

Where Homemakers Look for Information

By Diana Ferris

The survey findings in this article have been abstracted and condensed from the 8th progress report of the "Special Study of Ontario Farm Homes and Homemakers." Copies of this and other progress reports, from the socio-economic study jointly undertaken in 1959 by the Ontario Department of Agriculture and the Canada Department of Agriculture, may be obtained on request from Home Economics Service, 20 Spadina Road, Toronto 4, Ontario.

WHAT DO you read, listen to, watch for? 352 Ontario farm homemakers were asked these questions in a much more detailed, specific way several summers ago and, in brief, they told the county home economists who were doing the interviewing that they turned most often to the farm press for "helpful" homemaking news, next often to radio, then to television. After that, they said, they either opened a magazine or wrote away for pamphlets, and least of all, they read newspapers.

We wanted to know more about this apparent preference list of information sources farm women gave us, so we examined carefully the kinds of articles and programs and pamphlets they described in their answers. Analysis revealed that:

In selecting "helpful" radio programs, it was as if farm homemakers were saying: "Most often we want to listen to practical kitchen and how-to-do-it household hint shows. Then we want to hear something about the farming work we, as a family, are engaged in, so we tune in on farm programs. Then, to round out our listening, we usually like to take in some of the extras that are a part of special women's shows."

In selecting "helpful" TV programs, it was as if farm women were saying: "When we turn on the TV set looking for homemaking information, most often we want to be entertained as well as instructed, and so we choose women's variety shows. Next often, we look at demonstration type household hint programs. Then, being farm wives, we like to watch those farm telecasts."

In selecting "helpful" brochures, pamphlets, etc., it was as if farm homemakers were saying: "When we take the time to sit down and write away for leaflets and what-have-you, we most often compose letters to government agencies, like the Home Economics

Service of the Department of Agriculture, or we write directly to commercial companies, like the soap and soup people; and we want specific homemaking information when we do, on a particular topic.

And what about various press information sources? As we've already said, farm papers and magazines, the "farm press" was the press most used of all the media we asked about. Nearly eight out of every ten farm women contacted found "helpful" homemaking information in the pages of the farm press. As for the non-farm-press, about four farm women out of ten got some homemaking help from magazines, but only about two out of ten from newspapers. Of course, it's not surprising, actually, that farm women would use the farm press, and our survey just reconfirmed that they did so, but it was interesting that rural homemakers made comparatively more use of farm newspapers and magazines than of any other media, in spite of having other available ways of obtaining information readily accessible right in their own homes. For no farm home surveyed was without at least two mass media from which information might be obtained and the majority had four or five available media to choose from. Oh yes, mail boxes were really bulging: 99% of the homes visited took farm press publications; 90% of the homes visited bought newspapers; and 83% of the homes visited subscribed to magazines.

And TV aerials were sprouting from the rooftops of three quarters (78%) of the farm houses, and nearly everybody (98%) had a radio; in fact, half of the farm families visited owned more than one radio.

Farm homes having all of these five media were scattered throughout Ontario, but more of them were concentrated in the southern regions of the province than anywhere else. Another thing, five-media households tended to be characterized by a greater volume of farm business and to have a higher material level of living, as compared with other survey farms. And homemakers and farm operators having five mass media to choose from also tended to have more formal education than the others; and proportionately more of the farm women in five-media homes were members of the Women's Institute.

What kinds of homemaking information, we