

FARM HOUSING AS FARM WOMEN WANT IT

EDITOR'S NOTE: The best answers sent in during the recent Better Farm House Contest, launched by the Central Mortgage and Finance Corporation and conducted in Ontario by the Women's Institute Branch, were loaned to Miss Ethel Chapman. With their answers as a basis she has written this article which was published in October Farmer's Magazine and which we publish below through courtesy of the author and the Farmer's Magazine.

It was a sound idea of the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation to launch a Better Farm Houses Contest to try to find what farm women want in farm houses. It was just as sound to organize their contest in a way that would get groups of farm women discussing and studying farm housing together. Inevitably the women's talk about better houses would overflow into family groups and other gatherings where men as well as women would be drawn into the discussion; so, in some places at least, the whole community would be set thinking about how farm houses could be made more convenient and comfortable and attractive.

No doubt a considerable amount of actual improvement has already resulted, and will result, from all this, and when the views of farm women all across Canada have been assembled, anyone interested in building or remodelling a farm house should find them well worth considering. After looking over a number of the Ontario reports from Women's Institutes, Farm Forums and Church organizations we would like to pass on some of the women's recommendations.

One of the first questions asked was whether the women believed the majority of the farm houses in the district could be remodelled satisfactorily, or would it be necessary to build new houses. The replies, in general, showed that in the newer districts where pioneer houses are still in use, it would not be practical to spend much money in remodelling them. In older areas where most of the houses are of good size and still in good condition it would be less expensive and more satisfactory to remodel than to build new houses, with the present scarcity of materials, especially seasoned lumber.

Would the women build houses of one or two storeys? Many women like the convenience of a house all on one floor and several recommended a one-storey house for an elderly couple or a small family. One group said, "We like houses of one or one and a half storeys because they are attractive and snuggle down cozily in the wide rolling landscape". Of those preferring a two-storey house, a group in Huron county wrote, "In our climate a one-storey house is an extravagance that farm people can ill afford. For economy in building and heating we would recommend a two-storey house.

Considering the rooms desirable in a farm house, one of the first questions was, "How many bedrooms?" Several groups set three as a minimum, but more felt that four bedrooms were necessary because of the need of providing for farm help, even if only part time help. Every bedroom should have a clothes closet, and a room to be shared by two people should have two closets if possible. The size of closet recommended varied, but a rather general guide was that a closet should be large enough to take a hanger rod without crushing the shoulders of garments and that it should be equipped not only with a hanger rod but with a shelf for shoes and a shelf for hat boxes. Almost every group asked for a linen closet with shelves for bedding and at least one other storage closet.

Would they have a bedroom on the ground floor? Most of them would. They considered it important in time of sickness or where there are elderly people who should not have to climb stairs. Several said this room should be located so it could be used for other purposes if not required for a bedroom.

On the question "Would you have a utility room next to the kitchen for laundering, separating the milk, and wash-up facilities for men coming in from work?", the women had very

definite ideas. They all seemed to want a utility room for a wash room and laundry; but practically all said the milk should not be separated there. Milk should be separated in a milk room near the stable, to save carrying and "muss" about the house. A great many reports emphasized the point that the utility room should be heated so that mi.tens and clothes wet from snow and rain could be dried there. One suggested having a special corner for the children with low hooks for coats and caps and a box-bench with a hinged cover for rubbers and mittens. All agreed that the room would be accessible from the rear entrance to save traffic and mud tracks through the kitchen.

When they came to deal with the questions on the kitchen, its size and dimensions, what cupboard space and other special features should be provided, it was very evident that most of the women had made some study of kitchen planning. Suggestions for an exact size or dimensions varied—one group said an area of 160 or 170 square feet, another 12 by 16 feet; most of them said they did not want either "the small city kitchen" or "the big old-fashioned farm kitchen". Almost without exception they recommended having some meals in the kitchen, so a dining centre should be provided a little apart from the "working unit". On the point of equipment, a report typical of many listed as essentials: an ample cupboard for dishes, another for supplies; sink with drain-boards; a stove—preferably a combination electric and coal or wood so that it could provide warmth as well as cooking facilities; a kitchen cabinet or a similar cupboard with a good amount of working surface; a refrigerator. Several recommended having a "rest corner" with a comfortable chair or a built in couch with cabinets beneath for storing children's toys—if there are children in the house. The working area should not be crossed by traffic to and from the back door. The sink should be well lighted for night as well as for day, and should not be used by men for washing up. The room should have a window giving a view of the driveway and barn, and of the place where small children play.

While the reports were almost unanimous on the point that some meals could well be taken in the kitchen, the majority favored having a dining room too. One said, "A dining room is a must, not only for company but for unhurried family meals—good for adults as well as for children. The dining room should be large enough to serve a large family party comfortably." Others said the dining room should not be larger than is necessary for the essential dining room furniture. A few recommended having china cupboards and a serving counter opening into both kitchen and dining room.

There was considerable variance of opinion on the necessity of a farm office. One report said that even when he has an office a farmer usually does his office work in the kitchen. Those who did not see the need of an office usually suggested having a desk in the kitchen. Comparing the reports it was quite clear that in areas of large stock and dairy farms the women felt that an office was needed; on smaller or mixed farms it did not seem necessary—though a few secretaries reported that their own members were not unanimous on this point. All reports recommending an office stated that, like the utility room and basement, it should open from an outside entrance; it should not be necessary to walk through the kitchen to reach it.

"Would you have a bathroom?" asks the questionnaire and "What a question!" one secretary replies. Without exception the women want bathrooms in farm houses. A considerable number of reports recommended having the bathroom—or else an extra toilet and basin—on the ground floor, particularly in homes where there are small children. A few mentioned that a downstairs bathroom requires less piping and that there is less danger of damage to the house in case of

breaks or leaks. In cases where water under pressure is not available several groups recommended having a chemical toilet in the house at least for the winter.

