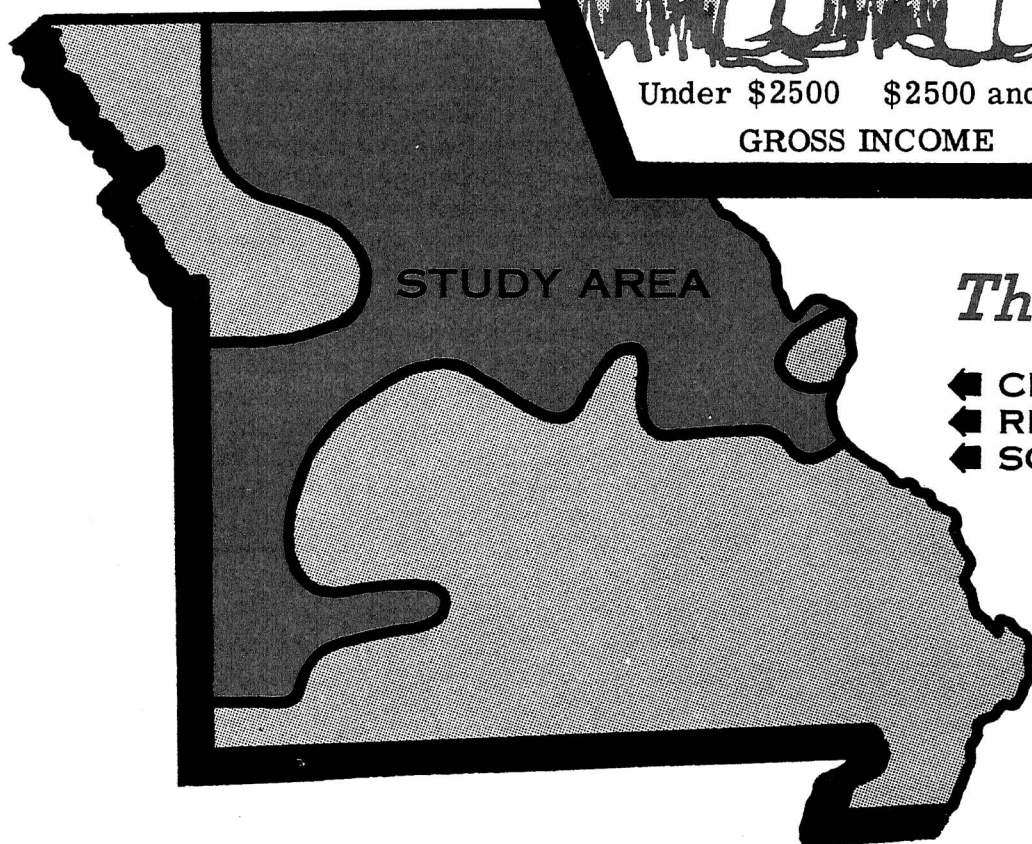
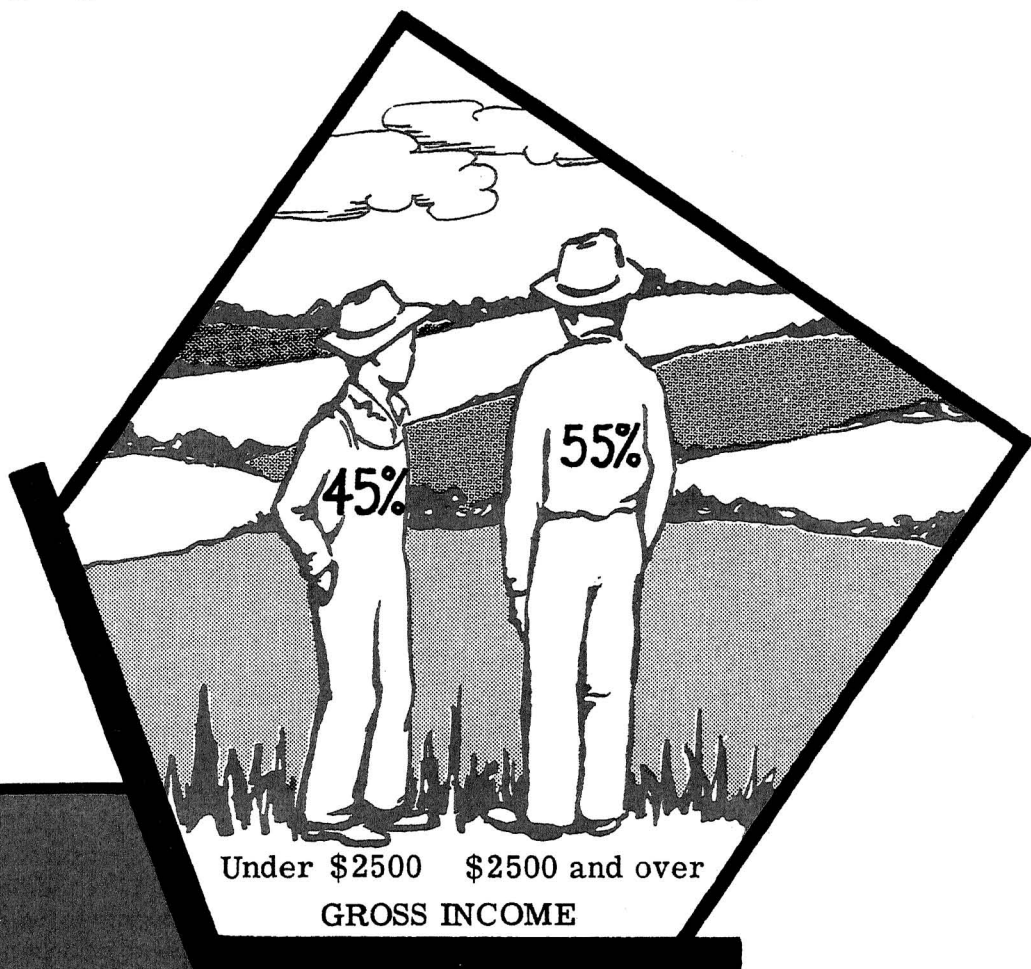


LOW INCOME FARMERS

IN GOOD FARMING AREAS



Their _____

- ◀ CHARACTERISTICS
- ◀ RESOURCES
- ◀ SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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This bulletin reports on Department of Rural Sociology
Research Project 29, Barriers to Information

Low Income Farmers in Good Farming Areas of Missouri

HERBERT F. LIONBERGER

INTRODUCTION

Low-income farmers have been a subject of concern to educators, social workers, and legislators for several decades. During depression years, relief for survival was a major concern. Today attention seems primarily directed to great disparities in income among farm families and to the consequences. The fact that many farmers and the rest of the nation are enjoying unprecedented prosperity tends to emphasize this concern. A feeling seems to be prevalent that low income status among a sizeable proportion of the nation's farm people is detrimental to the public interest. From an economic point of view, low-income farmers contribute little to the overall national product of food and fiber.

Incomes of this group are no more than necessary to provide the minimum essentials of subsistence. Children reared under such conditions are deprived of services and opportunities needed for proper development of individual capacities. This is further aggravated by the fact that low-income farmers ordinarily have more than the average number of children per family. Conditions which perpetuate under-utilization of human resources thus may exist. Also, major problems of financial support for such basic institutions as the school and church are created in areas where there is a high concentration of low-income farmers.

In a broader sense, the gross under-utilization of human resources on low-income farm units is not in accord with our cultural emphasis on efficiency of production. Perpetuation of conditions that keep people from reaching the achievement for which they are capable is not in accord with our ideals of equal opportunity and unobstructed upward mobility. Furthermore, continued low income of a sizeable segment of a farm population in the face of national prosperity is discomfoting to those who assume a high degree of perfectability in the operation of the free enterprise system. And it is a challenge to those who believe that gross under-utilization of human resources comes at too great a price.

Number and Distribution of Low-Income Farmers

In assessing the magnitude of the low-income farmers' situation and thus the problems they create, cognizance must be taken of the function of farm-

steads. Not all low-income farms are primarily intended to produce food and show large profits. Some low-income farms are simply residences of people who are engaged in some other occupation. Some are old folks homes and some are "play houses" for urbanites. As such, they cannot properly be judged by commercial farm standards, nor should they be regarded primarily as food producing units. People living on such farms may not be at a disadvantage. In fact, conditions existing on these farms with respect to food production standards may represent a good adjustment to the needs and situations of the individual families involved.

With this in mind, we observe that of Missouri's 3,924,653 people, 863,496 (or 22 percent) were classed as farmers by the 1950 U. S. Census. An estimated two-thirds of the families listed as farm residents had net incomes of less than \$2000 per year. Viewed from the standpoint of the 230,045 operating units in the state, 64 percent reported gross incomes of less than \$2500 per year. This includes part-time, residential, and abnormal farms, which account for 28 percent of the farms in the state. Only 164,586 of the 230,045 farms (72 percent) in the state were commercial farms. With minor exceptions, they represent units where the operator is actually engaged in farming as his major occupation. These are the people who make a living from farming and who produce the nation's food supply. Of the commercial farms, 49 percent had gross incomes of less than \$2500 per year, the figure arbitrarily taken by the United States Department of Agriculture as the upper limit of low-income status in a recent study. If these households are of average size for all farms in the state (3.54 persons), they would involve approximately 286,764 people, or 7 percent of the entire population of the state and 49 percent of the bonafide farmers.

