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Results of the 1988 Regional Farm Survey: North Dakota

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This report summarizes data collected from a sample of North Dakota farm families as part of a larger study conducted in the twelve North Central states. These states included Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. This survey was conducted through the cooperation of North Dakota State University and the North Dakota Agricultural Statistical Service with funding from the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development.

The purpose of the survey was to

1. identify what adjustments farm families made during the 1980s in response to the farm crisis,
2. identify information and educational needs of farm families, and
3. assess farm families' opinions about several important agricultural and rural development issues.

Methodology

In February, 1989, a statewide random sample of 700 farm operators and spouses was contacted. A packet of two questionnaires was sent--one for the farm operator and the other for the spouse. One set of questions was answered by both operator and spouse; other questions were answered only by the operator or only by the spouse.

There were 273 operator surveys returned for a response rate of 39.4 percent, and 232 spouse surveys returned for a response rate of 33.1 percent. Of the total, 232, or 85 percent, were matched questionnaires for both the spouse and the operator. This paper presents the major findings from the mail survey on the status of farm families in North Dakota.

Results

The average age of operators, 49.5 years, compares quite closely with that reported by the census (Table 1). The majority of respondents had completed at least twelve years of formal education. Over one third of the operators and nearly half the spouses had gone on for postsecondary education.

In 1988, 8.2 percent of the respondents experienced a negative net family income, which includes both farm and nonfarm income. The average household had a net family income in the range of \$10,000 to \$19,999, and about 73 percent netted less than \$30,000.

Farm characteristics reported by survey respondents reflect farms that are similar in terms of acres and sales to the average reported by the census (Table 2). The average farm size of survey respondents, 1,265 acres, was slightly more than that reported by the census, 1,143 acres. Likewise, the distribution of gross farm sales of respondents matched the census fairly closely, although our survey included more operators with higher gross farm sales.

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Table 1. Comparison of Respondents' Personal Characteristics to Personal Characteristics of Total Farm Population in North Dakota

| Personal Characteristics | Sample of Operators | Sample of Spouses | Farm Population* |
|----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Average Age | 49.5 | 46.7 | 48.3 |
| | -----Percent----- | | |
| 18-30 years | 9.1 | 13.1 | NA |
| 31-50 years | 47.0 | 50.7 | NA |
| 51-65 years | 30.6 | 26.2 | NA |
| 65+ years | <u>13.3</u> | <u>10.0</u> | NA |
| | 100% | 100% | |
| <hr/> | | | |
| Average Years of Education | 12.3 | 12.8 | NA |
| | -----Percent----- | | |
| 1-8 years | 15.4 | 6.8 | NA |
| 9-12 years | 48.3 | 45.8 | NA |
| 13-16 years | 33.7 | 44.8 | NA |
| 17+ years | <u>2.6</u> | <u>2.6</u> | NA |
| | 100% | 100% | |
| <hr/> | | | |
| Net Family Income | | | |
| | -----Percent----- | | |
| A loss was realized | 8.2 | NA | NA |
| \$1-9,999 | 14.9 | NA | NA |
| \$10,000-19,999 | 27.1 | NA | NA |
| \$20,000-29,999 | 22.4 | NA | NA |
| \$30,000-39,999 | 11.0 | NA | NA |
| \$40,000-49,999 | 7.5 | NA | NA |
| \$50,000-59,999 | 3.1 | NA | NA |
| \$60,000-69,999 | 2.7 | NA | NA |
| Over \$70,000 | <u>3.1</u> | NA | NA |
| | 100% | | |

Note: * = North Dakota 1987 Census of Agriculture, Advance State Report

Table 2. Comparison of Respondents' Farm Characteristics to Farm Characteristics of Total Farm Population in North Dakota

| | Sample of Operators | Farm Population* |
|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Average Size Farm** | 1,265 | 1,143 |
| | -----Percent----- | |
| 1-9 acres | 0.8 | 2.5 |
| 10-49 acres | 1.1 | 4.5 |
| 50-179 acres | 3.8 | 8.6 |
| 180-499 acres | 14.4 | 17.4 |
| 500-999 acres | 26.5 | 24.5 |
| 1,000+ acres | <u>53.4</u> 100% | <u>42.5</u> 100% |
| <hr/> | | |
| Gross Farm Sales | | |
| | -----Percent----- | |
| Less than \$10,000 | 9.4 | 19.8 |
| \$10,000-99,999 | 60.8 | 63.3 |
| \$100,000 or more | <u>29.8</u> 100% | <u>16.8</u> 100% |

Note: * = North Dakota 1987 Census of Agriculture, Advance State Report

** = Average farm size is defined as land owned and operated plus land rented *from* others minus land rented *to* others.

