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UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO  
AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION

Department of Home Economics

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The Use of Time by Farm Women

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By

INA Z. CRAWFORD

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# THE USE OF TIME BY FARM WOMEN

By INA Z. CRAWFORD

## FOREWORD

On February 24, 1925, the Purnell Act was passed by Congress, appropriating money for the support of research along a number of lines, including home economics. The Purnell national committee on rural home management studies, realizing the importance of the management of time and energy in the home, chose "The Present Use of Time by Homemakers" as one of the national projects to be worked on.

The object of this investigation was to study the present use of time by homemakers, in order to further the more efficient management of time and to provide a greater amount of leisure. The University of Idaho Agricultural Experiment Station, with this purpose in view, made a survey of the use of time by Idaho homemakers, using the plans and blanks provided by the Bureau of Home Economics of the United States Department of Agriculture.

The procedure employed in making the study was to get seven-day reports from individual homemakers, in which were listed the activities which engaged their time for each of the seven days. Special blanks were used and the homemaker reported her activities in five-minute units, so that a detailed and complete record was available for the whole 24 hours a day for seven days. These specific entries were then tabulated, being put into 10 major classifications, as follows: Food, House, Clothing, Family, Management, Sleep and Rest, Self, Leisure, Other work, Miscellaneous.

## HOW TIME IS DISTRIBUTED

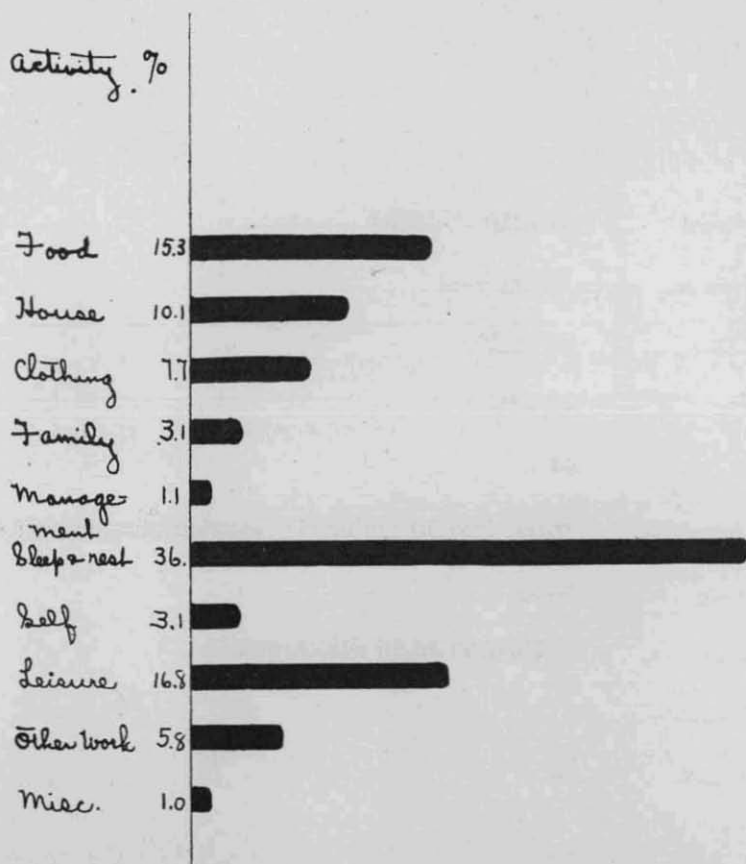
Plate 1 shows in graphic form how a farm woman's time is distributed over the ten divisions of work in a week. Plate 2 has the same information about the town woman's work, and plate 3 shows the average for all farm and town women combined. As will be seen from these tables the greatest percentage of time is devoted to sleep and rest. This time amounted to 36.8 per cent of the week's total. On first thought this percentage may seem comparatively large, but figured on the twenty-four hour basis, it amounts to only 8 hours and 44 minutes per day. Health authorities agree that adults should sleep at least 8 hours a day. If eight hours out of the total time is devoted to sleep and rest is used for sleep there remains only 44 minutes for the day-time rest.

