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The Influence of Tenure Status upon Rural Life in Eastern South Dakota

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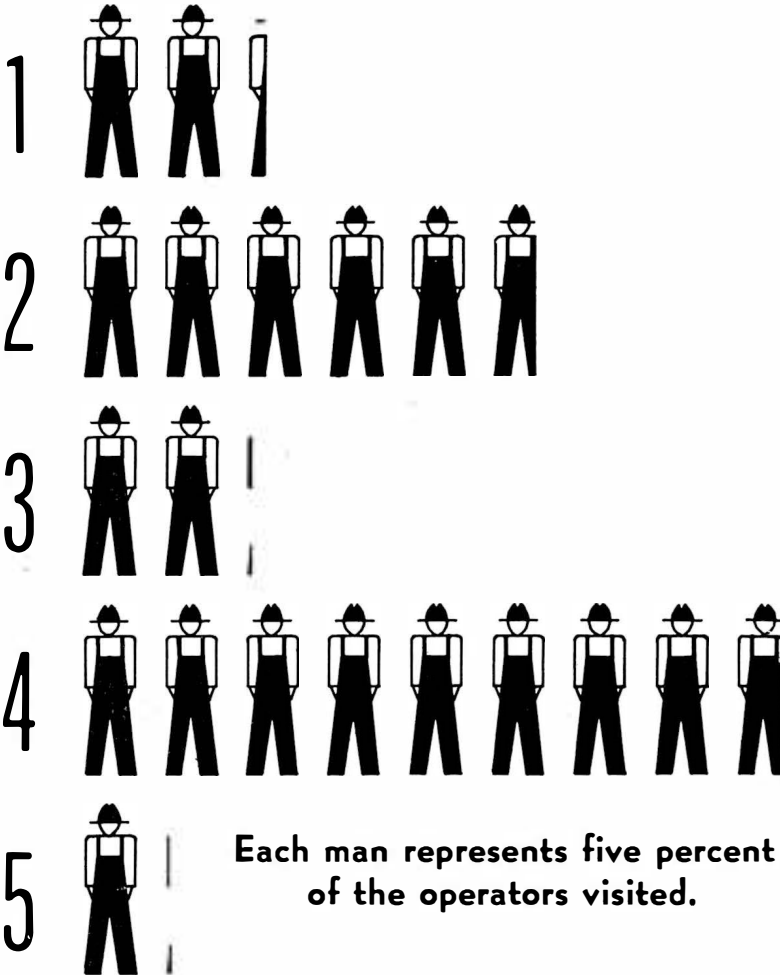
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The Influence of Tenure Status Upon Rural Life *In Eastern South Dakota*

TENURE TYPE



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Why Study Rural Life in War Time?

ALL OF US are seeking ways and means of making our best contribution to the war effort. We are fighting to preserve our homes, and our democratic traditions of life. We must seek for ways to improve as well as to protect our institutions. We must make democracy work in war-time as well as in peace time. We can best preserve it by using it.

Rural America is known as the seedbed of the Nation's population. Because the great bulk of our people do come from rural homes and because basic patterns of thinking and acting are established early in life it is clear that the rural family, the rural neighborhood and the rural community are extremely important in perpetuating the democratic way of life. Any condition, then, which interferes with the maintenance of a wholesome pattern of rural life strikes at our fundamental values.

Insecure tenure status is such a condition. A farm family that moves year after year from one neighborhood to another cannot participate fully in the life of any. It is also true that a family living in constant fear of having to move next year is not likely to make its maximum possible contribution to the community. In this state of uncertainty the family as well as the community suffers. Not only this but now that the Nation has stated its wartime needs for food the same spectre of insecure tenure may be keeping some farmers from making shifts to the most essential production.

This study was begun before war was declared. The conditions reported by it still exist, however, and solutions for the problems discussed are even more important now.

Acknowledgements. This study was greatly facilitated by access to data collected under the direction of Dr. W. F. Kumlien, Rural Sociologist of the South Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station. Dr. Kumlien's project was entitled "A Social History of Population in South Dakota." The author gratefully acknowledges the faithful assistance of all those who worked on the study.

The Influence of Tenure Status Upon Rural Life *In Eastern South Dakota*

WALTER L. SLOCUM¹

I. Introduction

The subject of land tenure has been of primary interest to South Dakota people for a number of years. Almost without exception, county agricultural planning committees have listed tenancy among the more important land-use problems in South Dakota. The State Agricultural Planning Committee at its February, 1942, meeting requested that land tenure studies be continued by the South Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station.

There has also been a considerable amount of interest in the problems of land tenure at the national level. An outstanding evidence of this concern is *Farm Tenancy*, the report of the President's Committee which was published in 1937. This report deals mainly with the problem of security for farmers, and in the preface it is made clear that "thousands of farmers commonly considered as owners are as insecure as tenants." In the realm of governmental action the Farm Security Administration, acting under orders from the Congress, has helped some disadvantaged tenants to attain ownership.

In normal times the essential rural problem is the improvement of living conditions: physical, financial, social and spiritual. The report of the President's Committee² has charged that "fully half of the total farm population has no adequate farm security." To the extent that tenure arrangements contribute to this condition,³ land tenure patterns should be modified, by governmental action if necessary. Now that the nation is at war still another major question is involved in the evaluation of tenure arrangements, namely: To what extent do existing tenure arrangements:

1. Impair the efficiency of farms in meeting production goals or
2. Prevent shifts from less-essential to more essential products?