Respondents were asked to evaluate local services, facilities, and economic conditions as to whether they had improved, gotten worse, or stayed the same over the last five years. Overall, most respondents believed that local services and facilities had either remained the same or gotten worse (Table 3). Job opportunities, in particular, were perceived to have gotten worse; two thirds of the respondents felt they had deteriorated. Nearly half felt shopping facilities had deteriorated, and about 32 percent felt entertainment and recreation opportunities had gotten worse. On the positive side, over 20 percent believed that police and fire protection, adult education opportunities, and health care services had improved. But again, most respondents felt these areas had remained the same. Over 70 percent perceived that financial conditions for farmers and agribusiness had gotten worse over the last five years, and about 34 percent felt financial conditions for lenders had deteriorated. Overall, 43 percent of the respondents believed their farm's financial condition had gotten worse over the years.

Table 3. Farm Operators' Opinions on Local Services, Facilities, and Economic Conditions

How have the following services, facilities and economic conditions changed in your community over the past five years? Would you say they have generally "improved," "remained the same," or "gotten worse?"

| | Improved | Remained The Same | Gotten Worse | Uncertain | Not Available | Number Of Respondents |
|--|----------|----------------------|-----------------|-----------|------------------|--------------------------|
| | Percent | | | | | |
| Quality of schools | 15.3 | 57.1 | 20.5 | 5.2 | 1.9 | 268 |
| Job opportunities | 2.6 | 23.2 | 66.9 | 4.0 | 3.3 | 272 |
| Health care services | 22.4 | 46.7 | 25.7 | 2.6 | 2.6 | 272 |
| Child care facilities | 13.5 | 50.0 | 12.0 | 15.0 | 9.4 | 273 |
| Shopping facilities | 15.0 | 33.7 | 48.3 | 1.1 | 1.9 | 267 |
| Police and fire protection | 21.0 | 69.5 | 6.3 | 2.9 | 0.4 | 272 |
| Adult education opportunities | 22.2 | 48.9 | 10.7 | 10.4 | 7.8 | 270 |
| Banking services | 14.1 | 65.4 | 18.6 | 0.7 | 1.1 | 269 |
| Opportunities for entertain- ment and recreation | 9.3 | 54.1 | 31.5 | 2.2 | 3.0 | 270 |
| The current financial condition of farmers has | 5.5 | 17.3 | 74.9 | 1.8 | 0.4 | 271 |
| The current financial condition of agribusiness firms in your area has | 3.0 | 19.9 | 70.5 | 5.2 | 1.5 | 271 |
| The current financial condition of lenders in your area has | 7.1 | 47.2 | 34.2 | 10.4 | 1.1 | 269 |
| Your farm's financial condition has | 18.7 | 36.2 | 43.3 | 1.5 | 0.4 | 268 |

Respondents were also asked to evaluate the quality of life in their community. Here again, respondents believed most factors had remained the same (Table 4). Pessimism is reflected in the responses of nearly half the operators who believed the overall economic condition of farmers will become worse in the next five years; about one third felt their satisfaction with farming had deteriorated along with the tradition of neighboring. What is the likelihood the respondents will continue to farm for five years? About 30 percent felt that likelihood had become better, half felt it had not changed, and about 20 percent felt it had become worse. The spouses, who were asked identical questions, gave very similar responses.