The division of activity taking the second largest percentage of time

is leisure, which amounts on an average to 18.7 per cent. This might imply that women have a great deal of unoccupied time, but leisure includes many activities, such as religious activities, study, lectures, telephoning, correspondence, and care of persons not members of one's house-

Plate I

### Distribution of Farm Homemakers' Time

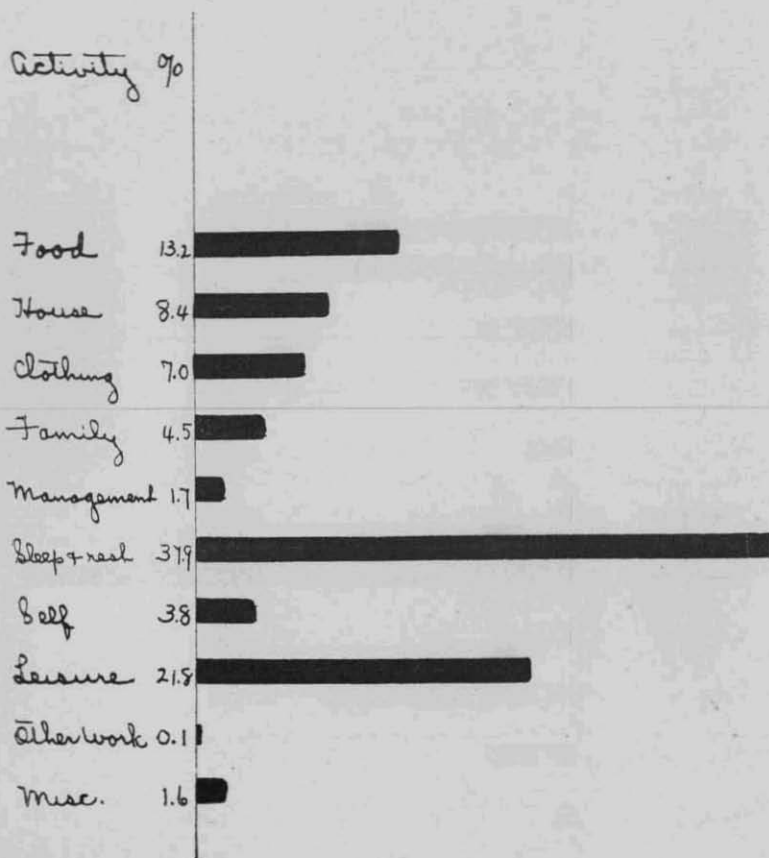


hold. Leisure also included the purely social activities such as card playing theater-going, dancing, and outside sports. When one considers how many divisions of leisure are possible it is easy to see that women may devote as much as 18.7 per cent of their time to it and yet not indulge in what most people would term "idle leisure."

The amount of time devoted to food ranges between the extremes of nine per cent and 22 per cent. This difference is easily explained by comparing conditions in the two specific homes which used such widely different amounts of time. The equipment used by the two was very much the same. Neither had a sink in the kitchen. All of the water

Plate II

### Distribution of Town Homemakers' Time



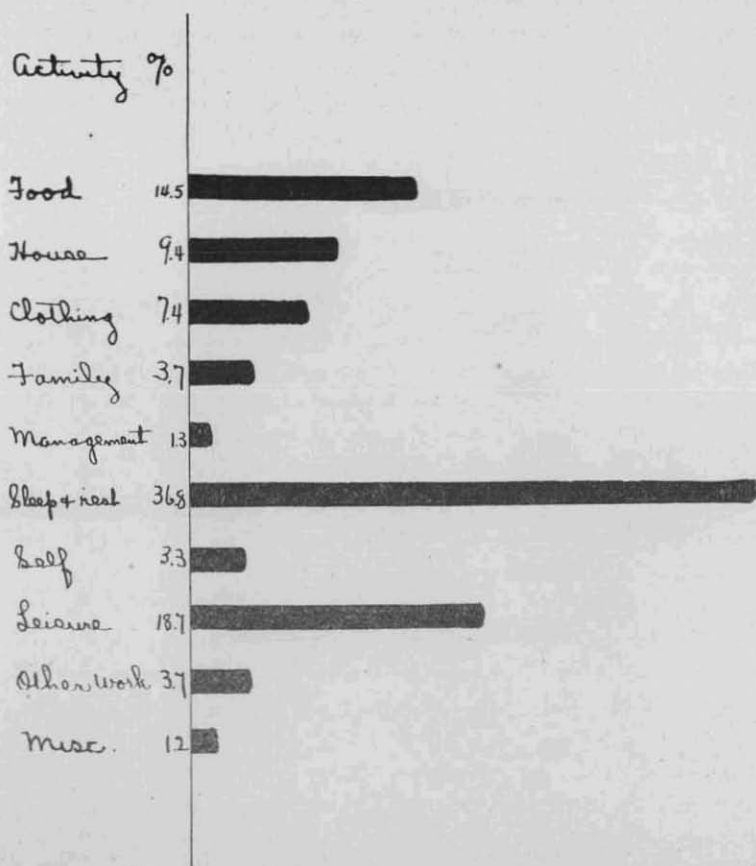
had to be carried about 25 feet in both cases, and a wood stove was used by each. The difference is shown in the age and type of family. The woman who spent 22 per cent of her time on food was taking care of her two small grand children. The woman who spent nine per cent of her time on food was in her early thirties, and her family consisted