The two questions are to a very large extent interrelated, for it is clear that insecure and distressed farm families can hardly hope to meet wartime production goals as efficiently as families that are not disadvantaged.

In a previous report on some aspects of the farm tenure situation in South Dakota⁴ the history of the growth of tenancy during the last 30 years is discussed in some detail. The significant features of the trend are:

1. That the proportion of tenants has been increasing and the proportion of full owner-operators has been decreasing for at least 30 years.

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2. *Farm Tenancy*, 1937. National Resources Committee. U. S. Government Printing Office.

3. In security is included not only economic factors but also psychological and sociological factors.

4. Coons, A. E., and Slocum, W. L., *Farm Tenure in South Dakota*, mimeograph pamphlet No. 1, Rural Social Science section, S. D. Agr. Exp. Station, Brookings, January 1942.

In 1910 half⁵ of South Dakota farm operators owned all the land operated; by 1940 only one out of every five operators⁶ owned all of the land operated. In 1910 only one out of every four⁷ operators was a tenant; by 1940 a little more than half⁸ of the operators were tenants.

2. That part-owners remained at about the same level throughout the period. In 1910, 22.6 percent were part owners; in 1940, 25.4 percent were part owners.
3. That as a result of the increase in the proportion of tenancy and the operation of rented land by part owners, the percentage of land operated by someone other than the owner has increased. In 1940, 69.6 percent of the farm land was operated under lease, oral or written.
4. That almost six out of every 10 owner-operators⁹ reported their farms to be mortgaged in 1940.

These figures emphasize the fact that problems of land tenure are of major importance in connection with the economic and social organization of South Dakota agriculture.

Traditionally, ownership has been considered to be very good and tenancy to be very bad insofar as community life is concerned. In this study an attempt is made to discover how the tenure type of farm operators influences their social attitudes and behavior and the social structures such as neighborhoods, communities, organizations, and social institutions which are created and maintained by the interactions of farm people. In the background, of course, is the basic question: What type or types of tenure are most desirable in terms of wholesome community life?

The report is based primarily upon data secured through interviews with 274 farm families that lived in the following seven counties when visited during the spring months of 1940: Brookings, Hyde, Kingsbury, Marshall, Moody, Sully and Turner.¹⁰ Fig. 1 shows the localities in which the families lived when interviewed.

II. Tenure Types

The rights and privileges of an individual with respect to a particular tract of land are limited to some extent by the general rules of society. Within these limits his rights and privileges are defined by oral or written contracts, which establish his tenure status with respect to the tract of land in question. Thus conceived land tenure includes not only all types of tenancy, but also all conditions of ownership.

This view is in accordance with the concept of property as a bundle of rights over material objects or activities involving such objects. Through ten-

5. 52 percent.

6. 20.8 percent.

7. 24.8 percent.

8. 53 percent.

9. 58.2 percent.

10. The procedure used in selecting the sample, together with a discussion of representativeness is explained in the appendix.

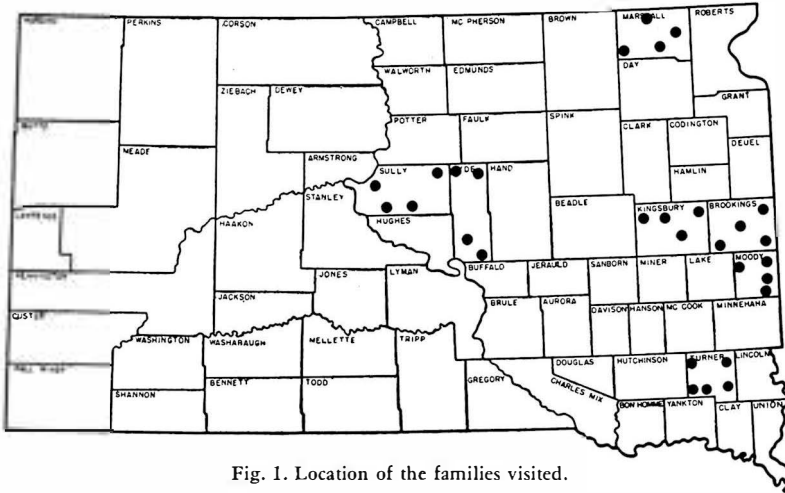


Fig. 1. Location of the families visited.

ure arrangements the rights may be divided. For example, as Ely and Wehrwein¹¹ have pointed out, when a tenant rents a farm the owner surrenders some of the rights to the land for a period of time. The landlord does not, however, surrender all his rights. In fact, if he undertakes to finance the farm operations he may retain most of them, allowing the tenant very little freedom of management. It also follows, that if a nominal owner has pledged his land as debt security to some person or agency, he must surrender some of his rights to his creditor. If the equity of the owner is small or if the risk is high, the creditor may demand enough of the rights so that the encumbered owner retains only a very limited degree of freedom over management. The presence of debt usually makes the operator less secure in the possession of whatever rights he may have at any particular time.

In this study an attempt has been made to classify the 274 operators into tenure types with respect to their freedom of control over management and their security in possession of such rights. The tenure types follow:

Tenure Type	Description	Pct. of Operators
I	Debt-free full owners	11.3
II	Debt-free part owners, full owners and part owners with light debt, long-term debt free tenants	29.2
III	Debt-free short-term tenants	10.2
IV	Part owners and full owners whose land is mortgaged, tenants whose chattels are mortgaged	44.2
V	Standard loan clients of the Farm Security Administration	5.1
Total		100.0

11. Ely and Wehrwein. *Land Economics*. 1936. p. 8.

Type I includes only the debt-free full owners. These operators have full control over the management of the farm subject only to the rights reserved by society. They also are secure in the possession of their rights as long as they remain free of debt.

