lunch

[178] Bonslagel, 1939 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[179] Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1992).

room; paid tuition for three grammar school children; and $1 bus fare for bus going to Luna Landing from Lake Village for people to attend church in town.[180] Often times, these women did not always have money to give, so they shared what they could from products of their own labor – food grown on the land where they lived or articles of clothing or household furnishings, fashioned by their own hands from home grown products or purchased through the sale of them. Since these projects were not formally part of USDA dictated program, all contributions made by members were voluntary and given directly to the recipients or through an organization.[181]

Like many women clubs prior to the canning clubs or home demonstration clubs, home demonstration programs provided an opportunity for multi-generational women to gather and share knowledge with each other. These experiences reveal how "rural feminism" flourished at the grassroots level as rural women found ways to secure formal and informal power within their local communities.[182] The club members not only shared knowledge with each other but many held their first leadership position within their community through these clubs. At times, these positions would result in serving in another leadership position at the local, district, state, and national offices within the Extension Service.

In addition to holding leadership positions, club women were viewed as experts in their communities and as a result enjoyed significant informal power within their communities. In Sebastian County, farm women who worked in a mattress factory made their own mattresses with cotton they had grown. The state clothing and household specialist at the time travelled to Sebastian County to study the women's technique. These women were teaching the "teacher."

[180] Bonslagel, 1940 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[181] Ibid.
[182] Nancy Gray Osterud, *Bonds of Community: The Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth Century New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 199), 10-11. Osterud finds that New York farm women engaged in what she calls "a distinct tradition of rural feminism" which continued well into the twentieth century. She suggests that it was this feminism at the grassroots level that provided women with access to broader formal and informal power within their communities. I see a similar experience in Arkansas but one that reflects the south's racial and paternalistic mentality.

As a result, the state clothing and household specialist in turn taught women in other counties how to make their own mattresses, using homegrown cotton.[183] In 1932, only 375 mattresses were reported made that year. By 1935, 2,630 mattresses were reported made that year in 54 counties, spending an average of $3 for materials to make each mattress. In Greene County, the agent reported that forty leaders in various clubs had been trained in mattress making. A number of clubs were engaged in making mattresses for members as well as fulfilling requests from individuals outside the clubs to earn additional income, another tool women used to remain producers on the farm. Women used the money they earned to support their families. At times, women reported pooling their resources and applying the money earned in mattress making to cover the cost of a kitchen they had recently added to their club building.

By using cotton grown on their own farms, these women demonstrated how time and time again they used their new skills as a means of living at home.[184] At the same time, the very fact that an agent was teaching the skill of mattress making and comfort making highlights the Extension Service's underlying and paternalistic goal to promote gender specific skills that would overall improve life on the farm for women and their families. Farm families were made aware of the possibilities of cotton mattress through mattress demonstration programs and for most families, the mattress these women made was the first they had ever owned. The mattresses were not only more comfortable than the traditional bed tick filled with wheat straw or other home-grown material but were more convenient, better looking.

Although mattress making improved their own homes, women also put this new skill to use in emergency relief centers. In 1937, twenty-five counties established emergency relief

[183] 1932 Annual Narrative Report, St. Francis County, Local Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[184] Bonslagel, 1937 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

mattress factories that made 6,902 mattresses.[185] In 1939, Connie Bonslagel evaluated the program listing several reasons for the rapid expansion of mattress making in the state such as low incomes throughout Arkansas prevented families from replacing worn ones, farm families' surplus of low-priced cotton, leaders trained over an eight-year period were readily available to teach the process and the proven worth of the homemade mattresses had been established over the years.[186] One year later, Clay, Crittenden, Jefferson, Madison, and Columbia counties initiated a mattress demonstration program as a community outreach. The program quickly spread to the remaining seventy counties within a month.[187] By the end of 1940, 137,477 mattresses had been made: 7,772 of home grown cotton and the remaining vast majority had been made with Federal Surplus Commodities Corporation (FSCC) cotton. The average cost per family was $.28 for needles, twine and thread. These were high-quality, all-cotton mattresses made with eight-ounce ticking, worth $15 each.[188] Only low income farm families were eligible for the mattresses which allowed mattress manufacturers not to be hurt by the program. Bonslagel reported that only 20% of the eligible women were home demonstration club members demonstrating the impact home demonstration work was having among the lowest income farm group alongside the average and higher-income groups.[189]

At the same time club members were extending their reach farther into the communities, the extension program was putting a heavier emphasis on programs promoting the middle class ideal of the housewife. Women participating in home extension were not only encouraged to improve their own homes, but clubs were encouraged to take pride in their community by

[185] Bonslagel, 1937 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[186] Bonslagel, 1939 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[187] Bonslagel, 1940 Annual Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[188] Efforts were made to keep high standards in mattress making in all counties in order to eliminate criticism from mattress manufacturers or small town merchants who sold mattresses. Bonslagel, 1940 Annual Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[189] Bonslagel, 1940 Annual Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

undertaking community improvement projects. Once again, these gender appropriate tasks were shifting the farm woman's focus from remaining active producers on the farms to highlighting alternative projects for their time and attention. These projects took many different forms such as community landscape, community canning centers, county recreation centers, county parks, and county libraries – all of which were bringing middle class ideals into the countryside. It was not until the mid-1930s that these programs gained any traction among clubwomen which reveals the control the local women had in the implementation of demonstration programs at the local level. Like many other programs, these women used "beautification programs" on their own terms and applied their power as a group in ways most meaningful to them. For example, in 1932, in each of the forty-two counties, as many as three communities were working on a five-year community landscaping demonstration, which had begun in 1930. During this same time period, home demonstration club members became involved in highway beautification in an effort to improve tourism to Arkansas as part of the George Washington Bicentennial Celebration. One cross-state highway, no. 71, was selected and members set out to have every home along the highway cleaned up, painted and planted. Nine counties were involved. They added highway no. 3, which diagonal across the state, involving 13 additional counties. As a result, 464 miles of highway were cleared of junk and cleaned up. Over 1,000 miles were graded, 1 mile of embankment was terraced and over 400 miles of fence rows and roadsides were cleaned. By the conclusion of the two year project, 85 communities in 30 counties worked on this highway beautification project."[190] Home demonstration work was a tool for Arkansas farm women as they were fighting to preserve their roles as producers on the farm while slowly but surely embracing aspects of the middle class notion of a "housewife".

[190] Bonslagel, 1932 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

It was not only at the local or state level that women were beginning to be exposed to leadership positions. On a national level, women took active roles in representing the state of Arkansas in unique ways. Connie Bonslagel, state demonstration agent represented Arkansas at the national level when she was appointed to the Committee on Landscape Planning and Planting of the President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership. She attended two meetings in Washington, D.C. with leading landscape architects. Her report on the Bicentennial Home Grounds and Tree Planting work outlined how the program encouraged farm people to take part in the George Washington Bicentennial Celebration. The tree planting efforts were connected to the home grounds work already underway in many of the Arkansas clubs. "Of the 29,000 plus trees planted in the three month campaign, 14,912 were shade trees and 6,000 plus of these were planted on or near home grounds. 1,911 on school grounds, over 500 on church grounds, 817 [unclear] in cemeteries, and over 400 in parks and along parkways. Also along highways, and the rest around filling stations, courthouses, stores, gins and railroad stations 19,000 plus shrubs were also planted to the memory of George Washington and to the advantage of farm homes; 7,000 plus of the trees and 6,000 plus shrubs came from the woods of Arkansas."[191] Women used home demonstration clubs to uplift not only their communities but the entire state. Club women had always taken great pride in their work, in their communities, and in their state. But most importantly, through experiences with home demonstration clubs they were recognizing that they had strength in numbers.

By the 1930s, club women accepted the role they could play in uplifting the entire family not just physically through food production but also socially and emotionally. The extension service promoted this through a community activities program. In 1935 during the Great Depression, an extension specialist in community activities was appointed. These recreation

[191] Bonslagel, 1932 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

programs exposed many rural families to middle class ideals and practices in the city further reinforcing the gendered and paternalistic approach of the extension programs. "The average farm family life is not complete without the opportunity for self-expression to be provided through drama, music, games, and other forms of community recreation."[192] By appointing an extension specialist in community activities, the organization was making a step towards establishing a recreational program in all counties in the state. During this time, more than 57,000 farm women where members of home demonstration clubs and the community activities specialist was charged with working in 1,800 home demonstration clubs throughout the state, many who had already selected a leader in recreation for each particular club. Furthermore, there were 72,668 4-H club members and 38,000 men who were members of farm organizations.[193] The community activities program sought to provide additional support for the entire rural family, both socially and emotionally. The two county extension agents, both male and female, were jointly responsible for the program with adults, young people, and children. All ages, from the grandfather to the pre-school children participated in "neighborhood nights" which were a part of the recreation program in 477 communities in 1938.[194]

Progressive and Country Life reformers believed that cultural possibilities in rural living up until now had been scarce in these rural communities and somewhat overlooked even by farm people themselves.[195] Home demonstrations themselves often turned into a social activity. Many were specifically planned at a community gathering place, such as a school or church in order to draw people. Often times an outdoor kitchen would be assembled and whole families would show up to participate in the activity. Recreation efforts included activities such as a

[192] Bonslagel, 1939 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[193] Ibid.
[194] Bonslagel , 1938 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[195] Bonslagel , 1939 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

"neighborhood night" that included a plan of regular activities, community choruses, community orchestras, plays, home recreation programs and libraries. In 1939, it was reported that there were 217 community choruses, 129 community orchestras, 2,075 plays and pageants, 46 counties participated in state-wide drama tournaments, 8,162 families followed a program of home recreation and 176 communities were assisted in obtaining library facilities as a result of the home demonstration club's recreation program efforts.[196] Twenty-two clubs reported sponsoring 53 community nights for whole families. The kinds of parties listed were picnics, ice cream socials, basket dinners, meetings in parks with outdoor cookery, wiener roasts, watch parties, Valentine parties. Fourth of July celebrations, farewells and homecomings, taffy pulls, egg hunts, cake walks, and orchestra practices.[197] Aspects of the recreation program exposed all ages to emotional health. Big little, old and young Arkansas farm people found they liked to play.[198] Once again, this work was extending outside the home and into these women's communities.

Mrs. Ollie Crook of the Round Pond Home Demonstration Club in St. Francis County found that the family recreation hour project kept her family of nine happy and congenial. Their family recreation activities consisted of radio programs, homemade games, and family reading. The favorite game of the children included checkers. Each child was assigned a designated special radio time. During this time, any member of the family could listen in with them or they could play a game in another part of the house. However, it was encouraged that all family members participated in both the reading hour and the music hour collectively.[199] Agents concluded that these programs resulted in the interest in recreation growing among all family

[196] Bonslagel , 1939 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Bonslagel, 1939 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[199] Ibid.

members, young and old expressed an interest in learning more about homemade recreation games.

Although farm women may not have directly challenged the racial order and patriarchy within southern society, they actively sought ways to mitigate inequalities and improve the quality of their lives and others with the resources available to them. These available resources expanded through their interaction and participation in home demonstration work as seen through the effort to sponsor a community library. The Mountainburg Home Demonstration Club in Crawford County, under the direction of the club president, Mrs. E.F. Bruce worked with the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to sponsor a community library. Club members were aware of the community's need for reading materials, both educational and entertaining and with the help of the WPA the club secured a vacant room in one of the store buildings and built shelves for the books. People in the community donated 246 books which were approved by the State Library Board. There were approximately 300 books available and the Board planned a number of entertainments to raise money to buy more books.[200] It was noted that twelve magazines such as American, Readers' Digest, Better Homes and Gardens, Good Housekeeping, Ladies Home Journal, etc., were on file. Mrs. Harrison Peters, librarian, reported that 38 people checked out books the first day the library was open, and the total expense was $15.39 for lumber, supplies, tables, etc., to start the project.[201] While home demonstration started out with informal demonstrations, a formal organization soon emerged as women were exposed to leadership opportunities and empowered to make a difference in their communities. When these women saw a need time in their communities, they organized to successfully address that need.

[200] Bonslagel, 1939 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[201] Ibid.

