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FARM WOMEN'S LABOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO AGRICULTURAL OPERATIONS

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Abstract. *Employment data for women living on farms/ranches in six Wyoming counties were gathered in 1985 and 1986 as part of a farm/ranch households survey. This paper focuses on female employment and its contribution to the economic viability of farm operations, by considering the importance of women's as well as men's employment in maintaining the economic viability of farming/ranching operations during a farm crisis and a wage boom. Although an equal percentage of females and males work off-farm, the data show gender-defined patterns. While size of farm operation was a major predictor of the likelihood of engaging in off-farm employment for men, age and education level proved important predictors of women's employment off the farm. Both men and women recognized that the need for off-farm income conflicted with the perceived negative consequences for the farming operation as a result of off-farm work, but comments on the questionnaire suggest that husbands were more comfortable having their wives get a job than taking one themselves.*

Attention to the role of wage work in supporting farming enterprises has produced a renewed research focus on farm women's labor. This research has centered on three dimensions of farm women's work: household tasks, farm related tasks (both paid and unpaid), and off-farm paid employment. Generally, women's work is viewed within two broad analytic perspectives: the farm family life cycle and structural analysis of economic changes in agriculture (Boulding 1980; Colman and Elbert 1984; Ross 1985).

Life cycle research (see Barlett 1986; Bokemeirer et al. 1983; Brooks et al. 1986; Bultena et al. 1986; Coughenour and Swanson 1983; Maret and Copp 1982; Murdock et al. 1986) focuses on traits of individuals, primarily the female, and how these traits are related to their likelihood of entering into off-farm employment. Some of this research combines structural analysis with trait analysis by focusing on the relationship of size of operation, measured either by sales or acreage, and the relative male and female earning differentials as well as availability of employment and type of employment.

Early research on task allocation within the farm household generally followed the lead of the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), which assumed that males engaged in farming activities and females engaged in household tasks. Recent research, however, focuses on the interrelationship of household tasks and farm tasks, thereby emphasizing the contribution of women to the farm operation. This research suggests that farm households make rational decisions based on economic survival as well as work preferences in the allocation of scarce labor resources. These decisions take into account financial stress as well as seasonal demands of agricultural production (Bokemeier and Garkovich 1987; Boulding 1980; Buttel and Gillespie 1984; Fassinger and Schwarzweller 1984; Flora 1980; Huffman 1976; Molnar 1985; Reimer 1986).

Within this model of rational allocation of farm women's labor, a new focus of concern developed in the 1980s: the role of farm women's labor in mitigating the farm fiscal crisis. This research suggests that macro-structural variables, such as changes in interest rates, declining markets for farm products, declining value of farm land, and increased foreign competition along with increased costs of farming, created a climate of general agricultural economic decline. Also, at least for farmers with gross value of agricultural products of less than \$40,000 per year, the negative consequences of structural changes in agriculture were partially off-set by increased reliance on off-farm employment by one or more family members.

The Wyoming Experience

Agricultural economic trends for Wyoming are not unlike those for the nation as a whole. In Wyoming and surrounding states the number of farms/ranches continued to decline in the early 1980s while farm/ranch acreage has remained relatively constant. Wyoming agriculturalists, like other United States farmers and ranchers, were adversely affected by low crop and livestock prices, by declines in farm land values, and by high farm credit costs. Furthermore, Wyoming farmers and ranchers were not spared ravages of nature such as a severe late spring snow storm in 1984 and a drought in 1985. These factors combined to increase the financial stress of ranchers and farmers in Wyoming.

In addition to changes in economic factors, ranching/farming operations are likely affected by large shifts in population growth rates. During the 1970s Wyoming's population expanded by more than 40%, with population increasing from 332,000 to 471,000 and substantial growth occurring in both its urban and rural areas. Growth in the 1970s was due to the massive development of its mineral and energy resources, particularly coal, oil and natural gas resources (see Blevins and Bradley 1988). Rural

and small town growth continued but at a slower rate during the early 1980s and since 1984 population for the state has begun to decline, substantially for some counties. This paper examines the impact of these changes on the allocation of women's labor.