Type II includes part owners who have little¹² or no debt, long-term (10 years or more) debt-free tenants, debt-free tenants who rent from a relative and who are owners in prospect,¹³ and full owners with little debt. Such operators have relatively full control over their holdings and they are relatively secure in the possession of their rights. The part owner is, of course, less sure of continued control over the rented part of his farm than he is of the owned portion but the latter gives him a "base" so to speak, from which he can operate. Economically, many of the members of this group are probably more prosperous than the average member of Type I. This would be true especially for the part owners who tend to operate larger acreages.

Type III includes only the debt-free short term tenant. While on a farm, this type of operator has considerable control over the management of the farm but he is subject to disturbance because he operates under a one-year lease.

Type IV includes tenants whose chattels are mortgaged and those part owners and full owners who have mortgages.¹⁴ These operators tend to have somewhat less control over farm management because they do not have a great deal of bargaining power. Nor are they secure in the possession of whatever rights to land they may now have. Both tenants and owners in this class operate under the fear of foreclosure and submit to more or less supervision by their creditors.

Type V includes standard loan clients of the Farm Security Administration. These operators are subject to detailed supervision of farm operations. They may frequently be more secure in their rights than Type IV, however, because of the policy of the FSA to foreclose only as a last resort; furthermore, the FSA may help them to find farms if they are displaced.

III. The Influence of Tenure Status on Selected Behavior Patterns and Attitudes

The tenure types described in the preceding section were set up on the basis of an evaluation of the degree of control over management possessed by the operator, together with an estimate of his security in possession of such rights as he may have had. These types were constructed without reference to differences in farming practices, differences in patterns of social participation or differences in attitudes. Consequently the question may now be raised: Has his classification any meaning in terms of behavior patterns and attitudes? The hypothesis set up at the outset of the study was that a classification of operators by tenure type would have significance in terms of community life.

12. Those with little debt had chattel mortgages but no debt on the land.

13. It is, of course, true that relatives sometimes are close supervisors.

14. Because it was not feasible to secure an appraisal of the farm the relative mortgage burden could not be accurately determined. Consequently, this group probably includes a few owners and part owners who have good equities in their land and are therefore relatively independent.

A. Conditioning Factors

There are, of course, numerous factors other than tenure status which may condition human behavior. Some of these are: Age of operator, size of family, nationality and religious backgrounds, and education of operator. Although it has not been possible to control¹⁵ these or other factors it may be advisable to examine the distributions so as to note the amount of similarity or difference that does exist between tenure types.

Age of Operator. The average age of all farm operators in South Dakota at the time of the 1940 census was 46.1 years. The average age of the 274 operators included in this study was 45.3 years.

The average age differences between tenure types (Table 1) are of such a character that one gains the impression that age alone does not necessarily have a great deal to do with farm success as measured by tenure status. For example, the average ages of operators of Types I and IV are similar. The greatest divergence from the group average is found in Type V. These FSA clients are evidently considerably younger than other operators. In this sample seven out of 10 are under 40.

Table 1. Operators Classified by Age and by Tenure Type

Age	Tenure Type					Total
	I	II	III	IV	V	
60+		8	2	13	1	24
55-59	6	3	1	17		27
50-54	8	8	6	16		38
45-49	8	18	6	20	3	55
40-44	4	13	3	14		34
35-39	1	11	4	9	3	28
30-34	3	9	2	14	3	31
25-29		6	3	9	3	21
20-24		2		2		4
No report	1	2	1	7	1	12
Totals	31	80	28	121	14	274
Average	48.3	43.9	44.4	47.7	39.4	45.3

Size of Family. There was not a great deal of variation between tenure types with respect to number of members in the family. The average size of family¹⁶ varies from 4.0 to 4.6. This means that this factor may be largely dismissed in comparing the behavior tendencies of tenure types.

Education. The typical operator was an eighth grade graduate. A few have gone beyond this point and some left school before reaching it, but more than six out of every 10 reported that they had left school after completing the eighth grade (Table 2). There are some minor variations between tenure types, but the averages and the distributions are sufficiently alike so that education, like size of family, may be largely dismissed as an interfering factor in this inquiry.

The fact that there are no significant differences between tenure types does not necessarily mean that specialized agricultural education can make no contribution to success in farming. Practically none of the operators included in this sample had received systematic training in scientific agricultural methods.

¹⁵ It was not possible to control these or other factors physically and it did not appear worthwhile to attempt to do so mathematically with such a small sample.

¹⁶ Average size of family by tenure types: I, 4.4; II, 4.5; III, 4.0; V, 4.2; all types, 4.4.

Table 2. Operators Classified by Highest Grade of School Completed and by Tenure Type.

Highest grade completed	Tenure Type					Total
	I	II	III	IV	V	
College graduate		2		1		3
1, 2 or 3 yrs. college	2	2		1		5
High school grad.	2	4		6		13
1, 2 or 3 yrs. H. S.	3	1	3	13		20
8th grade	15	43	15	58	6	137
Less than 8th grade	3	16	7	18	1	45
Not reported	6	12	3	24	6	51
Totals	31	80	28	121	14	274
Average	8.64	8.01	7.68	8.15	8.38	8.11

Residential Stability. Families that move frequently from neighborhood to neighborhood cannot enter fully into the life of any. It takes a considerable period of time for new families to gain acceptance. Even after four or five years residence in a locality a family may not be fully accepted. On the other hand families that move only a few miles can readily keep in touch with relatives and friends in their home locality.