It is important to be reminded how the economic, social, and political consequences of the Great Depression and the New Deal impacted farm women's daily lives. Both the Depression and the New Deal placed home demonstration work at the center of rural family life, national service, and new federal programs. Remember the Great Depression struck Arkansas hard. With its population 80 percent rural in 1930 and the majority of the farm incomes dependent on cotton, resulting in the fall in cotton prices had a devastating impact.[202] With the inauguration of Franklin D. Roosevelt in the spring of 1933, the New Deal was greeted and ushered in a series of new agencies and programs such as the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA), the Farm Credit Administration (FCA), the Credit Commodity Corporation (CCC), the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), the Public Works Administration (PWA), and the Civil Works Administration (CWA). The implementation of these programs and the impact they had on Arkansas' agriculture was intimately related to the work and development of the College of Agriculture and the Cooperative Extension Service.[203] As a result, the New Deal agricultural program enjoyed enthusiastic support of the extension service. The AAA sent billions of dollars in price supports to farm operators across the nation by 1940 and integrated them soundly into the emergent corporatist New Deal state. These shifting links between capital-intensive agriculture and the American state placed the USDA at the center of the New Deal political coalition.[204] The emergence of these new federal programs contributed to many southern farmers transition away from a labor-intensive agriculture and toward a more capital-intensive approach.[205] But the New Deal marked only the beginning of this dramatic transformation for agricultural families in the state. As the men were adjusting to this shift in

[202] Zeller, 80.
[203] Ibid, 88-89.
[204] Gabriel Rosenberg, *The 4-H Harvest: Sexuality and the State in Rural America: Sexuality and the State in Rural America*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 6.
[205] Whayne, *Delta Empire*, 5.

agriculture, farm women were as well and home demonstration programs provided ways for them to continue to secure formal and informal power within their homes and local communities.

As World War II was emerging, Arkansas had moved away from being an activist state government and was instead embracing federal programs - a trend that resulted in a greater dependence upon the national treasury that would only build. Overall, the state was ill prepared for World War II, just as it had been in 1917, unable to capitalize on industrial production for the war effort with manufacturing remaining a far distant second to the agricultural economy. As the nation was preparing for another World War and responding to the war already being fought in Europe, home demonstration women did the same. The National Defense Program directed farm women's thinking toward 1) increased emphasis on the production of a well-planned food supply for all farm families; 2) increased home consumption of cotton; and 3) improved standards of citizenship among farm families. In preparation, agents made lists of all the home economists in their counties, listing their expertise so that if home economists were needed for special activities the agents would be able to name well-qualified individuals for foods, housing or sewing work.[206] In September 1940, the Preparedness Committee of the State Home Demonstration Council met and determined that food was the first line of home defense. "A nation is only as strong as its people. And we cannot be strong as a nation or as individuals unless we have the proper food."[207] Many felt National Defense was as much a part of the farmer's duty as it was the soldier's duty. The Live-at-Home program returned as a central focus for home demonstration work allowing women to contribute to the war effort. Club members understood the importance of planning so that she would raise and can vegetables, fruits, and meats enough

[206] Bonslagel, 1940 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[207] Home demonstration clubs' Committees on Preparedness made live-at-home inventories in their home communities. In Stone County, Mrs. Myrtle Fulks was chairman of the County Committee on Preparedness. Fulks entire speech was included in the Connie Bonslagel's state report. Bonslagel, 1940 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

for a full year's supply. Demonstration work focused again on raising poultry and the need for families to own at least two good milk cows so that they would supply the family with milk and butter year round.[208]

Club members who served as "preparedness leaders in foods and nutrition" played a vital role in their counties and communities during World War II. They were already leaders in dairy, poultry, gardening, or canning foods and had been selected to facilitate Live-at-Home surveys on food production and food in their neighborhoods.[209] Leaders would visit families and use a survey sheet as a basis for discussing neighborhood needs during their visits. During the next visit, the leaders would return with Family Food Supply Charts to help the families determine the amount of food the family should raise in order to be well fed.[210] Canning budgets were also provided for planning tools and each family member was given a food selection score card to help build better food habits. These women leaders were often surprised to find families in their communities who produced little of their own foods. One club president reported that "three families in our community were assisted in planting their garden. Our club foods leader took her pressure cooker to their homes and taught them to can. These three families are [were] as proud of our club is [was] that the shelves which were bare last year are all full of canned vegetables and fruit for this [the coming] winter."[211]

During World War II the interest from urban women about home demonstration programs significantly increased. Urban women were most interested in learning more about and being trained to can. The work of the home demonstration agents and local members interaction with local communities expanded as their expertise was viewed as valuable to "city

[208] Bonslagel, 1940 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[209] Bonslagel, 1941 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[210] Ibid.
[211] Ibid.

folk." Victory gardeners, particularly in urban areas, sometimes found they lacked canning equipment, time, or the know-how. Food preservation centers, pressure cooker sharing, canning on the shares, all helped to address the issue. Maintaining pressure canners was an important part of the canning program during the war. There were 7,316 gauges tested during the previous year and 1,200 of these needed adjustments to replace or repair them. Urban leaders were invited to attend leader training schools given by Extension workers and home demonstration club leaders. Rural women were able to influence fellow "homemakers" in areas of their expertise. In Pulaski County, thirty-five specially trained home demonstration club leaders in food preservation held thirty meetings in the greater Little Rock area. At these meetings which were mostly held in churches, 596 city women were taught to can by the steam pressure cooker method as well as by the hot water method.

With the cheese rationing going into effect, making American cheese which had only received passive interest in the past, took on greater interest. Home demonstration agents reported holding 26 leader training schools, with an attendance of 336, and 178 method demonstrations with attendance of 2,603.[212] Home demonstration women also provided major support to the government's Share-the-Meat campaign which started in late 1942. Neighborhood leaders – set up by the Extension to carry our special wartime activities in rural areas - joined block leaders in urban areas in the distribution of information on the campaign through circular letters, leader meetings, and home visits. Although women had long been encouraged to buy cotton products during the Cotton Christmas campaign, by 1943, cotton household items were becoming scarce and conservation was at the heart of the family clothing and household

[212] 1943 Annual Narrative Report, State Foods and Nutrition Specialist, Record Group 33, Records of the Arkansas Extension Service, National Archives and Records Administration Southwestern Branch, Fort Worth,Texas.

furnishings program.[213] Special war-time leaflets and miscellaneous publications were prepared and distributed. Two of the leaflets were titled Remodeling Garments into Victory Clothes and Mend Your Clothes. The specialist provided leader training meetings on remodeling and mending, washing knitted garments and dry cleaning and storing woolen garments. Once women learned how to, it became more convenient to clean garments at home rather than to send them out of the county by parcel post to be cleaned. Contributing to the war effort not only involve projects such as cheese rationing or conservation of cotton, home demonstration women contributions extended outside their own communities. For example, these women not only made garments for themselves and their families but for children in war-torn European countries. The "Hands-Across-the-Sea" project was the first organized project by rural women for aid to Europe's war victims. This was a grassroots effort by club members and items collected or made included dresses, boys' suits, shirts, overalls, nightgowns, slips, panties, and robes and dressing gowns for preschool children.[214]

As the war wound down and finally came to an end in August 1945, the nation looked forward with enthusiasm to the future. Arkansas's home demonstration women were proud of their contribution to the war as they had provided invaluable support. Through the Live-at-Home program, women conserved clothing, textiles, home furnishings, and food all while making sure their neighbors did the same. Despite these efforts by home demonstration women,

[213] The South continued to produce cotton even though demand and prices continued to fall and in 1940, the Cotton Christmas program – sponsored by the Agricultural Extension Service and the Arkansas Council of Home Demonstration Clubs – became a part of the year-round cotton utilization program. The program included a proclamation by the governor, several mayors, and a few county judges; demonstrations in making cotton gifts and in wrapping them in bright cotton materials; and pledges by home demonstration club groups to give cotton gifts, decorate doors, windows, and trees in cotton, and wrap gifts in cotton. In one county, all home demonstration women's husbands received cards saying, "Your wife would like to have a 108 inch good grade cotton sheet for Christmas." After learning about the cotton situation, members of a 4-H club wrote notes to their parents asking for cotton gifts in their stockings this year. In another county, home demonstration club women agreed to try to popularize the wearing of cotton both summer and winter by buying better cotton materials and tailoring them more beautifully. Bonslagel, 1941 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

[214] Bonslagel, 1941 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

the larger economic and social forces affecting the world during the twentieth century continued to be felt by every member of the family. There was uncertainty, as many changes had come over the country during the years of the Great Depression and WWII, especially in agriculture.[215] However, as outlined in this chapter time and time again home demonstration club women continued to meet the needs of their own family and other families in their communities. Home demonstration work experienced significantly grown from the first club with 150 members to 45,780 in 1936 to 64,863 during World War II.[216] Within a short time period, these women were learning that there was strength in numbers and that demonstration work reached far beyond their families and into their community, county, state, and across the globe.

[215] Zeller, 108-109.
[216] Hill, 185-186.

"…I believe that through working together as a group we can enlarge the opportunities and enrich the life of rural people…"

Chapter 4
The Power of Organizing

Home demonstration work provided rural women a unique opportunity to develop their talents, gain confidence, and participate more actively in their communities. Their generosity was seen time and time again as home demonstration work exposed Arkansas women to rural feminism at the grassroots level.[217] Farm women engaged in what Nancy Osterud calls a "distinct tradition of rural feminism." This feminism "flourished at the grass-roots level as rural women secured formal and informal power within local communities."[218] Home demonstration work offered an organizational framework for this process and women's experiences in these clubs altered women's sense of importance outside the home and exposed them to the collective power of organizing. Although the focus of home demonstration work did not officially include activism and public outreach, women utilized the new skills they had learned to uplift their own families as well as those around them. This chapter takes a closer look at how home demonstration work exposed women to the power of grassroots efforts through two important programs – the school lunch program and the organizing of the Arkansas State Council of Home Demonstration Clubs. The successes of these programs were a direct result of grassroots efforts by these women who quickly learned there was power in numbers. It is clear these women

[217] Osterud argues that urban models of gender roles do not fit the rural experience. That farm women were "authors of their own lives" and that although they were constrained by poverty and male authority they enjoyed a "remarkable degree of gender equality" and integration within social networks allowing them to challenge social norms in "appropriate" ways even though the very nature of their advocacy and grassroots organizing were a contradiction to the traditions of "southern society" and separate spheres/patriarchy. Her work focuses on farm women in the nineteenth century New York but I see it continue into the twentieth century through home demonstration work in Arkansas.
[218] Osterud, *Bonds of Community*, 288.

played a prominent role in their communities and in turn had a larger impact on their community's embrace and support of initiatives that were important to rural women.

As discussed in the previous chapter, a significant focus for Arkansas extension work was food and nutrition for the malnourished family. This was not because of a lack of food but due to incorrect habits, which often resulted in disease and undernourishment in children and adults. This was especially true among rural women.[219] Home demonstration women were taught how to improve their food habits through result demonstrations in food selection for the family, including demonstrations in special modifications of the food-selection standard suitable for an expectant mother, the nursing mother, the preschool child, and the school child. This work was carried on by local women organized in communities with the advice and help of county extension agents and state extension specialists in nutrition and related subjects. One important way home demonstration members applied these skills outside their homes and into the community were through the school lunch program. The school lunch program was a natural extension of the home demonstration clubs' educational activities. Clubs taught women nutrition and safe canning practices, and as a result, members felt the most logical next step was to share the abundance of their labors with the community's most vulnerable population - children. Malnutrition was one of the most significant children's health issues of the early twentieth century. It reduced resistance to infectious diseases and slowed or even prevented recovery from them. Furthermore, malnourished children were unable to meet the demands of work on the farm and in school. Rural schools ran four months of the year, known as a split term, where students attended only during the winter, and in July and early August, the beginning of cotton

[219] Miriam Birdseye, Extension Agent in Nutrition, Office of Cooperative Extension Work and Bureau of Home Economics Cooperating, July 1925, U.S. Department of Agriculture Circular 349, Extension Work in Foods and Nutrition, 1923,United States Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Library, Historical Dietary Guidance Digital Collection, https://nutritionhistory.nal.usda.gov/download/1789402/PDF (accessed January 16, 2017).

harvest. The schools reopened in November and concluded the term in early spring just before cotton was planted. This remained the norm throughout the majority of the twentieth century. However, one of the most prominent obstacles hindering children's learning process at this time was chronic hunger which had physical and psychological effects on young people that made learning substantially difficult.