Census data, however, permit little further refinement with respect to function of low-income farms or expectations of the farm operators who operate them. If we may assume that the hopes of the farm people themselves are to be taken as a partial guide to the solution of problems of low income, both function of farms and wishes of operators are important considerations. For more complete answers we must look beyond U. S. Census data.

With commercial farms as the definition of farmer

for this study, further observation of census data readily reveals that low income status is highly concentrated in the southern part of the state where, with the exception of the fertile southeast lowlands, land resources are an important limiting factor to the improvement of farming. It should be observed, however, that low income is by no means confined to the parts of the state where land quality is below average. In 25 of the 44 counties north of the Missouri River 40 percent or more of the commercial farm operators reported gross farm incomes of less than \$2500 (perhaps no more than \$1500 net) in 1950.

If the major thing that dooms many farmers to low-income status is limited land resources, as some insist, land quality then becomes the crux of the problem. If, however, as we find, there are many low-income farmers living on land capable of high production, we are immediately led to suspect that what the farmer does to and with the land is also important.

Although no clear cut cases of one or the other type of causation are to be found in actual practice, relative differences are such that appropriate remedial action needs to vary accordingly.

Description of Samples

With the possibility in mind that there may be an inclination to dismiss low-income farmers as inevitable products of poor land, a sample was selected for study from the better farming areas of the state and proportionately from the good and poor land within the areas represented. See Figure 1 for the areas studied. A total of 459 farm operators and wives were selected and interviewed in 1946.

Since the study was primarily concerned with diffusion and use of farm information, sample selection was done to best serve that purpose. Low-income status in relation to persons living nearby was deemed more important to the diffusion of farm information

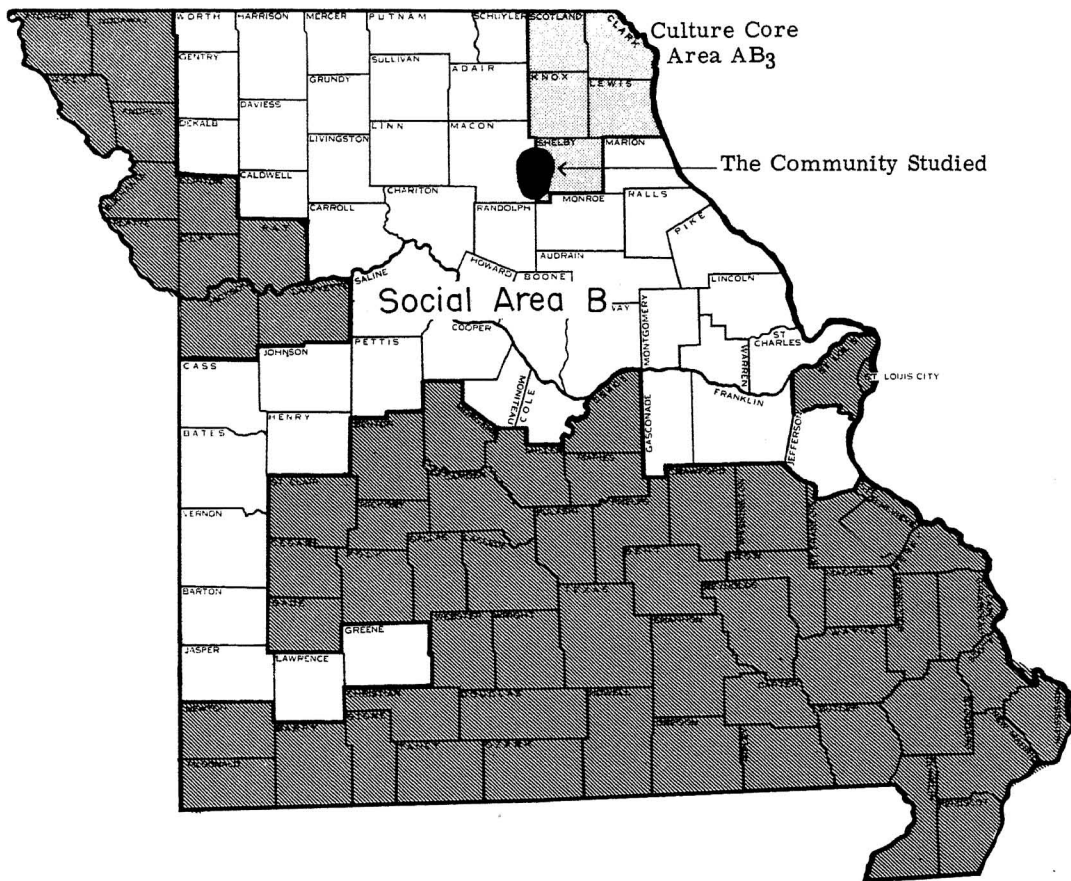


Fig. 1—Social Area B, Culture Core Area AB₃, and the community studied.

than low-income status in relation to farmers living some place else in the state, so the lower third in the immediate locality was used as a definition of low income. This meant that the farmers in the sample had low incomes in relation to their friends and neighbors. The median gross farm income they reported for the crop year 1945 was \$763. A few (6 percent) had gross incomes of \$2000 or over. They may have represented a mistaken judgment of local residents who rated them in the lower third in the sample selection procedure.

If a certain figure had been set as the upper limit of low-income status, and if the limit had been set low enough, a sample would have been taken almost exclusively from what have been traditionally regarded as problem areas. Concentration of attention on such areas tends to divert attention from other areas where low-income problems also exist and where the prospects for improvement are much better.

In order to intensify analysis of conditions related to the situation of low-income status, particularly with respect to the acceptance and use of new farm practices, attention was directed in 1950 to a single community from the same general area as the 1946 study. In 1950, a total of 279 farm operators and wives out of a total of approximately 285 bonafide farm families living in the community were intensively interviewed regarding factors bearing on the acceptance and use of farm information. Although the median gross income of \$3424 reported was considerably above that reported by the U. S. Census for either the county or the area of which the community was a part, other considerations seemed to indicate that the community could be regarded as roughly representative of the 17-county area in Northeast Missouri illustrated in Map 2. The nature of the data did not permit separation of farmers at the \$2500 gross income level as was done in a recent publication by the United States Department of Agriculture. Instead, \$2000 was used. On this basis, 70 farmers were sorted out for special treatment as low-income farmers.

In both studies reported in this bulletin the definition of operator or farmer closely parallels the 1950 U. S. Census definition of commercial farmer. All

farmers not actually engaged in farming as their chief occupation or who, because of age or other considerations, were not actively engaged in farming, were excluded from the sample.

SITUATION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF LOW-INCOME FARMERS

Material Resources

The material resources of low-income farmers were limited. Far fewer owned tractors and somewhat fewer had automobiles and/or trucks than other farmers in the same locality. They operated farms which were much smaller than those of their more prosperous neighbors and were handicapped by poor roads.

Also, the farm wife had fewer conveniences and resources to work with in the house. Despite disadvantages in these respects, most of the low-income farmers owned their homes. Percentages for the area sample and for the community were 70 and 80, respectively. It will be observed that this is not greatly different than for other farmers living in the same locality.

Age

While low-income farmers averaged considerably older than other farmers, some were young men just getting started as farmers. Although the problems of the latter may have been somewhat different from those who were a little older and better established in farming, both were actively engaged in farming. Therefore, both are likely to be interested in improving farm operations. For older farmers, this may not be so important. By the age of 60, they are likely either to have cut down farm operations or to be looking to the time when they will. Matters of health, security, and adjustment to declining physical energies are likely to be more important considerations than improvement of farming operations.

For that reason, age 60 is used as a dividing point in this study for the consideration of selected factors related to the improvement of the situation of low-income farmers.

	Farmers in Area B		Farmers in the Community	
	Low-Income	All	Low-Income	All Others
Average Size of Farm (acres)	113	131	100	237
Median Gross Farm Income (dollars)	763	1288	1054	4350
Percent Owning:				
Their Own Farms	70	74	80	80
Tractor	22	38	54	89
Automobile or Truck	79	94	89	99
Percent Living on All-weather Roads	41	62	47	82

Age (Years)	Farmers in Area B		Farmers in the Community	
	Low-Income	All	Low-Income	All Others
Median	56	52	61	41
Percent:				
Under 35	11	13	4	23
35-64	65	67	66	68
65 & Over	23	20	30	7

Schooling

From the standpoint of years schooling completed, low-income farmers were not at a great disadvantage. Median number of years completed by the area sample of low-income farmers and the entire farm population of the area in 1945 favored the latter by only 0.6 of a year. The difference in median years of school completed by low-income farmers and all farmers in the community was likewise small. Although small in all cases, it will be observed that the proportion completing some high school or college training was considerably greater for high-income farmers than for those with low incomes.