The reports of the 1940 census show clearly that operators with more secure tenure tend to live on the same farm for longer periods of time. More than seven out of each 10 owners had lived on the same farm for more than 10 years as compared to a little more than one out of each four tenants.¹⁷ These figures do not tell the whole story, however. Many tenants who have lived on a farm for a number of years have never had a feeling of security because of the fear that someone else might buy or rent the place.

Still a further test of residential stability is the number of years that an operator has lived in the same county. Less than one out of each 10 operators interviewed had lived in the county less than 10 years.¹⁸ Type I operators have the longest record of residence in the same county and Type V the shortest but few are newcomers.¹⁹ The two sets of data indicate that there has been considerable movement from farm to farm within counties.²⁰ Even a move of a few miles, however, may affect inter-family interaction patterns to a considerable extent. Proximity facilitates visits and work exchanges.

B. Farm Operations and Practices

Insecure tenure status, whether short term tenancy or mortgaged ownership has an undesirable influence upon farm operations and practices.²¹ It is unreasonable to expect that a family will improve or maintain a farm for the benefit of someone else to the extent that they will for themselves. On the other hand, secure tenure does not necessarily guarantee better conservation practices. The most that can be said is that security of tenure creates a more favorable pre-condition for better practices. The values, attitudes and habits of the family will determine whether practices are actually better.

17. 72.1 percent and 26.3 percent respectively.

18. 9.5 percent.

19. The average number of years operators have resided in their present home county follows: Type I, 39.7; Type II, 32.4; Type III, 30.8; Type IV, 31.7; Type V, 20.8; and all operators, 32.2.

20. See also South Dakota Agr. Exp. Sta. Bul. 315, *Rural Mobility in South Dakota*, for further verification of this pattern of farm to farm migration.

21. See for example, J. A. Baker, *Tenure Status and Land Use Patterns in the Corn Belt*, U.S.D.A., BAE, Washington, D. C., August 1939.

Care of Machinery. Basic attitudes toward preservation of property are indicated to a considerable extent by the care given machinery.²² The machinery belonged to the operator on all of the farms visited although the equipment of Type IV was usually mortgaged.

Three out of each four members of Type I were reported to have kept their machinery in good shape. Review of the data of Table 3 shows that very few members of other tenure classes take good care of their machinery. Fig. 2 shows the usual care given machinery by operators not of Type I.

Table 3. Percentage of Operators Whose Machinery Was Well Cared For.

Tenure types	Percentage
I	75.9
II	31.4
III	30.4
IV	19.2
V	25.0
All types	31.1

Size of Farm Versus Security of Tenure. The average size of farm in eastern South Dakota at the time of the 1940 census was 430 acres. The average size of farm in this study was on 14 acres larger, 444 acres. Type II operators in their communities had the largest farms. This is due to the inclusion of debt-free part owners in Type II; the average size of farms operated by part owners in 1940 in South Dakota was 1,042 acres.²³

Even within a stable, low-risk area, control of larger acreages does not necessarily make for better farming practices or a better community spirit.



Fig. 2. On many farms machinery is given inadequate care in spite of the fact that exposure such as this shortens the period of service that an implement can give.

22. Evaluation made by interviewer immediately after leaving farm.
23. Coons, A. E., and Slocum, W. L., *Farm Tenure in South Dakota*, p. 12.

As a matter of fact the operator who has only tenuous and temporary control over a large acreage may be impelled to mine the soil and to forget that he has neighbors. The operator who has more security in his tenure and consequently more freedom of control over management, such as a Type I operator, will be freer to follow a soil conserving type of farming. He can make long-term commitments and investments without fear of disturbance. Type II, III and IV operators might be able to make shifts to dairy, meat and poultry production if lease improvements were made which would increase their security of tenure and/or compensate them for disturbance. The essential point here is not freedom of control—possibly in many cases some supervision would be desirable—but rather security in possession of a specified amount of control which would make long-term investments feasible.

The Labor Force. The data of this study together with data from the 1940 census show clearly that the typical South Dakota farm is a family-size farm in the sense that the family itself furnishes most of the labor force. Only 14.3 percent²⁴ of South Dakota farm operators hired labor by the month in 1939. Only one out of each eight of the farms included in this study had a hired man when visited in the spring of 1941. More operators of Type I kept a hired man than those of any other type.²⁵

Not only is our typical farm a family powered farm but on only one out of each three farms visited²⁶ was there a boy between 16 and 21. This means that on more than half of the farms visited the operator and his wife constitute the principal labor force. Again Type I operators were in the most favorable condition.²⁶ More of them will, of course, need help if and when their sons are called into the armed forces.

The types of agriculture practiced on eastern South Dakota farms have two periods during which more labor is needed than at other times: namely, planting time and harvest time. During years of poor yield the need for harvest help is, of course, reduced. In any year, however, there are variations from season to season in the labor needs of most farms.

One way in which the rush season problem of extra labor is normally met in many localities is for farmers to exchange labor and machinery. More than seven out of each 10 operators reporting on this subject regularly exchanged work with at least one neighbor.²⁷ Four out of each 10 reporting exchanged work with at least two neighbors.²⁸ An illustration of an outstanding neighborhood pattern of work exchange is presented in Fig. 4, page 17.

