

## EDUCATIONAL AND OCCUPATIONAL PLANS OF FARM BOYS IN 1967

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Decisions farm boys make upon graduation from high school with regard to education and occupation are important to their future welfare, the optimum allocation of human resources, and the rate of economic growth. In order to help these boys make educational and occupational plans, parents, teachers, counselors, and other adults must understand what factors influence their choices. Several well designed studies [3, 4, 5, 6] have been conducted in other states by sociologists and economists within this general area. This analysis was specifically designed to provide information about the factors which influence Oklahoma farm boys' educational and occupational plans.

The data used in this study were obtained from the state-wide survey of plans of Oklahoma high school seniors in 1967. The survey was conducted by the Vocational Research Coordinating Unit, Oklahoma State University. The 1967 high school graduates in Oklahoma totaled 34,580, of which 86 percent (29,798) completed the questionnaire. A farm boy, in this study, is defined as one whose father owns, rents, or manages a farm or ranch. The total number of farm boys who responded to the questionnaire was 1217.

This paper reports the results of a study on differences in characteristics among the groups of farm boys planning different occupations. This information can help parents, teachers, counselors, or other reference groups guide farm boys in making plans.

### OCCUPATIONAL PLANS OF OKLAHOMA FARM BOYS

Of the 1217 farm boys completing usable questionnaires, about a quarter (25.88 percent) of them indicate that they hope eventually to farm, 9.12 percent have no specific plans, and the others (65.00 percent)

plan to take nonfarm occupations. For those planning nonfarm careers, 35.83 percent of the total farm boys indicate they plan to be in higher white-collar (HWC) occupations (professional and executive); 7.24 percent plan to be in lower white-collar (LWC) occupations (office work, salesmen, or small business); 20.62 percent plan to be in higher blue-collar (HBC) occupations (skilled work); and only 1.31 percent of the boys chose lower blue-collar (LBC) occupations, such as laborers (Table 1).

Generally speaking, less than one out of eight boys in Oklahoma can expect to take over an economic farming unit. The number of farm boys planning to farm far exceeds the number of economic farming units which will become available. It will be pointed out later that farm boys planning to farm have lower educational aspirations than boys planning to be in HWC occupations. Therefore, some of the boys who forego college education by their plans to farm will have to leave the farm to compete with urban boys in nonfarm job markets. This may offer a partial explanation for the low level of urban occupational achievement of farm boys found in other studies [2].

### EDUCATIONAL AND OCCUPATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

Education attainment has an important influence on occupational alternatives and information concerning the various occupations.

#### Educational Plans

It has been generalized that farm boys are less likely to aspire to education beyond high school than nonfarm boys [1]. This is not true in Oklahoma. The data on the survey of 14,861 high school senior boys indicate that 77.02 percent of farm boys plan to go to

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TABLE 1. OCCUPATIONAL PLANS OF OKLAHOMA FARM BOYS

Occupational Plans	Numbers	Percent
Higher white-collar	436	35.83
Professional	377	30.98
Executive	59	4.85
Lower white-collar	88	7.24
Office work	58	4.77
Salesman	8	0.66
Small business	22	1.81
Higher blue-collar	251	20.62
Lower blue-collar	16	1.31
Farmer	315	25.88
No specific plans	110	9.12
Total	1217	100.00

college; whereas, 70.29 percent of nonfarm boys are so inclined.

A random sample of Wisconsin farm boys in 1957 indicated that 32 percent of farm boys planned to attend college [4]. The percentage of farm boys planning to attend college in 1959 for Kentucky was 35 percent [6], and for Iowa it was 49 percent. In comparison with these States, we may say that either Oklahoma farm boys have higher educational aspirations than the farm boys in Wisconsin, Kentucky, and Iowa, or there is a general upward trend in farm boys' educational aspirations across the nation, or both.