of three grown people, so that no extra time was required for preparing and serving children's meals. The third member of her family was a grown sister who gave some help each day in preparing and serving meals.

The contrast in the amount of time spent on "House" is not as

Plate III

*Distribution of All Homemakers' Time  
(Farm and Town Combined)*



noticeable as in the case of food, but ranges from six per cent to 15 per cent. This difference may be largely due to difference in equipment and in help. The woman who spent six per cent of her time on house had

to carry her water supply only 10 feet, and she had a kitchen sink, so that there was no time lost in carrying out waste water. She also had gas lights for the entire house, and received a great deal of help with the house work from her mother. In contrast to such an arrangement the woman who spent 15 per cent of her time on house had no help with her work. She had to carry all of the water for household purposes 200 feet, and because there was no sink in the kitchen the waste water had to be carried 50 feet. Furthermore, the house was lighted with kerosene lamps, which had to be filled, polished and trimmed every few days.

The division on clothing shows a much greater variety of time than for either food or house. Several women spent only one, two, and three per cent of their time, while others spent as high as 14 and 15 per cent. For contrast two reports will be used, one devoting one per cent of time to clothing, and the other 14 per cent. The division clothing included not only sewing and mending, but all time required for washing and ironing. The woman who spent 14 per cent of her time on clothing had a small baby so that it was necessary to wash and iron more than once a week. She did all of her washing with a wash board and tub, and had to carry the water 12 feet to the tubs and 100 feet to empty it. The other woman who spent only one per cent of her time on clothing had hot and cold water running to her laundry and all the washing and wringing was done by electricity. Since, however, one per cent of the week would be less than two\*hours, it is evident that either that was not a typical week or that she had help for her laundry work.

The percentage of time devoted to family runs as high as 16 per cent in one case, with the average for the group 3.7 per cent. A large number of women devote less than one per cent to family, but in such cases there are no small children. In every case where a great deal of time is devoted to family, one or more small children will be found. This low percentage does not mean that the women are not spending time with their families, but most entries as "visited with family," "played with children," "talked to husband," are classified as leisure, leaving only such personal things as "put children to bed," "read story to son," for the column on family.

The time devoted to management is very small for both town and farm women, the average being only 1.3 per cent. Probably if more time were spent on this division of work, the time that remained could be more wisely and advantageously distributed among the other nine columns. In the University practice cottages where the girls are taught how to keep house and how to use their time to the best advantage, they are required to spend several hours of each week in planning menus and



budgets, and checking up on expenditures and supplies.

If women used more time for management they would profit by having more time to devote to self. It is reasonable to believe that they need more than the 3.3 per cent for self, which is the average shown in the reports. One of the criticisms of married women is that they become too busy with household responsibilities and forget the importance of being cheerful and making themselves attractive.