Years Schooling Completed	Farmers in Area B		Farmers in the Community	
	Low-Income	All	Low-Income	All Others
Median	8.4	8.1	8.4	8.9
Percent Completing:				
8 years or less	80	74	74	55
Some High School	17	19	23	36
Some College	1	6	1	7

Perhaps more important than the number of school-years completed is the kind of schooling which they had received. Only 3 percent of the low-income farmers in the area sample had vocational agriculture training in high school and none of those in the community low-income group. In the community group 10 percent of the higher income farmers had vocational agriculture training. A comparable figure was not available for the higher income farmers in the area sample. It thus appears that kind of schooling is much more important than the amount of schooling. With respect to vocational agriculture training, low-income farmers were at a disadvantage. Despite their own lack of schooling, they were favorably disposed to education for farming. Over 46 percent of the low-income farmers in the area sample recommended a high school education for boys expecting to farm, 30 percent recommended a college education and another 8 percent advised "all they can get."

Although low-income farmers with little schooling were less favorable to specialized training as a means of preparation for farming than those with

more schooling, they were generally in close agreement and favorable.

Percent Who Think:	Low-Income Farmers in Area B	Farmers in the Community Low-Income	All Others
	Vocational Agriculture is Valuable Training for Farming	69	80
4-H Club Work is Valuable Training for Farming	89	76	88

All this means that low-income farmers, although they themselves had little specialized training for farming, generally were in high agreement regarding its value. This is in a sense reflected in the amount of schooling obtained by the sons and daughters of low-income farmers. The amount they received was comparable to that obtained by sons and daughters of more prosperous farmers.

Community Prestige

People invariably rate associates on the basis of the possession or non-possession of characteristics or attributes considered important. Some are rated high and are referred to as "upper crust," "those who really amount to something," etc. At the bottom are those who "don't amount to much." The rank and file who fall in between are regarded as "good ordinary folk."

When ratings of this kind were made by local judges and averaged on the basis of a scale ranging from 1.5 at the high end and 7.5 at the low, low-income farmers fell quite distinctly below the average in the community.

Prestige Rating*	Farmers in the Community	
	Low-Income	All Others
Average	5	4
Percent:		
Under 3 (High Prestige)	1	12
3-4.9 (Middle Range)	46	75
5 & Over (Low Prestige)	53	14

*Based on a scale ranging from 1.5 to 7.4 with low scores representing high prestige

Prestige differences are important because of the social distances which they create. There was a correlation between prestige and technological competence. Since those at the bottom of the prestige scale may not feel free to communicate with those at the top, it is possible for low-income farmers to become somewhat secluded from the more competent personal sources of farm information. This may become especially impor-

tant where high dependence is placed upon other farmers as sources of information about new ideas in farming and advice concerning the adoption of new farm practices.

Attitude Toward Farming

Low-income farmers are farmers by choice and tradition and may be ill prepared to do anything else. Despite frequent complaints about hard times and injustices, 19 out of 20 farmers in the area sample said they liked to farm and three-fourths of them said they would choose farming again if they had it to do over. In both the sample area and the community, low-income farmers had been farming virtually all of their lives and probably were ill prepared to do anything else.

Number of Years Farming	Farmers in the Community		
	Low-Income Farmers in Area B	Low-Income	All Others
Median	30	32	22
Percent:			
Less than 10 Years	14	19	23
10-34 Years	46	40	54
35 or more Years	39	41	21

Since the search for economic opportunity off the farm generally means movement to the city, willingness to move and the conditions under which movement would be made, are important factors in considering alternative opportunities. Reluctance of operators to move was also indicative of the esteem placed upon farming as an occupation. The low-income farmers in the area sample were inclined to give reasons for their satisfaction with farming as an occupation that probably could not be matched elsewhere. Approximately 46 percent said they would not consider a move to the city, 2 percent said they would move for such non-monetary reasons as "poor health" or to "educate their children." A large proportion of those who specified that they might consider a move to the city indicated incomes as a condition for moving that probably could not be met in view of their qualifications for jobs available in the city. For all practical purposes, at least 70 percent of the low-income farmers in the area sample would not consider moving to the city.

MEMBERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL GROUPS

Formal Groups

Formal social groups are the product of differentiated and specialized interests. They provide for elected officers, written regulations, and a program for

promoting group interests. Membership in them is an indication of the interests and orientation of an individual.

Percent Reporting Membership In:	Farmers in the Community		
	Low-Income Farmers in Area B	Low Income	All Others
Church	65	37	52
One or More Farm Organizations	31	37	70

Since such groups represent something of a departure from informal patterns of association which are largely confined to the immediate locality, low-income farmers were less likely to be members. The nearest to an exception to the rule was church membership, which relates to an organization dedicated primarily to the preservation of traditional religious beliefs. As such, it is somewhat different from other formal organizations. Even though more low-income farmers belonged to a church than to any other group, fewer were members compared to their more prosperous neighbors.

In the aggregate, far fewer low-income farmers than other farmers were members of farm organizations. In terms of membership in specific farm organizations, the Missouri Farmers' Association led the list with 26 percent of the low-income area sample and 24 percent of the community group reporting affiliation. Fourteen percent of the low-income farmers in the area sample were Farm Bureau members but none in the community sample were so affiliated. Membership in other major farm organizations was nil. Thus there may be a real question of how well any farm organization is able to speak for low-income farmers in the areas studied.

Amount and kind of social participation is a further indication of an individual's orientation. The smaller the locality from which group membership is drawn the more limited contacts are likely to be. Conversely, the broader the area from which membership is drawn, the greater the possibility for diversity in ideas obtained. Social participation is also an indication of interest in things and people outside of the immediate locality. When low-income farmer participation in formal organizations is classified in this manner, it is plain to see that low-income farmers are less interested in persons and things outside the immediate locality than their more prosperous neighbors. Seventy percent of the low-income farm households reported no participation in formal organizations drawing membership from the entire community and 99 percent reported no participation in organizations with membership outside the local community.

Social Participation Rating of Farm Operator and Wife in Formal Organizations Drawing Membership from:	Farmers in the Community	
	Low-Income	All Others
The Immediate Neighborhood or Locality (Median)	1.6	5.2
Beyond the Neighborhood but within the Community (Median)	0.7	2.3
Beyond the Community (Percent reporting none)	99	84

Confinement of personal contacts to the immediate locality is particularly important to the diffusion and use of farm information, especially where heavy reliance is placed upon other farmers as sources of farm information. This we will see is the case with low-income farmers.

Informal Groups

Intimate association on a primary group basis is common to all people but the manner of selecting associates varies. The more traditional method is on a locality (neighborhood) or kinship basis. Actually, there have been times when a farmer could hardly escape membership and social participation on a locality or neighborhood basis. However, today with great diversity in interests and socio-economic status and with facilities for moving about freely, choice of intimate associates is likely to be more selective in nature. Associates are likely to be chosen on a special interest and personal acceptability basis and are likely to be more scattered in geographic space.

Such selectivity of associates being more characteristic of upper income groups, low-income farmers may be expected to remain more a part of what remains of neighborhood life and neighborhood orienta-

tion than the middle and upper class farmer.

This holds important implications for reaching low-income farmers through social clique organization. Low-income farmers are less likely to be clique members and therefore less likely to be influenced by clique leaders. They ordinarily do not benefit by the facilitating influence that cliques have on the inter-personal exchange of farm information.

SOURCES OF FARM INFORMATION

Government Agencies

Low-income farmers make comparatively little direct use of government agencies as sources of farm information. Of particular importance in this respect is the small number using the services of the Agricultural Extension Service and of the local Vocational Agricultural Department. Almost five times as many low-income farmers in the community study used the almanac as a source of information as the county agent. Percentages were 6 and 29, respectively. Twenty-six percent of those in the area sample got help from the county agent, but no more than 16 percent of the farmers in either group used any other government agency as a source of information. Thus, low-income farmers are relatively isolated from the agencies specifically designed and operated for dissemination of farm information. For the most part, farm information comes to them second-hand.

Mass Media

The proportion of low-income farmers using the mass media was much larger than of those using gov-

Sources From Which Farm Information Was Obtained	Low-Income Farmers in Area B (Percent)	Farmers in the Community	
		Low-Income (Percent)	All Others (Percent)
Government Agencies			
County Agent	26	6	39
Vocational Agricultural Teacher	2	7	24
Vocational Agricultural Department*	--	14	56
Soil Conservation Service	--	3	21
PMA (ASC) Office	7	16	39
FHA Office	7	1	4
Intimate Associates			
Friends & Neighbors	64	79	94
Own Children	9	10	17
Mass Media			
Newspapers	64	51	69
Farm Journals	63	53	83
Radio	52	47	46
Almanac	--	29	16
Other			
Farm Bulletins	24	10	28
Balanced Farm Action Day	--	6	21
Commercial Sources	21	4	2
Farm Meetings	11	3	8

*Includes Adult Farm School and Veteran Teachers

ernment agencies. In this respect, they were not greatly different from other farmers in the community. Outside of friends and neighbors (mostly other farmers) the mass media were the most universally used means of getting farm information. Approximately half of the low-income farmers in the community got information from newspapers, farm journals, and the radio. The proportion in the area sample who used these media as a means of obtaining information also was much higher than the proportion using government agencies. In the interpretation of these data it should be noted that the usefulness of the mass media is primarily limited to creating interest in and in getting first information about new practices to farm operators. The knowledge gained ordinarily is not sufficient for a decision for or against adoption except perhaps for the simplest practices. Other sources are generally relied upon for additional information before a decision is finally reached. Perhaps trusted friends and associates are most frequently used for this purpose. For those reluctant to change, the judgment of trusted fellow farmers is regarded as more useful than the advice of professional agents and agencies.