Almost every group felt that a septic tank was the only sanitary method of sewage disposal for flush toilets but a few said they would prefer a cesspool.

The women were asked if they would have a full basement under the house, and if they would provide a recreation room in the basement. Everyone recommended a full basement because a large basement is necessary in a farm house to provide space for a furnace and for the extra storing of food on the farm; also because any floor without a basement is likely to be cold. Several reports stressed the need of a well insulated cold room in the basement for storing eggs, cream, fruit and vegetables. One suggested having a rack in the furnace room for drying "wet overcoats, snow suits and horse blankets."

But there was no general approval of a recreation room or a playroom for children in the basement. Several reports said the basement was not a good place for small children to play—it was damp and out of the mother's sight. Others seemed to favor the idea of a basement games room for young people with a table for table tennis and similar games.

The question "would you have covered verandahs on the front or rear or side of the house?" seemed to suggest to most groups the choice of a front or side entrance. A side entrance was usually preferred "because it is nearer to the driveway and more convenient for the housewife answering the door." A considerable number would rather have a verandah at the back of the house than at the front; they believe the family would make more use of it and it could be screened to use as an occasional dining place.

Should the garage be attached to the house, or part of the house? The women, generally, said they would like the convenience of having the garage where they could pass from the house to the garage without exposure in stormy weather, but because of fire hazards the garage should not be a part of the house, or, many said, not even attached to the house. The garage on the farm, they said, is usually part of a building used for storing gasoline and tractor oil, and should not be attached to the house.

On the question of finishes, everyone voted for a concrete floor in the basement. For walls they were divided between plaster and fibre board. One report favored fibre board because there were no skilled plasterers in the district and fibre board is easy to put on. As a floor finish linoleum was exceedingly popular. One report recommended hardwood for all floors except the kitchen, bathroom and utility rooms; one suggested painting bedroom floors; but the majority would have linoleum on all rooms except the living room and bedrooms and many would use it on bedrooms too, with a few small rugs. It was frequently mentioned that linoleum is easily cleaned and easy on the feet in work rooms like the kitchen.

The favorite building material—brick, stone, wood, concrete—varies with the locality. Where wood is the best available material some reports recommend finishing it with an asphalt type brick siding.

Practically all the groups want central heating, and the preference seems to be fairly evenly divided between hot water and hot air. Those who favor hot air say it is less expensive and gives a quick heat, but many say that with a hot air system they want air conditioning attachments and the forced draught. The advocates of hot water heating say they like it because it is clean, gives an even heat and "over a long period is no more expensive than hot air."

A fireplace, it was generally agreed, is desirable but not essential. One group argued that the "psychological benefits of an open fire outweigh the cost of a fireplace". Others felt that

One made the suggestion that a fireplace could be omitted in the original construction and "could later be made an interesting family project."

Insulation? Everyone was for it and practically every report said that insulation would pay for itself not only in comfort but in saving in heating costs.

Even if electric power lines are not yet serving the farms in the district most groups advocate wiring a house at the time of construction. A few would instal a local electric plant; many prefer to wait for hydro power which they hope to have soon.

What about refrigeration appliances? Practically every group felt that a kitchen refrigerator was essential. Several would hesitate to instal a deep freeze unit in the individual home because of the cost, because they believe these units will soon be improved, and because local creameries and fruit storage plants give convenient locker facilities. Communities out of reach of lockers seemed most interested in home freezing units. One group made this interesting suggestion: "If electricity is not available, have an ice-house with built-in storage compartments for summer use."

On the question about water supply, most districts reporting seemed to have an adequate supply from wells. One secretary wrote: "We also make good use of our running streams." Another suggested having two cisterns, not only for a greater supply of water, but so that one can be used while the other is being cleaned and refilled.

In either building a new house or remodelling an old one, practically every Ontario group wants an electric or gasoline pumping unit for both hot and cold running water for kitchen and laundry use, for a modern bathroom, for lawn and flower bed sprinkling, for use in other buildings on the farm and—though this was not suggested in the questionnaire—to give water under pressure in case of fire.

The women were asked what water heating facilities they would have in a farm house. This was a typical where funds are limited they could be invested in more practical comforts. reply "In winter, water would be heated from a coil in the furnace; in other seasons by an electric heater installed below the hot water boiler. Where electricity is not available the hot water tank could be heated from the kitchen stove—" (We presume this would mean through a hot water front on the stove.) Most of the groups recommended having an "electric pail" at the barn to heat water for washing milking utensils.

On the question of reducing fire risks, and providing a means of escape in case of fire, the women had a lot to say. These were some of their recommendations: Have a fire-proof roof. Inspect chimneys and stove and furnace pipes regularly. Observe all precautions in installing electric equipment and check wiring periodically. Have lightning-rods and fire extinguishers for both house and barn. Have garden hose connected with the water pressure system. To provide a means of escape in case of fire: have an upstairs window easily accessible from all rooms on that floor, opening onto a gently sloping porch roof and build a ladder into the porch. Down stairs have an outside door close to the stairway, another on the opposite side of the house.

One report added a cellar safety note: "If the cellar door cannot be placed away from other doors, let it open out, rather than in, so that accidentally leaning against it unclatched, will not land one at the bottom of the stairs."

Dealing with the questions on farm grounds, lawn, flower gardens, drives and walks, some recommendations were that the house and barn areas should be well separated and that having out-buildings grouped fairly closely looks better than having them scattered and also saves labor. A farm should have well gravelled drives and walks about the house—if the

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