In this connection, it should be pointed out that patterns of neighborly work exchange are not nearly so well developed in some of the other localities visited. Members of tenure Types II and IV tend to exchange work with neighbors somewhat less frequently than members of other types.²⁷ Wartime

24. 1940 census of agriculture.

25. The percentages of operators who kept a hired man are: Type I, 22.5; Type II, 12.5; Type III, 14.2; Type IV, 14.8; Type V, 7.1; all operators, 12.4.

26. The percentages of reporting operators that have a son 16-21 were: Type I, 40; Type II, 25.3; Type III, 35.3; Type IV, 30.5; Type V, 10; all operators, 32.8.

27. The percentages of those reporting who regularly exchange work with at least one neighbor are: Type I, 100; Type II, 71.5; Type III, 89; Type IV, 71; Type V, 80; and all operators, 72.8.

28. 41.5 percent.

labor needs will make it necessary for farm families to develop even more fully the possibilities of exchanging labor and machinery with neighbors. It is possible that it would be desirable to facilitate this through such a group as a community planning council.

How Ownership Was Achieved. The question of how ownership was attained by those who hold or have held that status is a matter of considerable importance in connection with the development of a solution to the undesir-

Table 4. Operators Classified by How Ownership Was Attained.

How Attained	I	II	Tenure Type III	IV	V	Total
Inheritance	10	14	2*	10		36
Help from parents	6	13	3*	20	1	43
Saved money and bought	6	13	1*	16	2	38
Other	3	7		17	1	28
No reply	6	33	22	58	10	129
Totals	31	80	28	121	14	274

*These persons had lost their farms prior to 1941.

able features of the present tenure situation. Of the 145 operators who reported on this question, more than half said that they had received substantial help from parents, either through gifts of land, money and-or equipment or through inheritance (Table 4). The numbers reporting were small but the reports show that a somewhat higher proportion of Types I and II had received family help in attaining ownership than had Type IV.

C. Attitudes Toward Ownership

An effort was made during the course of the survey to find out the attitudes of farmers with respect to tenancy versus ownership and especially with respect to the attainment of ownership by non-owners, especially younger men, under conditions prevailing at the time.

How Should Ownership be Attained? There was general agreement among those interviewed that assistance from relatives is very desirable in connection with the attainment of ownership. More than seven out of every 10 that answered this question gave this reply. There was, however, a consid-

Table 5. Attitudes of Operators Regarding Method of Attaining Ownership.

	I	II	Tenure Type III	IV	V	Total
Percent recommending aid from relatives	92.0	82.5	62.4	67.2	33.1	73.1
Percent recommending government aid	4.0	12.0	31.2	20.8	55.0	18.4
Percent making other recommendations	4.0	5.5	6.4	12.0	11.9	8.5
Number reporting	25	52	16	77	9	179

erable amount of difference between tenure types (Table 5). Tenure Types I and II were much more favorable to this sort of start while only one out of three of Type V thought that this was the best way to get a start. As Table 5 shows, there was also a great deal of difference between tenure types with respect to the frequency with which government aid was spontaneously sug-

gested as the best means of attaining ownership. More than half of the members of Type V, already receiving federal aid, felt this to be the most desirable way to become owners. Less than one out of eight in Type II and only one of 25 in Type I recommended government aid. Very few suggested using commercial credit as a means of gaining ownership.

Should Young People be given Governmental Aid to get a Start in Farming? During the interview the investigator asked: "How about the young man whose parents are unable to help him to set up in farming for himself. Should he be given governmental aid?" In answer to this specific question 87 percent of those who replied, said "yes." Many of them, however, added "but only as a last resort." Again there were some differences between tenure types with fewer operators of Types I and III approving governmental aid to the beginning farmer.²⁹

Economic Advantage of Ownership. In an effort to learn whether farm operators regard ownership as a more desirable tenure status from the economic standpoint the question was asked: are owners or tenants worse off in this locality? Seven out of each ten of those who answered this question replied that tenants were at a greater disadvantage than owners. More of those who are themselves in a fortunate position with respect to their control of management and their security therein believed tenants to be at a greater disadvantage than owners.³⁰ Many of the answers to this question were qualified by the statement that heavily mortgaged owners are frequently worse off than tenants.

Prestige of Ownership. In a comparative study of the social aspects of farm tenure in the Corn Belt and in the Cotton Belt, Schuler³¹ found that the status of farm ownership carried much more prestige in the South than in the North. In the current study farmers were asked: Do you think that people would (or do) respect you more as an owner than as a renter? Only one out of each 10 of the 222 who answered this question said "yes." A somewhat higher percentage of Types IV and V replied in the affirmative.³²

D. Social Participation

How does tenure status affect the social participation of the farmer and his family? This is an important question. Without participation of families in organizations, institutions and informal group relationships there can be no such thing as rural community life.

Organizational Membership. The organization or special interest group provides an interaction channel for the farm operator or for members of his family. Usually an organization is centered around some specific interest such as cooperative purchasing or marketing. Some students of rural life believe that special interests have replaced locality as a major basis for group forma-

29. The percentages of those reporting that favored governmental aid for beginning farmers was as follows: Type I, 76.9; Type II, 87.7; Type III, 76.2; Type IV, 90.6; and Type V, 91.7.

