

ADULT EDUCATION IN AGRICULTURE---A FAMILY AFFAIR

ORVILLE THOMAS, Adult Agriculture Instructor
Sebeka, Minnesota

"Yes, I am sure Sam would like to attend your classes, but with his other activities, I am left alone so often". I suppose we have all heard similar comments when inviting farmers in to our adult classes. I answered, "You should come along too. To my surprise, Mrs. R. did come into my next meeting. As they didn't have a place to leave the children, they brought them along. Thus was the initiation of my "Family Classes".

As the situation evolved, I divided my adult group at our central school into two sections: Section A, comprised of the older more established farmers of the area. The instructional plan followed closely along conventional lines. Their wives did not attend the meetings except as we might have a special speaker or program. Section B: the family group. These were the younger families, men who had not been in the Veteran's Training classes or veterans who wanted to continue their systematic programs established while in Veteran's Training.

Specific effort was made and directed toward encouraging the wives to attend classes and to participate in the development of the program for the farm.

I called upon prospective young families and extended a personal invitation to them. I explained that this group was to be a family affair. Letters and schedules were addressed to both Mr. and Mrs.

I soon found many advantages of having the wives in the classes, other than the obvious improvement in the scenery. I have never noted any disadvantages. No one has seemed embarrassed, whatever turn the discussion might take.

The presence of the wives tended to bring the class to a more fundamental planning type of pro-

gram. The discussion would stay on the subject much more than in a group of men.

Class attendance was more stable; interest held out longer in the series. Conversely, I believe such an approach to the adult program will tend to keep numbers down to a workable group.

We are not prone to develop that common affliction "Numberitis".

To put forth the effort; to invest the capital; or to break with tradition, makes it difficult to "sell" approved practices to the point of adoption. By discussing the practices together both in the class and in the farm visit the whole picture becomes more clear to everyone.

To illustrate, we may use the program of the C. M. family. They have changed from conventional dairy housing and marketing, to a large loose housing set-up with parlor, pipe-line milker, automatic washer, bulk handling and Grade A marketing. Their cropping system from grain and corn to grassland; changing machinery to fit the system. An extreme example to be sure, but imagine the effort, the capital, and the break with tradition; to say nothing of the shock to the neighbors and relatives, that went into that decision. A decision that had to be based on past records, estimated future income, alternatives, and a complete understanding and the enthusiasm of the whole family; including two children old enough to understand what it would mean to them.

In most instances the wife is the farm bookkeeper. We have been trying to teach Mr. Farmer why and how to keep farm accounts. He turns the job over to his wife with only the instruction he may have remembered from our teaching.

From this we expect to get accounts accurate enough for analysis.

I derived a great deal of satisfaction from observing the interest and enthusiasm of Mrs. R. as she showed me her accounts and made a comparison of the dairy income this summer as compared to the same period last season. She pointed out that this season their dairy production had held up much better than previously. She attributed it to fertilized native pasture, daily rotational grazing, and rye pasture for this late summer. She would discuss the program with as much knowledge and enthusiasm as her husband.

Some system must be developed to briefly record
(Continued on Page 24)



ORVILLE THOMAS



Mr. and Mrs. Sam Rittenhouse are shown attending a meeting of the Sebeka high school Adult Evening Class. Their daughter, Debbie, seems to have already gotten the point being discussed.

ADULT EDUCATION IN AGRICULTURE

(Continued from Page 8)

the farming program for each individual family and kept handy in our traveling file. When we call on a farm family we are taking their valuable time. We can easily over-visit our welcome unless we have a definite purpose for each call. A good record enables us to plan our visits as to timeliness and subject matter. It, of course, gives us a check on progress being made. When the wife is thoroughly informed of the farm plan and understands the management program it is possible to make an effective farm visit even if Mr. Farmer is not at home. Incidentally, she will often accept a specific practice more readily than her husband.

I have noted several items or "kinks" that are important to success with this type of program. It is extremely important that the classes end on time. Sometimes they have the children along, or there is a baby-sitter at home, or maybe they were left at Grandma's; whatever the situation, mother wants to get home at a reasonable hour. I consider that a distinct advantage.

Often we can "sell" an approved practice by showing it in operation somewhere; locally is more effective than at some distance. I make liberal use of pictures and colored slides. I often carry a few pertinent slides and a small viewer in my pocket. If necessary I will take both Mr. and Mrs. to see some practice being carried out.

While my family classes have been comprised mostly of families with younger children the same principle of family participation would easily and effectively apply to families with boys in our all-day classes.

The farm wife is a working partner and whether we recognize it or not she is a management partner as well.

I feel that this approach has greatly contributed to the effectiveness of our adult program.