I've Worked, I'm Not Afraid of Work: Farm Women in New Mexico, 1920–1940

Joan M. Jensen

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in New Mexico Historical Review by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact disc@unm.edu.
These words of Edna Gholson of Quay County, New Mexico, in many ways symbolize the history of farm women in New Mexico during the two decades from 1920 to 1940. The work of farm women has always been visible, known, and talked about in rural areas. Any farm woman can give a detailed description of the work she and her neighbors perform in the farm house, farm yard, farm field, and farming community. It is only historians who have had difficulty translating that oral tradition into a written account. Because New Mexico has been rural longer than most states, women have been absent from most written accounts of New Mexico history. Rural women's history is accessible, however, through census material, agricultural extension records, and especially oral history. These sources make the twentieth-century history of New Mexico farm women a particularly rich field of study.

This essay describes the work of New Mexico farm women in family and community. It is confined primarily to the Hispanic and Anglo majority. Although Native American women have had a long, rich agricultural history, their history has also been separate in many ways. Their history...
deserves special skills of analysis and is available through separate sources for the most part. For these reasons, the Native American minority, which numbered less than six percent of the population in 1920 and lived scattered through McKinley, San Juan, Sandoval, and Valencia counties is not discussed here. Nor are black women, an even smaller, more urban group that numbered less than two percent of the population. The intercultural perspective here presented, then, is that of the almost equal numbers of Hispanic and Anglo females who together composed the 85 percent majority in the state in 1920. Of these 306,000 females, almost 78,000 were twenty-one years or over, and 64,000 of them rural. Members of this rural adult female population and the changes in their lives over twenty years are the focus of the following study.¹

This study takes as its direct focus farm women in Bernalillo, Doña Ana, Union, Rio Arriba, Santa Fe, Taos, and Valencia counties. Anglo women were represented heavily in the counties of Bernalillo, Doña Ana, and Union, although only Union was almost entirely Anglo. Rio Arriba, Santa Fe, Taos, and Valencia were predominantly Hispanic with small Anglo minorities. Doña Ana is located in the south, Valencia and Bernalillo in central, and Santa Fe, Rio Arriba, and Union in the northern part of the state. These counties give regional and ethnic representation. In addition, oral and family histories from women of a number of other counties describe similar conditions; attitudes of farm women, and agricultural extension documents from 1921, 1925, 1930, 1935, and 1939 describe the activities of farm women. Together, the oral histories and written records provide rich documentation of the work farm women performed in the economic and cultural survival of family and community. Although divided by ethnicity and sometimes by class, these farm women shared a common history as they worked in the valleys, plains, and mountains of New Mexico.

The primary bond of unity among these Anglo and Hispanic women was poverty. The majority of each group was desperately poor, not only by contemporary standards but also by middle-class standards of the time. As frustrated extension agents found, many women were so poor they could not afford the few cents necessary for patterns, hat frames, or material to complete clothing projects. For this reason, extension agents in most areas concentrated on food preservation, labor intensive work that could provide necessary food for the whole family and which required equipment that could often be purchased collectively and used cooperatively. Pressure cookers and glass containers, although still expensive for impoverished farm families, were within the reach of most.

Growing food and preserving it increasingly became an important summer task for large numbers of Hispanic and Anglo farm women.  

All New Mexico farm women were affected by certain grim economic facts of life in the two decades between 1920 and 1940. Bounded on each end by a world war that affected agriculture and family intensively, these decades were primarily ones of economic depression and change for the entire farm population of the United States. The adjustment to changing world and domestic markets after World War I, the depression that spread out from urban areas, combined with one of the worst droughts in the history of the Southwest, left thousands of farm families with little hope for changing their lives. Hard times were not new to most New Mexican farm families, whether homesteaders who had so recently and so optimistically dotted the eastern plains with their sod and frame homes and windmills or Hispanic farmers who held small irrigated plots along the Rio Grande. All had already suffered hard times. What they lost in these depression years was primarily the hope that hard work could make a good life for their families on the land. It was hard to look forward and to expect better times. Without that hope many sold out, moved to town, or became tenants and farm laborers on the land of other farm families.  

The life-styles honed by poverty, nevertheless, gave these farm families great survival skills. Labor exchange, barter, and a common rural socio-economic status gave people a feeling of shared experience. There were few wealthy farm families at whom rural people could direct their anger. Simple life styles were the rule even for most ranch and farm families that had wealth in land. While there were growing class divisions in the state, these were masked by urban-rural rifts. The wealthy most often lived in town or out of state, appearing occasionally in communities or, as one commentator wrote, in the offices of extension agents in their “white linen suits.” Conflict occurred during these years but it usually took the form of conflict against outsiders who attempted to extend control into rural areas. Open violence flared occasionally but usually the community majority united against the outsider. The representatives of these outside interests held their tongues, for the most part, and bided their time.

In addition to a type of class homogeneity, farm women also benefited from federal and state agencies expanded or established to meet the crisis of the depression and drought of the early 1930s. In addition to dealing with new conditions, officials tackled old problems like rural health, hazards of water supply, environmental dangers of soil erosion from overgrazing, and isolation of farm women. The actions of state extension agents and federal officials, while sometimes bungling and inappropriate, eventually provided an impressive rural service infrastructure. Rural women were better organized in many ways by the end of the 1930s than their urban sisters. There was a community spirit of cooperation which, while unequal in different areas, increased during the 1930s. Welfare, government jobs and loans, extension clubs, and projects all had their pitfalls. But when officials could operate effectively with their rural constituency, helping them meet their needs, the agencies provided a network of support that rural people had not experienced previously in American history. Some contemporary commentators noted the great gains by the wealthy elite from federal funding. Hugh G. Calkins, for example, observed that in the Mesilla Valley of southern New Mexico, the wealthy farmers had received most of the $675,000 in payments under the Agricultural Adjustment Act. Nevertheless, middle-class farm families in the Mesilla Valley also gained from the assistance of state and federal programs. Poor farm families, who did not have enough money to keep their land, received federal relief.5

For rural women, the family remained central to their lives in a peculiar way, for most of their work was performed within the family on family-owned farms. The rules for this circumstance were embedded so deeply in family law and custom that many may not have consciously considered them or possible alternatives. For that reason, a review of family law that encompassed community property law in New Mexico is fundamental to understanding women’s relationship to agriculture.