Food was the fuel necessary to get through a normal day and many Arkansans were not eating the right types of food. Early reports reveal how home demonstration agents taught members about the importance of nutrition. As members saw the value of improving the nutrition of their own families, they began to advocate for better nutrition for school children. In addition to malnutrition, many school children suffered from various diseases such as hookworm or pellagra. Early public health practitioners in Arkansas were concerned with controlling the spread of infectious disease. The Arkansas Department of Health worked to protect people against diseases by supplying vaccinations. Yet, nutrition practices were not the focus of the work. Many communities relied on the work of home demonstration club members to deliver best practices to address malnutrition. Clubwomen's strategies to address the need for better childhood nutrition were two-fold. First, women held demonstrations focused on milk consumption for school children. Secondly, demonstrations were offered on selecting and packing children's lunches.

As early as 1919, clubwomen led a special drive in Desha County, located in the Arkansas delta that focused on increasing the amount of milk school children were drinking. Detailed records were kept which included charts documenting weights, measurements, and improvements in school work.[220] By 1920, more than 240 public demonstrations in child

[220] Bonslagel, 1919 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

feeding, including schools lunches, had been conducted throughout the state by agents.[221] The clubwomen at these demonstrations then took the new knowledge about nutrition and shared it with their own communities. At the annual Farmers' Week in Fayetteville, a demonstration of a poor school lunch was given by Bethel Grove twins and 4-H members Polly and Dolly Rouse. The poor school lunch included a slice of pie, mashed apple pie, biscuit sandwich with fried egg, and another biscuit with cold fried meat. In contrast, the ideal packed lunch included sandwiches wrapped in oiled paper, a ripe tomato, and fruit. The twins encouraged mothers to keep small, cold-cream type jars on hand to fill with jelly or fruit.[222] These were healthy alternatives and would provide the nutrients children needed to learn.

In her 1927 state report, agent Connie Bonslagel included a detailed account of the school lunch work in Hot Springs County and noted that other counties throughout the state had established similar programs. The Hot Springs County demonstration focused on Malvern school children as well as five surrounding rural schools. The school children were weighed and measured to determine which children were underweight. In each case instructions in better food habits were given to children, to the teachers, and to parents. The final results revealed that 101 children had brought their weight to normal in three months.[223] It was reported that these young people were following the home demonstration club instructions and were drinking a quart of milk a day as well as bringing sandwiches to school that their mothers had made according to the home demonstration agent's suggestions. For example, raw carrots and raisins were used as sandwich fillings instead of meatloaf. It was also noted in the state agent's annual report that parents in Hot Spring County were also following the school lunch advice and forming the habit of giving the children candy as dessert at meal time instead of letting them eat it between meals.

[221] Bonslagel, 1920 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[222] Ibid.
[223] Bonslagel, 1927 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

One agent even reported that many of the children would stop her on the street to tell her they had quit eating candy.[224] It was also reported that, a large number of families used the food selection score cards after the study concluded in order to keep track of their own food habits – increasing the use of milk and fresh fruits and vegetables in the diet and decreasing candy between meals, coffee, coca cola, etc. Food selection score cards were used on a demonstration basis in order for individuals to measure the benefits and progress made. The card helped people follow essential food habits which were frequently neglected such as the amount of milk (three to four cups daily of children), vegetables (two daily with special emphasis on green, leafy vegetables), fruit (twice daily), whole-grain products (once a day) and plenty of water consumed daily.[225] Food-selection demonstrations were held over a series of four to six club meetings at monthly intervals. Once members scored their own habits they were able to better educate those around them such as their own families or local school children. It was not only the children who reported interest in nutrition as a result of this work in the schools but the people of Hot Spring County were hopeful that the interest in nutrition would result in being able to secure a public health worker in the near future.[226] Resources were limited for a public health worker and in towns were there was not one many relied on the work of club women.

That same year, 1927 in Rockport, a city on the Ouachita River in Hot Spring County, twenty-four children in school were reported underweight at the initial weighing and measuring. During the first month of the program, every child gained from one to eight pounds and 14 brought their weight up to normal. During the second month, four more brought their weight to

[224] Bonslagel, 1927 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[225] Birdseye, Extension Agent in Nutrition, Office of Cooperative Extension Work and Bureau of Home Economics Cooperating, July 1925, U.S. Department of Agriculture Circular 349, Extension Work in Foods and Nutrition, 1923,United States Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Library, Historical Dietary Guidance Digital Collection, https://nutritionhistory.nal.usda.gov/download/1789402/PDF (accessed January 16, 2017).
[226] Bonslagel, 1927 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

normal, making 18 out of the 24. An ambitious goal was set to make it 100 percent by the end of the school year. The teacher and this group of children made it a practice to sit together at lunch every day. They shared stories and entertained each other during the lunch hour. It was noted that every child brought a bottle of milk to school and agreed to bring boiled eggs instead of fried eggs which were often found in the school lunch. Those children who were severely underweight drank a mid-morning and mid-afternoon glass of milk.[227] Educating school children on the importance of milk consumption supported efforts to address the problem of nutrition-based diseases in Arkansas like pellagra which affected thousands of Arkansas and other Southerners in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Furthermore, it is important to note that dairy production was long a mainstay of Arkansas farming. In 1924, there were 350,000 dairy cows in Arkansas while there were 1.8 million people. These cows were primarily in the rural areas, with one to two cows per farm. In the 1920s and 1930s, dairy production was emphasized by the farm county agents as a means of economic development in rural communities. Yet, with the movement of the population from the farms to the cities companies like Coleman Dairy were established. The direct link between the focus on milk by both home and farm demonstration agents appears to have resulted in an increase of dairy cows on farms from 349,000 in 1930 to 482,000 in 1943, with milk per cow of 2,880 pounds a year. At that point, milk per cow began a steady increase as dairy cows' numbers declined. The availability of milk in rural communities contributed to the success of the school lunch program as it had a central focus around the importance of increasing milk consumption for nutrition benefits.

The significance of a hot lunch to nutrition was also a major focus for home demonstration women. The beginnings of the hot school lunch program in the United States can

[227] Bonslagel, 1927 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

be traced as far back as the mid-nineteenth century with the Children's Aid Society of New York which initiated a program in 1853, serving meals to students attending its school. However, the effort did not gain enough momentum to convince other organizations or states to establish similar programs until years later. The Department of Agriculture attributes the 1904 book *Poverty*, by Robert Hunter, a sociologist, with influencing the United States' effort to feed hungry, needy children at school. Hunter argues that "learning is difficult because hungry stomachs and languid bodies and thin blood are not able to feed the brain. The lack of learning among so many poor children is certainly due, to an important extent, to this cause."[228]

Nationally, rural schools struggled to establish warm noonday lunches for their pupils. The majority of these schools did not have room available for setting up a kitchen and dining area. Most children came to school from long distances and their lunches consisted mainly of cold sandwiches, many of them in questionable nutritive value.[229] Rural schools tried various methods of providing hot lunches from large stew pots filled with meats and vegetables donated by school families to the pint-jar heating method. The Department of Agriculture credits teachers, parent-teacher groups, philanthropic organizations, school-oriented associations, school boards, and groups of mothers with providing support for the program. Most importantly, county home demonstration women were an extremely important resource to rural schools in devising plans for providing supplementary hot foods and in drawing up suggested "menus" in advance.

Saline County, in central Arkansas serves as an example of how the school nutrition program work was slow to gain momentum in Arkansas under local women mobilized around the issue. In 1920, the agent reported only two schools focusing on consuming more milk, with

[228] Gordon W. Gunderson, "The National School Lunch Program Background and Development," National School Lunch Program website, http://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp/history_2 (accessed August 2, 2015).
[229] Ibid.

one of those documenting the weight and measurements of every child.[230] By 1923, three schools served a hot dish in the noon lunch hour during the cold months and milk was taken by the pupils from home during the warm days. It was reported that the teacher in each school worked closely alongside the home demonstration women.[231] It was not until 1927 when the Saline County home demonstration club's "food work" included hot lunches in two schools and attempted to establish the habit in other schools.[232] As you can imagine, Arkansas home demonstration club women and agents were deeply concerned by the number of children taking cold lunches to school during winter months. One Saline County leader encouraged each child to bring a fruit jar filled with something they liked to eat. That dish might have been a vegetable or left over soup from the day before or something prepared specifically for lunch. A large vessel with a lid was provided to the school and a rack of some kind was placed in the bottom of the vessel. Around eleven or eleven-thirty in the day one pupil would be direct to put enough water into the vessel for the water to be about one inch deep. All the jars with loosened jar-lids were placed on the rack and covered. At noon the food would be hot and each child could get their own jar. The agent argued this method was effective because the "poor preparation that is often done at schools is avoided. The dish washing does not take up the playtime as each child carries his jar and spoon or fork home with him."[233] This soon became the norm and educators were adopting these practices learned from home demonstration women.

[230] 1920, Annual Narrative Report, Saline County, Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[231] 1923, Annual Narrative Report, Saline County, Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[232] 1927 Annual Narrative Report, Saline County, Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[233] 1924 Annual Narrative Report, Saline County Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

Hot lunches are being served at 105 schools as a result of the Work of the Home Demonstration Agents. These Boys and Girls are being served Hot Cocoa.

Figure 8. Image in the nutrition and food preparation section of home demonstration work in the Arkansas Extension Service Annual Report, Extension Circular No. 193, February 1925.

Guaranteeing a hot lunch for school children, even if it was only part of the time was very important to home demonstration women. After preserving enough food for their families', many clubs would can their remaining vegetables, often as a soup mixture, and donate them to the local school. In Phillips County, located in eastern Arkansas, when there was an abundance of vegetables the Elaine club women would use the extra vegetables and can soup mixtures for the school. Elaine is located in Phillips County in a flood zone making the work of canning by clubwomen a vital service to their community. In 1927, the club members met three times and canned 150 no. 3 cans of soup mixture. By September, the women were unable to find any more tomatoes for additional soup. The county agent, Mary Alice Larche asked for and received 200 cans of tomatoes from the Red Cross which had been canned by other home demonstration club

women in northeast Arkansas for women in the flooded area. The soup was served free to children who brought their lunch on cold days. When the soup supply ran out, the women worked to provide additional mixtures.[234] Although the school lunch program fell within the appropriate province of demonstration work, women were extending their reach and applying their new skills and leadership positions in new ways throughout their communities.

These same club women worked tirelessly to establish a cafeteria for the Elaine school which opened in January of 1928. There was no Home Economics equipment in the school so the Elaine clubwomen hosted a Community Dinner to raise money to purchase cups, spoons and a stove. The Elaine club made nearly $100 on the dinner and was able to pay for the equipment as well as purchase crackers for the soup, oil for the stove, meat, potatoes, etc. for the soup.[235] The school cafeteria was run by a volunteer committee from the Elaine home demonstration club, under the leadership of the club President. As a result of these grassroots efforts by membership, approximately 275 children were served each time, with one or two cups of soup, on average four times a week for three months in the new school cafeteria. [236] The work of these Elaine club members helped to prevent illness among the children, as there were many who would not have had a sufficient amount of food during those hard months following the Great Flood of 1927.