Table 4. Farm operator and spouse opinions on quality of life in their community

Please circle the response that comes closest to your opinion about the quality of life in your community.

| | Become Better | | Remained The Same | | Become Worse | |
|---|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|------|--------------|------|
| | Op ^a | Sp ^b | Op | Sp | Op | Sp |
| | -----Percent----- | | | | | |
| During the past five years, <u>your</u> family finances have | 31.9 | 34.5 | 30.0 | 31.4 | 38.1 | 34.0 |
| During the past five years, the quality of life for <u>your</u> family has | 29.4 | 34.5 | 50.0 | 46.3 | 20.6 | 19.2 |
| In the next five years the overall economic condition of farmers will | 26.8 | 18.4 | 25.3 | 26.3 | 47.9 | 55.3 |
| Considering your farm's overall financial situation, the likelihood that you will continue to farm for at least the next five years has | 29.1 | 17.6 | 50.0 | 64.9 | 20.9 | 17.6 |
| Compared to farmers in your area, your financial situation has | 27.5 | 24.2 | 58.0 | 56.1 | 14.5 | 19.7 |
| All things considered, your satisfaction with farming has | 21.0 | 17.1 | 46.5 | 45.8 | 32.4 | 37.0 |
| Has "neighboring" over the past five years | 7.1 | 10.9 | 57.4 | 64.3 | 34.5 | 24.8 |
| Has neighbors helping each other over the past five years | 12.5 | 17.4 | 59.2 | 66.4 | 28.3 | 16.2 |
| Do you believe the things you have in common with people in your community has | 13.0 | 13.6 | 75.6 | 73.4 | 11.5 | 13.1 |

^aOp = Operator (N = 265-273)

^bSp = Spouse (N = 223-230)

How have farmers adjusted to these changing economic conditions? Over half have postponed major household purchases, changed their transportation patterns, and cut back on charitable contributions (Table 5). Between 40 percent and 50 percent had used savings to meet living expenses, changed food shopping or eating habits, decreased money saved for their children's education, and reduced household utility usage. Over one fourth had fallen behind on bill-paying, and about 38 percent of respondents and 31 percent of spouses had sought off-farm employment. Over 20 percent had cut back on health and life insurance during the past five years.

Table 5. Farm family adjustments reported by operator as made in 1985-1989 because of financial need

Has your family made any of the following adjustments because of financial need in the past five years?

| | Yes | No | Number of Respondents |
|--|-------------|------|--------------------------|
| | --Percent-- | | |
| a. Used savings to meet living expenses | 48.2 | 51.8 | 272 |
| b. Sold possessions or cashed in insurance | 26.5 | 73.5 | 272 |
| c. Purchased more items on credit | 30.9 | 69.1 | 272 |
| d. Postponed major household purchase(s) | 65.7 | 34.3 | 271 |
| e. Let life insurance lapse | 21.6 | 78.4 | 268 |
| f. Cut back on charitable contributions | 51.5 | 48.5 | 270 |
| g. Changed food shopping or eating habits to save money | 46.3 | 53.7 | 270 |
| h. Changed transportation patterns to save money | 53.5 | 46.5 | 269 |
| i. Reduced household utility use, such as electricity, telephone | 40.2 | 59.8 | 271 |
| j. Postponed medical or dental care to save money | 38.4 | 61.6 | 271 |
| k. Cancelled or reduced medical insurance coverage | 20.3 | 79.7 | 271 |
| l. Borrowed money from relatives or friends | 17.7 | 82.3 | 271 |
| m. Fallen behind in paying bills | 27.5 | 72.5 | 269 |
| n. Decreased money saved for children's education | 44.2 | 55.8 | 251 |
| o. Children have postponed education | 11.7 | 88.3 | 247 |
| p. Spouse has taken off-farm employment | 37.7 | 62.3 | 257 |
| q. You have taken off-farm employment | 31.1 | 68.9 | 267 |

As stated earlier, many operators and spouses had sought off-farm employment over the last five years. In 1988, 32 percent of operators and 39 percent of spouses worked off the farm an average of 33.4 hours and 31.8 hours per week, respectively (Table 6). Over half worked full-time during part of the year. Operators worked an average of 34 weeks in 1988, and spouses, 41 weeks.

Table 6. Off-farm employment of operator and spouse in 1988

| | Operator | | Spouse | |
|-----------------------|----------|---------|--------|---------|
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| 1-9 hours per week | 9 | 10.2 | 12 | 12.0 |
| 10-19 hours per week | 13 | 14.8 | 7 | 7.0 |
| 20-29 hours per week | 13 | 14.8 | 12 | 12.0 |
| 30-39 hours per week | 6 | 6.8 | 18 | 18.0 |
| 40+ hours per week | 47 | 53.4 | 51 | 51.0 |
| Average hours worked | 33.4 | | 31.8 | |
| Number of respondents | 88 | | 100 | |

Comparisons were made between 1984 and 1988 regarding changes in the farm operation. Most respondents had not changed the size of their operation or the hours worked on the farm by the operator or the family (Table 7). Nevertheless, over 30 percent had increased the number of acres in their operation and the percent of labor contributed by their family.