Current Research

We examine the role of farm women's labor in mitigating the farm crisis through the contribution of farm labor or off-farm employment to total farm viability. This analysis combines an evaluation of hypotheses relating to the structural variables of farm production size with an analysis of traits of women involved in farm labor and/or off-farm employment. While other researchers have investigated some of the same hypotheses we test, our data provides a look at farm women's labor decisions in the dynamic context of dramatic need for cash due to low farm prices and the possibility of employment, if generally in traditionally female and service jobs, due to a decade of economic growth preceding this research.

Research Design

With the assistance of the Wyoming branch of the Statistical Reporting Service of USDA, a sample of farm/ranch households was drawn from six of Wyoming's 21 nonmetropolitan counties (Natrona and Laramie Counties were omitted because of their metropolitan status). The criteria used for county selection were previous population growth experience and ratio of ranching to farming in gross agricultural production. Two counties, Weston and Niobrara, were included because they had experienced little growth since 1970; two counties, Campbell and Sublette, were selected because they were currently experiencing substantial population growth (primarily as a result of energy developments); while the last two counties, Carbon and Platte, were selected because they experienced rapid growth during the 1970s but were undergoing substantial population decline by 1984 (Table 1). Counties were also selected to be representative of the state's agricultural mix between ranching and farming. The lack of irrigated land and the reliance on dry land farming makes Wyoming agriculture heavily dependent on livestock production, and much of the farming produces livestock feed for sale to other ranches. In 1982, Wyoming agriculture grossed \$606 million of which 78.9% was attributed to livestock production; however in 11 of the 21 nonmetropolitan counties livestock production accounted for over 90% of the total growth agriculture production. Our selected counties accounted for \$168 million in gross sales of which 85.9% was attributed to livestock production with livestock

TABLE 1

SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF SURVEY COUNTIES

Variables	Rapid Growth Counties		Boom/Bust Counties		Stable Counties	
	Campbell	Sublette	Carbon	Platte	Niobrara	Weston
Population						
1970	12,957	3,755	13,354	6,486	2,924	6,307
1980	24,367	4,548	21,896	11,975	2,924	7,106
1985	29,280	7,026	17,950	8,595	3,177	7,576
Population % Change						
1960/70	121.1	-0.6	-10.6	-9.9	-22.0	-20.5
1970/80	88.1	21.1	64.0	84.6	0.0	12.7
1980/85	20.2	54.9	-18.0	-28.2	8.7	6.2
Total Employment ¹						
1970	5,955	2,004	7,141	3,103	1,557	2,883
1980	16,594	2,764	13,504	5,607	1,684	4,082
1985	21,044	3,763	10,367	4,023	1,828	4,074
Unemployment %						
1970	2.6	3.6	6.1	4.9	2.7	4.1
1980	2.8	2.7	3.3	4.6	1.6	2.7
1985	9.9	7.0	10.1	8.6	9.4	9.0

¹ Source: US Department of Commerce. 1988. Full and Part-time Employees by Major Industry. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Information System, Data tape, Table CA25.

production accounting for over 90% of gross sales in three of the six counties (Fig. 1). Once counties were selected the criteria for inclusion in the household sample required being head of household on a farm or ranch of 100 or more acres, or owning ten or more head of cattle, sheep, or hogs. These criteria eliminated some "small hobby farms," and resulted in a population of 1379 farms/ranches from which 710 households were drawn. Forty-four farms/ranches were dropped from the sample because operators had moved, heads of households were no longer in agriculture, or the unit failed to meet the inclusion criteria. Of the remaining sample