That same year, the Health Unit Nurse and the county home demonstration agent visited the Elaine school every two weeks weighing the students and giving them health talks. They found 70 children were undernourished and underweight in 1928. The agent and nurse appealed to the Red Cross and were given a pint of fresh milk a day for each of the children. For three

[234] Mary Alice Larche, 1927 Annual Narrative Report, Phillips County Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[235] Larche, 1928 Annual Narrative Report, Phillips County Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[236] Ibid.

months, the milk was sent to the school by bus every morning from the creamery in Helena. A creamery allowed bottled milk to be distributed to a wider area. This was of enormous value to the children but at the same time, educated others in the community both children and their parents about the importance of drinking more milk. "The principal of the school cooperated with us [them] and said that the scholarship of the children had been increased and he wished that it was possible to continue to work longer. The children kept health score cards in all the grades and were very much interested in the project. They improved in personal appearance at once."[237] The agent further noted that "with the work being done along the line of better nutrition in the school and the club, there is no wonder that the cases of Pellagra and other deficiency diseases are [were] becoming scare."[238]

By this time, club women had already been collaborating with various community partners whether that was the Red Cross, government agencies or local associations in order to meet the needs of families during difficult times. Women continued their work to ensure a proper lunch for the school children in their communities into the 1940s. More than 250 cans of vegetables and 122 pounds of beef were canned and used by the Home Demonstration Club in Benton County to serve a hot lunch to each one of the fifty children enrolled in the rural school. It was noted that the children had better health, fewer colds, a noticeable increase in weight as well as a marked improvement in grades due to eating a hot lunch beginning in January. Children were given all that they could eat.[239] In numerous counties across the state home demonstration club members cooperated with the Parent Teachers Association (PTA), where one existed, and were influential in making the school lunch possible. In ten Lincoln County schools, located in southeast Arkansas, the home demonstration clubs sponsored the hot lunch

[237] Larche, 1928 Annual Narrative Report, Phillips County Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[238] Ibid.
[239] Bonslagel, 1940 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

program serving more than 900 students throughout the county. All of these ten schools used the surplus commodities, with two school utilizing WPA workers.[240] In northeast Arkansas in Jackson County, 500 children were eating hot lunches as a result of a joint project between rural and urban clubs. While a hot lunch project was being established in the Tuckerman and Swifton schools, the home demonstration club women and PTA women met. It was agreed that the urban women would raise the money to buy sugar, crackers, cocoa and other staples while the rural women would furnish canned foods to supplement these and the Surplus Commodities, and the Welfare Offices furnished the ingredients to make soup or stew.

These women understood there were powers in numbers and that it was important to work with as many partners necessary in order to meet a community need. Through coordinated efforts like in Johnson County in northwest Arkansas, home demonstration clubs sponsored 18 of the 25 schools offering hot lunches, 3 were partially supplied by surplus commodities and eleven of these centers had paid WPA workers. In the first hot lunch school project in Johnson County – the Lamar project, the PTA sponsored the project but a home demonstration club member, Mrs. Florence Sparks was in charge. The program served over 300 children a hot lunch consisting of two vegetables, bread, fresh or canned fruit and a hot drink each day.[241] The Surplus Commodities supplied the project with cornmeal, flour, beans, fruits, potatoes, and cabbage. The remainder of the food was contributed or brought from home by the children in exchange for their lunches. The PTA also grew a garden and canned food to contribute to the program. The majority of the PTA members were home demonstration club women. At the beginning of this project, 30 children were documented as underweight. Not one of the 30 children was underweight by the end of the school term. During an influenza epidemic all the

[240] Bonslagel, 1941 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[241] Ibid.

schools in that county were forced to close except Lamar and the PTA attributed this to the hot lunch program. Once again, women used theirs new skills to reach out into the community and uplift those around them.[242]

Another example in Johnson County of women's organizing efforts was in Spadra were one hundred and fifteen children were fed daily. The Surplus Commodities furnished lard, meal, flour, beans, tomatoes, canned grapefruit, rice, eggs and wheat cereal. The project raised a garden and canned over 300 quarts of beans and tomatoes. In order to participate, children could sell food to the project which would cover the five cents a day for the meal. For example, the project would pay ten cents per quart of sweet milk, ten cents for one-half gallon of buttermilk as well as eggs and canned goods at market price.[243] Not everyone was able to pay and donated items from the community and home demonstration women covered these children's meals. Most importantly, it was noted that the children who were able to pay did not know the other children who did not pay. Mrs. Ruby Matlock, 4-H club leader serving as the project supervisor, commented that she noticed an improvement in the children's dispositions and that they were less fussy on the playground as a result of not being hungry.[244] Through this work, children were receiving the nutrients they needed and able to thrive in school.

Many of these clubs not only sponsored the hot lunch program but did all they could to support their community school in the only way they knew how – organizing. In Baxter County, six of the eight hot lunch projects at schools were sponsored by home demonstration clubs. The Buford hot school lunch was started by the home demonstration club and the first year the members even took turns cooking. This continued until a WPA cook was hired and eventually a WPA garden was even planted. However, the club still donated food, and eventually even gave

[242] Bonslagel, 1941 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW
[243] Ibid.
[244] Ibid.

their club house to be used for the lunch room.[245] When they saw a need in their local community, club women organized to meet it. The Cassville project was sponsored by the East Cotter Home Demonstration club who helped raise money to buy the equipment and hire a WPA cook. The Oakland Home Demonstration Club sold a quilt at a pie supper to raise twenty dollars to buy the lumber to build a house for the lunch room. They convinced men in the neighborhood to donate their labor to build the house.[246] Although the focus of home demonstration work did not formally include activism and public outreach, women utilized the nutritional and canning skills they had learned to uplift their community.

The school lunch program is merely one example of home demonstration women's experience with grassroots efforts and the impact these club women had on the community's embrace and support of initiatives important them. The school lunch program gained momentum during the 1920s and obtained greater significance during the Great Depression of the 1930s. The depression years of the 1930's deepened the concern over hunger and malnourishment among school children, and many States adopted legislation to enable schools to serve noonday meal to their children.[247] In 1938, only 355 Arkansas schools were serving a hot dish or lunch. By 1941, 1,711 reported provided a hot dish or lunch in their school.[248] As more home demonstration club women took over the projects more schools became interested in serving hot lunches.

The success of home demonstration work depended on the club women themselves. From the very beginning, the importance and influence of lay leaders to the home demonstration program was crucial. The role of the home demonstration agent is often viewed by historians as

[245] Bonslagel, 1941 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[246] Ibid.
[247] National School Lunch Program, United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service website https://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp/history_2 (accessed April 6, 2017).
[248] Bonslagel, 1941 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

the government messenger. Yet extension work was carried on by local people organized in communities with the advice and help of county extension agents and State extension specialists in nutrition and related subjects. Agents were mediators between the formal program and rural women. Club women had always been instructed as county and community leaders and if the topic or project did not win their support it did not go any farther than the initial demonstration. However, it did not take long for an effort to organize more broadly began to emerge. County Councils were formed first consisting of the presidents of the county's home demonstration clubs then growing to include all home demonstration club members for the county. The County Councils were meant to serve the individual needs of the county, which included home demonstration and 4-H, county fairs, and county extension schools. While the organization of the county councils evolved over the years and varied widely from county to county, looking at the organization of two such councils – Garland County Council and Washington County Council - provides a glimpse into the organization.

In central Arkansas, the Garland County Council of Home Demonstration Clubs was organized in the 1930s and only consisted of white women. The council was led by elected officers, appointed officers, an executive committee, and a Board of Director. The elected officers consisted of a president, vice-president, and secretary-treasurer. The appointive officers were a parliamentarian, historian, and press correspondent. The Executive Committee was made up of the elected officers, the Executive Committee, the appointive officers, formal council presidents, chairmen of standing committees, and presidents of all member clubs. The council met 2-4 times a year and was open to all home demonstration club members.[249]

[249] By-laws. Garland County Extension Homemaker's Club Records (MC 1117), box 1, folder 1. Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. The name was changed to the Garland County Extension Homemaker's Council of Clubs in 1966.

In Northwest Arkansas, the Washington County Council consisted of a similar organization and consist of white women members. This council was first organized in 1926 as the Washington County Council of Rural Women's Clubs. They would change their name twice, once in 1943 and again in 1965. Their constitution and by-laws from 1956 list almost the same organizational structure as the Garland County Council with much of the same wording. The appointive officers, Executive Committee and Board of Directors were the same. The elected officers were also the same except the addition of a second-vice president and the council met twice a year.[250] The Board of Directors also met twice a year, but the Executive Committee met four times a year and had a supervision of the affairs of the council between regular meetings. The constitution stated that, "To be eligible for membership in the county council a club shall be a bona fide home demonstration club vouched for by the home demonstration agent; it shall have been organized and active for at least three months; it shall have a membership of 10 or more women; and it shall be operating under a constitution which conforms to those of the county and state council."[251] Through these organizations, women began to expand their reach farther outside their own communities providing them with more and more opportunity to obtain both formal and informal power.

As the interest in home demonstration work grew across Arkansas, so too did the interest in establishing a statewide organization of home demonstration clubs to unite rural women and coordinate activities. Organization at the statewide level for white demonstration work took place in 1929 when the Arkansas State Council of Home Demonstration Clubs was organized

[250] Constitution and By-Laws of the Arkansas Council of Home Demonstration Clubs, Revised, November 1957. Washington County Extension Homemakers Council Records (MC 906), box 2, file 1. Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.
[251] Constitution and By-Laws of the Washington County Home Demonstration Council, Revised, August 1956. Washington County Extension Homemakers Council Records (MC 906), box 2, file 1, Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.

during the Farmers' Week at Fayetteville. By 1933, there were 66 member councils with a membership of 26,000 women. By 1934, county councils from all counties were participating. By 1941, there were 77 county councils with a membership of 2,224 clubs which had an enrollment of 64,863.[252] The state council was organized in a similar way to the county councils with elective officers, appointive officers, Executive Committee, Board of Directors, and Board of Trustees. According to the Constitution of the Arkansas Council of Home Demonstration Clubs, "To be eligible for membership in the State Council, a county home demonstration council shall have a membership of not less than ten home demonstration clubs, and shall have as members at least ninety (90) percent of the home demonstration clubs in the county." The State Council met annually and each county council was allowed one voting member for the membership of 10-15 home demonstration clubs with an extra vote for each additional 10 clubs. As club members became more and more organized at the local, county, and state level, these women utilized their skills learned through demonstration work in new ways through activism and public outreach.

As was typical of the racial division of labor during this time, the Arkansas Council of Home Demonstration Clubs excluded black women from membership. But because black women served the most impoverished communities around the state and often had to do so with fewer resources, they understood the importance of coordinating their efforts into a state organization of their own. In 1936, two home demonstration agents, African American Cassa L. Hamilton and white Connie J. Bonslagel, helped establish the predominantly black State Council of Home Demonstration Clubs at a farmers' conference at Arkansas A&M. Like the Arkansas

[252] Hogan, 125.

Council, the State Council created a network of county clubs in rural black communities around the state.[253]

Club women did not hesitate to extend their reach into politics when political issues important to the membership surfaced. In 1933, the Arkansas Council of Home Demonstration Clubs state president Pearl E. Perkins and Fern Salyers, state chairman of the Legislative Committee sent a letter to all counties informing members of a bill introduced in the State House of Representatives that would abolish their branch of experiment station – the Fruit and Truck Station at Hope, the Rice Station at Stuttgart, and the Cotton Station at Marianna. The letter called for "immediate action on the part of the Home Demonstration women over the state. Every member of the legislature, and the Governor, must be told that the farmers people of the state want their support for this work. Please have the presidents and officers of your clubs to write, and a majority of members to write letters at once to your Representative, our Senator, and to the Governor, asking them to support both measures."[254] As a result, the "effort to secure adequate and permanent state funds for the support of Agricultural Extension and Experiment Station work received time and attention" when the state legislature met that year.[255] Overall, the work of these white club women empowered them while, at the same time, providing them an opportunity to demonstrate their strong and dependable leadership. Many had been home demonstration club members for ten and fifteen years. Their commitment to the work was significant among many farm families. This leadership and organized effort also shifted the focus of the county agents by giving less personal supervision to the carrying out of

[253] Jones-Branch, 89.
[254] Bonslagel, 1933 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[255] Ibid.

demonstrations under way and more time to initiating home demonstration practices among people who were not familiar with the work.[256]

For black clubwomen, their political activism was most often led more directly by the home demonstration agents themselves. In the 1940s, black agents increased their activism in rural black communities. Despite the nationwide mobilization for the war effort, blacks still suffered disproportionally from the economic privation of the Depression years. Black home demonstration agents continued to focus on skills such as teaching farmwomen to improve their homes, families, and communities by doing more with less. In an effort to organize alongside other key black community leaders, various leaders sought ways to encourage black farmers to help the USDA meet food production goals during the war years. In 1942, black home demonstration and extension agents, ministers, educators, and farmers met in Little Rock, Forrest City, and El Dorado to discuss how farmers could use the features of AAA to implement objectives of the USDA "Food for Freedom" program.[257] Organizing for black home demonstration women always included a broader reach and various components of the black community. Their work always focused on black community uplift not just home demonstration work. Increasing, however, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the State Home Demonstration Council meetings began to include themes with implicit political messages as "Working Together for World Understanding," "The Homemakers' Responsibilities in Changing Times," which reflected black agents understanding of the interconnectedness of their work to the changes occurring around the nation.[258] The complex realities of black home demonstration work reveals that agents and members alike always acknowledged the heightened social,

[256] Bonslagel, 1933 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[257] Jones-Branch, 90-91.
[258] Ibid, 92-93.

economic, and racial components of their work yet the home demonstration programs provided to rural Arkansas black communities contributed greatly to black families daily lives.