Farming is often described as a high-risk industry in which the operator has little control over major factors that can determine success or failure--weather and prices. Still, there are some adjustments farmers can make to reduce their risk. Over 70 percent reported they had paid closer attention to marketing in the last five years, had postponed major farm purchases, kept more complete financial records, and bought crop insurance (Table 8). Many had also reduced their long- and short-term debt, shared labor or machinery with neighbors, and reduced expenditures for hired help. Diversification into other crops or livestock is another risk-reducing adjustment made by nearly 40 percent of the respondents. Over the next five years 9 percent of the operators thought they would quit farming, and another 18 percent thought they might quit.

Table 7. Changes in farm operation reported by farm operator--1984 and 1988

| | Acres Owned | Acres Rented | Total Acres Operated | Operator Hours Worked on Farm | Percent Family Labor on Farm |
|-----------------|-------------------|--------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| | -----Percent----- | | | | |
| Increase | 19.2 | 29.6 | 32.1 | 16.7 | 12.3 |
| Decrease | 4.7 | 16.0 | 13.7 | 12.3 | 19.4 |
| Stayed the same | 76.1 | 54.4 | 54.2 | 71.0 | 68.3 |

Table 8. Farm operator's report of risk reduction behaviors for 1984-1988 and behaviors planned for 1989-1993

Many farmers believe that the risk in farming has increased during the last five years. Please indicate if you have made any of the following adjustments.

| | Changes Made 1984-1988 | | Changes Planned 1988-1992 | | |
|---|---------------------------|--|------------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| | <u>Yes</u> -Percent- | <u>Number of</u> <u>Respondents</u> | <u>Yes</u> ----- | <u>Maybe</u> ----- | <u>Number of</u> <u>Respondents</u> |
| a. Diversified farm by adding new crops | 38.4 | 268 | 19.6 | 31.8 | 255 |
| b. Diversified farm by raising livestock | 39.1 | 266 | 26.9 | 16.7 | 245 |
| c. Paid closer attention to marketing | 84.7 | 268 | 74.8 | 8.9 | 246 |
| d. Postponed major farm purchase | 76.8 | 267 | 47.0 | 28.5 | 249 |
| e. Reduced long-term debt | 61.3 | 253 | 56.5 | 15.6 | 237 |
| f. Reduced short-term debt | 65.2 | 256 | 57.8 | 11.8 | 237 |
| g. Bought additional land | 17.5 | 268 | 13.7 | 27.8 | 248 |
| h. Sold some land | 5.2 | 268 | 2.8 | 9.3 | 248 |
| i. Rented fewer acres | 20.5 | 263 | 11.2 | 12.4 | 242 |
| j. Rented more acres | 27.2 | 265 | 22.8 | 25.6 | 246 |
| k. Started a new business (not farming) | 9.7 | 268 | 5.3 | 17.8 | 247 |
| l. Used the future markets to hedge prices | 13.4 | 269 | 18.0 | 22.0 | 245 |
| m. Shared labor or machinery with neighbors | 49.8 | 267 | 38.6 | 14.2 | 246 |
| n. Transferred land back to lender | 3.7 | 267 | 1.2 | 6.1 | 247 |
| o. Sought training for new vocation | 3.7 | 268 | 5.3 | 13.9 | 245 |
| p. Reduced expenditures for hired help | 44.5 | 265 | 34.3 | 10.3 | 242 |
| q. Kept more complete financial records | 72.8 | 268 | 67.6 | 6.1 | 247 |
| r. Changed from cash rent to crop share | 9.2 | 262 | 13.2 | 14.0 | 242 |
| s. Bought crop insurance | 72.6 | 266 | 61.9 | 11.9 | 244 |
| t. Reduced machinery inventory | 26.1 | 268 | 16.4 | 14.8 | 244 |
| u. Sought off-farm employment | 28.7 | 265 | 23.4 | 15.6 | 244 |
| v. Retire from farming | 6.8 | 266 | 15.4 | 15.4 | 254 |
| w. Quit farming | 3.4 | 262 | 8.9 | 18.2 | 247 |