Based upon the results of other studies [1,2,3,4,5], it was hypothesized that boys planning to farm have lower educational aspirations than those planning nonfarm occupations. Of the farm boys who plan nonfarm occupations, 82.27 percent indicate that they want to continue their education beyond high school and only 17.73 percent indicate they do not plan to continue their education. In contrast, only 65.61 percent of boys planning to farm want to obtain more schooling

upon graduation from high school and 34.39 percent of them plan not to continue ( $\chi^2$  (chi-square) = 35.71, d.f. = 1, p. < 0.005). But, nonfarm occupations range from high prestige occupations, such as professional, which require a college education to enter the occupation, to low prestige occupations, such as laborer, which require no education at all for entrance. It is doubtful that boys planning to farm have lower educational aspirations than boys planning to be laborers. Most (94.50 percent) of the farm boys planning HWC occupations, 70.11 percent of the boys aspiring LWC occupations, 67.48 percent of the boys planning HBC occupations, and 40.00 percent of the boys planning LBC occupations intend to go to school beyond high school. There is no significant percentage difference in educational aspirations among the boys planning LWC occupations, HBC occupations, or farming ( $\chi^2$  = 0.69, d.f. = 2, not significant). The percentage difference in educational aspirations among the boys planning HWC occupations, the boys planning LWC, HBC, and farming occupations (66.95 percent), and the boys aspiring LBC occupations is significant ( $\chi^2$  = 125.84, d.f. = 2, p. < 0.005).

We may conclude that, in general, the Oklahoma farm boys who plan HWC occupations have the highest level of educational aspirations, and the boys who plan LWC, HBC, and farming occupations have a modest level of educational aspirations, and the boys who plan LBC occupations have the lowest level of educational aspirations. There is no statistical difference in the level of educational aspirations among the boys choosing LWC, HBC, or farming occupations.

### Types of Schools

Occupational plans also are related to the type of schools the boys plan to attend after high school. Of the farm boys planning to continue their education the following fall, about three-quarters (74.07 percent) of them plan to go to colleges or universities. Of the boys choosing farming, 77.86 percent plan to go to colleges or universities; whereas, 89.22 percent of the boys planning HWC occupations, 62.34 percent of the boys planning LWC occupations, 42.65 percent of the boys planning HBC occupations, and 63.63 percent of the boys aspiring LBC occupations plan to go to colleges or universities. Of those not going to colleges or universities, the boys planning LWC occupations tend to go to business schools (14.29 percent) or vocational and technical schools (14.29 percent), while the boys planning HBC (44.61 percent) and LBC (27.27 percent) occupations tend to go to vocational and technical schools.

### Attitude Toward Further Education

To examine why the boys with different occupational plans have different levels of educational aspirations, three questions were asked. The first question was "For the vocation I checked above, further education or training is: (i) necessary, (ii) desirable, or (iii) unnecessary?" Although 61.27 percent of the boys planning to farm consider it desirable, only 23.81 percent of them believe it is necessary; whereas, 89.89 percent of the boys planning HWC occupations, 63.64 percent of the boys planning LWC occupations, 69.60 percent of the boys planning HBC occupations, and 26.67 percent of the boys planning LBC occupations indicate that further education or training is necessary for the occupations they plan. This evidence supports the generalization that most farm boys planning to farm believe further education or training is not important for successful farming.

The question, "Would you borrow money for further education?" was asked to two groups of boys: those who plan to go to school the following fall, and those who plan not to go to school. In the first group, 34.68 percent of the boys planning to farm indicate their willingness to borrow money; whereas 45.35 percent of the boys planning HWC occupations, 38.16 percent of the boys planning LWC occupations, 42.36

percent of the boys planning HBC occupations, and only 10 percent of the boys planning LBC occupations are so inclined. In the second group, a large proportion (80 percent) of the boys planning HWC occupations, 41.18 percent of the boys planning LWC occupations, 40 percent of the boys planning HBC occupations, and 33.33 percent of the boys planning LBC occupations are willing to borrow money for further education. In contrast, only 26.09 percent of the boys planning to farm so indicate.

In general, farm boys consider further education and training unimportant for successful farming and, thus, those planning to farm are least willing to borrow money for further education.

Those boys who plan not to go to school were asked the question, "Do you plan to resume your education or training in the future?" Eighty-five percent of the boys planning to be in HWC occupations, 70.45 percent of the boys planning to be in LWC occupations, 66.45 percent of the boys planning to be in HBC occupations, and one-third of the boys planning to be in LBC occupations indicate they plan to go to college when money is available, when the time is right, or to go to vocational school at a later date; whereas, 62.67 percent of the boys planning to farm are so inclined. Thus, the future plans to resume education are positively associated with occupational aspirations.