Research on the history of family law in New Mexico is still relatively new but the general outlines are clear. Hispanic women had enjoyed the rights of community property under Spanish and Mexican law but these rights were diminished under American rule and the adoption of common law procedures. The property rights of Hispanic women, however, should not be romanticized. Like women under common law, New Mexico women forfeited most of their civil rights upon marriage. Married women were subordinate to their husbands under Mexican law. While a woman had a legal right to retain separate title to property brought into a marriage and had a legal right to one-half of the property accumulated after marriage, her husband, as legal head of the family, had

5. Ibid.
management and control of property during marriage. She could lose her property rights for adultery or if she entered the church. Community property laws gave the family, not the individual woman, protection. Marriage was a legal partnership under Spanish and Mexican law with each partner owning one-half of the acquired property but one partner, as a legal commentator remarked, had "larger power than the other." A woman had a legal right to control of her property only at her death unless her husband died first. The husband could dispose of his property at will; the wife, except for small gifts to the poor, only with the consent of her husband. Before 1907, however, women did have the right to dispose of their separate property and one-half of the community property by will.6

In 1907, the New Mexico legislature passed statutes modeled on California family law. Under the new law, a woman could not dispose of her property by will. This meant that her property passed automatically to her husband. She had no right to make a will or determine who would receive her property. Although California changed its law in 1923, New Mexico retained the old California law until the 1970s. In 1919, the courts held that a wife did not forfeit community property because of adultery. Moreover, an Eddy County ranch woman, bringing suit in this case, and having admitted adultery, was found by the courts to have a right to one-half of a ranch valued between $100,000 and $200,000. The court held the husband had tried to defraud the woman by offering her a settlement of $4,000 and ordered the lower courts to divide the property equitably. But a loyal wife had little legal power. To be single, widowed, or divorced gave farm women their only legal equality.7

Given the property structure of family law, married farm women theoretically had little control over the property that they owned as marital partners. How this law worked out in practice, however, has not yet been studied by historians. The law gave farm widows considerable power; it may also have given farm wives more power in practice than the theory indicates. But farm women in their oral histories complain of husbands as "partners" who uprooted the family when they decided to move, and as "managers" of the partnership who ran families into debt, leaving women no alternative but divorce or acquiescence. The experiences of Florence Hill of Carlsbad and Edna Gholson of Tucumcari are relevant here. Both husband managers ran up debts for the partnership. Hill found out only after her husband died that he had run up debts for

another woman. She worked to pay for his funeral expenses but refused to pay his debts. She had to support her children by keeping house for a wealthy neighbor. Gholson had a partner whose problem was drinking. After her divorce, she paid off $900 in debts in one year on her own by taking in boarders.  

Divorce was less common in Hispanic than in Anglo families in the 1920s and 1930s. Equal division of land among children by Hispanic fathers remained common, however, and when a husband died without a will the courts divided his community property equally among the children. Such equal partition gave daughters a stake in family property and increased their control; it also increasingly divided the farm land. By the 1930s, land owned by Hispanic families in counties like Rio Arriba and San Miguel averaged three acres per family. While land was plentiful and communal grazing lands available, equitable partition had strengthened the families. As Anglo landowners gradually took over communal grazing lands, such farms could provide only subsistence. Cash incomes had to be sought, usually by the males in the family, in off-farm employment. This trend began in Hispanic families before World War I and accelerated at the end of the war in 1918. Works Progress Administration accounts of the 1930s noted, for example, that in Cordova men came back from the war reluctant to take over the farming that women had managed while they were gone. Women continued to plant the fields while men left the community to work at nonagricultural jobs for six to eight months. The men’s incomes went to buy new tin roofs and new automobiles while the women’s subsistence farming provided for basic family needs.

Thus the increasingly small irrigated farms of Hispanic families and the larger dryland farms of the Anglos both led to a large number of subsistence farms where women took care of the farms while men sought off-farm labor for much of the year. By 1920, the homesteading boom of the first two decades was over and families were already moving to town. The rural population in New Mexico had increased by 67 percent in the decade from 1900 to 1910, almost the same percentage as the urban population, which increased by 70 percent. In the next decade, the homesteading boom over, rural population increased by only 5 percent. The total number of farms dropped by 16 percent.

---

In 1920, farm women lived on less than 30,000 individual farms in New Mexico. In the previous decade, the amount of land in farms had doubled and the average size and value increased over 100 percent. Overall, farms under 20 acres decreased by almost 20 percent, farms from 10 to 175 acres decreased by almost 30 percent, farms from 175 to 500 acres by 7 percent. Farms over 500 acres, on the other hand, increased by 337 percent, from less than 4 percent to over 20 percent. Almost 50 percent of the farms were 50 to 500 acres, and about 30 percent were under 50 acres. Ownership was still 86 percent but tenancy more than doubled between 1910 and 1920, and mortgaged farms increased from 5 to 25 percent. Women owned about 5 percent of owner farms, ran 2 percent of managed farms, and worked less than 2 percent of tenant farms. The farms controlled by women were small and poor.\footnote{11}

In other words, women held few farms singly and small farms operated in conjunction with husbands were decreasing in number and becoming more heavily mortgaged.

During the next two decades the number of farms gradually increased again to the 1910 number but the average size increased very little. Of the 41,000 farms that existed in 1935, almost half of them reported crop failures and the value of farm lands was lower in 1940 than in 1920. By 1935, half of the operators had off-farm work. As the depression worsened, fewer farmers hired labor. Only 14 percent of the farms had hired labor by 1935. Increasingly, the work was done by family labor, a trend that continued to 1940. Families still labored with little mechanization. Two percent of farms had tractors in 1920 but twenty years later only 15 percent of the 34,105 farms had them.\footnote{12}

By 1940, a 67 percent majority of New Mexico women were still rural. Almost half of these 84,000 farm women (46 percent) lived on farms under 50 acres and over three-fifths (65 percent) on farms under 175 acres worth just over $4,000 each. Over a third of the farms were subsistence farms, producing primarily items that totaled less than $200 per year. Almost two-fifths (39 percent) were semi-subsistence, producing less than $250 for use and sale each year, while almost three-fourths (73 percent) were living on family farms that produced less than $1,000 worth of products to use or sell. Thus, by 1940 three out of every four farm women worked on these small family farms where there was virtually no cash to spend on consumer goods.\footnote{13}