Many government programs exist to aid farmers. Respondents were asked whether they participated in these programs and the level of help the program offered. As expected, nearly 90 percent received help from the 1988 Drought Assistance Act, and most felt the aid was helpful

(Table 9). Similarly, over 75 percent had federal all-risk crop insurance, and the majority felt it was beneficial. Other than the federal government commodity programs, few farmers took part in other programs, such as job training, food stamps, fuel assistance, and mental health or financial counseling. In most cases, respondents felt they did not *need* to participate. Interestingly, about 14 percent filed Chapter 11 bankruptcy or Chapter 12 reorganization, but nearly all felt it did not help to do so.

Table 9. Farm operators' report of participation in government programs and their opinions on how helpful the programs were

There are a number of government programs and laws designed to assist farmers. Please indicate whether you have participated in them over the past five years and how much help they provided.

| | Participated | | | Did Not Participate | | | | Number of Respondents |
|--|-------------------|-----------|---------------|---------------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| | No Help | Some Help | A Lot of Help | Not Needed | Did Not Qualify | Not Available | Did Not Know About | |
| | -----Percent----- | | | -----Percent----- | | | | |
| Federal government commodity programs (e.g. Feed Grain, Dairy Support) | 6.8 | 42.4 | 35.2 | 7.6 | 8.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 250 |
| Conservation reserve program (CRP) | 11.7 | 19.7 | 12.6 | 36.4 | 18.8 | 0.8 | 0.0 | 239 |
| Loans from FmHA | 12.6 | 10.5 | 13.9 | 44.1 | 16.8 | 1.7 | 0.4 | 238 |
| Farmer/lender mediation service | 13.9 | 6.7 | 0.8 | 66.0 | 4.2 | 1.7 | 6.7 | 238 |
| 1988 Drought Assistance Act | 4.7 | 40.2 | 44.5 | 55 | 3.9 | 1.2 | 0.0 | 256 |
| Federal all-risk crop insurance | 6.4 | 40.6 | 29.9 | 20.3 | 0.8 | 0.8 | 1.2 | 251 |
| Chapter 11 bankruptcy (debt reorganization) | 13.7 | 0.4 | 0.0 | 82.5 | 2.5 | 0.0 | 0.8 | 240 |
| Chapter 12 (debt restructuring for farmers) | 13.1 | 1.3 | 0.0 | 82.2 | 2.1 | 0.4 | 0.8 | 236 |
| Vocational retraining/ education program for self or family member | 13.1 | 4.6 | 0.4 | 72.2 | 1.3 | 1.7 | 6.8 | 237 |
| Job Partnership Training Act or other off-farm job search assistance program | 13.5 | 1.3 | 0.4 | 73.4 | 0.4 | 3.0 | 8.0 | 237 |
| Mental health counseling for yourself or family member | 12.6 | 1.7 | 0.4 | 76.6 | 0.4 | 2.5 | 5.9 | 239 |
| Food stamps | 13.1 | 0.8 | 1.6 | 72.1 | 11.5 | 0.0 | 0.8 | 244 |
| Fuel assistance | 12.7 | 2.0 | 1.2 | 70.5 | 11.9 | 0.0 | 1.6 | 244 |
| Unemployment benefits | 13.1 | 3.3 | 0.8 | 66.8 | 12.3 | 1.6 | 2.0 | 244 |
| Income assistance (e.g., AFDC, SSI) | 11.9 | 2.0 | 0.8 | 67.6 | 11.9 | 0.8 | 4.9 | 244 |
| Financial analysis or counseling by Extension Service | 11.2 | 5.8 | 1.7 | 70.1 | 2.9 | 1.2 | 7.1 | 241 |

As stated previously, about 80 percent of the respondents believed they would continue farming for another five years. What types of information and training would these operators desire? Topping the list of information items that were highly or very highly needed was marketing skills, information on available government assistance, and information on reducing costs through low-input farming (Table 10). At the bottom of the list of needs was processing farm products prior to sale and information on diversification (nearly 40 percent had already done some diversification over the last five years--Table 8).