## OTHER FACTORS RELATED TO OCCUPATIONAL PLANS

### Academic Achievement

Occupational plans appear to be associated with academic achievement. The boys who chose HWC, LWC, HBC, LBC, and farming occupations achieved average grades of 2.90, 2.48, 2.32, 2.19 and 2.41, respectively. An F test was used to determine the statistical significance of the difference in average grades among the boys planning different occupations. The results indicate that there is no significant difference in average grades among the boys planning LWC, HBC, and farming occupations ( $F = 2.31$ ,  $f_1 = 2$ ,  $f_2 = 645$ , not significant at the 5 percent level). The difference in average grades among the three groups of farm boys choosing HWC occupations, the boys planning LWC, HBC, and farming occupations, and those planning LBC occupations is highly significant ( $F = 6.45$ ,  $f_1 = 2$ ,  $f_2 = 1089$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ).

### Vocational Experience

Vocational experience is associated with farm boys' occupational choices. About half (49.64 percent) of the boys had a skill class, which includes shop classes or actual work experience (welding, auto mechanics,

carpentry, cosmetology, etc.). This percentage varies with the boys choosing different occupations. The boys choosing blue-collar occupations had the highest proportions (66.93 percent for HBC and 62.50 percent for LBC). In contrast, the corresponding percentages for those planning HWC, LWC and farming occupations are 39.68 percent, 53.41 percent and 47.94 percent, respectively. Besides the skill class, the boys choosing LWC occupations were more interested in public speaking (7.95 percent), office practice or clerical training (6.82 percent) and record keeping (4.55 percent); those planning HWC occupations were more interested in public speaking (10.32 percent) and project ownership (13.99 percent); and those planning farming were most interested in project ownership (20.00 percent).

A majority (62.27 percent) of farm boys received more credits in agriculture than in any other vocational field. But this percentage varies for individual occupational groups: 73.70 percent for the boys planning to farm, 55.32 percent for those choosing HWC occupations, 54.12 percent for those choosing LWC occupations, and 62.30 percent and 73.33 percent for those planning HBC and LBC occupations, respectively. A large proportion of the boys planning white-collar occupations (24.31 percent for HWC and 29.41 for LWC) received more credits in business and some boys choosing HBC occupations indicate that they received more credits in business (11.89 percent), technical education (8.61 percent), and trade and industrial education (10.66 percent) than in other vocational fields.

### Reference Group

Several studies [3, 7, 8] have reported that educational and occupational aspiration levels are highly related to social status of families. Youth from higher status families are inclined to attend college and aspire to higher prestige and income-earning occupations. Parents and older siblings are probably the most important reference group for youth within their social status level in regard to their educational or occupational aspirations.

*Parent's Expectations.* Educational plans are highly related to their parents' aspirations for them. For all farm boys, most of the parents (88.89 percent) want their children to go to college. This percentage varies for individual occupational groups. Eighty-five percent of the boys planning to farm report that their parents want them to attend college. On the other hand, 96.33 percent, 81.82 percent, 84.68 percent and 73.33 percent of the boys planning HWC, LWC, HBC, and LBC occupations, respectively, report that their parents are so inclined. In general, the parents of the boys planning to farm have educational aspirations for their children lower than the parents of the boys choosing

HWC occupations but higher than the parents of the boys choosing LBC occupations. There is no significant difference in parents' educational aspirations for their children among the boys choosing farming, LWC, and HBC occupations.

*Parents' and the Oldest Siblings' Education.* Educational and occupational aspirations also are related to parents' and the oldest siblings' educational achievement. The boys who plan to continue their education the following fall report the following educational attainment for their fathers: 42.21 percent had not graduated from high school, 32.87 percent graduated from high school and 21.47 percent had education beyond high school. (No report on other 3.44 percent). In contrast, the corresponding percentages for the fathers of the boys who plan not to go to school are 58.86 percent, 20.21 percent and 11.33 percent ( $\chi^2 = 64.55$ , d.f. = 7,  $p < 0.005$ ). The same tendencies are apparent in the influence of the mother's education.