Farm Operators

Other farmers are the most universally used of all sources of information, and are probably sought most frequently as sources of additional information about new ideas learned of elsewhere. Also, for low-income farmers, they often represent the first source of information about new ideas. Those who are critical of the new and therefore reluctant to change, will often seek and accept from friends and neighbors advice which would not be accepted from any other source.

This may be because other farmers are able to perform certain functions that other media cannot provide, or at least not so well. Often having tried the new practice themselves, they are able to give first-hand advice concerning its usefulness. In trying the new, they assume risks that many low-income farmers feel they cannot afford to take themselves. Also, they

are in a position to give advice concerning the adaptability or usefulness of a practice to a particular situation, namely that of the seeker. Whatever the reason, indications are that the counsel of trusted friends and associates, more frequently than anything else, is the main reason for the final decision to try a new practice. This tends to be true even for farmers with higher incomes.

With such heavy reliance placed on other farmers as sources of information, it is important that channels of communication remain open and that those sought as sources be competent to give advice. Local norms of neighborly behavior, of course, dictate that farm information be shared with neighbors, but channels of communication on a person-to-person basis do not remain entirely clear. Low-income farmers, being of lower socio-economic status than their more prosperous neighbors, may become reluctant to communicate freely with persons at the top of the socio-economic status scale. Also, there is a possibility that social cliques may impose barriers to the communication of ideas. Although more middle and upper class farmers are members of social cliques than low-income farmers (23 and 11 percent, respectively) their obstructive influence on patterns of communication does not seem great. Neither was there any marked indication that social distances along the income scale were so large as to preclude communication between low and high income farmers. This does not mean that low-income farmers did not feel conscious of their economically inferior position and of their inability to do many things that those with higher incomes were doing. On the contrary, there was considerable evidence that this feeling did prevail.

Conclusions concerning competence of persons sought as sources of farm information had to be drawn exclusively from the community study and, therefore, may not apply equally to all sections of the state. Perhaps most directly indicative of competence is the state of farm technology existing on the farms of persons sought for advice. In so far as it is possible to

Improved Farm Practice Used	Farmers in the Community	
	Low- Income (Percent)	All Others (Percent)
Sodium Fluoride Treatment for Worms in Hogs	13	26
Ladino Clover	9	17
Commercial Fertilizer	43	88
Nitrate Fertilizer	1	16
Rock Phosphate	4	27
Fertilizer Applied According to Soil Test	4	24
Recommended Variety of Soybeans	--	--
Chemical Spray to Control Weeds	16	31
New and Recommended Oat Varieties	27	53
Terraces or Contour Farming	6	27
Methoxychlor Spray for Dairy Cattle	1	6

judge from comparative improved practice ratings which considered both use of selected new farm practices and length of time they had been used, the farmers who were named as sources rated much higher than low-income farmers who named them as sources. These ratings averaged 8 and 20, respectively.

Also of significance with respect to competence of persons sought for advice are the sources from which they obtained their information. Of particular importance is the use of the sources specifically constituted to disseminate farm information. A reasonable assumption is that farm operators who have made use of such sources are likely to be better qualified to give advice than those who have not. The following figures suggest much greater competence for those sought as sources than for the low-income farm operators who sought their advice. Only 6 percent of the low-income farmers sought advice directly from the county agent compared to 69 percent of the farm operators whom they sought as personal sources of farm information. Corresponding percentages for the vocational agriculture teacher were 7 and 41, respectively. Other proportions concerning comparative use of government agencies as sources were similar. (See Figure 2).

Much the same pattern of use occurred with respect to farm bulletins and mass media except the differences were not as great. Actually a few more low-income farmers than the operators sought as personal sources secured farm information by means of the radio. The proportion of low-income farmers who got information from newspapers and farm journals was sizeable in comparison to those getting information from bulletins and government agencies but in each case the operators they sought as sources were more frequent users of these media. (See Figure 3.)

Social participation in formal groups offers another clue for inferring competence to give advice. Extensive participation in such groups puts the farmer in a position to get ideas more frequently than otherwise would be the case. Participation of persons sought as sources was many times greater than that of the low-income farmers who sought them as sources, again giving evidence of greater potential competence.

Thus, all indications are that low-income farmers look up the competence scale in picking personal

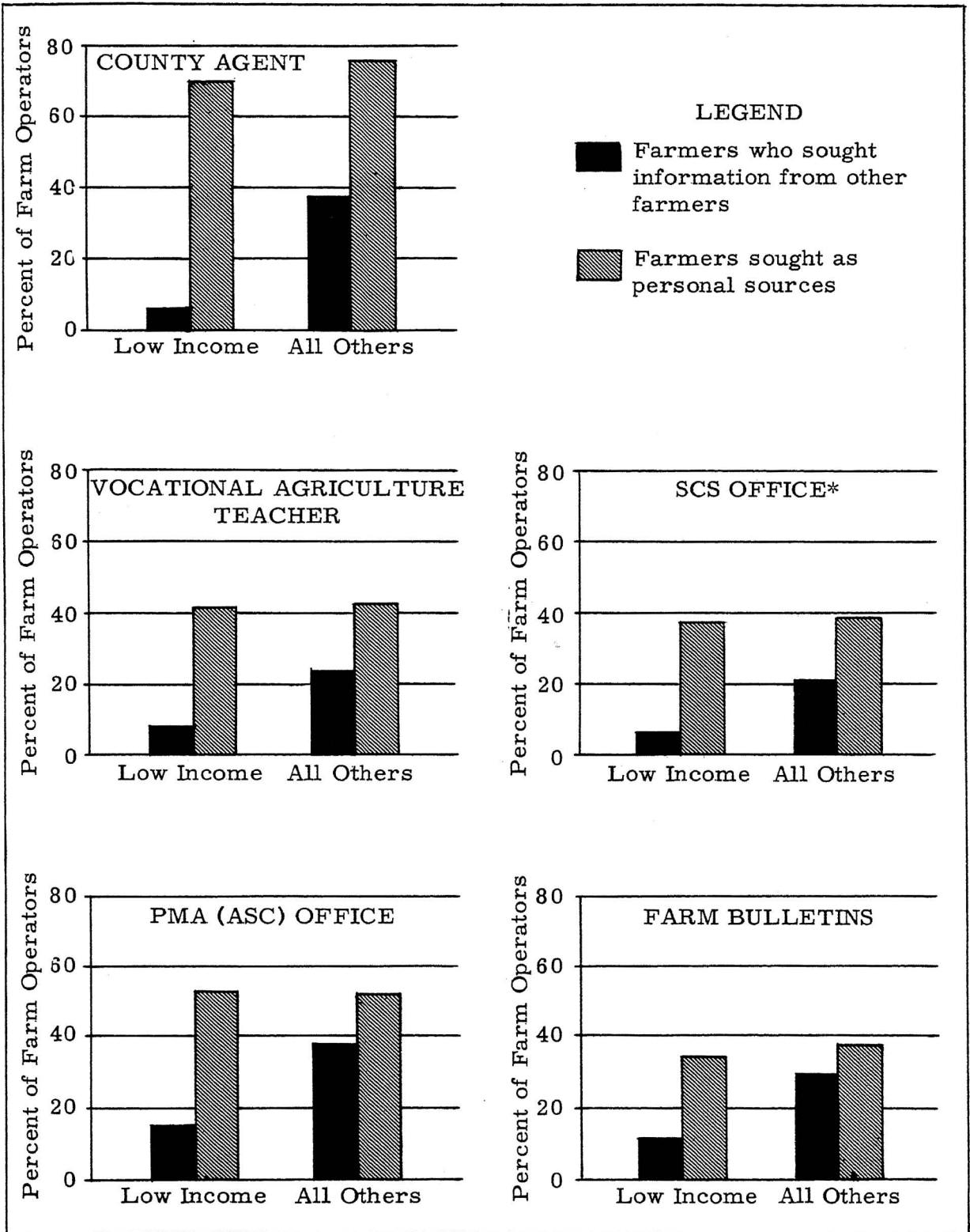
sources of farm information. This suggests that they are in a position to, and probably do, get much competent advice through interpersonal channels of communication.

Since farm operators who are in the process of retirement, or who are contemplating retirement (here regarded as age 60 and over) have problems somewhat different from those who are still actively engaged in farming, a distinction was made on that basis. The older low-income farm operators apparently were inclined to select somewhat less competent persons than the younger ones as sources of farm information, although the sources were far superior to themselves. For example, the average improved farm practice rating of farm operators sought as personal sources of farm information by low-income farmers under 60 years of age was 23 compared to 18 for those 60 years of age and over. Also, the younger low-income farmers were more likely than the older ones to select other farmers who did use government agencies as sources. This is understandable in view of the limited value of new farm technology for those looking forward to a decline in farm operations. Security in old age becomes a relatively more important consideration.