Table 10. Farmers' opinions on their information and training needs to continue farming in the next five years

In order to continue farming in the next five years, I will need information/training on:

| | Not Needed | Low Need | Moderate Need | High Need | Very High Need | Number of Respondents |
|---|---------------|-------------|------------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| | Percent | | | | | |
| Marketing Skills | 17.1 | 9.1 | 38.0 | 23.6 | 12.2 | 263 |
| Diversification of farm operation by adopting new crops and livestock | 25.6 | 16.4 | 40.5 | 13.0 | 4.6 | 262 |
| Available government assistance | 14.8 | 13.6 | 38.5 | 21.8 | 11.3 | 257 |
| Bookkeeping and financial systems | 22.8 | 16.7 | 35.4 | 17.9 | 7.2 | 263 |
| Using appropriate conservation techniques | 17.6 | 17.6 | 43.5 | 17.6 | 3.8 | 262 |
| Using new technologies as they become available | 10.3 | 12.6 | 49.2 | 22.5 | 5.3 | 262 |
| Using new machines and chemical inputs to increase my production | 18.7 | 12.6 | 42.0 | 19.1 | 7.6 | 262 |
| Reducing production costs through low-input farming methods | 11.5 | 14.2 | 44.8 | 21.5 | 8.0 | 261 |
| Processing farm products on farm before selling | 37.8 | 26.7 | 22.5 | 8.0 | 5.0 | 262 |

Labor assistance from farm spouses can be one key to the success or failure of an operation. Spouses were asked if they performed various farm duties and whether the time spent on the duty had changed over the last five years. Results reveal that spousal participation in the farming operation ran very high (Table 11). Over 90 percent sometimes or always performed household and child care tasks in addition to running farm errands and tending the garden or animals for family consumption. Nearly 80 percent maintained the farm records and financial books, 65 percent did field work, and about 58 percent milked cows or tended the livestock. At some time, nearly 60 percent had also worked off the farm. Answers were mixed as to whether the time spent on these farm duties had changed. Most felt the time spent had stayed the same, although over 20 percent said the time spent on bookkeeping, farm errands, housekeeping and child care, and off-farm employment had increased.

Table 11. Farm spouses' report on types of farm duties and changes in the amount of time spent on these duties

| | Perform These Duties | | | | Number of Respondents | Time on These Duties Has | | | |
|--|----------------------|------------|-------|----------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|------------|-----------------------|
| | Always | Some-times | Never | Not Done | | In-creased | Stayed the Same | De-creased | Number of Respondents |
| | Percent | | | | | Percent | | | |
| Field Work | 12.3 | 52.9 | 26.4 | 8.4 | 227 | 16.6 | 55.8 | 27.6 | 199 |
| Milked or cared for farm animals | 15.6 | 42.0 | 20.1 | 22.3 | 224 | 9.7 | 58.3 | 32.0 | 175 |
| Run farm errands | 34.6 | 60.1 | 4.8 | 0.4 | 228 | 23.3 | 64.3 | 12.4 | 210 |
| Purchased major farm supplies and equipment | 5.4 | 23.9 | 59.0 | 11.7 | 222 | 6.5 | 82.2 | 11.2 | 169 |
| Marketed farm products through wholesale buyers or directly to consumers | 2.2 | 15.4 | 65.2 | 17.2 | 227 | 4.4 | 85.6 | 10.0 | 160 |
| Bookkeeping and maintained records | 43.7 | 35.8 | 17.9 | 2.6 | 229 | 30.1 | 63.1 | 6.8 | 206 |
| Done household tasks and/or child care | 96.1 | 3.1 | 0.9 | 0.0 | 228 | 23.1 | 64.6 | 12.3 | 212 |
| Supervised the farm work of others | 4.9 | 35.0 | 49.1 | 11.1 | 226 | 6.4 | 78.6 | 15.0 | 173 |
| Took care of a vegetable garden or animals for family consumption | 69.9 | 22.3 | 5.2 | 2.6 | 229 | 12.6 | 69.1 | 18.4 | 207 |
| Worked at an off-farm job | 30.1 | 29.2 | 28.3 | 12.4 | 226 | 21.7 | 59.2 | 19.0 | 184 |

How involved are spouses in decision-making? Few make major decisions by themselves on any of the items listed (Table 12). Between 50 percent and 60 percent of the spouses were involved jointly with the operator or another person in making decisions about land purchases or sales, land rentals, and major farm equipment purchases, and between 25 percent and 37 percent were involved with production and marketing decisions. For some, however, the matter of decision-making had never come up. Nearly 25 percent had not had to make a decision about buying or selling land.