#### DIFFERENCES IN FARM AND TOWN HOMEMAKING

Table 4 shows a comparison of farm and town homemakers as to distribution of time. Before the results from this survey were compiled it was thought that such a comparison would show decided differences, but when the farm woman's distribution of time is placed side by side with that of the town woman, they are found to be very similar. One reason for this similarity may be due to the fact that Idaho is so largely a rural state, having no large cities, and therefore life in the country is spent in very much the same way as it is in the small towns. A second reason for similarity lies in the rapid development of good highways, and the extensive use of automobiles. Country people are no longer isolated. They can get in the car and go to church or attend social gatherings just the same as the people in town.

In comparing the use of time by farm homemakers with that of town homemakers the greatest difference found is in the amount of time spent on the other or outside work, and that difference is to be expected. Farm women spend 5.8 per cent of their time on this division of labor in contrast to 0.1 per cent spent by town women. The reason for this difference is obvious. There are many more outside chores to be done on the farm than in town. Those mentioned are gardening, milking, shelling peas, feeding chickens raising orphan lambs, hunting eggs, feeding the cows, and helping put down fence posts.



Farm women spent a little larger percentage of time on food, house, and clothing than the town women. That difference was expected to be more noticeable, particularly in the case of food. Farm women usually have to cook not only for their own families, but for the farm hands as well. Then too, people who are doing strenuous farm work require greater quantities of food than town people who work in offices. It would seem possible, therefore, that the difference in time devoted to food by farm and town women might be greater than 2.1 per cent. The absence of a greater difference is probably due to several counterbalancing factors. In the first place, farm women are somewhat more in the habit of putting all food for a meal on the table at one time and let-

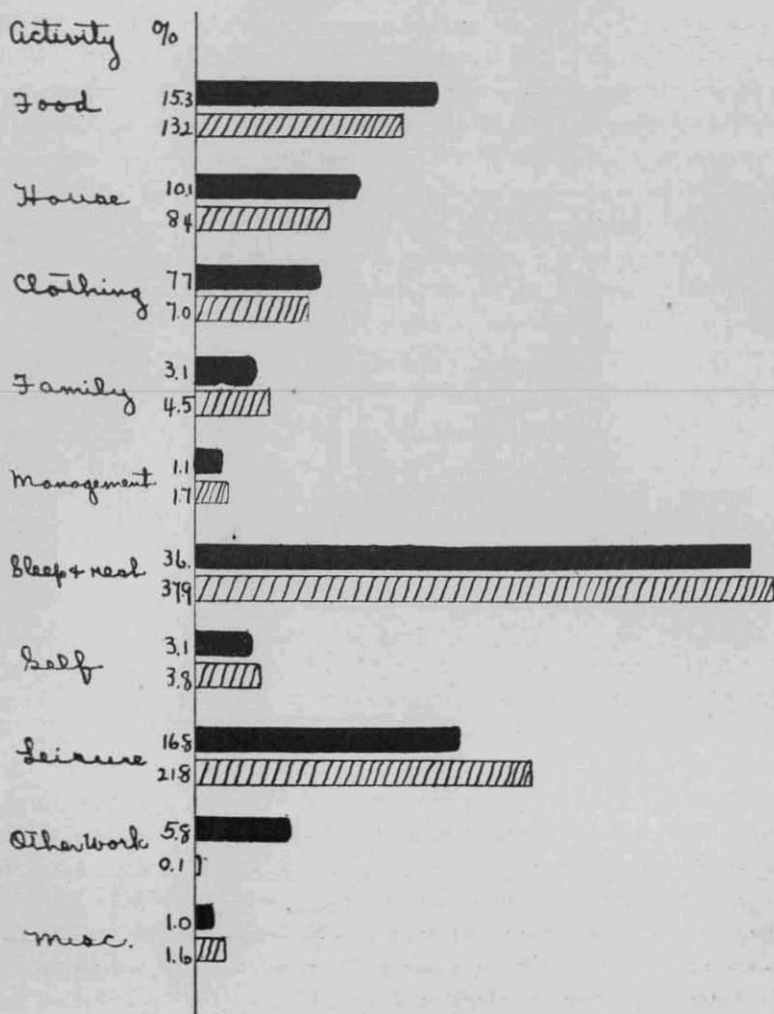


ting each member of the family serve himself. This method of serving saves many steps back and forth to the kitchen and, therefore, takes much less time than when a meal is served in two or more courses. Serving in courses is practiced by many town women. A second counter-

Plate IV

Comparison of Farm and Town Homemakers  
as to Distribution of Time

Farm  Town 



balancing factor, on which we have not been able to make a direct check, may be attributed to the help which the country women receive from their children. While a country girl is helping her mother pare potatoes, a town girl of the same age may be engaged in some form of play.