The gender division of labor on these small New Mexico farms was

\footnote{13} Ibid.
never strict. While census statistics do not describe the division of labor, both extension records and oral histories reflect the extensive work performed by women on the farms of New Mexico. On subsistence farms, both small Hispanic farms and homesteading farms, women worked outside most of the year. In the counties of Rio Arriba, Taos, and Santa Fe, the farm work of women, like men, was heaviest in the summer. They planted gardens, hoed and weeded, harvested, and then preserved, usually outside in the yards. In counties where chile was the main cash crop, they picked and strung, dried and marketed it. In Rio Arriba, for example, merchants handled over 60,000 strings of chile a year, usually offering credit. Strings of chiles translated into necessities at the markets. In 1939, Rio Arriba women produced not only enough food for their families for all year and bartered chiles, but also sold $2,600 worth of food, $2,459 worth of eggs, and several hundred dollars worth of handicrafts.14

Should their fields not produce enough, women picked at neighbors

on shares, or canned on shares. The Home Demonstration Agent re­
ported from Rio Arriba that women who had poor chile crops helped
neighbors hoe and irrigate, pick and string, in return for enough food
to feed their families. She estimated that labor exchange saved people
at least $200 a year. An additional 150 people exchanged food—peaches
for apples, chile for beans and potatoes. At the stores they bartered
chile and eggs for sugar, coffee, citrus fruit, and a few other food luxuries.
In other parts of New Mexico homesteaders did much the same thing.
Edna Gholson remembered working for a neighbor picking tomatoes,
carrots, cucumbers, and green beans, washing them and preparing
them for market in return for vegetables that she stayed up all night
canning. The next morning she would be in the fields picking again.15

Hispanic women in northern New Mexico also plastered their own
homes in fall and exchanged their labor for cash and in-kind payments.
Women bartered skillfully. In fall, they also helped thresh and took re­
ponsibility for hand winnowing. Relatives and neighbors performed this
task cooperatively. Grace Pritchett, who taught at Placitas, boarded in
a household where the mother came to the home of her daughter to
help winnow. They poured the wheat from one pan to another to winnow
it, then washed and spread it on clean tarps to dry. Women kept small
flocks of chickens, and whenever possible, a cow or goat for family milk.
Men were frequently gone at off-farm work in the 1920s. When men
returned, they concentrated mainly on growing fodder crops for animals,
and on growing beans and corn. A surplus of beans might also be
traded at the stores or in specific communities such as Mountainair,
where families went to trade. The cash of the male usually went to
purchase his necessities, equipment for the farm, and building supplies.
The woman’s income provided food and clothing for the family. Farm
women may have preferred credit at the local market to cash purchase.
Credit, like barter and labor exchange, gave women some control over
the products of their work. Despite the cultural differences of home­
steading women, the subsistence economy made their working lives
similar to those of Hispanic women. Men hired out on larger farms for
harvest, worked on the railroads, on road construction, or at any other
day labor they could find. Women remained on the farms, tending ani­
imals, raising vegetables, preserving food, and developing a crop to
provide credit or cash for the necessities of the family.16

Although buttermaking had been a traditional way of bringing in
cash in other regions, women soon found that this was not true in many

15. Ibid.; oral history of Edna Gholson, WLNMW, NMSU.
16. Grace Pritchett, The Road Goes This Way and That Way (St. Paul, New Mexico:
parts of New Mexico. Stella Hatch, for example, on arriving near Sand Hills, New Mexico, took a batch of butter to a nearby store, fully expecting to get the traditional credit. The storekeeper told her they had no market for butter but he could use lard. "I was shocked," she said, "I had never heard of anyone not wanting to buy butter." She had just rendered some lard, however, so she returned with it to get her needed credit. The experience of Hatch was probably typical of the experiences of other Anglo women settlers. Most women produced butter and lard for use but only a few marketed it. Lard had a ready sale as few Hispanic families raised hogs, but wanted lard for cooking. Lucille Tatreault of Mesilla Valley remembered selling lard to Hispanic neighbors.17

Some women did sell dairy products. When Stella Hatch moved to the Mesilla Valley, she sold butter there—fifteen to sixteen pounds a week. Tatreault also found a market for butter in Las Cruces. Edna Gholson remembered selling cream from their dairy near Tucumcari in the 1920s. Doña Ana had a dairy project in 1921 where four families sold two pounds of butter a week at seventy-five cents a pound and made $78 a year. Extension records mention dairying principally as a male occupation, however. Some girls enrolled in extension clubs to raise dairy cows in 1921 and the female tradition of dairying must have lingered on in practice but males received most support for managing commercial dairies. Extension reports reflect little support for market production of butter by farm women.18

Poultry raising more likely occupied women in New Mexico. Here again, the practice seems to have been regional and shifting. The extension agent in Union, Edith Hurley, for example, reported that in 1921 on her suggestion families had marketed 105,856 dozen eggs and 9,468 chickens for an income of $35,000. Hurley reported "the farm flock a very profitable part of the farming operation" and that she found "nearly all of the ladies and many of the men interested in poultry." Florence St. John marketed eggs in El Paso from a flock started with 15,000 chicks. Later she sold eggs to stores and restaurants in Las Cruces. She and her husband found the income from chickens more steady than that from cotton, which they also raised. Florence Hill remembered raising turkeys in Chavez County for the Kansas market. Another farm woman remembered sending turkeys from Roosevelt County to Los Angeles in dry ice. She cleared $500 one year. On small farms in Bernalillo County, women were well known for their expertise in poultry. Mrs. J. G. Gentry

17. Oral histories of Lucille Tatreault and Stella Hatch, WLNMW, NMSU.
18. State Administration Reports, 1921, NMCAAES, Reel 4, reported some cheese-making but no buttermaking. Doña Ana County, Home Demonstration Agent, Annual Narrative Report, 1921, NMCAAES, Reel 4, reported that women made cheese and butter for home use only and that dairies exported milk to El Paso.
headed the Bernalillo Poultry Association in 1925. Other women appear in the records as poultry experts.\textsuperscript{19}

But developing a poultry business was beginning to require a market expertise that farm women had not needed traditionally. Egg merchants in cities were picky. They wanted eggs that kept in warm weather. This meant eggs could not be fertile so hens had to be kept from roosters. Purebred chickens, fed with animal feed, culled regularly, and kept in well-built poultry houses was what extension agents recommended. In 1925, New Mexico imported one-half of the poultry products consumed. Still, hundreds of New Mexico women did develop poultry businesses. The high cost of feed during the drought of the 1930s seems to have driven many of these small poultry keepers out of business. By 1936, 70 percent of eggs used in the counties of Bernalillo and Valencia were shipped in from outside the county. By 1939, the town of Santa Fe was importing most of its eggs from Kansas City. Yet credit at markets for chickens and eggs as well as the bartering of eggs with neighbors persisted through the period.\textsuperscript{20}