Table 12. Farm spouses' opinions on family decision-making behavior

For each of the following decisions, please indicate whether you usually make the decision, your spouse/someone else makes the decision, or you make the decision together with your spouse/someone else.

| | Usually Myself | My Spouse or Someone Else | Myself and Spouse or Someone Else | Decision Has Never Come Up | Number of Respondents |
|--|-------------------|---------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| | -----Percent----- | | | | |
| Buy or sell land | 0.9 | 20.4 | 54.0 | 24.8 | 226 |
| Rent more or less land | 0.4 | 25.8 | 56.0 | 17.8 | 225 |
| Buy major household appliances | 10.4 | 11.7 | 77.0 | 0.9 | 230 |
| Buy major farm equipment | 1.8 | 42.5 | 50.9 | 4.8 | 228 |
| Produce a crop or livestock | 0.9 | 49.8 | 31.1 | 18.2 | 225 |
| When to sell your agri- cultural products | 1.8 | 54.8 | 36.8 | 6.6 | 228 |
| Try a new agricultural practice | 1.3 | 53.7 | 28.2 | 16.7 | 227 |

Farming is a high-risk industry, and with risk often come conflict and adjustment. Spouses were asked how often they experienced various stressful situations. Over 30 percent felt daily pressure because of a lack of control over the weather and commodity prices, and about 25 percent responded that they daily experienced pressures in balancing work and family responsibilities (Table 13). Over half experienced occasional pressures from adjusting to new government policies, conflicts with spouse or children, and lack of control over the weather and prices. On the positive side, 43 percent felt they almost always received sufficient support from their spouse, and between 30 percent and 35 percent felt they almost never were pressured over child care arrangements, conflicts with spouse and children, and lack of farm help.

Table 13. Farm spouses' report on frequency of life pressures

| | Almost | Occasionally | Daily | Does not | Number of |
|---|--------|--------------|-------|----------|-----------|
| | Never | | | Apply | |
| -----Percent----- | | | | | |
| Problems in balancing work and family responsibilities | 18.6 | 48.7 | 25.2 | 7.5 | 226 |
| Conflict with spouse | 32.0 | 56.4 | 8.0 | 3.6 | 225 |
| Conflict with children | 31.0 | 50.0 | 6.2 | 12.8 | 226 |
| Adjusting to new government policies | 21.5 | 59.2 | 9.4 | 9.9 | 223 |
| Difficulty with child care arrangements | 35.3 | 16.5 | 0.4 | 47.8 | 224 |
| No farm help or loss of help when needed | 30.1 | 41.6 | 1.8 | 26.5 | 226 |
| Lacking control over weather and commodity prices | 10.2 | 51.3 | 31.4 | 7.1 | 226 |
| Insufficient support from spouse in farm or family duties | 43.0 | 40.4 | 7.0 | 9.6 | 228 |
| Indebtedness and debt-servicing problems | 29.3 | 42.8 | 12.6 | 15.3 | 222 |

What coping mechanisms do spouses employ to meet these pressures? Many participate in church activities a great deal or often, remind themselves that there are good things about farming, focus on others with more problems, tell themselves that successful farming is not the only thing in life, or just put up with the pressures as long as they can remain farming (Table 14). Interestingly, many do not share their problems with others or seek counseling.

One means of support and social activity is membership in farm or local organizations. About 56 percent of the spouses and 67 percent of the operators were members of some organized group (Table 15). Nevertheless, the vast majority of spouses and operators had *never* been a member of a commodity organization, a marketing cooperative, or a farm political action group.