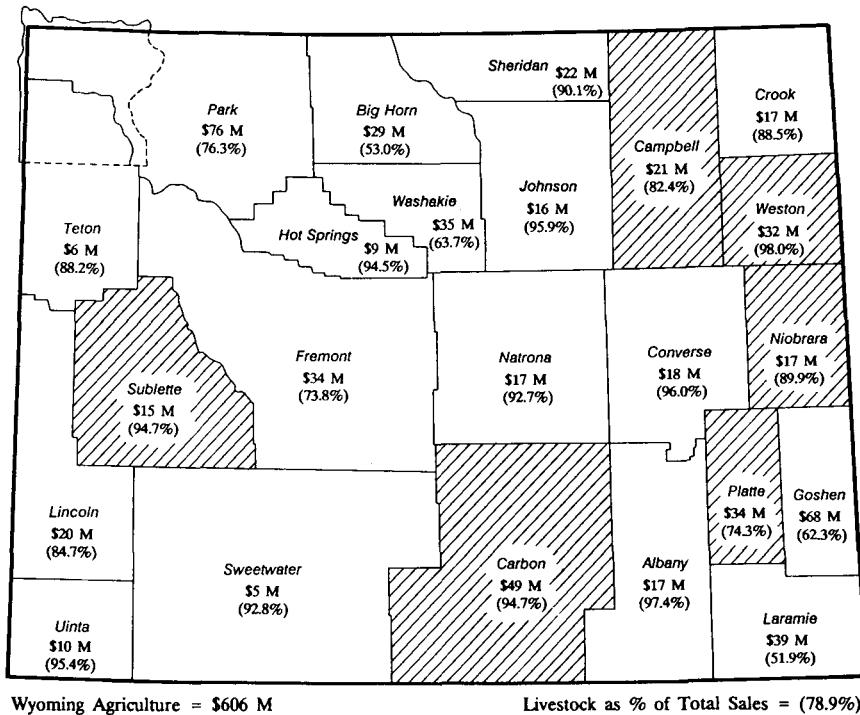


Figure 1. Total agricultural sales in millions for Wyoming by county, 1982.

of 666, 270 (40.5%) returned the survey instrument after two mailings and a postcard reminder. Respondents appear to be representative of the farm population in these counties as measured by the 1982 farm census (Table 2). For consistency, "heads of households" were requested to complete the mail survey, but sex, age, labor distribution of farming work and off-farm employment information were collected for both farm partners. Some women in farm partnerships filled out the questionnaire for themselves as heads, and some women filled it out for their husbands. Surveys were initially mailed in November 1985 and the mailing were completed by end of January 1986.

This paper analyzes questionnaire information for households in which women engaged in work other than or in addition to domestic chores and included households headed by women, households where both male and female were listed as working on the farm or ranch, or households headed by males whose spouses worked off-farm. Those excluded

TABLE 2

SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS COMPARED
TO CENSUS INFORMATION FOR SURVEY COUNTIES

Variables	Rapid Growth Counties		Boom/Bust Counties		Stable Counties	
	Campbell	Sublette	Carbon	Platte	Niobrara	Weston
Median Age Of Operator						
Census, 1982	50.6	48.5	51.4	50.7	54.7	52.6
Survey, 1985	52.0	51.7	54.3	53.0	56.8	56.7
Median Years on Farm						
Census, 1982	19.0	16.4	16.9	17.6	22.1	21.4
Survey, 1885	21.1	24.0	19.2	20.8	27.8	24.9
Percent Who Listed Primary Occupation As Farming						
Census, 1982	70.5	60.7	77.1	66.1	84.2	71.7
Survey, 1985	79.1	73.5	76.7	76.0	86.6	68.4
Percent Male Operators						
Census, 1982	91.0	91.5	93.2	93.6	90.8	93.4
Survey, 1985	86.1	94.1	91.9	95.7	88.9	89.5
Percent Operators Working Off-farm						
Census, 1982	51.4	56.3	46.5	51.7	40.0	48.6
Survey, 1985	44.2	50.0	40.5	38.5	35.6	52.6

Source: US Bureau of the Census. 1982.

TABLE 3

SAMPLE DISTRIBUTION BY FARM AND OFF-FARM WORK STATUS

Farm and Off-Farm Work Status	Number	Percent
Single male farmers with off-farm job	12	4.5
Single male farmers	14	5.2
Male farmers and female homemaker	71	26.6
Male farmer with off-farm employment and female homemaker	30	11.2
Male and female ranch and some males have off-farm employment	37	13.9
Male farmer and female works off-farm	27	10.1
Both male and female work off-farm	56	21.0
Female farmer ¹	20	7.5
Total ²	267	100.0

¹Some female head of household farmers were married (3); if so then spouse worked off-farm.

²Three single males were excluded from the analysis because they were retired.

from detailed analysis are single males (both farmers and farmers with off-farm employment) and those households where the female was listed as a homemaker with no discernable unpaid farm labor (Table 3). However, homemakers' education and lifecycle characteristics were used as a comparison to women wage earners and female farm partners.

Recognizing housework as well as farming as unpaid labor, we assumed all respondents had at least one job (even though farming or housework may not be the primary source of household income) and those with more than one job are employed in some other occupation off-farm.