The fact that farm women spend 1.7 per cent more time on house than do town women seems only natural, for the country women reporting had, in the majority of cases, no electricity for household use, and few household conveniences. For example, the task of having to polish, fill, and trim kerosene lamps takes a few extra minutes each day. With the problem of cooking for both the family and the hired help comes the additional time necessary for dish washing. In many cases the water for dish washing had to be carried 220 feet or more, and then carried out again as waste water. All of these extra chores require time, and would be charged to "time spent on house."

Farm women spend only 0.7 per cent more time on clothing than do town women, and this difference is largely due to the laundry problem. The women who have to carry water for dish washing usually have to repeat the process on wash day. Not all farm women have to carry water, but the number is sufficiently large to make the average for the group a little greater than for town women. It is very rare indeed that a town woman does not have running water in the house. The actual washing of clothes on the farm, where the men work in the fields and with stock, is a much greater problem than in town. It was expected that farm women would spend more time on sewing than town women. The reports show that farm women buy about as many ready made clothes as do the town women.

Having considered the activities which require more time from farm homemakers than from those in town, namely, other work, food, house and clothing, the discussion will now be centered around those activities on which town women spend more time such as leisure, sleep and rest, self, management, family and miscellaneous. Just a glance at the rising hour of farm women easily shows that they do not get as much sleep as town women. The time of rising for farm women ranges from 4:30 to 6:00 o'clock while for the town women it is from 6:00 to 8:00. It is obvious that a farm woman must get up early in order to get through with breakfast so that the men can go to the fields. She often has to serve breakfast a second time for the children who are not up in time for the first breakfast. It is true that people in the country retire earlier than those in town, but the extra sleep they get at night is not enough to counterbalance the amount they lose in the early morning. In the late afternoon and immediately following supper town women are usually

free to read, do fancy work, or visit, while that is a busy part of the day for farm women. They must feed the chickens, gather the eggs, and often help with the milking, so that the time for remaining leisure is not very great.

The amount of time devoted by town women to family is only slightly more than that spent by country women. Realizing the large number of activities which engage the country woman's time, such as milking, churning, gardening, raising chickens, cooking for hired hands, and helping with the stock, it would seem in comparison that the town woman could spend a larger percentage of time on her family.

The percentage of time devoted to self is meager, being 3.8 per cent for town women and 3.1 per cent for farm women. It seems almost impossible for a woman to maintain a proper and pleasing personal appearance by devoting no more than 48 minutes a day to self. Yet that is the average time reported. It appears that women should endeavor to so utilize their leisure that more time could be devoted to self, and less time to purely social activities. More time spent on management might make this adjustment possible.

#### WHAT IDAHO HOMEMAKERS SAY

Some information obtained from the supplementary information sheet but not given in the plates, may be of interest.

1. In answer to the question, "What is your favorite housework"? 26 women out of 81 gave cooking as their choice, and 15 gave care of children first choice. No doubt a very much larger number of women would have given care of children as their favorite work if they had thought of that as being included in the question. About an equal number gave sewing, home decoration, and care of flowers as their favorite work.

2. The statement is often heard that women keep house not from choice, but because they can do nothing else. The answers obtained in this investigation do not confirm such a statement. Out of 81 answers 63 women said they preferred the work of homemaker to any other work. This was true even though large numbers of them had taught school and held other positions both before and after marriage. One woman who had been efficiency expert for Marshall Field and Company, Chicago, so decidedly preferred being a homemaker that she made this statement: "The two positions, rearing a family and having a career, are not comparable." On the other hand, there are a few women who would prefer going back into their old positions, leaving a maid to take care of and cook for the family. These women have not been trained to

look upon homemaking as a profession. One of the main objectives in the present methods of teaching Home Economics is to instill into the minds of girls the idea that no nobler profession exists than that of homemaker. There are the chosen few who have a special talent but are not gifted or trained in the art of homemaking, who prefer to leave the household responsibilities to servants and render their services to the family by continuing in their former professions.