In the north, Hispanic women relied on chile as their main cash and credit crop. As urban areas developed, rural women found a ready market for red chile. They picked and strung chile, then hung it on the walls of their adobes to dry. A crop was often estimated by the number of strings produced. Relatives and neighbors gathered at harvest time to work at stringing \textit{ristras}. Merchants accepted strings for credit at their stores. One could buy almost anything with a ristra. Women also ground chile, which stores then marketed. When the Farm Security Administration estimated income for loans, they carefully noted the number of "strings" of chile produced the year before, along with beans, corn, and wheat.\textsuperscript{21}

In northern New Mexico, there was also a revival of handcrafts for sale, a movement in which farm women participated. Indians had been creating handcrafts for tourists since the late nineteenth century. The Spanish colonial handcraft revival dated from the early twentieth century. Wood and tin work, and textiles were the main handcrafts revived. Women participated most frequently in the textile revival.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid. Union County did not turn out to be a major poultry region, however. By 1924, farm families were producing only for home use. Union County, County Agent Annual Report, 1924 and Bernalillo County, County Agent Annual Report, 1925, NMCAAES, Reel 7. Oral histories of Florence St. John, Lucille Tatreault, Florence Hill, WLNMW, NMSU.


\textsuperscript{21} Farm Security Administration, Rehabilitation Loan Application, Record Group 96, National Archives.

\textsuperscript{22} Sarah Nestor, \textit{The Native Market of the Spanish New Mexican Craftsmen: Santa Fe, 1933–1940} (Santa Fe: Colonial New Mexico Historical Foundation, 1978), 3–4.
Extension agents kept careful records of the value and amount of handcrafts sold by Hispanic families, for they saw the artisan's work as a way to supplement subsistence on small farms in the heavily populated northern counties. Unfortunately, this handcraft market was geared to tourism for the most part rather than to mass urban consumption. It also usually depended on local marketing. When tourists did not tour, as extension agent Felix Armijo reported from Rio Arriba in 1939, many people could not sell their wares.

Families in several northern villages were successful in supplementing their income by selling handcrafts. In one of these villages, Chimayo, east of Española, families had long depended upon income from male migration to work in sheep camps, lumber mills, mines, smelters, and railroads, as well as from weaving. This weaving dated back to the nineteenth century and Chimayo blankets had gained income and fame for the community. In the 1920s, women from Chimayo took the weaving skills to Cundiyo, about twenty-six miles north of Santa Fe. There more than half of the families were weaving blankets by the 1930s. But neither at Chimayo nor Cundiyo could the expert weavers bring in enough money to provide a sufficient income for families. Most also depended on tourists who came to their villages. When no tourists came, their income shrank.

For villages that could not depend on tourists, the Santa Fe artisan's market was of some assistance. From 1934 to 1940, a group of Santa Fe philanthropists established what they called the Native Market to provide an outlet for artisans. Curio stores and a few factories that featured Spanish colonial crafts were flourishing by the early 1920s, and a revival of Spanish New Mexican folklore, architecture, and crafts was in full swing. Author Mary Austin and artist Frank Applegate founded the Spanish Colonial Arts Society in 1925. Concha Ortiz y Pino established the Colonial Hispanic Crafts School at Galisteo in 1929. The Normal School at El Rito began offering craft classes in 1930 and Santa Fe schools under supervisor Nina Otero Warren soon began offering similar courses. The federal government added its support and funding for vocational training in the arts. For urban Anglos and artists, the arts revival was tinged with a romantic conservatism about preserving the "native" past. For farm families, it was a way of modernizing to survive agricultural hard times.

In 1934 a wealthy Anglo, Leonora Curtin, subsidized the opening of the Native Market, an outlet for only the best quality crafts. The market

---

24. Descriptions of weaving and economic conditions at Chimayo and Cundiyo are in Farm Security Administration, RG 96, National Archives.
was an important outlet for yarn, weaving, and colcha, traditional wool embroidery that many northern Hispanic women still loved to produce. In the early 1930s, Santa Fe already had a sizeable Anglo artists' community. By 1936, Santa Fe had been "discovered" by the eastern artistic elite. That year Vogue magazine carried an article on the Native Market, but the market nevertheless operated at a loss. Rural people found it difficult to use hand skills to compete in an industrial economy. When federally subsidized programs like the WPA and the National Youth Administration offered rural people reasonable wage rates, most quickly abandoned the poorly paying craft work. Women found fewer opportunities in federal work and thus continued to combine crafts with their subsistence farming longer than males. When they had opportunities, young women also moved to the city to obtain better paying jobs.  

Still, like canning, handicrafts helped rural families to survive the deepest trough of the depression. A report of Rio Arriba agriculture extension agent Armijo showed that, even with a decline in tourism, women and men produced and sold $5,700 worth of weavings in 1929. Santa Fe women continued to provide the main outlet for rural handicrafts. They organized craft fiestas and the women's exchange market, as well as the Native Market.  

Produce markets as well as craft markets underwent a revival in the 1930s. In the 1920s, children usually had the task of selling surplus garden produce by the roadside. Fruit or vegetables piled in old cans, and a farm child, were the main ingredients in this marketing of surplus. As automobiles became more popular in the 1930s, urban dwellers often combined inexpensive touring with food purchases. The number of automobiles, even on farms, increased rapidly in New Mexico in the 1920s and 1930s. To a people frustrated by long distances, the automobile seemed a necessity. The number of automobiles on farms more than doubled between 1920 and 1940, from 6,018 to 15,731. Farmers could now more easily bring produce to town while townspeople could also more easily fetch their own country produce. Rural people took advantage of both.  

Roadside stalls became a common sight in the 1930s, replacing the child and pail. Farm families built attractive stalls, and women began to organize and staff them. Bernalillo County was developing roadside markets by 1930. That same year extension agent Armijo reported from Rio Arriba that farm families had sold $3,000 worth of farm products.