Another example of white clubwomen applying their organizing skills across the states was in 1939 when the Arkansas State Council of Home Demonstration Clubs initiated a tree-planting program in which demonstration forests were established in nine counties on idle farm lands.[259] The initiative was an impetus to the federal land use program as the acres were leased to the county home demonstration councils for a period of time to allow seedlings to grow into trees for logs or fence posts. Plans were developed the previous year by the Extension's forester and a county home demonstration agent. The plan was presented to the State Home Demonstration Council in August of 1938 for its approval. "Two points of popular appeal in this program were the pride of ownership in the educational and financial enterprise, and the personal participation of each club member in planting her own seedling."[260] The Cross County Home Demonstration Council sponsored the second home demonstration forest planting in the state. A 40-year lease was given to the council on an acre of land located 4 miles east of Wynne on Highway 64. Seedlings were obtained from Ohio through the Extension forester and one thousand seedlings were planted. "The purpose of this planting [was] fourfold: 1) to encourage the planting of similar forests throughout the county; 2) to encourage the study of 4-H and farm and home organizations of forest managements; 3) to use as a highway beautification project; and 4) to be used by 4-H and farm and home organizations for picnic purposes."[261] Although this program appears to be short lived because it is not mentioned in following annual reports, it is important to our understanding of how the Arkansas State Council of Home Demonstration

[259] This appears to have been a short lived program because there is little mention of this program in later report. However, I felt it was worth mentioning in this chapter to reveal the power of organizing.
[260] Bonslagel, 1939 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[261] Ibid.

Clubs organized women throughout the state providing them with a process for the initiation of new programs that were important to them.

The Arkansas State Council of Home Demonstration Clubs met annually but in 1933 they began the tradition of holding their meeting during a four day long camp. When they began the State Camp in 1933 there were 1040 women present, in 1934 they had nearly 1200 women in attendance and by 1935 there was 1533. The National Guard furnished camping equipment, camp ground and facilities with a building for meetings and a swimming pool. Special committees were appointed to take care of the meals, hospitality, program, speakers, activities and contests. Miss Vera Knook, the librarian for the city of Little Rock set up an exhibit of about 400 books "suitable for use in a rural community library." 307 women entered various contests held during camp. Speakers came from all of the state to present during camp on variety of topics. Afternoon group meetings included topics such as child care, home industries, rural library, art and home life, and officer's round table, home community planning and improvement, and home community recreation and housing. The annual Camp provided another opportunity for club women to organize. Over the four day camp, twelve hundred women were housed, ate, and gathered at central points to be transported back and forth on school buses, attended demonstration lectures and meetings. Before the Camp, the farm white women's home demonstration clubs met annually with the white men's farm organizations – the women spending practically their whole time cooking for the men and the home demonstration topics taking a backseat to the men's programs.[262] The Army camp allowed club women to focus on their own work, their needs, and their desires but most importantly reflect on the growth and needs of their own organization. The Camp meeting allowed women to discuss best practices

[262] Elizabeth Griffin Hill, *Splendid Piece of Work: One Hundred Years of Arkansas's Home Demonstration and Extension Homemakers Club*, (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), 155-158.

among each other as well as build relationships among a multi-generational group of women. Overall the army camp was often times the only night out many of the twelve hundred women had ever had, or ever would have in their whole lives.

As white club members across the state reflected on the growth and needs of their organization, it became apparent that supporting the next generation of home demonstration leaders was of utmost importance. In 1932, a cooperative house was started for girls attending the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville who had previously participated in 4-H. A "cooperative house" meant that the girls living in the house shared the duties of the housekeeping and did their own laundry in order to keep the cost for living low while attending college. All other expenses tied to the house were supported by Home Demonstration clubs around the state. That first year, the 4-H house held nine former 4-H girls, all majoring in home economics.[263] In 1934, there were 14 women living in the house on $10 a month and many brought food from home to share. It did not take long until an effort was underway, led by Josephine Bunch, a University of Arkansas student from Kingston, for the State Home Demonstration Council to build a house for 4-H girls on the University of Arkansas campus.[264] In 1939, the first steps were taken and each home demonstration club member donated $1 toward the building of this house. In 1944, a lot for the house was purchased at Douglas and Lindell streets in Fayetteville. Home Demonstration Clubs from all over the state contributed to this effort, such as the Columbia County Home Demonstration Club, who raised $1,000 for the house and contributed $200 for living room furniture. In April of 1951 the house was completed and was officially dedicated on May 5, 1951. The total cost of the project was $130,000 and had a capacity for 40 girls. The house was under the direction of the Arkansas Council of Home Demonstration Clubs and was open year

[263] Allen, 8.
[264] Ibid.

round to undergraduate and graduate women. Similar to the ideals of 4-H and home demonstration clubs, the ideals of the house were: Leadership, Scholarship, Cooperation, and Loyalty. Girls applying to live in the house had to have participated in 4-H and preference was given to home economics majors which reflected the original goal of the membership which was to support future leaders of home demonstration work in the state. It was even required that a certain percentage of the house had to be home economics majors though the percentage seemed to change through the years. Individual home demonstration clubs continued to donate money as well as special items for the improvement of the house, donating everything from lace table cloths to a world globe and atlas.[265]

Home demonstration work provided rural women a unique opportunity to develop their talents, gain confidence, and participate more actively in their communities. Although the focus of home demonstration work did not officially include activism and public outreach, women utilized the new skills they had learned and their wide network of clubs across the state to uplift their own families as well as those around them. Through their work with the school lunch program and the organizing of the Arkansas State Council of Home Demonstration Clubs, women experienced first-hand the power of organizing and in turn, the significant role they played in initiating and mobilizing grassroots efforts across the state. It is clear home demonstration club women played a prominent role in their communities and in turn had a large impact on their community's embrace and support of initiatives that were important to these rural women.

[265] Allen, 9. Interest in the house declined over the years and by 1976, the Arkansas Extension Homemaker Council decided the purpose for which the house had been established had been filled and voted to sale the house.

Chapter 5:

A Shift in Focus

The rural South's entry into the national consumer economy significantly shaped home demonstration work. As Mary Hoffschwelle argues, a shift in reform occurred in the 1920s that redirected the extension agency's focus from food production and self-sufficiency to promoting rural uplift through consumerism and commercialism. However, this took place much later in Arkansas when compared to other states like Hoffschwelle's Tennessee. Consumption during the 1920s was gendered female but assumptions rested on the experience of middle class whites. Historians have debated the perception that consumption in the United States was the domain of women. Some historians condemn this, in Victoria de Grazia's words, "as an especially totalizing and exploitative force to which women are more vulnerable than men because of their subordinate social, economic and cultural position."[266] According to this view, the female consumer was a subject without will or agency, manipulated by commercial interests and diverted from political activism in her preoccupation with shopping. This was not the case in many rural households where women were often the individuals who were actively selecting or influencing the commodities available in their communities. Furthermore, histories of farm women tend to emphasize the significance of their production work not consumption. However, I believe the two are directly linked. As the marketplace changed so did this productive work, and home demonstration work was at the center of this transformation.

By the 1920s women typically purchased and used store-bought cloth. Home demonstration agents taught rural women, who often were not able to afford store- bought cloth, how to use seed and flour bags to make patterned cloth. Women with surplus feed sacks turned

[266] Victoria de Grazia, *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 7.

them into a commodity. As Lu Ann Jones suggests, the introduction of print feed bags indicated that feed dealers recognized women as farm decision makers, began marketing toward them and in turn, they saw an energized response to women's trade in bags. At the same time, the very fact that rural women began to use feed bags to make patterned cloth illustrates the changing dynamics within rural America as it relates to participation in a consumer culture and the emergence of middle class ideals in the countryside.[267] Agricultural reforms such as home demonstration programs encouraged farm women to continue efforts in domestic manufacture but at the same time urged patterns of middle class consumption. Farm women initially shunned extension programs that urged them to modernize but embraced those programs that enhanced the domestic production of sewing and food preservation as it allowed them to remain effective producers on the farm. As rural women in Arkansas became more interested in household amenities in the 1940s, home demonstration work began to incorporate home equipment and interior design into to their home improvement efforts. This top down approach to reform, this reflects a concerted effort by the Extension Service to promote a middle class ideal in rural America. This practice soon injected modern, urban-oriented standards of home economics into the rural community. However, it is important to be reminded that home demonstration programs were voluntary, agents could not force change on rural women. These programs were not merely the product of local people accepting or rejecting an agenda but rather a dynamic relationship between the formal demonstration and the application of the work in women's day to day lives. Eventually rural women chose to adopt new standards of housework and home decoration but most often on a sliding scale that ranged from adding new curtains or a fireless cooker to renovating the interior floor plan of their house. How rural women responded to

[267] Jones, 174 and 175.

demonstration agents and embraced certain programs shaped domestic reform in ways that limited its modernizing tendencies while preserved local traditions of the countryside.[268]

As outlined in the previous chapters, early home demonstration work focused on food production through the home demonstration rural preparedness program. Women used these programs in order to provide for their families during times of drought, floods, and poor economic challenges on the farm. Between and during the two World Wars, the focal point shifted from merely food production and revitalization to an emphasis on efficiency and production which eventually evolved into the "Live-at-Home" program. Although these programs had already attempted to improve rural life on the farm through modern conveniences, the postwar agricultural depression severely limited farm families' cash incomes making the purchasing of home conveniences difficult and not a priority for the majority rural women at the time. As the farm economy began to recover and rural women expressed interest, the extension service began to put home improvement campaigns back into high gear. At the same time, an expanding consumer ethic among rural women and in rural communities was transforming as they were being exposed to an influx of products through the Sears and Roebuck catalogs of the early 20th century. Furthermore, the Better Homes Movement of the 1930s dovetailed with the home demonstration projects in the 1940s which promoted home furnishings and home improvement projects leaving a lasting impact on rural women and their families.

From the earliest days of home demonstration work, it was believed by many reformers that home conveniences were badly needed in rural homes. Home improvements such as purchasing an ice box, installing a water system or electricity had long been promoted through extension work. However, it is important to note that in 1930, 2.1 percent of Arkansas farms had electricity. Rural electrification came late to Arkansas with the first major effort to provide

[268] See Rieff in *Hidden Histories*.

electricity to rural Arkansas with the passage of the Federal Rural Electrification Act (REA) in 1935. This was part of Roosevelt's New Deal programs to improve the economic condition of farmers hit hard by depression, flood, and drought. The REA provided loans so farmers could form cooperatives to electrify their homes and farms. It was believed that electrified farms would improve farm incomes and raise farm standards of living. Through programs like the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), which began providing inexpensive electricity to rural residents of the Tennessee River Valley in 1934, farmers began to see firsthand the benefits of using electricity to grind corn, milk cows, and perform other chores. At the same time, farm wives saw the benefits of electric water pumps, washing machines, irons, lights, and radios. However, it was not until farm families understood their needs that their own viewpoints shifted and after close to a decade of hardships, that home demonstration work at the local level embraced these conveniences in response to club members growing interest.