3. In going over the records to check up on the equipment used during the time the records were kept, it was found that 28 out of 32 town women had running water in the house, while only 19 out of 49 farm women had that convenience. The lack of this one necessity would mean that farm women would have to spend more time on food, house, and clothing.

4. A larger majority of farm women have washing machines than town women, but they are run by hand, while in town practically all are run by electricity. Even though 35 women out of 49 on the farm have washing machines, the washing problem remains a big one, for the effort expended in turning a machine and wringer is tremendous.

5. Comparison of the amount of baker's bread used in the country and in town is an interesting one. Twenty-four town women, from a total of 32 use baker's almost entirely, while only 14 country women in 49 use it at all regularly. Of course, country people cannot always get baker's bread conveniently. The main reasons given by the homemakers for not using it are "it is too expensive" and "it is not as healthful as homemade bread."

6. One of the questions asked in the supplementary information sheet was, "If you had a thousand dollars to spend as you liked in making your homemaking easier or more pleasant for you, how would you spend it"? The answers to this question differed considerably for town and country. Of the farm women answering the question, "plumbing system" was mentioned by 14, "lighting system" by seven, and "bath room" by seven. Others mentioned radio, rugs, new equipment, furniture, and hired help. As shown by these answers the majority of farm women would spend the thousand dollars for conveniences that town women already have, namely, plumbing and lighting systems. The town women included in their answers such things as travel, electrical appliances, new furniture, bonds, table silver, and a "sound-proof rest room." Not all of the women from either town or farm answered the question.

### SUMMARY

After having given a detailed account of the results obtained in this investigation, it is possible to summarize briefly as follows:

1. Of the 81 complete seven-day reports received, 49 were from farm homemakers and 32 were from town homemakers.

2. The largest percentage of time was devoted to sleep and rest by both farm and town women, amounting to an average of 36.8 per cent of each week, or eight hours and 44 minutes a day.

3. The second largest percentage of time was devoted to leisure. Leisure was made to include reading, church work, hand work, telephoning, visiting with family, and many other such activities. Town women used 21.8 per cent of their time for leisure, while farm women reported only 16.8 per cent. The difference was due to many outside chores on the farm, in addition to the increase in quantity of regular house work, and to lack of conveniences.

4. The amount of time devoted to food ranged from 9 per cent to 22 per cent, the difference being due to size and age of family, occupation, and kind of equipment. The average for all women was 14.5 per cent.

5. The range in the amount of time spent on house was not as great as for food. It ranged from six per cent to 15 per cent, with an average of 9.4 per cent.

6. The amount of time devoted to clothing ranged from 2 per cent to 15 per cent, varying according to size and age of family and efficiency of laundry equipment. The average was 7.4 per cent.

7. The time spent on management was very meager for both groups, averaging only 1.3 per cent.

8. Farm women spent much more time on "other work" than town women. There were many more outside chores to be done on the farm, such as gardening, milking, and care of chickens.

9. Since farm women had to get up so early in the morning, and had so many outside chores to do, they did not have as much time for sleep and rest as town women.

10. Farm women spent more time on food, house, and clothing than town women. Possible explanations of this are lack of equipment, such as running water, power machines, and electrical appliances, and also the necessity of cooking and doing the laundry work for hired help.

11. The majority of women listed cooking and care of children as their favorite work.

12. Sixty-three women out of 81 preferred to be homemakers, rather than to go out of the home to work.

13. Twenty-eight out of 32 town women had running water in the

house, while only 19 out of 49 farm women had that household convenience

14. More farm women than town women had washing machines, but electricity was seldom found on the farm, so that the washing machines had to be turned by hand.

15. Practically all town women used baker's bread most of the time, while only 14 out of 49 on the farm used it at all regularly. The farm women gave the following reasons for not using baker's bread: "It is not convenient to get," "it is more expensive than homemade," and "it is not as good for children as homemade."

16. The majority of country women, if given a thousand dollars to spend on their homes, say they would spend it to install either a plumbing system or a lighting system. Town women would spend it for electrical appliances and new furniture.