26. Ibid., 31–32.  
during the last season at roadside markets. This was an important source of additional cash. In Bernalillo County, farmers also brought their produce in to Albuquerque where they established a farmer's market in 1939. There the extension agent helped raise money and organize the market. Farmers near Albuquerque began to increase their truck farming with a ready market for their produce.29

For rural people to survive economically this market production had to be combined with subsistence farming and the cash brought in by males either from off-farm work or the raising and selling of animals and field crops. The records kept by the Farm Rehabilitation agents provide some idea of the rural economy in northern New Mexico in the late 1930s. The federal agents made most loans to Hispanic farm families who owned only a few acres although farm families with larger acreage were also eligible. By 1940, work for wages, most of it off-farm work, was bringing in almost 50 percent of the income of these families. Grants from the federal and state governments were bringing in another third; income from produce and livestock accounted for about one-fourth. Of the off-farm income, mining was by far the most profitable for the families, but income from daughters who taught school was the second most profitable. Teaching brought in more money than any of the male occupations, including shepherding. To have a farm daughter who taught was to have a substantial income in times when farm products could supply little to families.30

While subsistence farming doomed families to a minimal economic level, it nonetheless provided security. Through it, families could hold onto the small acreage they still owned. This was particularly true in the 1920s when men brought in cash from other work. This reliance on subsistence farming and commitment to it was one of the factors that deeply separated thousands of Hispanic farm families and the Anglo experts who most often staffed the extension offices. Time and again, Anglo agents would report that Hispanic families seemed unwilling to change, rooted in traditional ways, sometimes appearing almost inexplicably opposed to sound and reasonable concepts of commercial agriculture.31

The conflict over the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District was the most visible and violent confrontation between traditional and modern values in which farm women were involved. Almost as soon as

31. Comments were frequent from some Anglo agents. See, for example, State Administration, Reports, 1921, and Bernalillo, Annual Report, 1935, NMCAAES, Reels 4, 17.
extension agents went into Valencia County in 1914 and saw the conditions that existed on the irrigated farms there, they dreamed of reclamation. Deforestation in the north in the first two decades of the century had caused silting of the river. Intensive irrigation had resulted in waterlogged acres. By 1920, agricultural agents estimated that 60,000 acres of land in four counties were unusable. It seemed logical and progressive to support schemes for a conservancy district that would develop productive, commercially viable farms.32

Urban businessmen apparently saw the plan as one from which they could profit as bond holders of the money that would be raised to finance the project. Farmers owning land benefiting from the project would be taxed to pay for the capital and interest. Farmers would increase their productivity and their income and thus be able to pay increased taxes. Everyone would be happy.33 Unfortunately, no one consulted with the farm families who were to benefit by the scheme. The state legislature accepted petitions to establish the project from Albuquerque businessmen outside the farming areas, set up a conservancy district with the legal right to tax, and approved the sale of bonds.34

By the time engineers had their machinery in place to lay down drainage culverts, angry farmers had organized. They stopped the engineers, tore up the culverts, disarmed the attorney general, and kicked and pushed the directors of the project when they arrived at the confrontation. Officials called for the national guard and Governor Richard Dillon quelled the uprising by arranging for a moratorium on payment of taxes. Farms over twenty acres would have three years and farms under five acres would have five years before beginning tax payments for the improvements. By that time, they could have increased production to pay taxes levied on their farm land. The project went forward despite extreme hostility from the farm families. An Anglo extension agent who had enthusiastically supported the project found farmers hostile to him. "The situation even got so bad, that many farmers when visited by the County Agent, were not even friendly, sometimes very bitter and unfriendly, and at times refused to talk or have any business with the County Agent," R. S. Conroy reported from Valencia County in 1930. His work absolutely at a standstill, he soon left the county.35

33. Ibid., 13–14.
34. Ibid.
35. Valencia County Agent, Annual Report, 1930, NMCAAES, Reel 12; Calkins, "Reconnaissance," 58. Conroy was gone from Valencia County by 1935.
After the moratorium expired in 1934, the farmers refused to pay. Although few foreclosures occurred, much land changed hands. The state dared not move to foreclose lest they encourage open warfare. But many farmers grew discouraged and sold out. Between 1934 and 1936, Anglo ownership of land in the conservancy district rose by 7 percent. As one report concluded, Hispanic farmers would soon disappear and be replaced by Anglo commercial farmers.\(^{36}\)

A similar dispossession of Hispanic farm families had already taken place in the Mesilla Valley as a result of the building of the Elephant Butte Dam. There Hispanic men and women became the laborers for new cotton farms in the 1920s. The change had taken place with little overt conflict, however, a condition that led state officials to believe that similar changes could be effected in the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District. Despite the opposition of the Valencia farmers, this second dispossession took place. The refusal of many farmers to pay back taxes simply led to a federal assumption of state obligations. Federal funds eventually rescued the project financially and allowed its completion.\(^{37}\)

In the north, similar antagonism might have flared under the crushing impact of drought and depression. In these counties, however, Hispanic farmers had firm political control and there were no conservancy plans. County commissioners appropriated money for extension agents with the proviso they be Hispanic. In Rio Arriba County, Fabiola Cabeza de Baca arrived in 1929 to began a successful decade of work among Hispanic women, and agent Armijo found Hispanic families willing to work with him on changes. Both de Baca and Armijo reported good relations with the farmers, and a willingness on the part of Hispanics to experiment. Both exhibited understanding of how to work with these families. Armijo reported after de Saca's first year that her work had influenced the whole community favorably, men as well as women, and made his work much more successful.\(^{38}\)

De Baca was thirty-five when she arrived in Rio Arriba County as county extension agent. Born in Las Vegas, New Mexico, her mother died when she was five, and she went to live on her grandparents' hacienda, some miles from Las Vegas. Then she studied with the Sisters of Loretto and began teaching in a small rural school. She spent some time in Spain, some time on her grandparents' ranch, and then returned to school to receive her degree in Home Economics from the agricultural college in Las Cruces. After training ten weeks in San Miguel County, she began work in August 1939. For the next ten years, she sent lengthy

\(^{36}\) Ibid.

\(^{37}\) McDonald, et al., Case Studies, 43–47.

\(^{38}\) Rio Arriba County, Narrative Report, Extension Agent, F. A. Armijo, 1930, NMCAAES, Reel 12.
reports back to headquarters in Las Cruces describing her work with Hispanic women—a unique record of the lives of rural women.\footnote{Oral history of Fabiola Cabeza de Baca Gilbert, NMSU.}

De Baca’s reports on her work in Rio Arriba and Santa Fe counties are important both for what they tell us about the women and for what they document about the effectiveness of Hispanic agents in working in predominantly Hispanic communities. They also indicate the importance of work with women for the success of the extension program as a whole. De Baca concentrated on food because that seemed most important to the families and to the survival of their subsistence farms. De Baca gave demonstrations in women’s homes, organized youth clubs, located club leaders among teachers and mission workers, organized clubs for adult women, and began a home economics column in the newspaper \textit{El Nuevo Mexicano} that featured translations of recipes. Before long, she had helped Dixon women organize their own club house and helped county health officials start two clinics.\footnote{Rio Arriba and Santa Fe Counties, Home Demonstration Work, 1930, Fabiola Cabeza de Baca, NMCAAES, Reel 12.}

De Baca’s work accomplished the changes the extension service wished without creating tension and hostility. The women provided support for the changes men wished to make because they understood how their own work could change to benefit themselves and their families. When the depression of 1932–33 and drought of 1933–34 nearly decimated northern farm communities, the work of de Baca bore fruit.

