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Review of *Linoleum, Better Babies, and the Modern Farm Woman, 1890-1930* By Marilyn Irvin Holt

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Linoleum, Better Babies, and the Modern Farm Woman, 1890-1930. By Marilyn Irvin Holt. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995. Photographs, notes, bibliographical essay, index. 250 pp. \$34.95.

Marilyn Irvin Holt describes *Linoleum, Better Babies, and the Modern Farm Woman, 1890-1930* as a study of "the domestic economy movement and the rural women it targeted." Focusing on the Dakotas, Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas, she examines the many ways in which reformers worked to improve life on American farms through education and uplift programs for American farm women and their children. These efforts included the establishment of home extension programs, home economics education, and 4-H programs, among others. Their goals were the physical improvement of the farm home and the farm child, with the intent of keeping

families on the farm. Although these efforts failed to stem the flow of population from country to city, the programs persisted; many still serve farming families today. Holt argues that not all rural women embraced these programs, though many did, and those who did shaped the programs to their own needs and desires.

Holt's study is an interesting introduction to this topic, but it does not, by any means, fully explore the issues involved in the government-sponsored domestic education of rural women. While she does a fairly good job of discussing the reformers' views of the needs of farm women, she examines far less satisfactorily the concerns of farm women themselves. Too many questions remain unanswered. To what degree did farm women really participate in these programs? Why did they participate? Was it to learn about scientific homemaking, or to get out of the house, off the farm, and visit with other women? Which women participated? Did poor women feel comfortable taking advantage of these programs, or were they largely attended by wealthier farm women? What did rural women really believe about the value of these programs? Evidence for the worth and impact of scientific homemaking is drawn largely from the reports of home extension agents, who had a vested interest in the success of their own efforts. Finally, that these programs still exist is no proof in itself that they successfully served the populations for which they were created.

Linoleum, Better Babies, and the Modern Farm Woman is an inviting and entertaining work, but the definitive volume about farm women's relationship to the domestic economy movement has yet to be written.

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