The County Home Bureau in Illinois

What It Is and the First Steps in Its Organization
"OUR civilization rests at bottom on the wholesomeness, the attractiveness, and the completeness, as well as the prosperity, of life in the country."—Theodore Roosevelt.
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In the solution of the complex and varied problems of home-making many fields of knowledge must be drawn upon. Long ere this the fields of chemistry, physics, biology, physiology, psychology, and philosophy have been called upon to furnish help for the doctor, the lawyer, the minister, and the artisan, but only very recently has it been realized that from these same fields can be derived valuable help for the home-maker. Since home-making is not only a profession in which there are more women engaged than in any other, but is also a profession which probably more than any other affects the well-being of the race, it is of the utmost importance that all that art and science have to offer shall be placed at the disposal of the home-maker.

It is for the purpose of making accessible to the home-maker a knowledge of the progress which has thus far been made in the profession of home-making and of stimulating her to make her work more effective and her home more satisfying that the Home Economics Extension Service has been inaugurated.

While some extension work in home economics had been done previous to 1914, it was not until that time, with the passage of the Smith-Lever Act by Congress, that the work received its great impetus. This act made funds available to each state for the purpose of home economics and agricultural extension work, providing the state furnishes an equal amount of money for the same purpose. The amount allotted is based upon the relation the total rural population of the state bears to the total rural population of the United States. Provision is made that these funds shall be administered by the state colleges of agriculture.

For the administration of the funds in Illinois and for the promotion of the work the University of Illinois maintains what is known as an Extension Service in Agriculture and Home Economics. The home economics work is under the immediate direction of the State Leader in Home Economics Extension. This service determines the general policies to be followed and acts in an advisory and cooperative relationship with the local organizations, while the local organizations are responsible for the planning and carrying out of the specific work undertaken.
The county has been selected as the logical and most convenient local unit for work, and hence the organization is known as the County Home Bureau. The management of the Home Bureau is entirely in the hands of the members, who conduct their own business meetings, elect their own officers, handle their own funds, and plan and carry out the work of the organization. While every county is free to select its own form of organization, the State Service thru its experience in many counties has been enabled to work out a rather definite form of local organization which it believes is best adapted for this type of work and stands ready when called upon to assist in the development of the organization of any county.

The Home Bureau is composed of women from all parts of the county. Membership is open to residents of both town and country since all homes, whether city or rural, have many problems in common. However, because of the greater complexity of the home-making problems of the farm woman and her fewer opportunities for assistance, she is frequently the more enthusiastic worker in the organization, altho many interested and active city women are to be found in all the Home Bureaus established.

The membership is not confined to women alone. In many of the counties men hold memberships and frequently they attend special and annual meetings. They form but a small proportion of the total membership, however, since the problems taken up by the Bureau are commonly those which are chiefly the responsibility of the women.

The Aim of The Home Bureau

The aim of the Home Bureau is to provide for the women of the county a means of adding to their knowledge, improving their appreciations, and increasing their skill as home-makers. The ideal sought is to have every home —

- Economically sound
- Mechanically convenient
- Physically healthful
- Morally wholesome
- Artistically satisfying
- Mentally stimulating
- Socially responsible
- Spiritually inspiring
- Founded upon mutual affection
- and respect
The Place of The Home Adviser

In order that a Home Bureau may carry on its work effectively, it is necessary that it obtain the services of a paid worker trained and experienced in home economics, who will devote her entire time to the interests of the Bureau. Consequently among the first duties of the permanent organization is the selecting of the Home Adviser.

Contrary to the impression that some people have had, the Home Adviser is not a peddler of facts who goes about the county handing out information. Her function is quite a different one. Her work is to see that the interested home-makers have access to help with their home-making problems. Because of her specialized training and her touch with the new information in the field of home economics, and because she devotes her entire time to the work of the Home Bureau, she can assemble and place at the disposal of every interested homemaker in the county the available helps in the solving of home-making problems. She sometimes gives direct personal help. Often she simply locates sources of information and points them out to the home-makers, and again, she may put a woman in touch with another home-maker of the county who has met her same problem and solved it successfully. Thus the Bureau enables the progressive and well informed homemakers found in every county to share their experiences with other homemakers and at the same time to keep vitally in touch with new information in the field of home economics as it becomes available.