Logistic regression analysis (SPSSX Probit) was used to test the first two hypotheses. For that analysis the dependent variable, off-farm employment, was coded as "2" if a person was employed off-farm or a "1" if a person worked only on the farm as either a farmer or home worker. The independent variables were age, education, and farm size. Due to the tremendous variability in the productive capacity of land in Wyoming and incompleteness of reporting gross farm income (sales), we have incorporated an indicator of farm size and productiveness called Animal Unit Months (AUMs). This indicator incorporates size of farm or ranch, type of land (grazing, irrigated, etc.), and number of animals into one measure

TABLE 4

AVERAGE FORAGE PRODUCTION CAPACITIES PER ACRE BY COUNTY

Counties	Private Grazing Land ¹ (AUMs)	Dry Cropland ² (Tons of Hay)	Irrigated Cropland ² (Tons of Hay)
Campbell	.439	1.21	2.01
Sublette	.310	1.00	1.58
Carbon	.272	1.12	1.77
Platte	.399	1.18	2.70
Niobrara	.422	1.04	2.25
Weston	.377	1.11	2.09

¹ Source: Annual Report of the Department of Revenue and Taxation, Ad Valorem Tax Division, Cheyenne, Wy. 1980. AUM is 1 cow month, 5 sheep months, or 1 horse month.

² Kearl 1981.

(Table 4). In addition to the regression analysis, a descriptive analysis of the number of persons holding off-farm employment is provided in terms of each of the independent variables. Because of the relative small number of women who are heads of households third hypothesis will be evaluated by descriptive, qualitative analysis.

Research Hypotheses

Previous research regarding farm labor, and women's contributions in particular, suggests several hypotheses related to the structural variable of farm size and life cycle variables of age and education.

Hypothesis 1: Off-farm employment varies inversely with farm sales or farm size

Several writers have found a strong relationship between off-farm employment and farm size or some proxy of farm size such as sales (Coughenour and Swanson 1983; and Leistritz et al. 1985). For example, Youmans (1985) found that for operators with \$40,000 or less in farm sales off-farm income represented about 87% of the total net family income; for operators with \$40,000 to \$100,000 in annual sales, off-farm income represented about 55% of total net family income; comparable percentages for those with annual sales of \$100,000 to \$200,000 and those with \$200,000 to \$500,000 were 30% and 16% respectively.

Yet, when research specifies off-farm employment by sex, the relationship fails to hold across gender, with a strong inverse relationship occurring for male off-farm employment and farm size (Buttel and Gillespie 1984; Coughenour and Swanson 1983) whereas a weak relationship appears for female off-farm employment and farm size (Buttel and Gillespie 1984).

Although cognizant of the financial contributions made by female off-farm laborers, researchers note that off-farm employment causes a loss of farm labor, and a rational decision in regard to labor allocation may discourage off-farm wage work. Coughenour and Swanson (1983) found that "compared with families with both adults on the farm, the family in which the woman had off-farm job loses some of the woman's labor but gains in income if the marginal return for the woman's employment is increased." Huffman's (1976) examination of 1964 data suggests that the best allocation of wives' labor is in off-farm employment. On the other hand, Maret and Copp (1982:113) found "the average value of products sold is up to three times greater on husband-wife farm in which the employed wife is directly involved in agricultural work than when she is employed in nonagricultural work." Maret and Copp raise the issue of labor trade-offs by citing increased product value, but they fail to address the marginal gain possible by off-farm employment relative to increased product value.

Finally, researchers have noted that, if employed off-farm, women are more likely than men to be employed in white collar occupations which provide marginal returns--low paid clerical, sales, and secretarial positions (Barlett 1986; Bokemeirer and Tickameyer 1985; Coughenour and Swanson 1983).

Hypothesis 2: Life cycle variables of age and education will be related to the likelihood of off-farm employment

Hypothesis 2a is that education will be positively related to the likelihood of off-farm employment (Barlett 1986; Bokemeirer et al. 1983; Bokemeirer and Tickameyer 1985; Leistritz et al. 1985; Rosenfeld 1985;

Sweet 1972). Researchers such as Rosenfeld and Bokemeirer found that education was the best single predictor of off-farm employment and off-farm income.

Hypothesis 2b is that age is related to the likelihood of off-farm employment. Previous research is inconclusive regarding directionality. Leistritz et al. (1985) discovered that younger women were more likely to be employed off-farm (an inverse relationship) while Rosenfeld (1985) found off-farm employment to be positively associated with age. Most likely, off-farm employment is related to life cycle and the presence of children with off-farm employment peaking at 20-24 and 45-54 (Sweet 1972) with a trough in between that represents delayed off-farm employment because of child rearing. Perhaps this drop in off-farm employment is counterbalanced by increased farm labor.