30. The percentages of those reporting who said tenants are worse off than owners was: Type I, 93.3; Type II, 81.2; Type III, 69.6; Type IV, 57.6; Type V, 61.5; all types, 70.5.

31. Schuler, F. O. *Social Status and Farm Tenure*, FSA and BAE, Social Research Report No. IV, Washington, D. C., 1938, p. 64.

32. The percentages of those reporting who answered "yes" were: Type I, 8.0; Type II, 3.0; Type III, 4.5; Type IV, 14.3; Type V, 27.3; all types, 9.9.

tion and solidarity.³³ The data of this study appear to raise some question concerning the applicability of this statement to South Dakota. The study shows that South Dakota farm families are not "joiners." Less than four out of every 10 families³⁴ reporting on this question held membership in one or more of the following organizations: Grange, Farm Bureau, Farmers' Union, Women's Extension Club, Purchasing or Marketing Cooperative. A somewhat smaller proportion of Type I operators reported membership in farm organizations than was true of the other types. The highest proportion of membership was among Type IV operators and their families.

Church Membership. Failure to support farm organizations and other special interest groups does not, however, mean that no community spirit exists and there is no participation in community building activities. Of the 251 families reporting on this question, more than eight out of each 10 belonged to a church.³⁵ In contrast to the low organizational membership of Type I operators is the fact that they have the highest percentage of church membership.

The church is a community building institution in most instances although its community program is stronger in some localities and among some denominations than elsewhere.

Informal Interactions. The keynote of neighborhood and community life in South Dakota is informality. Of the families who reported on this question, 99 percent said that their contacts with other families were largely informal. The family visit is still an important social and business event. Other types of informal gatherings are the neighborhood picnic, the Saturday night meeting in town and the casual meeting at the livestock auction agency.

Type I operators have the best record and Type II operators the poorest record of visits with other families in the immediate locality.³⁶

Summary

All of these interaction patterns taken together lead to the tentative conclusion that Type I operators are somewhat more constructive in their community building activities. The distinguishing characteristic of the operators included in this type is security in possession of full control over their farms. There does not appear to be a clearcut difference in social participation between other tenure types. In some respects Types III and IV are apparently better than Type II. It may be that some Type II operators are more concerned with making money and achieving a higher degree of security in control of their farms and therefore tend to slight community and neighborly activities.

33. See Kolb and Brunner, *A Study of Rural Society*, 1940 edition, p. 162.

34. The percentages of families reporting who said that some member of the family was a member of at least one farm organization are: Type I, 23.3; Type II, 36.8; Type III, 35.0; Type IV, 40.3; Type V, 36.4; all operators, 37.2.

35. Of those reporting the percentages that belong to churches are: Tenure Type I, 96.7; Type II, 86.2; Type III, 89.2; Type IV, 88.4; Type V, 64.2; and all operators, 85.1.

36. The percentages of those reporting who frequently visit at least one neighbor family were: Type I, 100; Type II, 66.8; Type III, 83.4; Type IV, 82.3; Type V, 75.0; and all operators, 79.2.

IV. Neighborhood Variations in Tenure Patterns

A neighborhood is an area within which families have frequent face-to-face contacts with one another. It is more than a geographic unit, however. To be a true neighborhood there must be a psychological bond holding the families together. The contacts must be neighborly in character. A community is usually larger in area and the contacts are less frequent but here too there must be a psychological bond among the families; a community of feeling must prevail.

In this study, the informal social activities such as visiting, exchange of work and other forms of mutual aid were found to be mainly restricted to neighborhood families. This was largely true also of the elementary school and its related cluster of activities such as the PTA and the Christmas program. Church membership and attendance, participation in the educational and recreational programs of the high school, and economic activities are usually on the community level.

In the preceding section, inquiry was made regarding the interaction patterns and attitudes of the members of various tenure types. These data indicate that families that have more secure tenure and more control over management tend to take better care of their property and are somewhat more faithful in church affiliation. It is difficult, however, in classifying the data without regard for locality, properly to sense the importance of interactions between families and individuals. Tenure patterns vary greatly from locality to locality and apparently form an inherent part of local patterns of behavior and related attitudes.

To illustrate this point there is presented here an account of the inter-relationship of tenure patterns with other factors in three localities.

1. Rosefield: Secure tenure and a well-knit pattern of community life.

Rosefield township in Turner County is an outstanding example of fine neighborhood-community relationships. Eight out of every 10 operators in the township are owners. This stands in marked contrast to the situation in another township in the same county where only two out of every ten operators are owners. These differences call for some explanation—especially so, in view of the fact that the high tenancy township is located in an area of greater rainfall and consequently has less crop risk.

Not only is the tenure pattern one of ownership, but seven out of the 10 farmers visited were of tenure Types I and II. The explanation for the situation in this locality is to be found primarily in the philosophy of the group of families who live there. They are Mennonites of Swiss origin. All are church members and the organized phases of their community life is centered in their church and in their junior college which is located a few miles away at Freeman. None of those interviewed were members of any farm organization.

The social life of the neighborhood is principally informal, a great amount of inter-family visitation being the rule. Patterns of work exchange and other forms of mutual aid are principally, although not exclusively, within groups of families related by blood or marriage. There are many such relatives near-

by, for these people have a tradition of continuing the family line on the land. Parents and other relatives take a positive attitude with respect to helping young couples to get a start on a piece of land of their own. In some cases the parents have made outright gifts of land and equipment. In other cases the parental aid takes the form of standing security for credit. In any case, owner-operation rather than tenancy is the goal. Sacrifices are made until the goal is achieved. As a result ownership is attained at a somewhat earlier age than is customary in most localities. The average age of operator was 42.5 years and four out of the 10 were under 35.