The drought hit farm families before there were federal programs. The state responded as best it could. In Rio Arriba and Santa Fe counties, field crops failed and there was not enough fodder for animals. Many weakened animals could not survive the second year of the drought, and by that second year families were in danger not just of losing animals but of starvation itself. By this time, extension agents had already started counseling families to concentrate their energies on family gardens. They helped provide seeds. De Baca expanded and intensified her training in canning both vegetables and meat. When the federal government finally arrived with its program to purchase cattle, families were ready to butcher and can the healthiest of the starving animals.

No Rio Arriba families had pressure cookers when de Baca arrived in 1929, and only a few had them in Santa Fe and Taos. By 1935, thousands of pressure cookers existed in Rio Arriba, Santa Fe, and Taos counties. Families bought them cooperatively and shared them. Men put their cash earnings toward buying these tools for women. In 1935, extension agent J. W. Ramirez reported that the previous year, “would have been one of the worst calamities ever experienced had it not been for timely financial aid from the Agricultural Drought Service and the
food preservation program." Taos and Santa Fe county families survived for the same reasons. Better than 90 percent of the farm families there preserved enough food for the following year. Prodigious canning on subsistence farms allowed the rural population to remain on the land and to feed itself during one of the severest droughts and depressions in New Mexico history. The survival of Rio Arriba, Santa Fe, and Taos farm families during these years was the best example of how state and federal agencies working in concert with, instead of against, the wishes of a rural community, could provide crucial services.\textsuperscript{41}

Pressure cookers, which spread so quickly through Rio Arriba, Santa Fe, and Taos counties in the early 1930s, are perhaps the best material objects with which to trace the transfer of technology to farm women during the 1920s and 1930s. Pressure cookers became a necessary tool for most farm women, and one they most commonly purchased and used. Other types of household technology—washers, irons, refrigerators—had to wait electrification that reached rural families slowly and unevenly. Of technological systems desired by rural women, water was the most important. Sewing machines were too expensive for many families during the 1920s. Pressure cookers, water systems, and sewing machines, however, are the three technologies that best reflect changes in farm women's physical lives during these years.\textsuperscript{42}

Pressure cookers were just being introduced in the wealthier farm families at the end of World War I. The pressure cooker was a considerable time saver for women who needed to can, for it greatly reduced the time required to process canned vegetables, according to one account from five hours to eighty minutes. It also offered greater insurance that the processed vegetables would be safe when canned in home kitchens. The extension service published bulletins that explained use of pressure cookers in English in 1925 and in Spanish in 1931.\textsuperscript{43}

The problem for most farm women was not unwillingness to use new technology but inability to accumulate the cash to purchase it. Pressure cookers sold for $18 in 1921, an amount of money that women seldom spent on household tools. Doña Ana County, where there were many wealthier farmers and a great deal of educational work by the

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., Doña Ana County, Home Demonstration Agent, Annual Report, 1939, NMCAAES, Reel 22. Grace B. Luna, Canning Club Work (Extension Circular 83, March 1925) and Fabiola Cabeza de Baca, Boletin de Conservar (Extension Circular 106, May 1931).
college extension agents, led the way in cooperative purchase of pressure cookers. In 1921, agents reported the importance of acquiring cookers in Doña Ana, and arranged to purchase them in quantities for $13.50 each. At least 265 women bought them that year. So many women now owned them, reported the agent, that demonstrations were no longer needed. By 1939, the agent reported that almost all farm families had them. Thereafter, pressure cookers were seldom discussed in reports from Doña Ana County.44

Cooperative canning provided a solution for many farm women who could not afford their own pressure cookers. Agents helped set up community canneries. Maud Doty helped set up a successful community cannery in Bernalillo County in 1925 where women installed steam canning equipment with a 500 quart a day capacity and tinned everything from peaches to whole beef. During 1934, the federal government set up a canning project in Taos County to provide work for community women. That year women canned over 12,000 cans for the Federal Emergency Relief Administration to distribute to needy families in addition to cans for their own home use. Agents estimated women filled 43,000 number two tin cans in the first eleven weeks of operation and eventually 110,000 cans and jars. The Resettlement Administration also budgeted money in Bernalillo County in 1935 to purchase canning equipment for many women who had never canned before. In Rio Arriba County, federal funds helped women buy jars and pressure cookers. There women preserved food in over 46,000 containers in 1939.

Canning then, even for women who could not afford their own pressure cookers, was the main technological change for rural women in New Mexico during these years. While urban women were acquiring indoor plumbing, electricity, and such appliances as irons, these rural women were still devoting their time and acquiring technology to preserve food. While most farm women in New Mexico had pressure cookers by the end of the 1930s, few yet had electric irons, because as late as 1945 only one-third had electricity. Urban women, meanwhile, were using electric irons and buying most of their food in cans.45

Water systems were more costly to acquire and much more rare than food preservation tools during this period. The Doña Ana County

44. Bernalillo County, Home Demonstration Agent, Annual Report, 1925 and 1935, Reels 7, 17; Taos County, Annual Report, 1934, Reel 16, NMCAAES.
45. Some women in eastern New Mexico and perhaps elsewhere did have access by 1929 to gas irons. Joan M. Jensen and Mary Johnson, "What’s in a Butter Churn? Objects and Women’s Oral History," Frontiers, 7 (Fall 1983). Bernalillo County reported two gasoline systems for irons in 1921, Bernalillo County, Home Demonstration Agent, Narrative Report, 1921, Reel 4, and 25 houses with electricity in 1925, Home Demonstration, Annual Report, 1925, Reel 7, NMCAAES.
home demonstration agent reported proudly in 1921 that she was helping a ranch family to install an entire demonstration bathroom. The cost for supplies alone was $120, a sum that few but the wealthiest could afford. In Curry County, the home demonstration agent reported the importance of a kitchen water supply for her farm women and the industriousness of one woman in acquiring a system. Here, too, even with labor supplied by the family, the system cost the woman $90 for the tank and water pipes. Most farm women still carried their own water as they recalled in oral histories. For those fortunate few who got even partial running water, the saving in time and effort was impressive. The home demonstration agent who reported on the Curry County system noted that the farm woman had previously walked an estimated 260 miles a year bringing water from the well to her kitchen. Of almost 30,000 New Mexico farms in 1945, only 28 percent had running water. That meant 72 percent of all farm women still carried their water.