The percentage difference of the oldest brother's education between the two groups is much greater. Of the 578 farm boys who have an older brother, 421 boys plan to continue their education, and 157 boys plan not to continue their education. The boys planning to continue their education report 26.36 percent had older brothers who did not have education beyond high school and 73.40 percent had education beyond high school (no report of other 0.24 percent). In contrast, the corresponding percentages for the oldest brother of each of the boys planning not to go to school are 59.88 percent and 38.21 percent ( $\chi^2 = 78.31$ , d.f. = 7,  $p < 0.005$ ). Again, the same tendencies are observed for the oldest sister's education.

Evidence presented earlier indicates that occupational aspirations are highly related to educational aspirations, and we have just seen that educational aspirations are related to parents' educational achievement. It follows that occupational aspirations are likely to be influenced by parents' educational achievement. Generally speaking, the boys from families where the parents had higher education more frequently aspire to higher prestige occupations than those boys whose parents had lower education. The farm boys choosing HWC occupations report that 23.84 percent of their fathers had education beyond high school. On the other hand, the corresponding percentages for the fathers of the boys' choosing LWC, HBC, LBC, and farming occupations are 11.90 percent, 13.36 percent, 18.75 percent, and 19.88 percent, respectively.

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Findings on educational and occupational plans for Oklahoma farm boys in 1967 may be summarized as

follows: (1) Farm boys who plan to farm or to enter LWC and HBC occupations possess educational aspirations lower than those planning to be in HWC occupations but higher than those planning to be in LBC occupations. (2) Of those not planning to go to colleges or universities, farm boys planning to enter LWC occupations tend to choose business school; those selecting blue-collar occupations tend to choose vocational and technical schools. (3) Farm boys planning to farm believe education beyond high school is not necessary for occupational success. (4) Willingness to borrow money to continue education increases with occupational aspirations. (5) The percentage of boys planning to resume their education in the future increases with occupational aspirations. (6) Boys planning to farm have a high incidence of vocational agriculture. (7) Farm boys planning to farm far exceed the opportunities to take over an economic farming unit. Thus, some of the boys who forego college education by plans to farm have to leave the farm to compete in nonfarm job markets. (8) The percentage of parents favoring college attendance is highest for farm boys who plan HWC occupations, is modest for LWC, HBC and farming occupations, and is lowest for LBC occupations. (9) The educational level of farm youth is directly correlated with the educational levels of their parents. High educational attainment in oldest brothers and sisters is a good indication of high educational aspirations in the farm youth surveyed in 1967.

### IMPLICATIONS

Although a higher percentage (77 percent) of farm boys than nonfarm boys (70 percent) plan to attend college after graduation from high school, still there are indications that farm youth are not adequately informed about schooling and job opportunities. Education beyond high school is becoming more important for the operator of the successful modern farm, yet farm boys planning to enter farming have lower educational aspirations than those planning nonfarm occu-

pations. They consider education beyond high school unnecessary for success in farming and, hence, are less willing to borrow money for further education and have less desire to resume their education in the future.

There are more farm boys planning to farm than the economic farming units which will become available. Some of the boys who plan to farm and forego their college education will be forced to seek employment in nonfarm job markets. Lacking the schooling and special training required for better paying nonfarm jobs, farm youths frequently will have to enter low paying occupations. Had they been better informed, many of them might have prepared for higher paying occupations. This is a loss of human resources for the society.

Farm boys choosing to enter nonfarm occupations often are unaware of the entrance requirements and monetary and nonmonetary returns for different occupations. Eighty-three percent of the farm boys choosing to enter white collar or skilled occupations, which require education beyond high school, plan to go to college. In contrast, 40 percent of the boys planning to be laborers plan to continue their education beyond high school.

School administrators, teachers, counselors and parents can do more to help students evaluate their available resources and to inform them of the requirements and opportunities in alternative occupations. It was indicated earlier that farm boys from families where parents had a low level of educational achievement less frequently aspire to higher education and higher prestige occupations. One reason is probably a lack of funds. Another reason is that these parents are not aware of the returns to investment in higher education.<sup>1</sup> Since parents have a major influence on their children's educational and occupational plans, they as well as the children themselves should be made aware of the benefits and costs of education and occupational information.

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<sup>1</sup> In general, the returns to higher education are high, but this is not necessarily true for every person. It is entirely possible that some persons have invested in all the education which would be productive for them.

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