Hypothesis 3: Independent women farmers will be worse off financially than women on other farms

This relationship is partially due to the fact that independent female farmers are more likely to be never married, widowed, or married to incapacitated spouses (Boulding 1980; Tigges and Rosenfeld 1987). Furthermore this research suggests that independent women farmers will be worse off financially than independent male farmers.

Findings

Hypothesis 1

Results of the multiple logistic regression analysis reveals a strong inverse relationship for males a weak inverse relationship for females (Table 5). The larger the farm operation, the less likely that males were engaged in off-farm employment. The relationship was statistically significant, but data for female off-farm employment exhibits no significant relationship. Though statistically insignificant the sign of the regression coefficient indicates that generally the smaller the farm operation the more likely women would engage in off-farm employment.

To investigate these relationships further, the AUM measure was condensed into five arbitrary categories: under 1000 AUMs, 1000 to 1999 AUMs, 2000 to 4999 AUMs, 5000 To 9999 AUMs, and over 10,000 AUMs. Of the 237 males in our sample, 39.2% reported having off-farm employment. Off-farm job-holding was more prevalent among those on agricultural operations of less than 1000 AUMs, where 59.3% reported off farm employment, and less prevalent for operators on large agricultural

TABLE 5

LOGISTIC REGRESSION OF NON-FARM EMPLOYMENT WITH AGE, EDUCATION AND FARM SIZE FOR MALES AND FEMALES

Variables	Regression Coefficient (b)	Standard Error (SE)	b/SE ¹
Male Off-Farm Employment			
Age	-.01837	.00662	-2.77271**
Education	.10572	.03048	3.46885**
Size	-.00006	.00002	-3.33946**
Intercept	4.54310	.61329	7.40771
Female Off-Farm Employment			
Age	-.02416	.00670	-3.60628**
Education	.07963	.03428	2.32324*
Size	-.00001	.00001	-.89747
Intercept	4.83298	.59042	8.18568

¹ Significance test based on t with df=209 for females, df=247 for males. All tests are two-tail with * = P of .05 and ** = P of .01.

holdings with AUMs of 10,000 or more where only 18.9% reported working off-farm (Table 6).

Nearly as many, 36% of the 213, women reported off-farm employment, with women living on the smallest farms (AUMs of less than 1000) most likely to report such employment (44.8%) while women residing on fairly large operations (5000 to 9999 AUMs) were least likely to report non-farm employment (22.5%). Thus the pattern of off-farm employment for women is inconsistent and not significant, and confirms the findings of earlier researchers.

TABLE 6

PERCENT EMPLOYED OFF-FARM BY FARM SIZE, EDUCATION
AND AGE FOR FEMALES AND MALES

Independent Variables	Employed Off-farm ¹	
	Females	Males
Farm Size	% (N)	% (N)
0 to 999 AUMS	44.8 (13)	59.5 (22)
1,000 to 1,999 AUMS	24.3 (13)	33.3 (17)
2,000 to 4,999 AUMS	38.9 (28)	33.3 (26)
5,000 to 9,999 AUMS	22.5 (9)	37.5 (18)
10,000+ AUMS	37.1 (13)	18.9 (7)
Education		
0 to 12 Years	23.6 (26)	26.6 (34)
13+ Years	45.5 (49)	45.5 (59)
Age		
Up to 39 Years	48.2 (27)	44.4 (20)
40 to 49 Years	46.3 (25)	55.2 (32)
50 to 59 Years	27.3 (18)	37.3 (28)
60+ Years	11.9 (5)	16.3 (13)

¹ Non-respondents for each cross-tabulation have been dropped from the computations; therefore the number of respondents varies slightly for each of the independent variables.

An extension of the hypothesis states that women are likely to be employed in traditionally marginal occupations (jobs with low pay and prestige). Operator-reported occupations for spouses and self-report data for female operators were coded into two broad categories of blue collar and white collar. Of the 81 off-farm jobs reported, 61 were white collar jobs while 20 were blue collar jobs. Among the 20 blue collar workers, eight were school bus drivers (generally low paid, with low prestige, and part-time) and five were full-time or part-time cooks, two were highway construction flaggers, and two were in law enforcement. The other blue collar workers were employed at a lumber mill, at a laundromat, and as a welder.