Sewing machines were less expensive than water systems and less dependent upon males for installation, although women might remain dependent upon men for repairs. Clothing construction remained one of the most gender-defined of all farm tasks. Young men never joined clothing clubs although they were most popular among young women. Yet, the use of clothing construction equipment that cost money made little headway because farm women felt they could not spend money on clothing. The home demonstration agent in Taos County reported that women there "found it difficult to get even the price of a commercial pattern," then selling for a few cents. When hat making became popular in the early 1920s, and times were good in Union County, women there were able to order wire hat frames from the dime store for ten to thirty-five cents and delightedly made summer hats from dried corn shucks. Even before the depression deepened in the 1930s, demonstration agents reported that neither girls nor women could afford to purchase sewing supplies in counties like Otero, for "the people have hardly had enough to eat." Flour sacks were a necessity for sewing projects. Remodeling and maintaining older clothing became the focus of much of the women's attention. Two hundred Doña Ana County women reported making an average of two garments and remodeling ten during 1921. They pooled their scraps in a "community bag."

46. This cost included a hot water tank, bath tub and sink, pipe and drain boards. State Administration reports, 1921, Reel 4. NMCAAES. Bernalillo County reported one power washing machine that year. Quote from Joan M. Jensen, "Recovering Her Story: Learning the History of Farm Women," Paper presented at the National Extension Home-makers Conference, Laramie, Wyoming, August 3, 1983. Oral history of Nina Griffin, Mesilla Valley, reported having to carry water a half a block on their farm, WLNMW, NMSU.

47. State Administration Reports, 1921, Reel 4. Narrative Report of Mrs. Edith Hurley, Home Demonstration Agent, Union County, 1921, Reel 4; State Administration Reports, 1925, Reel 7.
No easily obtainable statistics exist for sewing machine purchases in New Mexico. Non-electric sewing machines sold for anywhere from thirty to eighty dollars in 1930 mail order catalogs. Farm families frequently ordered from these catalogs because towns were so widely dispersed and roads still largely unimproved. In fact, home sewing became a necessity even for women who had never sewed previously, because mail order clothes were unsatisfactory and towns so difficult to get to. Most farm women sewed their own clothes but even foot-powered treadle machines were not common. The operation of sewing machine clinics in Doña Ana County in 1921, and a record of 292 home repairs there, indicates that middle-class farm women in some counties had sewing machines. But these clinics did not appear in the north until late in the 1930s. In 1939, San Miguel County women had few sewing machines and only one girl could afford to purchase material for a sewing project. By the late 1930s, however, young girls were showing a much greater interest in sewing, perhaps because so many were considering moving to urban areas to find work.\(^{48}\)

Rather interestingly, creative handwork does not show up in most communities. Agents trained in home economics tended to discourage creative work of this sort because they felt farm women needed to concentrate on practical skills. Still the impulse to create beautiful and not necessarily functional items existed among some farm communities. De Baca mentioned the large number of Hispanic women who enjoyed doing colcha embroidery and other needlework during the three months a year they did not work outdoors. She wished the extension service had listed it as a project so that clubs could work on it. Here was a missed chance to combine the creative interests of women with support for a marketable product. An agent visiting the isolated village of Pilar in Taos County in 1921 mentioned seeing “oceans of crocheting and other fancy work” in the homes of Hispanic women she visited. Quilts do not show up in records of the counties selected for this study except in Union County in 1935 when the agent reported club women making 115 quilts. Where a quilt tradition existed, it probably came in with the homesteaders from Oklahoma and Texas. But women there were such hard working pioneers that they may not have had time to sew quilts, at least not the magnificent quilts that older women produced later when freed from incessant work and absorbing poverty.\(^{49}\)


\(^{49}\) Second Annual Report for Year Ending June 30, 1916, Reel 1, NMCAAES contains early disparagement of “fancy work.” Rio Arriba and Santa Fe Counties, Home Demonstration Work, Fabiola Cabeza de Baca, 1939, Reel 12, State Administration Reports, 1921,
Technology benefited a few women during these decades but organizing probably helped them more. To facilitate their work in reaching women, agents encouraged women to form clubs to decide what they needed. These clubs benefited poor women and women of different ethnic groups to the extent that agents oriented their work to the needs of these women. As such, the clubs provided an important forum for farm women. They met, exchanged joys and laments, and received support from each other in these clubs.

Organizing was not always dependent on agents. In counties like Union, for example, older farm organizations with hundreds of men and women members were in existence when agents arrived. Home demonstration agent Edith Hurley reported 250 Farm Bureau members in 1921 with "the ladies . . . as much, or more interested in all lines of work as the men." Two women and three men assumed leadership in organizing the Farm Bureau there and it flourished in the eastern part of the county. In some areas agents skillfully pulled farm women together into organizations, where they found new strength together. Sometimes club women, like Bernalillo County club women in 1921, used their organizational strength politically to maintain county financial support for home demonstration agents. The state narrative for Bernalillo County read: "There was some doubt about the work's being continued in Bernalillo County for the coming year, and a great deal of pressure was brought to bear on the commissioners by the women of the county, and some of the men, as well as the Director of Extension. . . . The rural women are working to save the work." In Union County, on the other hand, the agent reported, "the new County Commissioners have the reduction mania and there is some danger of the work being cut out. The women are making every effort to hold it." Women there failed to convince male county commissioners to fund a female home demonstration agent even though they continued to fund a male agricultural extension agent.

Some clubs welcomed agents; some operated successfully, aloof and separate; some crumbled without the agent's support. The two


50. Union County, Narrative Report of Mrs. Edith F. Hurley, Home Demonstration Agent, 1921, Reel 4, NMCAAES. "History of Extension Work in Union County, 1916–1939," in Union County, Annual Report, 1939, reported 500 members organized in a society of "farmer’s equity," when the agent arrived in 1916. Whether this was populist or socialist is not clear but members assisted the agent. A Farmers and Stockmen Bureau was organized in 1916 and grew rapidly. The Farm Bureau was apparently organized about the same time. Edith Hurley was not retained after 1921 and Union County had no Home Demonstration Agent from 1928 to 1933. State Administration Reports, 1921, Bernalillo Narrative Report, Reel 4, NMCAAES.
decades saw impressive organizing among women. By the end of the Depression large numbers of rural women in New Mexico were not only organized for the first time but also organized more effectively than many urban women. Women organized in Farm Bureau clubs, in rural women’s clubs, and in extension clubs. Each offered rural women important experience.