Home convenience demonstrations highlighted that with little money added to the household income, home conveniences could easily be purchased. In a 1934 report, Mrs. Ida Fenton, extension economist for household management, referenced a federal housing survey which noted that only 191 houses had running water even though above-average housing existed in the state. Fenton worked tirelessly with club members across the state to implement a five-year step-by-step farm water system plan to provide rural households with plumbing. The first year the kitchen sink, drain board, and pipe drain were to be addressed. During the first or second year, a hand operated pump with piping from the well to storage tank was to be installed. In the second year, a hot water tank and water heater could be added. A plan for the bathroom complete with installing the tub and lavatory with drain pipes was outlined for year three. The homemade septic tank was to be built in year four. During the fourth or fifth year, a flush toilet

was to be installed and a plumber hired to put all piping and connections in proper condition. By the final year, hot and cold running water would be available, the farm would have a septic tank disposal and complete bathroom. If electricity was available an electric pump could be installed or a gasoline engine might be used to pump water into the storage tank.[269] In the plan's first year, 175 women across the state committed to the project. To guarantee cooperation by the entire family, an agreement was signed by each family member.[270] The document stated how much of the farm income would be allotted for home improvement that year and on what improvement item. The farm crop or livestock used for earning this money was also specified on the card and the document was formally signed by both the husband and wife.[271] This type of work transformed the family household and had a significant impact on all members of the family. It further demonstrates the prominent role farm women played within the farm household and the disposition of the extension service to embrace a family approach for projects and farm enterprises as designed not for the land's sake nor for the livestock's stake, but for the farm family.[272] The reality was that farm and home were considered a unit, not necessarily separate entities as defined by the extension's separate farm and home demonstration work. Furthermore, this reveals the prominent role rural women were playing in the utilizing of modern conveniences within the rural countryside and how without their involvement many of these conveniences and improvements to farm life would not have been possible.

Time and time again skills learned from home demonstration programs highlighted women's ingenuity something that was not new to these farm women who had long been finding ways to provide for their families. The home convenience programs merely extended these daily

[269] Ida Fenton, 1934 Annual Narrative Report, Home Economist, Household Management Specialist, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[270] Ibid.
[271] Ibid.
[272] Bonslagel, 1938 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

tasks. For example, one woman reported installing complete plumbing, except running hot water, for $2. The materials were all obtained by collecting discarded materials around the farm. This included a storage tank; sink made from a gas tank, bath tub, and lavatory.[273] In Conway County, Mrs. Alma Stroud added a built-in cabinet with a sink made from a Ford gas tank. She placed two half-windows in the wall above the sink, and put ivory and green linoleum on the floor. This created the color scheme for her, so the cabinet and other woodwork were enameled ivory and green.[274] As you can see, these women were combining ingenuity to not only add improvements to their home but incorporate current fashion and trends. Another "easy-to-do" kitchen improvement lesson promoted with many clubs was how to make doilies or lunch cloths for the family to use at least once a day. Extension economist, Ida Fenton suggested making them from flour sacks, sugar sacks, or gingham. She described the project as "good pick-up work for this winter instead of so many quilt tops."[275] Once again, club women were using new skills and creativity in ways to not only meets the material needs for their families but also to remain effective producers and providers within the household economy. At the same time, one also sees the adoption and incorporation of middle class ideals sneaking into the rural countryside.

During this phase of home demonstration work, programs emphasized that it took only a little money to make real improvements in home decoration – something that would have been of little interest to women in the early years of the program. By emphasizing home furnishings as well as conveniences, home improvement moved into the realm of interior decoration. During the late 1930s and early 1940s, home decoration began to be linked to home improvement which

[273] Fenton, 1934 Annual Narrative Report, Home Economist, Household Management Specialist, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[274] Ibid.
[275] Ibid.

further reinforced modern, urban-oriented standards of home economics into the rural community. Since new homes for rural families were not possible, agents began to focus their efforts on the interior of the home. As Hoffschwelle argues the timing of the agent's emphasis on domestic furnishings reflects how rural women were agents of change. Purchasing a new home was not an option but rural women could rearrange and refurbish the interiors of their homes. Early on these interactions between rural women and demonstration agents shaped domestic reform in ways that limited its modernizing tendencies while preserving local traditions. Similar to Hoffschwelle, Rieff acknowledges the cultural conflict that emerged as home demonstration agents pursued reforms. She reveals that home demonstration programs adopted and maintained ambiguities that characterized and weakened the larger southern progressive movement.[276] It was not until after World War II that those rural families were more comfortable purchasing home conveniences with credit or had an interest in modernizing their homes. However, early demonstration work did lay the groundwork for this interest. For example, in 1934 the extension economist for household management offered a kitchen improvement demonstration, planned for a two or three-year period. The demonstration included: The cheerful kitchen: A discussion of backgrounds, windows, color schemes, the outlook and a general view of the kitchen. The comfortable kitchen: Light, ventilation, rest corner, heights of working surfaces, heat control. The sanitary kitchen: Cleaning methods, dishwashing, control of pests, disposal of waste, cleaning kit. The convenient kitchen: Arrangement, refrigeration, storage spaces. *The well equipped kitchen*: Store management, small equipment, how much and how to select it, and home safe equipment. The kitchen routine:

[276] Rieff, 136.

Methods and plans of work."[277] Each of these demonstrations provided plans for women to modernize their kitchen over a two or three year period.

In Yell County, "we [they] emphasized good arrangement as an improvement which can be made at no cost."[278] To demonstrate, the agent asked the entire group of women to bake an apple pie and count the steps or measure the distance traveled from the time they began making the pie until it was on the dining table ready to be served. At the next meeting, each member shared the distance traveled. Mrs. Apple, the women who took the most steps, walked one-sixth of a mile to make and place the apple pie on the dining table.[279] The agent helped her arrange her kitchen by moving the dining unit to one side of the room. She set up a circular arrangement, beginning with the stove as the fixed piece of equipment. The storage cabinet and the work table were moved to the left of the stove. To the right a serving table was placed that had a supply of condiments used in the final seasoning and garnishing of foods before sending them to the dining table. It was reported that these improvements reduced Mrs. Apple's travel from one-sixth of a mile steps.[280]

Home beautification work also included remodeling the house so that the largest room was used as a living room. Misses Clara and Ida Helmimch, assisted by their father and brothers, followed an extensive plan of home beautification. They changed a window to a door, added a window and remodeled a side porch to the front of the house.[281] Rural women were also encouraged to improve home grounds by planting flowers around the base of houses and in porch boxes as well as by using potted plants. Home demonstration programs even included

[277] Fenton, 1934 Annual Narrative Report, Home Economist, Household Management Specialist, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[278] Ibid.
[279] Ibid.
[280] Ibid.
[281] 1939 Annual Narrative Report, Saline County Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

learning how to use rocks – water worn rock, slate appearing rock found in streams and ditches, grey rock and glass rock in colors and white with the appearance of glass. The homemade home campaign, which began in 1937, arose from the need to assist farm families in constructing their own homes and farm buildings. Arkansas' per capita income was $139 in 1939; low incomes were the major cause of five out of every six farm homes in Arkansas needing to be repaired or replaced. Years of drought, floods, low prices and reduced incomes generally had delayed normal building and repair work on farms throughout the state. Farm families were beginning to show an interest in planning for better homes just as they had in the past planned for farm crops. The building of "attractive homes" was recognized as an essential part of farmstead operations from both the farm and home demonstration work. Once again, notions of middle class ideals were steadily creeping into the ethos of rural America.

The clothing program further reflected this shift towards promoting consumerism around middle-class ideals. Clothing and textiles had been central to home demonstration work since its beginning. However, demonstrations shifted from understanding fabric and repurposing textiles in order to provide for the family needs towards style and wardrobe planning, and for the first time, sewing machines were mentioned in the 1939 annual report. Sewing machines were badly needed in all counties and where they did exist they were in dire need of specific parts or replacements.[282] However, we must first understand the various elements that affected the extent and content of the clothing program. Although farm income was somewhat improving, very few families considered it appropriate to purchase brand new clothing except for a necessary replacement. Women responded to these reforms in ways that limited its modernizing tendencies. Clothing in good quality but out of date was instead remodeled to be more fashionable. In Lawrence County, 26 local leaders in clothing assisted the home demonstration

[282] Bonslagel, 1939 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

agent in moving the clothing program forward. These local leaders were brought together once or twice each year for definite training in clothing work and in 1939 these included demonstrations in clothing construction and wardrobe planning.[283] Leaders were provided a subject-matter file of all clothing information and were responsible for a clothing contest in their community, to assist fellow club members with clothing problems, and to give method demonstrations in clothing to both home demonstration club members and to 4-H members in 4-H clubs.[284] It was reported that sewing machine clinics were held in two communities and twenty demonstrations were given in dry cleaning, spot removal, and pressing by leaders in clothing that year. Two communities had a clothing contest with 31 women entering from the Clover Bend Community and twenty-six families carried wardrobe planning demonstrations.[285] For clothing contests, the Danish system of judging was recommended and fashion operettas were suggested as a medium for presenting models. This was a cooperative opportunity for the clothing, music, and recreation leaders to overlap in their work.[286] In regards to wardrobe planning, eighteen home demonstration club members carried a family wardrobe demonstration in Columbia County during 1939. Mrs. Laura Jarvis of the Waldo Rural Club said, "I didn't realize that I had so many clothes on hand, or that I spent so much for clothes. From now on I'm planning to buy quality instead of quantity."[287] Once again, middle class ideals were slowly being embedded in the rural ethos.

The proper care of clothing was included as part of the clothing program. Leader training was offered in laundering. These local leaders would offer a six-point lesson plan for wash day and ironing day through two separate demonstrations. Members were encouraged to use clothes

[283] Bonslagel, 1939 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[284] Ibid.
[285] Ibid.
[286] Ibid.
[287] Ibid.

lines but position them out of view from the highway and front of the house. Furthermore, recommended methods for bleaching clothes and starching were offered in demonstrations as well as the proper heights for the ironing board outlined, one for sitting and the other for standing. Proper ironing, folding, and airing techniques were also included. In Clay County, care and protection of clothing was the 1939 slogan for the clothing program. One Blue Home Demonstration Club member showed the women of her community that closets could be built with no extra cost. From scrap lumber two closets were constructed, canvassed inside and out with old dresses and other materials and then papered to match the interior of the rooms.[288] All of these skills instilled that the care and presentation of clothing should be at the forefront of women's minds. With each new skill learned, women's daily tasks continued to expand while altering women's labor patterns within the household.

As more conveniences were embraced in the community and the rise of consumerism in the countryside was taking place, women's productive work was changing in order for them to find ways to remain producers on the farm. In Craighead County more than 200 sewing machines were cleaned following demonstrations given at club meetings. Cleaning involved taking the machine apart and cleaning each part thoroughly with white gasoline applied using a small stiff brush. Then tensions and stitch lengths were adjusted.[289] During a Clinton home demonstration club meeting it was noted that "the demonstration Miss Mary Britman gave on cleaning sewing machines was of great interest to the entire group. We consider this one of the greatest services she has given our county."[290] The sewing machine broadened women's options as it related to clothing construction and allowed many women to replicate clothing seen in

[288] Bonslagel, 1939 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[289] Ibid.
[290] Ibid.

magazines or elsewhere. At the same time, sewing provided another way women's productive work contributed to the household economy.

An expanding consumer ethic among rural business interests further facilitated the movement. Home agents built alliances with small-town merchants and bankers eager to guide farm wives in exercising their purchasing power. Programs such as Home Improvement Days strengthened the alliance between home agents and business leaders. These programs were organized to bring farm women into the towns to participate in a series of educational programs on consumer consciousness, business practices, banking, and new products or services for rationalized homemaking. These experiences, similar to curb markets, exposed club women to various aspects of the "public sphere" further expanding their involvement within the local community and linking their power of consumers with their contributions to the household economy.