Table 14. Coping strategies used by farm spouses

| How often do you use any of the following coping strategies? | Use a | Use Quite | Use | Never | Number of Respondents |
|---|-------------------|-----------|----------|-------|-----------------------|
| | Great Deal | a Bit | Somewhat | Use | |
| | -----Percent----- | | | | |
| Participate in church activities | 33.0 | 30.4 | 25.7 | 10.9 | 230 |
| Become more involved in activities outside the farm | 12.2 | 29.7 | 46.7 | 11.4 | 229 |
| Notice people who have more difficulties in life than I do | 13.5 | 40.6 | 40.6 | 5.2 | 229 |
| Tell myself that success in farming is not the only important thing in life | 23.3 | 31.3 | 35.7 | 9.7 | 227 |
| Remind myself that for everything bad about farming, there is also something good | 23.2 | 40.4 | 27.2 | 9.2 | 228 |
| Put up with a lot as long as I make a living from farming | 22.4 | 31.8 | 30.9 | 14.8 | 223 |
| Go on as if nothing is happening | 10.4 | 24.3 | 39.2 | 26.1 | 222 |
| Make a plan of action and follow it | 12.6 | 32.7 | 43.5 | 11.2 | 223 |
| Try to make myself feel better by eating, drinking, smoking, using medication, etc. | 3.1 | 9.3 | 27.8 | 59.9 | 227 |
| Refuse to think about it | 3.6 | 10.3 | 43.3 | 42.9 | 224 |
| Keep problems secret from others | 10.1 | 12.3 | 51.5 | 26.0 | 227 |
| Seek support from friends and/or relatives | 7.5 | 18.1 | 48.9 | 25.6 | 227 |
| Seek spiritual support from minister, priest, or other | 6.2 | 15.0 | 35.4 | 43.4 | 226 |
| Talk to a family counselor or other mental health professional | 0.4 | 2.7 | 9.8 | 87.1 | 224 |
| Don't expect to get much income from farming | 11.6 | 16.4 | 43.1 | 28.9 | 225 |
| Try to keep my feelings to myself | 13.7 | 18.9 | 48.5 | 18.9 | 227 |
| Talk to someone who can do something concrete about the problem | 3.6 | 9.8 | 41.1 | 45.5 | 224 |
| Wish that the situation would go away or somehow be over with | 11.7 | 12.6 | 47.1 | 28.7 | 223 |

Table 15. Operator and farm spouse membership in farm and local organizations

There are a number of farm and local organizations. Please indicate spouse and operator's activity in these organizations.

| | Spouse | | | Number of Respondents | Operator | | | Number of Respondents |
|---|---------|---------------|--------------|-----------------------|----------|---------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| | Member | Former Member | Never Member | | Member | Former Member | Never Member | |
| | Percent | Percent | Percent | | Percent | Percent | Percent | |
| Any organization, such as National Farmers Organizations, Grange, Farm Bureau, National Farmers Union, Young Farmers and Farm Wives | 56.3 | 4.9 | 38.8 | 224 | 67.3 | 6.8 | 25.9 | 220 |
| Any women's branches of general farm organizations, such as Farm Bureau Women | 9.5 | 3.6 | 86.9 | 221 | 4.0 | 1.1 | 94.9 | 175 |
| Any commodity producers' associations, such as the American Dairy Association or National Wheat Producers Association | 9.6 | 3.2 | 87.2 | 219 | 22.6 | 7.7 | 69.7 | 208 |
| Any women's branches of commodity organizations, such as the Cattlewomen or the Wheathearts | 3.2 | 1.8 | 94.9 | 217 | 2.8 | 0.0 | 97.2 | 180 |
| Women's farm organizations, such as Women for Agriculture, American Agri-Women, or Women Involved in Farm Economics | 1.4 | 1.4 | 97.2 | 218 | 1.1 | 0.6 | 98.3 | 179 |
| Farm political action groups, such as a state Family Farm Movement or National Save the Family Farm Coalition | 1.3 | 0.4 | 98.2 | 223 | 2.5 | 0.5 | 97.0 | 199 |
| Local governing board, such as school board or town council | 11.0 | 5.9 | 83.1 | 219 | 25.0 | 14.0 | 61.0 | 200 |
| Marketing Cooperative | 7.2 | 1.8 | 91.0 | 221 | 16.9 | 4.0 | 79.1 | 201 |
| Farm Supply Cooperative | 17.3 | 1.8 | 80.9 | 220 | 33.8 | 5.0 | 61.2 | 201 |