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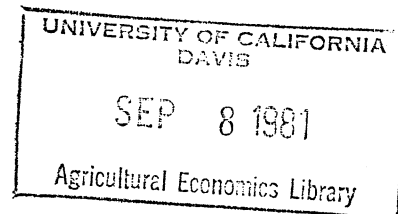
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THE CONDUCT OF THE SURVEY ON THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR
AND STATUS OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS

by

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THE CONDUCT OF THE SURVEY ON THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR AND STATUS OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS

At its July 1980 meeting, the Executive Board of the American Agricultural Economics Association authorized formation of an ad hoc committee to investigate systematically the status, role, and opportunities for women in agricultural economics. A survey of females and males in the profession, including but not limited to, members of AAEA, was undertaken. Because of the small number of women in agricultural economics (e.g., membership lists indicate that women comprise less than 5 percent of the AAEA), all women who could be identified in agricultural economics or related specialties were included in the survey. A sample of the much larger population of male economists was selected.

Questionnaire Development

The questionnaire was based on a similar design used by CSWEP in 1974. Communications revealed that several items in the CSWEP 1974 survey were insignificant and therefore left out of this survey. This survey was designed to make comparisons between male and female respondents, as well as to develop profiles in Agricultural Economics. The questionnaire was divided into five major parts.

Part I deals with the education and training of the respondents. This part covers when and why the respondents chose to become agricultural economists, as well as important positive role models that may have persuaded or dissuaded the respondents from entering the profession. Institutions attended, degrees received, and dates of degrees

may be important when completing the profile of male and female respondents with respect to salary.

Part II covers work experience and career development of the respondents. Work history and no-work periods are key areas in Part II. The 1974 CSWEP survey indicated that wages, particularly the percentage of salary obtained from consulting fees, may show significant differences when profiling male and female respondents. Job mobility and types and numbers of publications are important areas dealt with in this part.

Part III covers the participation in the job market for agricultural economists since July 1979 and applies only to persons actively interviewing for jobs during that period. Questions on the type of prospective employer (university, business, or government) for each interview as well as the type of employer for a job accepted were included in this section. Comparisons of salary for jobs accepted, between male and female respondents and between types of prospective employers, are key areas of interest in this section. The number of interviews for each respondent is also a key item.

The effectiveness and problems of Affirmative Action during the hiring procedure are the emphasis of Part IV. Possible problem areas dealt with in this section include female and male numbers in departments/divisions and in graduate programs, tenure, seniority, promotion, salary adjustments, and fringe benefits. Since the implementation of Affirmative Action, both males and females have indicated that they have encountered some problems in these areas.

Part V deals with the personal background of the respondents. The specialties of the respondents may be significant when profiling male and female respondents. Family situation including marital status, spouse's profession, number and age of children is dealt with in this part.

The final questionnaire was designed to be administered to male and female Agricultural Economists, including graduate students, therefore only parts of the survey were completed by some respondents.

Sample Selection

Names of the female sample were obtained from several sources. The membership roster of the AAEA provided a starting point. Known women ag economists were asked to supply the names of other women in the profession. Women on the rosters of the Washington Women Economists (WWE) and the Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession (CSWEP) with relevant specialties were also included in the survey. A total of 540 persons made up the female sample (see Table 1).

The male sample was selected from two sources. Each female respondent was asked to supply the name of a male of equal rank in her department or institution. To reduce bias in the selection process, the respondent was instructed to choose the male with the same rank or approximate level of job responsibility whose name appeared directly after (or before) hers in the alphabetical listing of agricultural economists at her institution or department. This matched-sampling procedure was intended to generate a group of males that would match as closely as possible the females under study.

Because only 84 names were obtained through the matched-sampling procedure, an additional 155 males were chosen randomly from the February 1981 list of paid-up AAEA members. The randomly chosen sample can be viewed to represent the male AAEA population more closely than the matched sample of male respondents. Identical questionnaires were sent to the females and males in the sample.