Some significant differences between low-income farm operators and those sought as personal sources of farm information were apparent in other more general characteristics. Low-income farmers in the community who averaged 61 years of age sought as sources of farm information farm operators who were ten years younger than themselves. Income-wise, they sought operators who had an average gross income six times the size of their own. Also, low-income farmers who rated much below average in community prestige sought farm operators who rated average or above. Variation in years schooling between low-income farmers and farmers sought as sources varied only slightly.

Although there was an inclination for low-income farmers both over and under 60 to seek farm operators in a more advantageous position than themselves, older ones were inclined to select those more like themselves, particularly with respect to age and income.

Factors Selected for Comparison	Low-Income Farmers	Those They Sought as Sources	All Other Farmers	Those They Sought as Sources
Average Age in Years	61	50	46	49
Gross Farm Income in Dollars	1054	6200	4250	7479
Median Years School Completed	8.4	8.9	8.9	8.9
Average Prestige Rating (High score represents low Prestige)	5.8	3.6	4.0	3.3
Average Improved Practice Rating	8.0	20.4	15.5	23.7



*Office not available to 15 percent of the farmers in the community.

Fig. 2—Proportion of farm operators in the community who used the designated sources of farm information.

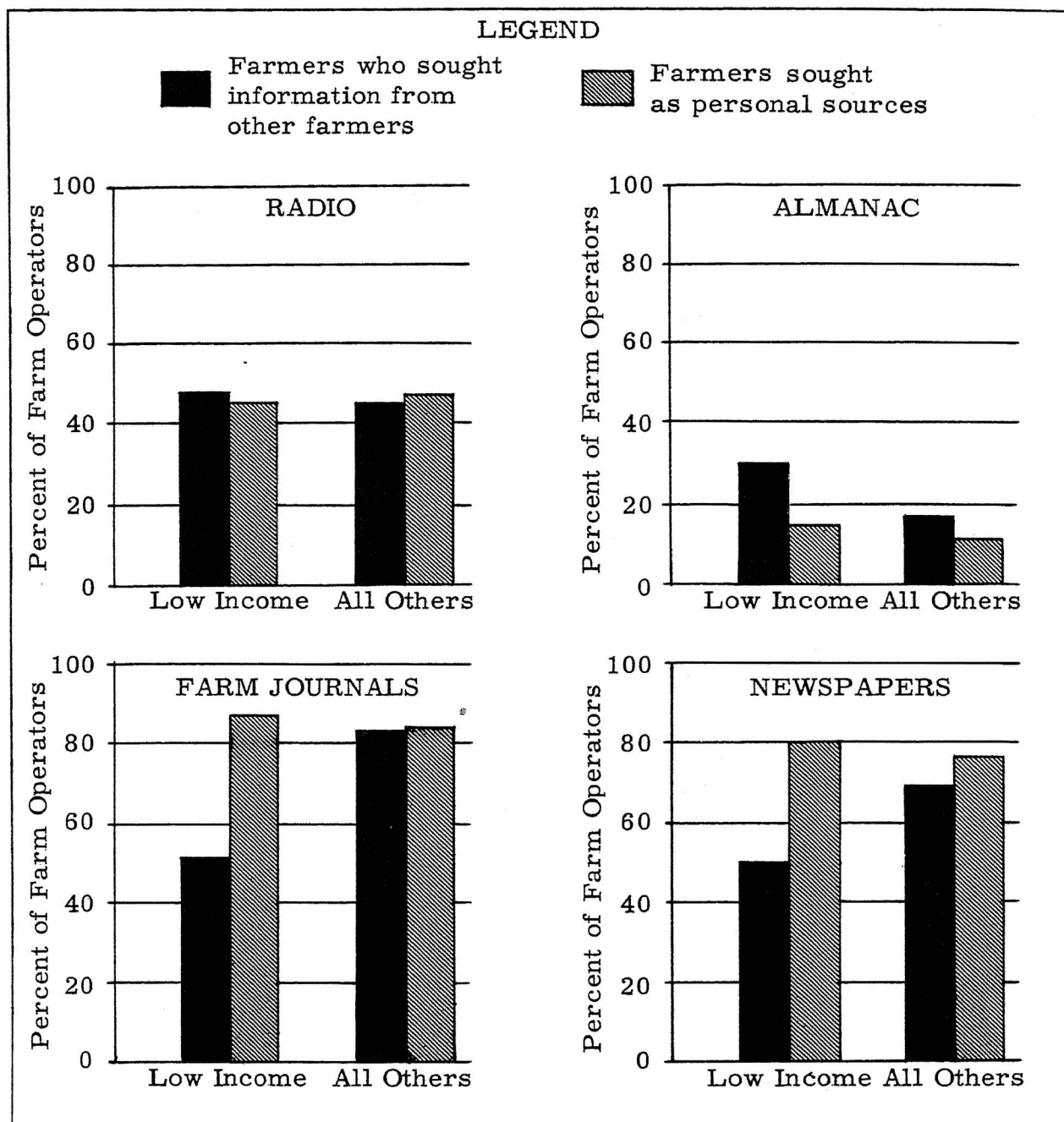


Fig. 3—Proportion of farm operators in the community who used the designated mass media as sources of farm information.

Local Influentials

In all communities there are some farmers who are sought more as sources of farm information than others and to whom other farmers defer in their thinking. Such persons hold key positions in the interpersonal pattern of communication and are in a position to wield more than their proportionate share of influence.

By asking farm operators specifically whom they talked to most frequently about matters related to farming, it was possible to determine those most sought as personal sources of farm information. Twenty-two farm operators out of a total of 279 interviewed in the community were designated in that manner. Since it has been shown elsewhere that these 22 farmers possessed distinctive characteristics with

respect to the diffusion and use of farm information, they have been and are here regarded as local influentials.

In general, they operated on a much larger scale and demonstrated much greater technological competence as farmers than the farmers who sought their advice, particularly the low-income farmers. Also, they were more broadly oriented socially, were less resistant to change, and made much greater use of direct sources of farm information than the farmers who sought their advice.

Approximately 34 percent of the low-income farmers got information directly from one of these influentials and over 10 percent got information from more than one. About the same proportion of other farmers obtained farm information in a like manner. Thus the same farmers who were in demand as personal sources of farm information for other farmers were in demand for low-income farmers. In other words, social distances between low-income farmers and at least some high-income farmers with influence were not great enough to produce serious barriers to the communication of ideas related to farming.

HOW LOW-INCOME FARMERS RATE SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Sources Most Valued

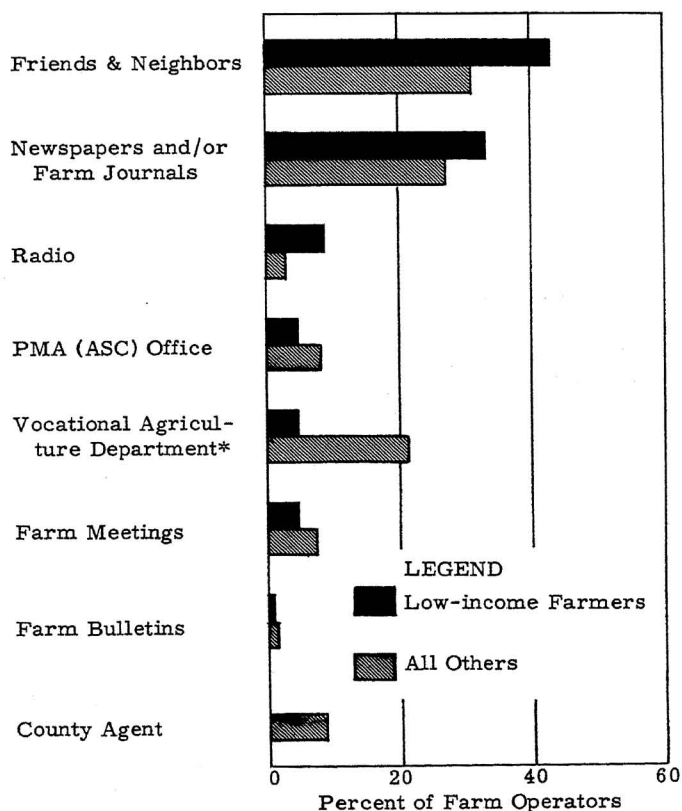
When questioned regarding the sources of information considered most useful, low-income farmers rated friends and neighbors at the top of the list by a wide margin. Newspapers and magazines were rated second in importance. All government agencies and agents were assigned positions low on the list. These ratings were somewhat in contrast to farmers with higher incomes. They also rated friends and neighbors at the top of the list but by a considerably smaller margin. Newspapers and magazines were rated second by a very close margin. Where low-income farmers differed most was in the relatively small proportion naming government agencies and agents as most valued sources, particularly the local vocational agriculture teacher. (See Figure 4).

In general, these data indicate the high premium placed upon other farmers as sources of farm information by low-income farmers and the rather low evaluation placed upon government agencies and agents as sources. This does not necessarily mean that they do not recognize the value of such sources for other farmers but that they themselves have not felt a need for the services offered.