The Adviser does not dominate or dictate but acts only in an advisory capacity. Her specialized training and experience enable her to give valuable counsel to the women in the selecting of work and in carrying on the County Home Bureau program.

To assist the Adviser in making more effective the work of the Home Bureau, the University sends out from time to time trained specialists, who not only confer with the Adviser but give lectures and hold schools of short duration for the members of the Bureau. At the present time specialists are employed in foods, child feeding, clothing and home furnishings, household management, and health.

Qualifications of The Home Adviser

In Illinois the assignment of federal funds to the county is made dependent upon the Adviser being selected from among the candi-
dates who have been approved by the State University. The following qualifications are required:

1. Graduation from a four-year course in home economics in a recognized university or college
2. First-hand practical knowledge of farm life
3. Successful experience after graduation in some line of home economics work
4. Five years' experience in educational work or in home-making

How The Home Bureau Is Financed

The funds of the Home Bureau are derived from the three following sources:

1. University Funds.—The University of Illinois, from the Smith-Lever fund, appropriates to each of the organized counties a definite sum on condition that the Home Adviser has been approved by the State Service, and also that the Home Bureau of the county raise an amount which will insure adequate financial support for the Home Bureau. This means that an initial sum of about $2,500 must be raised by the county. The sum allotted to each organized county from the Smith-Lever fund during the year 1921-22 was $1,500. This federal money can be applied only on the Adviser's salary and is sent to the county only while an Adviser is employed.

2. Home Bureau Membership Fees.—In order to meet the University requirement for local support and to provide a sufficient sum to carry on the work effectively, an annual membership fee of not less than $5.00 is advisable. To insure permanency in the work the membership fees are pledged for a period of three years.

3. County Funds.—By an act of the state legislature passed in 1919, County Boards of Supervisors are empowered to appropriate for the use of county soil and crop improvement associations (Farm Bureaus) and home improvement associations (Home Bureaus) a sum not to exceed $5,000. In all the counties excepting one which have been organized thus far, the county boards have given some financial aid varying from $100 to $1,600 annually.

The Activities of The Home Bureau

Any activity which has for its aim the improvement of homemaking is legitimate work for the Home Bureau to undertake. While
the work is educational, it must necessarily be informal and so planned as to make advantageous use of the rather limited time which most home-makers have to devote to it.

Briefly the activities may be outlined as consisting of —

1. Group meetings or conferences for the exchange of experiences. The frequency of these meetings is determined by the group itself.

2. Home demonstrations, or the working out by the individual in her home, under the supervision of the Adviser, of some problem in home-making.

3. Educational exhibits held throughout the county.

4. Short courses, schools, and lectures conducted by the Adviser or a University specialist, or in some cases by a well qualified member of the Bureau.

5. Tours among homes in the county to inspect labor-saving equipment or some well worked out scheme of arrangement.

6. The publishing of a monthly Home Bureau bulletin from the office of the Home Bureau. This bulletin keeps the members in touch with the work of the Bureau and informed on the news in the home economics world.

7. The publishing of newspaper articles dealing with subjects of interest to home-makers.

Just what the program of work for a county shall be is determined by the women themselves in conference with the Adviser. In the organized counties of the state last year the studies included the selection of food to suit the needs of the family, the selection of appropriate and attractive clothing and home furnishings, the keeping of household accounts, the planning of housework, household equipment and labor-saving devices, the establishing of the hot school lunch, the training of the family in healthful personal habits, home nursing, and various other home-making problems.

It must be remembered that the Bureau can be a worth-while organization of value to its members only in so far as they make it so. That is to say, the good which the members will be able to derive from the Bureau depends very largely upon the continuous contribution which they make toward it in the way of time, thought, work, and enthusiasm. As with any other organization, the members must keep in mind their responsibility toward the Bureau as well as the immediate benefits which they may receive.
How to Organize a Home Bureau

When several women of a county are interested in establishing a county organization, the first step is to write to the Home Economics Extension Service of the University of Illinois, asking that a representative be sent who can present the work to the women of the county. When such a meeting has been arranged it is of importance that the county women make every effort to have at least two thirds of the townships of the county represented.