Early responses revealed that few persons had participated in the job market in the past two years and thus few persons had answered Part III of the questionnaire which involved job search activities. Since job search is an especially important component of the study, a separate questionnaire containing only Part III of the original instrument, plus selected personal information, was developed and sent to persons who had accepted new positions within the past 1½ years and to students nearing completion of degree work. Names of persons who had accepted new positions were obtained from AAEA Newsletters from September 1979 to the present. Names of graduate students were obtained from rosters prepared by agricultural economics departments of universities and sent to prospective employers. Questionnaires were sent to 233 individuals in the job search sample.

Questionnaire Mailing and Response Rate¹

Questionnaires were mailed to approximately one-half of the female sample on January 17, 1981 with the remainder mailed a week later. Responses started to arrive in about two weeks. The responses were generally slow in arriving, however, and after four weeks the response rate was only 21 percent. A reminder was sent to those who had not responded. Additional responses brought the return rate up to 29.4

percent. An additional 1½ percent of the questionnaires were unusable because of incompleteness or wrong address. No further follow-up was undertaken for this group.

In view of the early indications of interest in the study by women and the fact that the results of the study have potentially important implications for them individually and more generally in the profession, the 29.4 percent response rate is unexpectedly low. One possible explanation, however, is that women with specialties only peripheral to agricultural economics (e.g., Specialty Areas 420, 440, and 900-950) may not have identified closely with the profession.

The response to the February 10, 1981 mailing of the job search questionnaire was sufficient (a 52.4 percent rate) so that no follow-up mailings were made.

Questionnaires could not be sent to the male sample until the majority of female responses were received. Thus the mail questionnaires were not sent until March 13, 1981. Responses filtered in through June 1, 1981. One hundred thirty-one responses were received for a response rate of 54.8 percent. The response rate for the matched sample was 39 percent and for the random sample was 63.2 percent.

In this survey, as with most mail surveys, the possibility exists that the survey-respondents do not adequately represent the full range of members in the population. While the survey questions were factual, the objective of the project could have been viewed as controversial by some. A high response rate of individuals with strong pro or con feelings would be expected. For example, women who feel they have suffered discrimination and envisioned the study as a means to document

this would likely have responded. On the other hand, females satisfied with their opportunities and/or who do not want to risk alienating male members of the profession may also have felt strong necessity to respond. Likewise, men who feel the study was anti-male or those particularly concerned with the status of women in the profession are more likely to have responded. Both males and females with neutral feelings, on the other hand, may have been less inclined to respond. While this raises the question of bias, time did not allow for the exploration of the possible nature of bias in the self-selection of respondents to the mailed questionnaires.

Coding and Analysis

The same coding structure was used for responses to all questionnaires to enable analysis not only by individual subgroups but for all subgroups combined. Selected personal information and job search activities were available from all 412 respondents. The remainder of the information from the longer questionnaire was available for 159 females and 131 males.

The male group was divided into two subgroups for analysis. Thirty-three of the male respondents comprised the matched-sample for comparison with their female counterparts. The remaining 98 male responses were from the randomly selected sample of AAEA members. This represents 2.97 percent of the total AAEA and may be used for analysis with the total female sample. The matched and random samples of males cannot be combined to provide a larger sample if either "matched" or

"random" is a prerequisite. However, for some general characteristics, combining the two groups provides a larger sample for analysis.

Responses were coded and put on tape at South Dakota State University and sent to committee members for analysis of separate sections to be used in their respective papers.

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Footnotes

1. The response rates and numbers cited in this paper reflect total responses in each category in each survey. Discrepancies between the numbers cited in this paper and the following three papers result from incomplete responses on some questionnaires and from different categories used by each analyst. For example, analysis may include all females, all males, matched sample of males and females, job search respondents, or some combination of these categories.

Table 1. Number in Sample and Response Rate for Surveys on Status of Women.

Sample Group	No. in Sample	No. of Responses	Response Rate %
Female	540	159	29.4
Male	239	131	54.8
Matched	84	33	39
Random	155	98	63.2
Job Search (both male & female)	233	122	52.4
Total	1012	412	40.7