These families have not only attained secure tenure but they have a keen appreciation of beauty. Their farmsteads are well kept in most cases and their equipment is generally well cared for.

As implied above, these families have a high regard for education. Together with other families with similar backgrounds, they maintain Freeman Junior College. All of the operators visited had finished the eighth grade, two had finished high school and one was a college graduate.

The farms range in size from 80 to 480 acres, the average being 176 acres. Dairying is in favor and many fine herds of Holsteins, Guernseys, and other dairy breeds are to be seen on these farms.

As might be expected the prevailing pattern of work involves the entire family with extra rush season work being handled mainly through exchanges with relatives and neighbors. Only on the largest farms is hired labor employed regularly.

2. Lake Hendricks: Secure tenure, prosperous with a closely knit pattern of neighborhood interaction.

The pattern of tenure in the Lake Hendricks neighborhood, Brookings County, is somewhat different from that just described but its keynote is also security. Of the 12 operators visited, four were of Type I and six were of Type II. One was of Type III and one was of Type IV. Of the six tenants, five were renting land from parents or other relatives.

Lake Hendricks neighborhood is a Norwegian settlement. All of the 12 families visited were of Scandinavian stock. Many of the families in this locality are inter-related by blood or marriage and there is evidently somewhat of a tradition of agriculture. In three cases the operating group was not a family consisting of man, wife and children, but consisted of unmarried brothers and sisters who were farming the family estate.

Farmers in this locality are more than ordinarily prosperous. Only one farm of the 12 was mortgaged. Most of the buildings were well constructed, beautifully landscaped and well kept. All but one of the Type I and II operators kept their machinery in good order and repair. Many old plows and wagons were observed to have new coats of paint. The land in this locality is rolling but very fertile. The old farmsteads are surrounded by beautiful groves. Fig. 3 shows a typical set of buildings of Type I operators in Rosefield and Hendricks neighborhoods. A general type of farming is practiced with emphasis upon dairying and poultry. Almost all of the operators were active



Fig. 3. Grounds and buildings were well kept up on the farm of this Type I operator.

members of the open country Lutheran Church and most of their organized activities are in connection with the church and its related cluster of activities such as the Ladies' Aid and the Luther League. None of the members of the families visited belonged to any farm organizations or special interest groups.

The principal patterns of interaction are informal. There is a great deal of visiting between families (Fig. 4). There is also a well developed pattern of work exchange to meet rush season labor needs. Otherwise the family group itself provides the labor. Only one operator kept a hired man. This neighborhood is located near a lake and groups of families frequently gather there for picnics during the summer months.

In addition to the existence of a high degree of inter-relationship with common backgrounds and membership in a common church, a further bond linking these families together is the fact that all are of Norwegian stock and that all—young and old alike—can speak the language.

There is consequently a high degree of community feeling and an atmosphere of stability and security prevails.

3. ——— Township, ——— County: High tenancy and high mobility.

In marked contrast to the two stable neighborhoods just described is a locality in one of the other counties. In 1939, 85 percent of the operators in this township were tenants. In discussing the situation existing in this locality it should be borne in mind that this area was very hard hit by drouth during the 30's. As a matter of fact, the township lost 41.3 percent of its population during the decade 1930-1940. A loss of this magnitude necessarily affects the patterns of interfamily relationship materially. There are many abandoned buildings such as the one shown in Fig. 5.

None of the families visited in this locality was of Tenure Type I and only one was of Type II. The most characteristic feature of the existing tenure pattern is insecurity and lack of permanence. In this locality the program of the