If, after full information has been given regarding the organization of the Bureau and the scope of its work, the women wish to establish a county Bureau and are willing to undertake a membership campaign and to raise sufficient funds to reasonably insure success, the next step will be the forming of a temporary organization. In Illinois particular stress is laid on the local initiative being taken by the women of the county, but from time to time while the work is in progress a representative of the Extension Service goes into the county to act in an advisory capacity and answer any questions that may have arisen.

The temporary organization should have at least three hundred members before a permanent Bureau is formed and a Home Adviser employed. These members should represent the entire county, since the Bureau is to be a county-wide organization. The length of time spent in securing the required number of members varies with the conditions in the different counties from a few months to a year. In no case is an attempt made by the Extension Service to hasten the workers unduly or to form a permanent organization before a preliminary organization is well established.

Counties Which Have Organized a Home Bureau

The Illinois counties having Home Bureau organizations at the present time are listed below. There are about twelve thousand members in all.

Adams  LaSalle  Mercer
Champaign  Livingston  Rock Island
Coles  Logan  Saline
Hancock  Macon  Tazewell
Kane  McHenry  Vermilion
Kankakee  McLean  Williamson
Some Advantages to Be Gained From The Home Bureau

The following are some of the advantages to be gained by having a Home Bureau in the county:

1. The home-maker has within easy access a well trained, practical woman in the person of the Home Adviser, whom she may consult regarding her home problems.

2. She may call the Adviser into her home for the consideration of problems which she cannot take to the Home Bureau office.

3. She has an opportunity to obtain expert instruction in schools and conferences carried on in the county by the specialists of the State Extension Service and by the Home Adviser.

4. She has an opportunity to go on tours to other homes in the county and see the equipment used and its arrangement.

5. She has an opportunity, thru her wider and better acquaintance, to benefit by the exchange of experiences with other home-makers.

6. Each Home Bureau member receives thru the County Home Bureau bulletin issued each month a digest of the news in the field of home economics.

7. She has access to the Home Bureau library, which contains reliable books on home economic subjects and also a good collection of state and government bulletins on these subjects.

8. Thru these advantages home-making assumes a fresh aspect. In many cases the new ideas acquired mean the lightening of household work to such an extent that a considerable amount of time is released for other duties or for recreation.

9. As a result of the arousal of the interest and activity of the women, there is bound to develop a new spirit of enterprise within the county, bringing with it a social satisfaction that is well worth consideration.

What Home Bureau Members Have Said About The Home Bureau

"The big thing, the thing that has meant the most to me, is the coming in contact with other workers, both those from the University and also my fellow members. Getting out and meeting those who are working along the same line in which I am interested has meant not only help, but inspiration as well."
"I want to tell you what a great help the Home Bureau has been to me. Through the food lessons I found that we were having too much meat and heavy foods and not enough fruits and vegetables, and also that the children were not having enough milk. We have all realized a benefit from the work as our health has been much improved."

"On one tour I learned enough to more than repay me for my three years' dues. After seeing the arrangement of equipment in another woman's kitchen, I have been able to rearrange mine so that I am saved many steps."

"At the clothing school I learned how to choose the pattern which is best suited to me and just how it needs to be changed. Now I make my dresses without any fitting and they are always satisfactory."

"Our unit visited the woods to find shrubs and vines to plant on our grounds. We also made a tour of several homes and gardens, and what I saw and learned there has aroused in me an ambition to make my home not only more efficient but more beautiful."

"After having six babies and making a study of caring for and feeding them, I thought there was little I could learn about raising babies. However, thru the Home Bureau I learned things that were helpful in caring for my seventh baby. I wish I had known these facts in rearing the other six."

"We learned to can vegetables and meats, which is one of the greatest helps to the farm home. In the summer I can enough fruit and vegetables, and during the spring enough meat, to last for the year with no more money spent from the farm than for new rubbers, jar lids, and a few new jars, which are of little value in comparison with the amount lost in the waste of vegetables before."

"I am a busy farm wife and the mother of five sons. I could not take the time to work for the Home Bureau if I did not need its teachings to help me to be a more efficient home-maker."

"I feel that I have been awakened from a life of just doing and doing without accomplishing anything. My work is so much more interesting with always something new to learn."

"It seems to me, and I say it in all reverence, that the Home Bureau has come that the country woman may have life, and that more abundantly."