Sources for Specific Purposes

Data concerning where low-income farmers got most of their farm information for specific purposes were limited to two rather universally used practices, namely, use of new soybean varieties and commercial fertilizers. In both cases, low-income farmers indicated friends and neighbors by a wide margin as the most used sources. Other farmers (those with higher incomes), although listing friends and neighbors first in importance, were much more inclined to name government agents or agencies, particularly the county agent and the vocational agriculture teacher, as the most used source. This was particularly true for information concerning the use of commercial fertilizers. (See Figures 5 and 6). Information required, in this case, undoubtedly involved more complexities than information needed about new soybean varieties. Also, the information needed was less precisely associated with specific farm enterprises. There is some research evidence to indicate that less reliance is placed on friends and neighbors and more on county agents and other like sources as the information required becomes

Fig. 4—Sources of farm information considered most useful by farm operators in the community.



*Includes vocational agriculture teacher, veteran teachers, and adult farm school

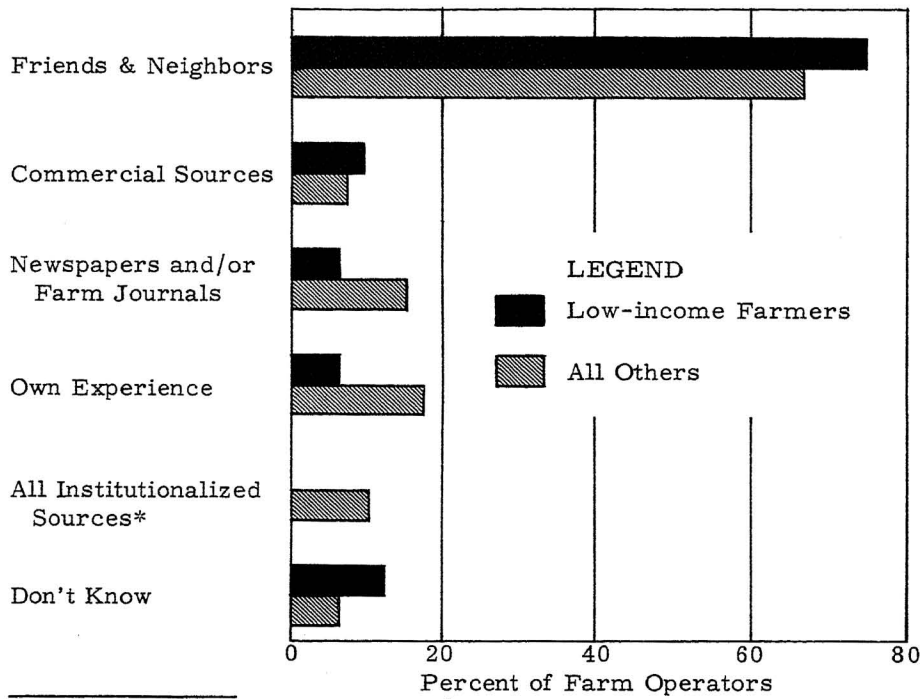
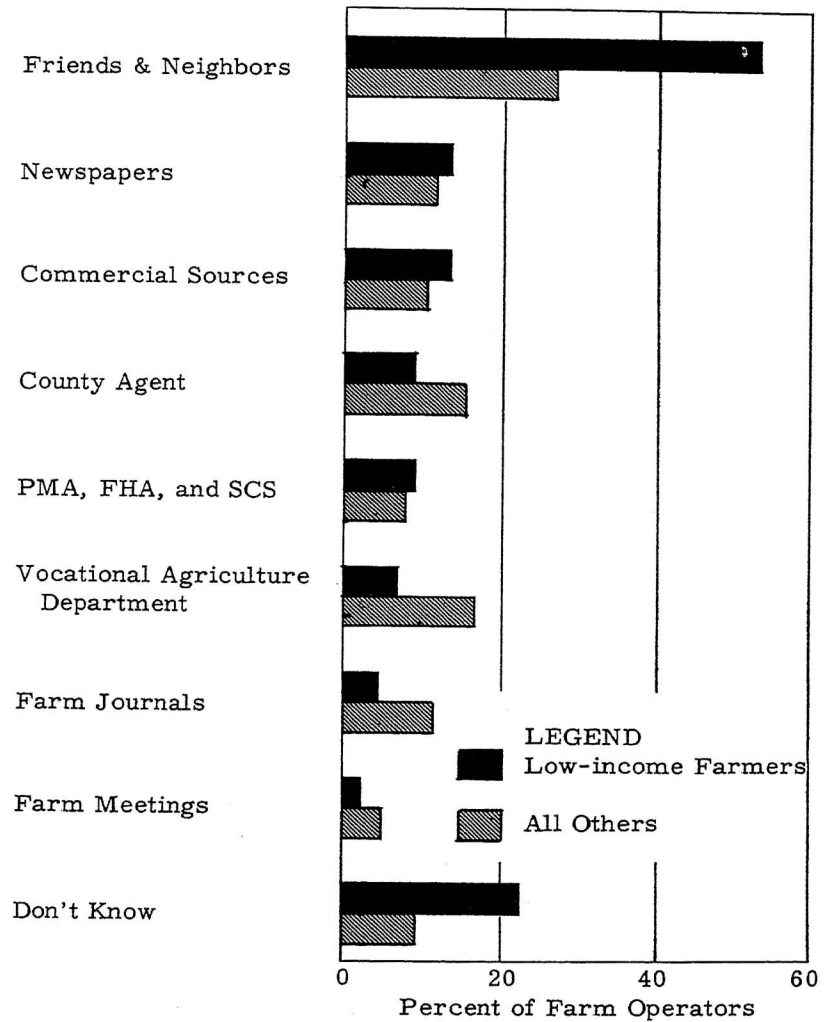


Fig. 5—Sources used most by farm operators in the community for information about new soybean varieties. (Based on those growing soybeans.)

*Includes County Agent, Vocational Agriculture Department, College of Agriculture, and farm bulletins

Fig. 6—Sources used most by farm operators in the community for information about commercial fertilizers. (Based on those using commercial fertilizers.)

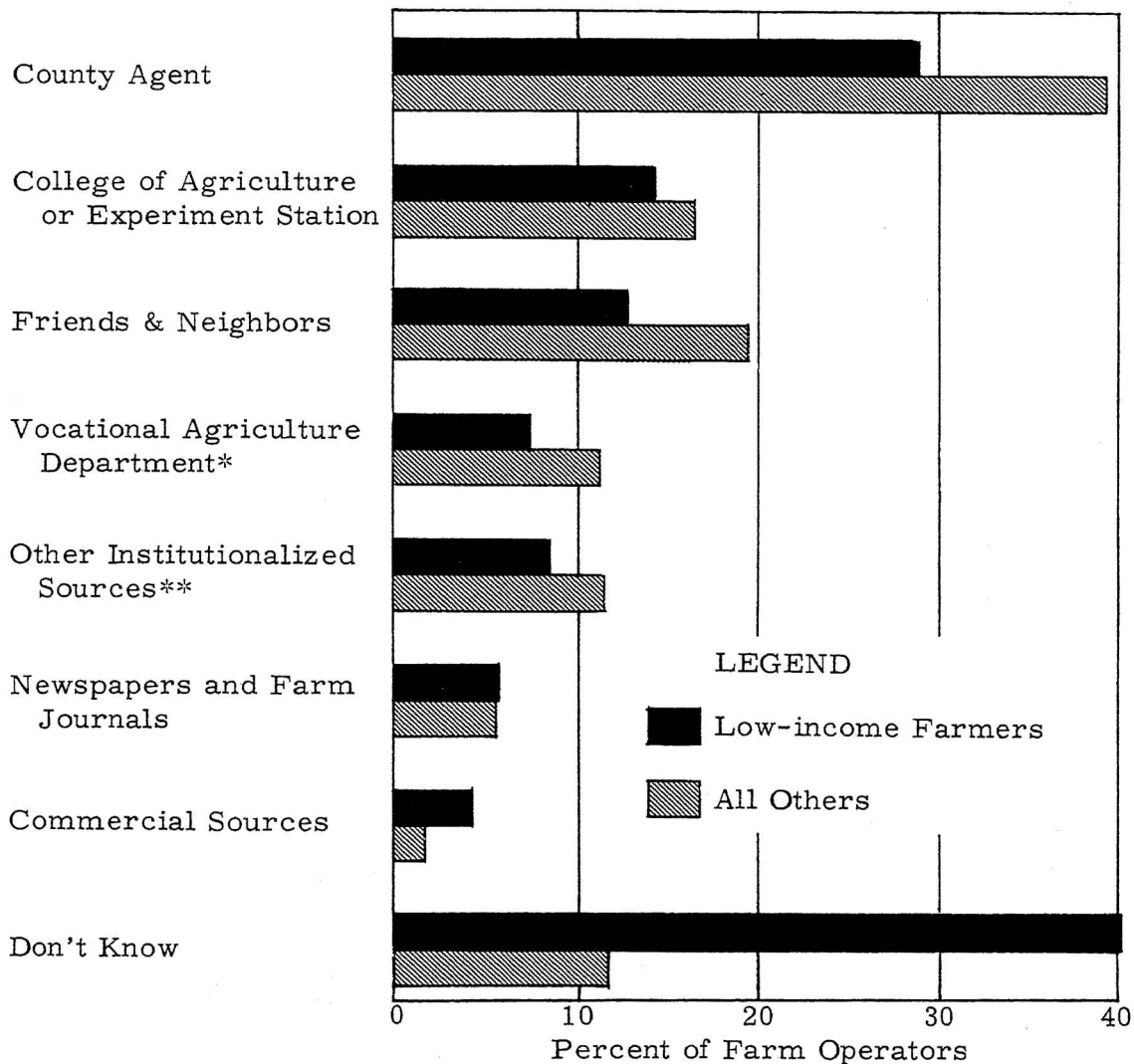


more technical in nature. Even in the case of low-income farmers this tendency was in evidence.