Among the 61 white collar workers the predominant job was that of school teacher, with 17 so classified. Of these, five were substitute teachers, or preschool teachers. Only three other job classifications were cited by five or more women: nine were bookkeepers/accountants, eight were in retail sales, and five own and managed their own business. The other women tended to be employed in "pink-collar" jobs such as nursing, dental hygiene, library and secretarial/clerical work. Neither the white collar "female" jobs nor the blue collar employees tended to be in high paying jobs. The descriptive analysis therefore supports the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2

Education has been shown almost universally to have an effect on paid labor force activity. The same is true for Wyoming farm and ranch women. Results of the regression analysis reveals that education is significantly related to the likelihood of off-farm employment (Table 5), with higher educated women more likely to be employed off-farm. As a group Wyoming farm women have a high median education at 13.01 years. Median education for Wyoming women living on farms but working at least one job off-farm was 13.23 years, while women not working off-farm, including those independent female farmers, those reported as being housewives and those who worked on the farm with their spouses was only 11.35 years. When education attainment is dichotomized into those with high school or less schooling and those with at least some college, the descriptive data reveals that employment off-farm is mostly likely for those with additional years of schooling. Women with at least some college are almost twice as likely to be employed off-farm as those with a high school diploma or less schooling (45.5% compared to 23.6%).

Age of women had a strong and significant inverse relationship with off-farm employment (Table 5). Differences in labor force activity was related to age differences as well as probable life cycle effects. For example, the median age for women who work off the farm is 44 years, while those who farm had a median age of 56 years. Homemakers, with a bimodal distribution, had a median age of 53 years, with 63% of them being more than 50 years of age (including 26% who are more than 60) while women who work off the farm include only 26% over the age of 50. For purposes of descriptive analysis, age was categorized into four groups (under 40, 40 to 49, 50 to 59, and 60 or more years). Off-farm employment for the four categories forms a linear pattern with younger women most likely to be employed in non-farm jobs (48.2%) while older women were least likely to be so employed (11.9%) with women 40 to 49 and 50 to 59 falling in the middle, 46.3% and 27.3%, respectively (Table 6).

Although the differences are not statistically significant, the presence of children probably affects off-farm employment. While 71% of the total women wage-earners fall in the 30-49 age groups, they have fewer children on the average and are more likely to have no children than are homemakers. Of the 30-34 age group of wage earners, the average number of children is 1.25, compared to 2.4 for homemakers. The 35-39 year-old wage earners average 2.18 children, compared to 2.6 for homemakers. The 25-29 year-olds in both groups average 2.0 children, but four of the wage earners under 40 have no children at home, while all of the homemakers under 40 are mothers.

Hypothesis 3

Our data fail to support the hypothesis that independent women farmers are worse off than other farm women. Female operators (9) showed a median of reported adjusted gross income of \$20,500, while households headed by a male with spouse reported as a homemaker had a median of \$14,104; households where the female worked off-farm reported a median income of \$11,600; households comprising single males reported a median income of \$9,230; and the lowest median income was reported by households where both male and female member engaged in farm labor, with a median of \$4,150. Caution must be used in evaluating these data since only 156 of the respondents reported usable information regarding income.

In general, female agricultural operators were older. Their mean age for the 20 female farmers is 60 years, but four are younger and have dependent children in their homes. They average more than 33 years residence at their present address. They also run sizeable operations. They own an average of 2,954 acres, and the 12 who rent more land from individuals or the government average an additional 2,030 acres. And they have a nearly average amount of education for Wyoming citizens at 12 years. Ten have completed between nine and 12 years of schooling, while eight have 13 to 16 years of education.

The four women household heads with dependent children average 44 years of age; all have had 12 or 13 years of schooling and have spent an average of 27.5 years on the ranch they operate. They have larger acreage than the group as a whole, owning an average 5,037 acres and renting an additional 3,425 acres. Two of them have off-farm incomes as well and two more, including a widow with seven children, have teen-age daughters who work part-time for wages. They also are among the most vociferous about their commitments to farming. One said, "I feel it's the most honest way to make a living and a good place to raise my kids." Another divorced and remarried household head asserted, "I will do anything to keep ranching."