Farm Bureau women were among the first to organize. The Doña Ana Farm Bureau was one of the largest and strongest units in the state and women in that county were probably the best organized. Farm Bureau membership was by family but members soon learned that the gender division of labor and special gender concerns of women made it more comfortable for them to meet separately. The disadvantage of separate groups was that it segregated women from meetings where important farming skills were learned and shared by men. The advantage was that separate locals gave women space and time to be by themselves to discuss their needs away from the men. Farm Bureau women in Doña Ana County formed women’s locals in every community. They discussed and planned their projects, and told agents what they wanted of them. They provided a strong support network for almost 300 members by 1925. Women helped raise money to establish a “Rest Room” for farm women in the Temple of Agriculture, furnished it, and used it in turn.
to raise money for other projects. Doña Ana Farm Bureau members provided experience for community leadership and needed service for women.

The main criticism that can be made is that the Farm Bureau apparently did not extend its base deeply into the poorer Anglo or Hispanic farming communities. Farm Bureau members remained composed primarily of Anglo women from medium-sized farms. Their organization gave these average farm families important leverage in the community. Nina Griffin later remarked that farm women were better organized than Las Cruces women in the 1930s. Moreover, when federal programs promised assistance to communities to modernize, these rural women led the way. Griffin remembered wanting paved roads and working with other farm women to raise money to pay for materials when the Works Progress Administration offered free labor. 51

Elsewhere, Farm Bureau organizations seemed to rise and fall. For a while, Valencia County boasted the only Farm Bureau in central New Mexico. Then during the conservancy conflict, it disintegrated. The agent there, who had begun to organize the Farm Bureau, soon found that he was doing all the work. Farm families simply refused to cooperate and the agent let it fold. Union County had a flourishing Farm Bureau for a few years. By 1934, however, that county's Farm Bureau was also gone. In other areas, Farm Bureaus were never formed. Men formed marketing associations for themselves, such as the Bean Growers Association, that left women out; or farmers remained unorganized. 52

Where no Farm Bureau existed, women organized rural women's clubs. These clubs apparently never federated. One club once affiliated with the State Federation of Women's Clubs, but the agent sadly noted that they were moving away from home economics. Most simply had an independent club that rose and fell with the fortunes and interests of community women. These clubs took names that reflected the attitudes of their communities: the Bluewater Food Club in Valencia County, Volcanic Canning Club of Union County, the Miercoles Club in Bernalillo County. The clubs usually concentrated on family and community affairs, and left few records but those by extension agents. Extension agents worked with these clubs, asking them to make plans for projects and to decide what information they needed from agents. Agents did demonstrations, showed films, suggested new projects, and acted as outside catalysts.

51. Doña Ana County. Home Demonstration Agent, Annual Report, Sara Van Vleck, 1925, Reel 7; Doña Ana County, Home Demonstration Agent, Annual Report, 1921, Reel 4, NMCAAES. Oral history of Nina Griffin, Mesilla Valley, WLNMW, NMSU.
52. Valencia, County Agent, Annual Report, 1929, Reel 11, 1930, Reel 12; Union, Esther B. Call Report, 1934, Reel 16, NMCAAES.
Eventually agents began to organize women into Extension Clubs that could function throughout the county. Taos had 500 members in twenty-three of these clubs by 1935. In these clubs, although the agents assumed more responsibility, they attempted to have farm women do most of the organizing. De Baca was especially successful in organizing Rio Arriba County women who had little experience with formal community organizing. She wrote in one report: "Outside of dances, Church festivals, and weddings, they never get together for social activities." But the women responded to her organizing activities. "It has been a change in their lives to get together once a month regularly," de Baca wrote. "They may not have accomplished very much materially, but they have gained much spiritually. It has started them to think along the social side of life." When one woman pleaded being too busy, another retorted: "If we have an excuse to leave our work for one day a month, we ought to take advantage of it even if it is only to get away from the work." For these women it was a rest, as one said, "from the daily routine of house and outdoor work." ⁵³

Whatever the club, farm women joined most often when clubs gave them new skills and encouraged them to share their own. Clubs provided important psychological support as well. One Colfax County farm woman recalled later joining a homemakers club after having a nervous breakdown. Other women remembered grabbing up small children and escaping to meetings where they simply enjoyed each other's company, laughing, joking, and swapping experiences. "I just picked up my baby and went," recalled Frances Mathews of Colfax County. ⁵⁴

As social organizations rather than economic organizations, clubs could do little to change the patterns that were making it increasingly difficult for subsistence farms to survive. Hispanic women in many counties were already moving off farms and into urban neighborhoods. Or they were continuing to live in villages but increasingly dependent on off-farm work. For these women, the clubs had little to offer.

Still, with the help of agencies and agents, their own hard work and resilient spirits, many women did survive as farmers and kept their families together on the land through hard times. Looking back on that experience, some things seemed particularly fortunate to the survivors. The fact that most families suffered about equally, that they usually could get enough food, that their children respected the hard work of the parents and understood that the work the family performed together was necessary for survival were among those mentioned later in oral histories. Women worked hard but they took pride in their work, whether in

⁵³. Home Demonstration Work Carried Out in Rio Arriba and Santa Fe Counties, 1930, Reel 12, Santa Fe, Home Demonstration Work, 1935, Reel, 17, NMCAAES.
⁵⁴. Jensen, "Recovering Her Story."
field or farm house. "Yes, I was busy," recalled sharecropper Ellen Grubbs Reaves. "And if you think I didn't work, you just wasn't there," exclaimed Edna Gholson when she remembered her hard work boarding highway workers to feed her family and pay debts. But perhaps Nona Berry captured the positive feelings that farm women must have often felt, after they had worked long and hard at tasks they could perform skillfully, when she asked, "Did you ever take a fine baking of bread out of the oven and felt like you had done real well?"

During these decades women's work on the farm was essential and crucial for the survival of farm families. Told from documents and from their own oral remembrances, women's history gives a fuller picture than what has been traditionally termed agricultural history. It is proof that agricultural history must give way to a true rural history in which women and men are represented in the full context of their lives on the land.

55. Oral histories of Ellen Grubbs Reaves and Edna Gholson, WLNMW, NMSU, Jensen, "Recovering Her Story."