When the low-income farmers were asked where they would go for more information about three hypothetical problems likely to arise, considerable variation was apparent. Also, their responses to these questions were more like those of other farmers than their responses regarding sources actually used.

In general, there was an inclination to name commercial and professional sources in preference to the friends and neighbors who were so universally named in actual practice. This could be interpreted to mean

that low-income farmers recognize fewer problems requiring specialized attention than the more prosperous farmers, but when they do, they may be inclined to go to much the same sources as other farmers. Considerable significance may be attached to the fact that for some problems at least, both low-income and high-income farmers may be inclined to go to commercialized sources, typified in this case by the druggist, hatcheryman, and elevator operator. It therefore appears that some commercial agents may be in a strategic position to play an important role in the dissemination of information. (See Figure 7, 8, and 9).



* Includes vocational agriculture teacher, veteran teachers, and adult farm school

**Includes PMA, FHA and SCS Office and farm bulletins

Fig. 7—Where farm operators in the community would go for more information about ladino clover, if needed.

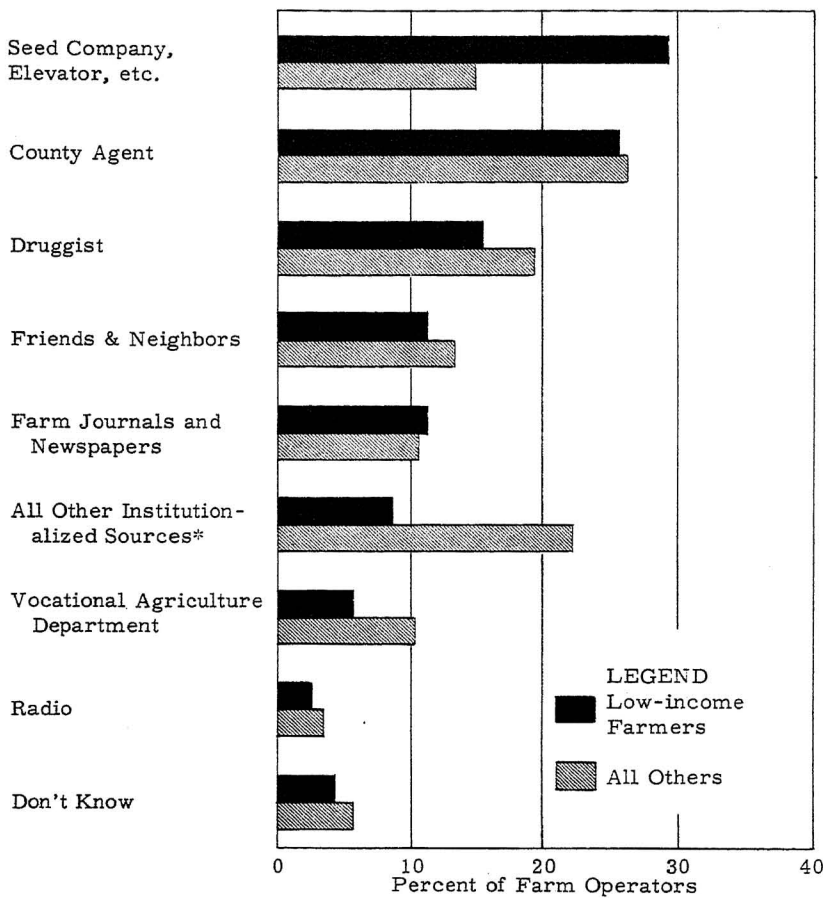
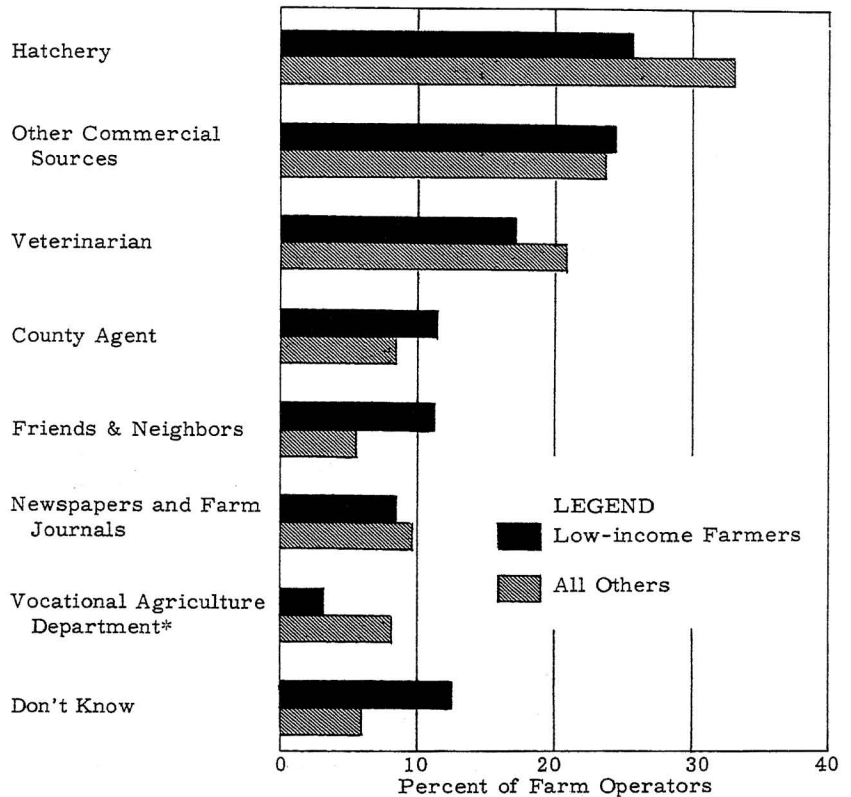


Fig. 8—Where farm operators in the community would go for more information about the control of garden insects, if needed.

*Includes College of Agriculture, government agencies, and farm bulletins

Fig. 9—Where farm operators in the community would go for more information about the control of chicken diseases, if needed.



*Includes vocational agriculture teachers, veteran teachers, and adult farm school

Another point worthy of note is the degree of rationality demonstrated in the choice of sources which would be used if needed for specific purposes. This is manifest in the variation of choices made for specific purposes and in the comparatively high proportion naming the county agent and other first hand sources.

From data regarding actual use of sources one must conclude that friends and neighbors, more than any other, are most used and most valued. Mass media, particularly newspapers and farm journals, were rated second in importance. However, for situations where farmers would be put in a position of needing additional and more or less immediate information, more direct sources were preferred and probably would be used.

FACTORS CONDITIONING THE IMPROVEMENT OF FARM OPERATIONS

Barriers to Change

Failure to use many improved practices which characterized farming operations of low-income farmers cannot be taken as conclusive proof of non-receptivity to new developments in farming. It may not be possible to put certain new changes into effect, either because somebody else makes the decisions or because the necessary resources are lacking. Also, the farmers who are approaching the age of retirement naturally will not be as interested in costly improvements in farming operations as the younger ones. With 40 percent or more of the farmers of both areas studied having attained the age of 60 or more years, age was an important barrier to desirable improvement of farming operations.

Seventy-three percent of the low-income farmers in the community appeared to be either indifferent to new developments in farming or to give during the interview an impression of self-sufficiency. Only one-fourth of them appeared to be receptive to or to be actively seeking farm information. In contrast, 72 percent of the other farmers indicated varying degrees of receptivity.

In an attempt to detect psychological barriers to change in farm practices, none were in evidence among 19 percent of the low-income farmers in contrast to 33 percent among those with higher incomes. The barrier most in evidence was declining farm operations with 46 percent of the low-income farmers indicating this as a barrier. Twenty-seven percent indicated lack of finance and 16 percent gave evidence of feeling that poor roads were an important handicap.

Barriers	Farmers in the Community	
	Low-Income (Percent)	Others (Percent)
None in Evidence	19	33
Farm Operations on a Decline	46	17
Lack of Finance	27	32
Practices Too Big	6	8
Location on Poor Roads	16	2

Another condition unfavorable to change was the local orientation of low-income farmers. Roughly three-eighths of those in the community belonged to no formal organizations drawing membership from the community area and only 1 percent belonged to organizations drawing membership from outside the community. Those who were members were less active as members than other farmers. This means that contacts through and by which farm information could be exchanged on an interpersonal basis were largely confined to the immediate locality, and thus to the kind and quality of advice available locally. Not ordinarily being clique members, they were also somewhat excluded from informal patterns of associations of this type.