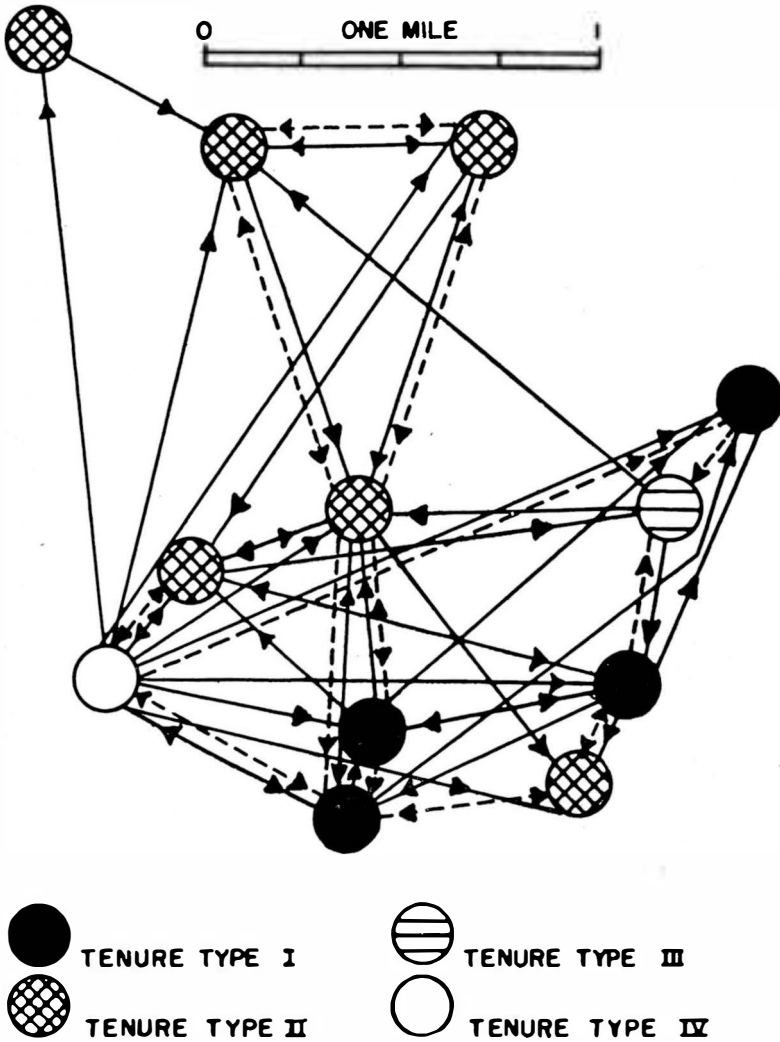


Fig. 4. Patterns of work exchange and inter-family visitation are well developed in the Lake Hendricks Neighborhood; tenure status apparently did not affect these interaction patterns.

Solid line connects two families that visit frequently.

Broken line connects two families that exchange work regularly.

Arrow points away from family reporting interaction.



Fig. 5. Buildings abandoned and land added to an adjoining farm.

Agricultural Adjustment Administration was very much in the foreground and farming operations were much affected by it. Much of the land is owned by insurance companies. Six of the eight operators visited were insurance company tenants. All of these tenants expressed dissatisfaction with the one-year lease and their subsequent inability to make long time plans for the use of the land without fear of disturbance. Six of the eight operators had received FSA grants during 1938.

All but one of the families visited were church members. In the township as a whole, 63.6 percent of the families are church members. The church and its activities did not, however, seem to be so central as in the preceding two cases. Two of the wives were members of an Extension Club but aside from this, the families belonged to no farm organizations.

Several of those visited seemed rather disillusioned. There did not seem to be a great deal of interest in neighborhood affairs and problems.

Although the farms were all 320 acres or larger, only one of the operators kept a hired man. Without the soil payments from the Agricultural Adjustment Administration and occasional help from FSA most of these operators would have been forced to move elsewhere as their former neighbors have already done. Although the renters expressed dissatisfaction with the one year lease, none of them expressed any desire to become owners. They believed that they were better off as renters.

The condition existing in this locality may be due to crop failures, to migration of leaders and to insecure tenure on the part of those that remain. Merely to remedy the insecure tenure situation would not necessarily be a full solution to the problem. There is need for a positive constructive program of community betterment.

V. The Influence of Tenure Patterns on Neighborhood and Community Relationships

Some rural neighborhoods and communities have a more constructive pattern of activities than others. There are differences too in the related complex of attitudes which may be thought of as the community spirit.

The evidence of this study suggests that Type I operators, families that own their farms and their equipment free of encumbrance, take better care of their property than do other types of operators; they also tend to be more neighborly and more of them support the church. They do not, however, participate in the programs of organized groups to any large extent.

The neighborhood descriptions presented in Section IV illustrate the complexity of the factors that make for wholesome community life. It seems fairly certain that stability of residence and independence of management are essential pre-conditions for the highest type of neighborhood and community relationships. There must, however, be more than this. There must be aggressive leadership in the locality. This leadership finds its expression through individuals but it derives its meaning and its strength from such institutions as the church, the family and the kinship group.

The solution to the tenure problem in South Dakota will probably be a matter of evolution. On the basis of this study and from the community point of view, however, it seems to the writer that an essential feature of tenure reform should be the creation of a greater degree of security in tenure. In most cases examined herein, there was not a great deal of difference in short-term control over a given farm. There were, however, essential and important differences from the long-term view. Not only are the latter differences important from the community point of view and from the soil conserving point of view, but those who have insecure tenure are undoubtedly handicapped to a considerable extent in meeting wartime production goals.

A positive program is needed to banish the insecurity that is indicated by the fact that 53 percent of the farms in the state are operated by tenants, that almost 70 percent of the land is operated by someone other than its owner and that 58 percent of the owner-operated farms are mortgaged. The keynote of this program should be security of tenure for the good operator. For some operators ownership is the answer, but owner-operatorship is not the only nor the best solution for all cases. One development that might help would be longer leases with provisions for compensation for unexhausted improvements in case of disturbance. The question of what to do must be given additional study and consideration, especially by groups of farmers and other citizens. Whatever solution is adopted should be accompanied by a program of community organization to insure the maintenance of a wholesome type of community life.

Appendix

Methodology. The procedure followed in selecting the sample localities and families is known as the purposive method of sampling. This method rests upon the theory that factors which are correlated can be used as controls in selecting a sample.³⁷ The three factors used as controls were nationality, percent of tenancy and percent on relief 1938.

Information collected from Agricultural Adjustment Administration records and Social Security Department records by the Works Project Administration under the direction of Dr. W. F. Kumlien, Rural Sociologist, South Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station, was available for each farm family in each of the seven counties included. In addition, the location of each family had been mapped. This information was extremely valuable, both in the selection of the sample and in making the interview.

Representativeness. The seven counties included were selected because they were the only counties for which the above mentioned information was then available. Tests of representativeness indicate, however, that the seven counties are probably quite representative of most of eastern South Dakota.³⁷

³⁷. The details of the sampling procedure and of tests of representativeness will be made available upon request.

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