With the focus on consumerism, home demonstration programs refocused their attention once more on girls but instead of "girls tomato clubs" they initiated bedroom improvement projects. At the same time, the Better Homes Movement dovetailed with demonstration projects in promoting home furnishings and home improvement projects. The kitchen became the focal point for the mothers as well as living room improvement and eventually home gardens, horticulture, and water works. This effort sought to move farm wives closer to the role of the urban homemaker: home consumption manager, attractive wife, and affectionate mother. Better Homes Movement contests sponsored by rural magazines appealed to national audiences but utilized the expertise and organizational experience of the home demonstration agent. Under the leadership of Herbert Hoover, Better Homes in America organized as a national domestic reform organization from 1922 – 1935 with goals to improve quality of housing and promote

homemakers role as economic consumer. These programs built on the work of home demonstration projects but were more centrally focused on improving and promoting urban and suburban housing such as bungalows and cottages, not farm houses, and assumed cash was readily available. As a result, home demonstration work concentrated their efforts on the refurbishing and rearranging of the interior of the home. Home furnishings demonstrations sought, at the very least, to introduce the contemporary aesthetic of simplicity and order to a rural home's appearance. Furniture and decorations were to be kept to a minimum and arranged nearly around the walls. Home decoration was now linked to home improvement that further injected modern, urban-oriented standards of home economics in the rural community which forever changed value-systems within the rural household. As they had done before, rural women responded to these efforts by blending tradition with modern technique.

As a result of the rapid changes taking place in twentieth century America, farm households in the South like households throughout the United States were transformed into places of consumptions. By stressing homemaker standards, new domestic ideals were introduced into rural homes. No matter what their cost, home improvement projects injected modern, urban-oriented standards of home economics into the rural home further reordering farm women's traditional domestic activities and spaces. Value-systems changed as a result of home demonstration programs introduction of new household products and heightened consumerism. The gender dynamics within the home was altered as women and children learned new skills and were exposed to a market economy. Although the responses and acceptance of various progressive reform efforts in the south demonstrate that race and gender remained integral to southern society, the southern farmer and farm wife individually evaluated reform by their own needs and aspirations. For the farm wife, the home demonstration program sought to expand

their roles in the family and community while the material dynamics of the time forced these women to begin to measure themselves and their homes by material standards of the national consumer culture and middle class America.

Chapter 6

The Impact of World War II

As the nation was preparing for another World War, home demonstration work refocused on food production in order to meet the war needs. The National Defense Program directed farm women's thinking toward 1) increased emphasis on the production of well-planned food supply for all farm families; 2) increased home consumption of cotton; and 3) improved standards of citizenship among farm families. Club women provided their expertise in foods, housing, or sewing to support the war effort.[291] Furthermore, the Preparedness Committee of the State Home Demonstration Council met in September 1940 and determined that food was the first line of home defense. These women were to contribute to the war effort by carrying out the "Live At Home" program in their own families but also were encouraged to "preach it and to tell it at every community gathering, whether it be home demonstration club, community night, or what not."[292] The extent of the work grew during the war with over 50,000 additional Extension agents trained nationwide between December 8, 1941, and April 1, 1942. At over 4,000 meetings, agents were given special training in all lines of important work, including food preservation, home gardening and other ways to increase production. The "Victory Garden" campaign familiarized many city dwellers with agricultural extension work for the first time.

As they had done throughout the previous decades, home demonstration women nationwide contributed invaluable support to the war effort. However, the changes brought on by the New Deal and the war would not only impact farm and home demonstration clubs in the post WWII area but all aspects of rural life in Arkansas. The small family farms, traditionally

[291] Bonslagel, 1940 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[292] Ibid.

regarded as the bedrock of the American Republic, were pushed to the margins as commercial agriculture took center stage.

During World War II, home demonstration clubs played prominent roles in the war effort. Home demonstration clubs' Committees on Preparedness held vital roles in their counties and communities during the war as they made Live-at-Home inventories in their communities and then went out into neighborhood homes to encourage farm families to do a better job of food production.[293] Furthermore interest in demonstration work continued to grow especially among urban women who were interested in learning how to can and garden. However, the conclusion of the war ushered in a period of reflection, reevaluation, and long-term planning for the future of home demonstration work.

During World War II, more than 17,000 Arkansas farm families left their homes.[294] Those soldiers returning to the farm following the end of World War II had been exposed to new experiences, some of which altered their attitudes about country life. Some were eager to come back to rural living but found it difficult to buy a farm because of new government policies concerning farm loans. Some were reluctant to return to life as they had known it. Some had a desire to take on work in factories and live in more urban settings. Others wanted a life with more free time or greater conveniences and others had a desire for greater cultural exposure through books, art, and music.[295] Another significant impact of the war in Arkansas resulted in fewer and larger farms. The 1945 census showed that the number of farms in Arkansas decreased by 10,147, although nineteen counties showed gains in the number of farms.[296] Whether it was the food production changes required to meet post-war needs; the hazards of land

[293] Bonslagel, 1940 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[294] Hill, 197.
[295] Bonslagel, 1945 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[296] Hill, 197.

speculation and further inflation; the need for improved road, rural electrification, and new farm equipment, returning service men and women or families were adjusting to the changing dynamics of the post-World War II area. At the same time, both farm and home demonstration work had to be refashioned in order to address the changing needs of rural America.

One result of the New Deal in agriculture was a concentration of land holdings in the hands of large-scale operators who farmed commercial quantities of the principal agriculture commodities. Agricultural mobilization for World War II, with its frenzied application of science, machinery, and labor needed to fuel the arsenal of democracy, brought prosperity not seen since the World War I. However, the wealth fell in the hands of a few wealthy individuals. By the close of World War II, with the shift to commercial farming firmly established, the role the extension service played on farms had significantly changed.

The war provided opportunities for club women to work in the schools, local stores, drive school buses, etc. Those who remained in the home returned to the fields assisting with planting, cultivating and harvesting food crops. After the war, home demonstration agents found that women were returning to their communities and fewer women were being employed outside the home.[297] However, the number of home demonstration clubs in Arkansas had declined over the course of the war. Even though 104 home demonstration clubs were still organized in 1945. The state still had suffered a loss of 182 clubs compared to 2,224 members at the beginning of the war. Agents remained optimistic that the loss of 3,323 members would be regained within a year.[298]

In an effort to address the changing needs of a post-war world, the Arkansas State Home Demonstration Council held a seminar on policies and problems in adult education in which

[297] Bonslagel, 1945 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[298] Ibid.

participants discussed the need for Extension workers to recognize and study the many ways in which Arkansas's rural living had been affected by the war. It was noted that women had been out of contact with home demonstration work for numerous reasons. Some moved with their families to war plant areas or moved as their husbands went from military camp to military camp. They may have dropped out due to low morale or were nonparticipants as they had been prior to war. At the same time, many remained active in clubs and other community activities while emphasis had turned to the war effort on the home front.[299]

Because membership had fallen off each year during the war, a membership campaign was initiated in 1945. As a result, fifty-five counties reported 184 newly organized clubs and 3,497 new members were added in seventy-one counties. During this same year, seventy-one counties reported the loss of 3,710 members.[300] Despite the decline in membership, women continued to be deeply concerned about local matters. The inadequacy of the rural schools remained a great concern especially when many boys and girls had left school to work in war plants.[301] There was a trend developing toward improving rural health conditions. With so many doctors and nurses gone during the war, farm families realized the need for a health program. Home demonstration work in 1946 embraced sanitation, sanitary toilets, and screens and prevention of household pests. Club members even assisted in organizing and attending Red Cross nutrition and nursing classes.[302] During 1948, a major emphasis was placed on developing health facilities and services for rural families through a group insurance plan and to decrease health hazards in the home. Health leaders were active in cancer drives and informing people about the county-wide cancer clinic. In addition, leaders worked tirelessly to inform their

[299] Bonslagel, 1945 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[300] Ibid.
[301] Ibid.
[302] Ibid.

neighbors of a county-wide tuberculosis clinic.[303] Women were also learning about the importance of having a family physician and dentist and consulting them yearly and shared this knowledge with non-club members. In 1956, it was reported that seven hundred seventy-four people went for chest x-rays in two days. Over 100 club women had a physical examination after discussing the importance of this medical procedure in their clubs.[304] Overall, mental health, heart disease, and health insurance were being recognized as important factors in a happy home life.[305]

Women's world views had also expanded as a result of the war. With so many young people from their communities in all parts of the world, women planned programs and discussions about new places. These were called "Keeping-up-to-Date."[306] In Craighead and Baxter counties, club women exhibited articles sent from various countries by sons and daughters, husbands and fathers in the armed forces. Madison County members studied Hawaii, the Philippine Islands, New Guinea, India, China, Italy, Russia and North Africa. In Lonoke County, a ceremony called "Authors of Democracy" was presented on V-E Day. Overall, citizenship had taken on more meaning and these women wanted to stay informed.[307]

By 1947, the demographics of home demonstration had changed drastically. Urban women, especially younger homemakers, were more and more interested in home demonstration work. Reports for 1947 revealed that several clubs had been organized in urban centers. As a result, young women, urban dwellers, G.I. wives, and women who worked outside the home were given special attention.[308] Of the total statewide membership of 39,421, 31,302 were farm

[303] 1948 Annual Narrative Report, Sevier County Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[304] 1956 Combined Annual Report, State Extension Agents, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[305] Ibid.
[306] Bonslagel, 1945 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[307] Ibid.
[308] Bonslagel, 1947 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

women, 4,818 were rural non-farm women and 3,301 were urban women. To meet the needs of town and city women, plans were developed for leaders of existing clubs to receive additional training from agents and specialists.[309]

Night classes began to be offered for working women. In Arkansas, the national project – The Consumer Speaks was also offered to urban women and was headed up by the state's subject-matter specialists. Areas studied in 1947 included clothing, foods, household equipment, and home furnishings. Thirty discussion meetings in each of the subjects were conducted by county agents.[310] Special-interest group meetings for urban families were held in most of the larger towns where freezer locker plants were to be established or were already operating. Demonstrations were offered on preparation of food for freezing. Freezer locker plants even mailed thousands of Extension Service leaflets on the preparation of fruits, vegetables, and meats for the freezer locker.[311] Less than 10 years later, it would be reported that families were eating more meals away from home as well as more ready-processed foods, a direct contradiction of the early home demonstration nutrition programs. Twenty-eight percent of married women were employed outside the home. These women had less time to prepare meals and needed information on how to "select, prepare, and serve food attractively with a minimum amount of time and effort." At the same time, homemakers were seeking more nutrition knowledge in order to make wise choices in buying, conserving, and planning well-balanced meals. Middle class ideals had transformed the original program once focused on promoting rural uplift. Homemakers were also asking for more help entertaining and for special occasions. As a result, the nutrition and foods work focused on "jiffy meals," meals for busy days and simple, nutritious

[309] Bonslagel, 1947 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[310] Ibid.
[311] Ibid.

and attractive holiday meals.[312] The home demonstration program was once again responding to the membership's wants and needs by offering resources for these women to meet the changing needs of their families. However, the membership of the late 1940s and early 1950s did not reflect the rural farm wife but rather an urban housewife.

In nearly all counties, the young wives of veterans were invited to join home demonstration clubs or to form groups exclusively their own. Following two open meetings on food preservation, one group was organized in Terry Village, the married student housing complex on the University of Arkansas campus in Fayetteville. A second group of wives, called the Dames Club, met with the home agent for demonstrations on kitchen efficiency and making educational toys.[313] In Waldron, the agent worked with forty-one G.I. wives, demonstrating yeast bread making, furniture refinishing, clothing construction and slip-cover and handicraft making.[314] At the State College at Jonesboro, G.I. wives who lived in a trailer camp were offered four classes in low-cost, nutritious meals and in child care.[315]

Despite these targeted efforts, it is important to note that in 1941, 64,863 Arkansas women were members of home demonstration clubs. By 1947, the number was only 39,421.[316] In response to declining membership and a modernized rural America, a shift in the program took place to broaden the base of interest in home demonstration clubs' programs and shift activities away from home economics and homemaking. In 1947, 1,505 clubs in seventy-seven counties held discussions on health; 1,057 clubs in sixty-nine counties discussed school problems; 1,042 clubs in sixty-one counties had programs on citizenship; and 1,446 clubs in

[312] 1956 Combined Annual Report, State Extension Agents, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[313] Bonslagel, 1947 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[314] Ibid.
[315] Ibid.
[316] Ibid.

seventy-five counties discussed safety.[317] Although the program broadened to include topics important outside the home, it appears women continued to express interest in some homemaking activities. In seventy-two counties, 36,283 families followed the Arkansas Food Supply Plan. An estimated value of $11,260,612 was placed on the food produced by these families at an average of $310 for each family.[318]

With each passing decade, the work of home demonstration programs refocused in response to the interests and demands of its members. The farm had always held great importance to the rural family from a production standpoint. However, the "home is [beginning to be seen as] equally as important for the wellbeing of the family, so naturally this necessitates the two being considered as a unit in planning a successful [home demonstration] program."[319] The collaboration between women and men was critical to the future farm program. Up until the late 1930s, the home demonstration program had focused more on physical things and dealt largely with food, shelter, and clothing. By the 1940s, the work shifted towards a focus on rural home standards. "We will soon be able to see how a planned agricultural program can help us to realize these high standards we are now only thinking about."[320] Farm and home organization leaders made possible the development of the county program. The majority of community programs and activities were a direct result of members of both the farm and home organizations working together. Following World War II, home demonstration work placed a greater emphasis than ever before on the emotional and social needs of its members such as the social influences of the family and community; urging women to accept responsibility for building a better world; to weigh values in family living in order to emphasize the factors that point to happiness, self-

[317] Bonslagel, 1947 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[318] Ibid.
[319] Bonslagel, 1948 Annual Narrative Report, Sevier County Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[320] Bonslagel, 1936 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.

confidence, and desirable adjustment for family members; and to recognize problems and learn effective ways of meeting them.[321] Women had learned the value of results through organized groups and therefore made use of organizational practices in every possible way. However, the post-World War II shift reveals a very different constituency served by these programs. Farm and home demonstration club members were no longer the sharecroppers, tenants or middle class landowners dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods but rather middle class urban dwellers and this membership impacted the programs agents offered throughout the state.