Reluctance to use institutionalized sources of information was also a barrier. Of particular importance in this respect was the use of and attitude toward the county agent, who, of all educational agents, was most responsible for the dissemination of farm information. Only one-third of the low-income farmers in the community indicated a generally favorable attitude toward the county agent and his work. This was quite in contrast to 66 percent of the other farmers who were rated as favorable or very favorable to the agent. However, when reasons for indifference are examined, the unfavorable attitude is of less importance than it at first appears. Over half of those who were indifferent seemed to hold their opinion merely because they felt that they did not personally need the agent. A few thought his recommendations were not practical, but few questioned his ability to supply sound information. This is in accord with the general attitude of favorability toward such educational programs as 4-H Club work and vocational agriculture. It is quite probable that many of the low-income farmers would seek an agent's advice, if they felt a need for it.

Conditions Favorable to Change

On the more hopeful side of the ledger was the absence of serious barriers in the informal social structure limiting interpersonal communication. No rural social classes were in evidence nor were prestige differences great enough to seriously impede the exchange of ideas about farming. Interpersonal channels of com-

munication through which farm experiences were shared were relatively unobstructed. Neighborhood norms of mutual assistance seemed to dictate free exchange of trade secrets, a condition not always found in the non-farming population.

Although high reliance was placed on intimate associates as sources of farm information, advice was generally sought from farmers that were much more competent and receptive to new ideas than the seekers of the information. Obviously, low-income farmers who displayed low receptivity to new ideas actually got advice about new developments in farming from others which they in turn put into practice. Of key importance in this pattern were local influentials who were especially well qualified to give advice.

Eighty-three percent of the low-income farmers in the community subscribed to one or more farm journals and 85 percent subscribed to a local newspaper which periodically contained articles related to better farming. Slightly over half of both operators and wives said they read these articles regularly and roughly one-third more in each case said they read them at least occasionally. The same was generally true of farmers in the area sample.

Ninety-four percent of the low-income farmers in the community had radios in operation over which farm talks could be heard. Although this was about 14 percent higher than the proportion in the area sample, radios were quite universally available and were used to listen to farm programs.

From the area sample it was found that low-income farmers recognized some vital farm problems of the day. One-fifth of them felt that soil depletion was one of the most important problems facing farmers today. Other problems named by over 10 percent of them were lack of operating capital, lack of farm machinery, poor health, unfavorable weather, and scarcity and quality of feed. In light of the last item, it should be recalled that these farmers were interviewed in 1946.

Except for specialized training in agriculture, low-income farmers were not especially at a disadvantage from the standpoint of schooling. Furthermore, they generally believed in the value of academic training for farming. Ninety percent of the low-income farmers in the area sample and 85 percent of those in the community thought 4-H Club work was valuable training for farming. Sixty-seven and 90 percent, respectively, indicated the same favorable opinion regarding vocational agriculture training. The favorable attitude toward formal training is further reflected in the high proportion of low-income farmers who recommended a high school or college education for training.

Also favorable to change, but somewhat paradoxical to actual use of sources of farm information, was the sizeable number of low-income farmers who indicated a desire for more information about farming. Almost 63 percent of the area sample and roughly three-fourths of those in the community indicated this desire. Even after discounting these figures for a possible tendency to give the "right answer" rather than the real one, the proportion may still be considerable. However, differences in opinion as to how this information could be best supplied were in evidence. Those in the area sample seemed to favor the College of Agriculture and the Agricultural Extension Service, while those in the community were most favorable to newspapers and farm journals as sources for additional information.

Finally, alertness to new developments in farming was a status factor and therefore something to be desired. This provided a constant incentive to the improvement of farming operations somewhat apart from the economic incentive of increased income and the things that money would buy.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

What the position of the low-income farmer is to be in a society committed to rational consideration of the causes and consequences of low-income status is a matter of public policy and therefore not for the researcher to decide. However, if the conditions and consequences of low-income farm status are to be regarded as matters of public concern subject to remedial action, definition of the problem and examination of conditions likely to influence results are in order.

In defining the problem, certain misconceptions about the nature and scope of the low-income farmer problem should be avoided. Current emphasis placed on problem areas could easily lead to a false assumption that low-income farmers are confined to such areas. It should be recognized that some of them live in the better farming areas of the state, as next door neighbors to farmers who are in no serious disadvantage.

Also, uncritical examination of U. S. Census data may easily lead to incorrect assumptions. Not all of the farm people reporting gross farm incomes of less than \$2500 per year are at a disadvantage. Some of them are largely dependent upon occupations outside of agriculture for a living and many are in the process of scaling down operations to a near retirement level or have already done so. Although more research is needed on the subject, it may be that no more than half

of those listed in the U. S. Census are primarily interested in high level production as the major objective of farming. This could mean as few as 432,000 out of the 863,496 people reported as living on farms in Missouri with gross incomes under \$2500 are directly dependent upon agriculture for their livelihood.

The low-income farmers considered in this study lived in one of the better farming areas of the state where conditions of farming were generally above the state average and were selected from good as well as poor land. What they did with the resources, including the land, was probably more important than the quality of the land with which they worked.

To be sure, their resources were limited. But what they did have, could have been used to better advantage. Evidence from the two studies unmistakably indicated that the state of technology on these farms was far below that existing on the farms of others living in the same area. This was true even for practices requiring small capital outlay. Low-income farmers were inclined to accept new practices only after trial by, and advice from, trusted friends and associates. Although expensive mistakes had to be avoided, there seems little doubt that fear prompted more caution than was either necessary or desirable.

An estimated 40 percent of the low-income farmers in the area sample and 57 percent of those in the survey community, were 60 or more years of age, meaning that many had either scaled down farming operations or were contemplating it. At this age, problems of efficiency of production and the attainment of high income status give way to matters of health, declining physical energies, and security in old age.

Perhaps operational units of aged low-income farmers should not be regarded primarily as food production units with the economic rewards that are supposed to accrue, but rather in terms of their retirement potential. Assistance directed to higher level production with existing resources or those that could readily be made available should not be ruled out, but probably should be incidental to matters of retirement. With farming still essentially a family enterprise, retirement systems within this framework seem a reasonable consideration, especially in view of present day farm surpluses. Special planning, of course, will be required.

In the absence of outside assistance, programs of action must be adapted to the limited resources of low-income farmers. This undoubtedly will require small things for small operators and the breaking up of larger, more costly practices into a sequence of smaller steps that the "little fellow" will be able to take.

If habitually used channels of communication are

to be relied upon for educational purposes, emphasis should be placed on working through other farmers, particularly those farmers who are most frequently sought for advice. Existing habits with respect to seeking farm information also indicated that newspapers, farm journals, and even the radio may be effectively used in getting initial information about new farm practices to low-income farmers. Local television stations were not in operation at the time the two surveys were made.

Indications are, however, that these media are insufficient to insure the adoption of any but the simplest practices. Additional influences are usually required. Clinchers to decisions to try are ordinarily needed. For low-income farmers, these seem to be most often provided by advice from other farmers. Effort of professional workers can be economized and results facilitated by working through local leaders or influentials. In this way, the professional leader may facilitate what tends to happen anyway among farmers when new ideas are considered for possible adoption.

Professional leaders working directly with low-income farmers may encounter resistance they would not encounter or would encounter to a lesser degree through the slower, more indirect methods. However, for educators anxious for quick results, who wish to formulate tailor-made plans of operation for individual farms, the informal approach will probably be too slow and not well adapted to comprehensive planning methods.

But planning and goal achievement objectives may be considerably facilitated by proper use of local leaders. For example, if informal leaders are first sold on a plan of action, low-income farmers who are inclined to be more skeptical may be willing to follow. In formulating comprehensive, tailor-made plans for low-income farmers, it may be that provision could be made for the counsel and guidance of trusted friends and associates who are known and respected for their sound judgment as a part of the program plan. Norms of neighborly behavior and the ego involvement of advisors may be sufficient to make the plan work. In any case, it would provide the kind of counsel that conservative farmers seem to require in arriving at decisions to change. Such a procedure, of course, would require special, methodical considerations for which experience to date is comparatively lacking.

The fact that low-income farmers are tied to the soil by tradition and sentiment has an important bearing on programs designed to encourage movement off the farm. Low-income farmers in the area sample had farmed an average of 30 years; 19 out of 20 said they liked to farm, and 75 percent said they would choose

farming again if they had the choice to make over. Almost half of them said they would not consider a move to the city for monetary considerations and almost another fourth imposed monetary conditions for moving that probably could not be met. Furthermore, many of them are ill prepared to do anything but farm and probably could not improve their economic position elsewhere. Problems of personal adjustment would be very great. Also, the limited resources of older farmers, supplemented by some income from off the farm would likely provide a much higher level of living where they are than the same

or greater income and resources would provide in the city.

However, younger low-income farmers with salable skills who are willing to move probably should be encouraged to seek economic opportunity elsewhere. If this is to be done as a matter of public policy, some means of objectively determining interests and skills and providing an orderly removal of persons willing to take jobs better suited to individual capacities, should be provided. The expense involved could well be less than the consequences of employment in occupations where skills are not properly utilized.

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