Discussion

While the size of operation differences are more important than age or education in the choice by farm partners to engage in off-farm wage labor, the comments by respondents shed some light on the impact of their decisions for one or both partners to seek jobs off the farm. A look at families in which both spouses farm exclusively provides an important comparison of the logistics of commitment to farming. Thirteen of the 37 families in which both farm simply answered "yes" to the question about their expectation of being in the farm business five years from now, while 25 provided explanations. Fourteen gave positive answers, seven were negative, and five expressed uncertain hopes or doubts. They speak of it as a life commitment: "It's what we wanted to do all of our lives, and would like to continue if we can make a living," or "I was born here and would like to ranch the rest of my life if I can keep from going broke." Even the most positive reflected the difficulty of their situations. One said "I need to ranch, I want to ranch. I like the outdoors and the animals. I would like a little more money though." Another reported, "If I had my choice of any job in the world I'd work the ranch, but with better weather, better prices and more time off."

Among those families in which one or both partners have found or chosen off-farm employment, the commitment to farming is little different, if their solutions are more varied and complicated by work schedules and distances. Twelve of the 27 male farmers with employed wives suggested that their spouses' work had an important impact on the agricultural operation, and they were equally divided on the positive and negative effects. Several mentioned her having less time to help or having to hire help or scheduling ranch work around a job timetable. One described a fairly typical situation in the sparsely populated West (a variation on the commuter marriage pattern), where the wife and children kept a house in town during the school week, leaving "no one to cook or keep house . . . no help with the ranch work" except on weekends. Others said simply of women's off-farm employment, "We couldn't make it without her income," or "it helped to pay the bills this dry year as we had no income from the farm." Only one made the assessment simply in terms of life satisfaction: "She enjoys teaching."

And when both spouses work off the farm, male "heads of household" who answered the questionnaire seemed relatively comfortable with the idea of their spouses' wage work. Thirty-nine of 56 in this category reported no effect on the farm operation. Of those 17 who did think there was an effect, 13 saw negative impacts related to "things not getting done," while the positive comments recount economic realities: "Very, very poor prices cause absentee ownership and, to a certain degree, management.

The ranch, successful as it is, could not during the past decade handle debt retirement and overhead without major outside employment."

The 39 men who saw little impact of their wives' off-farm work, however, were more likely to feel the negative impact of their own off-farm labor. Although slightly fewer than half (16) said their wage work had an impact, 14 thought it to be a negative one. They describe very specifically, "feeding after work and fencing and haying on weekends--always a patch job, a hurry-up job." Several described death losses during lambing or having to sell the cows because calving time was bad. And they found themselves in a double bind: "It's hard to do all the things at the farm that I need outside income to do, but I need the outside income first," or, more simply, "Nothing gets done when I'm gone, but the income sure helps." Only one, who had described his commitment to farming by saying, "I want to feed the world, but I deserve a fair return on my investment," also described his off-farm work positively: "It actually helps by keeping me informed with government programs and what is happening county-wide."

These combinations and variations on farm and wage work point not only to the difficulties of farm families in maintaining a lifestyle to which they are committed, they also point to the continued difficulty in accounting, either privately or scientifically, for the economic contributions of women. Women's wage work seems somewhat more likely to be positively credited as a contribution to the maintenance of the farm (echoing past tax and inheritance laws), even though their absence often will be considered an inconvenience and necessitating extra week-end and evening farm work. Men's off-farm labor is perceived as changing not only the schedule, but the very nature of the farm operation, without acknowledging that it may be the wage work of both partners that makes farm work so difficult at the same time that it makes keeping the farm possible.

Conclusions

Wyoming farmers and ranchers, like those in most of the Plains states, have had to rely on wage work off the farm in order to maintain the lifestyle and occupational identity they value so much. The decision to take employment off the farm is influenced by many factors, and the gain in cash income is, to some extent, off-set by lost labor on the farm or ranch. Men make decisions based on the size of their operations, the larger the farm the less likely they are to take another job. Personal life-cycle status seems more important for women. Education is still a key variable in predicting women's wage work employment, but age and the likely presence of children in the home are also very important for agricultural women's labor choices. It may be that their employment in relatively low paying jobs makes them less inclined to go to work off the farm when the

combination of agricultural demands and family demands makes that option less attractive. In any case, Wyoming farmers and ranchers of both sexes are often in the ironic situation of having to go to town to work in order to stay on the farm.

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