As the demographics of the membership continued to transform and work continued to evolve and include more and more outreach within the community, it was decided to increase state council dues from 25 cents to 50 cents per club during the 1951 annual meeting of the Arkansas Council of Home Demonstration Clubs.[322] During the same meeting, "rural arts" were discussed to include poetry and playwriting and other cultural arts in home demonstration programs.[323] "Citizenship" was discussed and agreed that all clubs were asked to observe United Nations Day, to observe one minute of prayer each day, to promote citizenship among members by being active in politics by being informed and voting, to study inflation and to reaffirm their concern for conservation of the natural resources of our state.[324] In regards to "education," club members were encouraged to discuss the importance of a college education with all groups of senior girls, supply more printed materials on universal topics for discussion, and urge all members to cooperate with local and state organizations in solving school problems.[325] At home, members were to stress the importance of books as a resource of information, inspiration and

[321] 1956 Combined Annual Report, State Extension, Record Group 33, Records of the Arkansas Extension Service, National Archives and Records Administration Southwestern Branch, Fort Worth, Texas
[322] Hazel C. Jordan, 1951 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[323] Ibid.
[324] Ibid.
[325] Ibid.

recreation. Library resources within their communities became a more central focus.[326] Within the health and community improvement, they agreed to encourage health committees to further develop an educational program, including physical and mental health as affected by nutrition, housing, early detection of disease, facilities for health and medical care, health insurance and immunization program.[327] It is also important to note by this time, the Rural Community Improvement (RCI) program had been launched in Arkansas to promote the working together of all organizations in a community for the betterment of each family, hence the betterment of the community. This ideology was further reflected in the home demonstration work emphasis on the family as a unit.[328] Politics took a more coordinated focus when it was voted on to acquaint members with both sides of any legislation and naming a county chairman for a legislative study.[329] The membership goal was set at 52,000 for 1952, an increase of 6,000 from the current year. Plans for membership included 1) a membership campaign throughout the state with training for membership leaders, 2) organization of additional special interest groups with more result demonstration, 3) radio programs and publicity, and 4) emphasis on better training of officers and subject matter leaders.

Changes wrought by the war forever impacted home demonstration work in Arkansas in ways it would never fully recover from. The evolution of home demonstration work in Arkansas following World War II aligns with the shifting dynamics farm families were facing as agriculture was completely its transformation. For example, as the standard of living improved for those rural families remaining on the land, farm life changed radically compared to when home demonstration programs began in 1914. Tenant shacks disappeared with the decline of

[326] Jordan, 1951 Annual Narrative Report, State Home Demonstration Agent, Arkansas, RG 33, NASW.
[327] Ibid.
[328] Ibid.
[329] Ibid.

sharecropping; farm women lost interest in gardening and canning. Sewing continued but women were more and more interested in relying on ready-to-wear clothing. According to the Baxter County home demonstration agent, Beverly M. Morris in 1956, women were working outside the home and did not have time to do home sewing.[330] Furthermore, the coordinated emphasis of the home demonstration program's membership changed to focus on younger women as well as urban women and women in the workforce. The overall role of the extension service had changed but more importantly, the audiences for this program had changed which required once again for the programs to respond to their needs. The rural population had declined, and the remaining families were reasonably prosperous. Demonstration agent's roles and programs offered to members were very different because rural life had transformed considerably by the end of the 1950s. After the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited discrimination based on race, color, religion, or national origin and denied federal funds to organizations that failed to integrate, the segregated home demonstration work in Arkansas ended and in 1966, black and white women came together within the newly reorganized Extension Homemakers Council, which continues to be in existence today that their work's greatest focus centered around community service.[331]

[330] Beverly M. Morris, Annual Report 1956, Record Group 33, Records of the Arkansas Extension Service, NASW.
[331] Jones-Branch, 95.

Chapter 7:

Conclusion

Beginning with an appropriation of fifteen-hundred dollars in 1912 from the United States Department of Agriculture, the home demonstration program pursued objectives in three broad areas: economic, educational, and social advancement. The "Tomato Girls" of Pulaski County laid the groundwork for over 100 years of service from clubs dedicated to bettering home management and rural farm life for women and their families in Arkansas. With the passage of the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, the U.S. Congress provided federal support for a Cooperative Extension Service coordinated between universities, state government, and county officials, to disseminate information about modern agriculture and home economics to rural communities. By 1915 funding was furnished for twenty-eight women agents in Arkansas; another eight received funding by private subscription. These thirty-six home demonstration agents organized ninety women's and girls' clubs during their first year of operation. In 1917, the number of agents had risen to forty-seven, and in 1936, despite the hardship of the Great Depression, every county in Arkansas provided funding for a home demonstration agent. In 1937, the state government assumed responsibility for funding the Women's Division, making it a permanent part of the Arkansas Extension Service. By looking at the records of home demonstration clubs throughout Arkansas, we are able to better understand the everyday concerns farm women and their families confronted as a result of the rapid changes taking place in the twentieth century. But most importantly, we see how these women used home demonstration programs to their benefit.

Women's experiences with home demonstration work provided an opportunity to learn new skills and fostered a community of multi-generational community of women in rural

Arkansas. These experiences transformed women's role both inside and outside the home, exposing them to aspects of community uplift and the market economy revealing an increase in rural women's political consciousness. Although home demonstration programs introduced middle-class ideals, household products, and a heighted consumerism into the countryside, rural women's involvement in voluntary organizations helped them develop their talents, gain confidence, and participate more actively in local communities. Women's experiences with home demonstration work in Arkansas reflect a continuation of rural feminism in Arkansas.

This dissertation does not dismiss some of the criticism that historians have made regarding the home demonstration program.[332] It does not advocate a radical feminist agenda for rural women. However, it does reveal that home demonstration agents or clubwomen did not challenge the idea of separate roles for men and women on the farm; as other historians have suggested, female agents and club members accepted the concept of a separate sphere of activities for rural women. The transition to capitalism only further intensified this "gender asymmetry," as men's commodity work gained in stature and importance and women's subsistence work was increasingly devalued.[333] Rural women used home demonstration programs in their own ways in an effort to develop their own independent remunerative activities such as through selling home goods at the curb markets or through consumption.

When evaluating the home demonstration program solely by its structure it seems like another government program designed to promote middle-class urban lifestyles. However, this fails to incorporate the members' agency in the programs offered, the acceptance, and the

[332] Several scholars focused on the lives and changing work patterns for rural women in the early twentieth century include Mary Neth, Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940 (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1995) and Ann Elizabeth McCleary, *Shaping a New Role for the Rural Woman: Home Demonstration Work in Augusta County, Virginia, 1917-1940* (Ph.D. dissertation, Brown University, 1996).
[333] McCleary, *Shaping a New Role for the Rural Woman*, 382.

application of the programs into women's daily lives. With each shift in strategy, the home demonstration agents were responding to the needs and requests of rural women. This was not something done to them, rather, they were active participants in the process of the modernization of the countryside. What this dissertation reveals is that both the agents and the club members in Arkansas saw home demonstration work as an opportunity to create a new role for the modern farm women, a role that had to adjust to the transformation of agricultural.

It is important to remember that the roles these women shaped for themselves were not all that new. These roles still reflected a nostalgic view of rural women's traditional role as a producer but with a modern twist. They did not challenge the gendered role within the farm family but rather they fought to ensure that those roles were not marginalized any further with the changes occurring in agricultural life. Rather, they used these experiences to find additional sources of power to control their lives and work. As Ann Elizabeth McCleary argues, the home demonstration vision for modern farm women incorporated two components, both of which drew on traditional gender roles: a productive role on the farm and a leadership position in improving both home and community life. Women used programs to strengthen their productive role in their families which provided an increased status both on the farm and in the community. Secondly, they extended and formalized women's involvement in the community through providing opportunities for organizing and the combining of forces around initiatives important to these women and reveal an expanded role for rural women as citizen reformers.[334]

The history of home demonstration programs in Arkansas reveals the persistence of rural feminism documented by scholars like Osterud and McCleary. The home demonstration program in Arkansas, as in other states, offered a convenient and quick framework through which farm women could experience and pursue their own ideas and programs. These clubs

[334] McCleary, 385-388.

followed the pattern of other women's voluntary associations as described by Anne Firor Scott: they "operated within their prevailing social norms" but "by their very existence…they have helped to challenge those norms."[335] Despite the condescending and gendered approach to the division of labor in rural America, women in Arkansas made the most of the resources available to them and at their individual point in time and place in history.

Home demonstration programs were a consistent resource for Arkansas women to continually provide for their families in times of disaster, drought, and war while at the same adapt to the rapidly changing dynamics of agriculture. Time and time again, women used these programs in ways to uplift themselves, their families, and their communities. Throughout the history of the program, the success of home demonstration work relied exclusively on local members. The program's dependency on local leaders and members reflects how Arkansas women were agents of change. Although the very creation of the home demonstration program with its gendered approach to a division of labor was condensing, women used these programs on their own terms. Club women were not forced to follow the national agenda; they picked what they wanted from an array of program offerings. The annual home demonstration work varied from club to club and from county to county, some embraced a state-wide campaign while others did not. Similarly, club members chose which projects they wanted to complete and often ignored those that did not interest them. Furthermore, looking at these terms throughout the history of demonstration work one can see a glimpse into a much broader cultural transformation taking place across the nation whether that was in response to the war effort, a rise in consumerism, the encroachment of middle class ideals into the countryside, or how families were adjusting to the commercialization of agriculture.

[335] Scott, *Natural Allies*, 180.

The nature of the home demonstration programs of the 1920s and 1930 were very different after World War II, reflecting women's evolving positions in rural life. Around this same time in 1950, Connie Bonslagel, the leader of home demonstration work in Arkansas since 1920 died. Having a consistent home demonstration state leader for over thirty years significantly contributed to its overall success as well as the focus of the work always making sure to be responding to the club women's wants and needs. The nature of the work might have looked different under another state agent. Regardless, with the rising farm incomes after the war, the emphasis on home production disappeared. Although many women continued to take great pride in canning and gardening, overall the majority of women were primarily consumers, and their lifestyles and homes increasingly resembled those of urban women. With the rise of commercial agricultural enterprises, women began to supplement the family income by working off the farm and contributing a cash income.

Membership in home demonstration clubs continued to fall throughout the twentieth century never recovering from World War II. By 1965, membership was less than half the total at the organization's height in 1941: 64,863 members in 2,224 clubs.[336] Today, the Arkansas Extension Homemakers Council continues to serve the state by partnering with the Cooperative Extension Service, University of Arkansas and the USDA in providing education to families through Arkansas. The Council claims a membership of over 4,400 and 350 clubs working to empower individuals and families to improve their lives through continuing education, leadership development, and community service.

[336] Hill, 255.

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