

Where Are All The Women?



PHOTO: RITA BRHEL

Exodus From Rural America A Growing Concern

BY RITA BRHEL
P&D Correspondent

There is a certain appeal to living in rural America, but apparently it's not one that attracts young women.

For years, there has been a growing concern about the population disparities between rural and urban America, particularly the relative low number of young adults who choose to stay in their rural hometowns or return home after college graduation—so much so that programs have been developed to encourage young adults to live in rural areas through financial incentives, such as Teach for America, the Rural Health Opportunities Program and Kansas' Rural Opportunity Zones.

But what some people have long speculated—that of the young adults who do stay or come back to rural areas, there seems to be disproportionately more men—has been validated by Robert Shepard, whose peer-reviewed research is the first of its kind.

"There is a lot of awareness that younger people are leaving rural communities," said Shepard, a doctoral candidate at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, Neb. "Where some of the men can come back, because there are a lot of traditionally male jobs in agriculture and industry to return to, many rural communities don't often provide the same opportunity to women. As long as that imbalance is there, it's going to limit the development or growth of that age group."

While there have been many studies evaluating census data showing the general population shrinkage of young adults in rural America, there is no previous research looking specifically at gender trends in this age group.

"My study was important in helping to substantiate that this is a problem associated with gender," Shepard said.

Examining census data from 2000 and 2010 for Nebraska and Kansas, he found that towns with populations of 800 or fewer tended to have a larger proportion of young men to young women. The proportional differences became more noticeable, the smaller the community. For example, in the smallest communities, the proportion of young men to young women was in excess of 200 percent.

Furthermore, Shepard found a growing proportion of young women in urban areas during the post-college years. Major metropolitan areas, including Omaha, Neb., and Kansas City, Kan., had equal ratios of young men to young women. In smaller metropolitan areas, like Scottsbluff, Neb., and Topeka, Kan., young women outnumbered young men.

So why do young women leave rural America? Like young men, many are attending college in urban areas. Unlike young men, it appears young women are less likely to come back to a small town to live, Shepard said. He speculated that the rural job market may be less favorable to women, but said more research is needed on the reasons for their exodus from rural areas. In previous studies exploring women's attitudes toward the rural Midwest, women reportedly were displeased with rural job opportunities as well as the patriarchal culture in some small towns.

"Our young people know that they can go anywhere in the country for employment and they do," added Michael McCurry, South Dakota's state demographer, whose developed population projections through 2035 predict a rapidly aging population in rural areas of the state. Young adults who leave rural South Dakota for college rarely come back, preferring to

live in Sioux Falls or other metropolitan areas.

Because young women are determinants of future families, the hope is that raising awareness of this gender division issue in rural areas will help develop efforts to revitalize sparse rural areas.

"The big implication here is that if these ratios don't trend back toward equilibrium, there is some concern about the long-term population stability of those areas," Shepard said.

The Center for Rural Affairs (CfRA) in Lyons, Neb., is working to find ways to make rural communities desirable to young people. According to CfRA, small towns with natural amenities, such as lakes or mountains, have been successful in attracting young families and individuals. However, most rural areas in South Dakota and Nebraska don't have a nearby lake or unique scenery, but they do have certain strengths that, if promoted well, can attract young people to settle in. These opportunities may be the schools, friendly people, openness to innovative ideas, high-speed Internet service, access to nature and so on.

Rural communities can take on certain attitudes that are more welcoming to new people, but they still need to be able to retain the young adults and families they attract. Kari O'Neill, South Dakota State University community development field specialist at Martin, feels that many small towns need to put more emphasis on this goal, rather than a general response to economic development.

"Special attention may be needed in welcoming younger workers and new entrepreneurs," she said. "Rural communities generally say they want to attract young families, but are they really welcoming younger workers to their area?"

Reminder: Follow SD Mowing Policy

Rural residents are reminded of South Dakota's mowing policy. Here is the rule:

(SD Codified Law 31-5-22 indicates that it is a Class 2 Misdemeanor to violate this Rule.)

• 70:04:06:06. Start of mowing. No mowing of the right-of-way may begin east of the Missouri River before July 10. All mowing by permit must be completed by Sept. 1 each year.

Mowing of the median by contract may begin on the date the contract is approved and must be performed during the hours between sunrise and sunset. The contractor shall notify the department 24 hours before beginning mowing.

The department may mow medians and areas within the rights-of-way prior to July 10 to control noxious weeds and provide increased safety to the traveling public.

Extension: Consider Direct Marketing For Livestock

BROOKINGS — Direct marketing their livestock is an option more cattle producers should consider.

"Direct marketing in essence removes the middle man from the marketing process," said Shannon Sand, SDSU Extension Livestock Business Management Field Specialist. "It's an alternative that beginning livestock producers should consider because it markets their product directly to potential customers."

If a producer is considering this direct approach for their marketing plan, Sand encourages them to ask themselves the following questions: What are the legal liabilities? Who are our target customers? Can we meet demand? What are the costs?

"Once a producer answers these questions, they can then begin to think about the different marketing channels available to them," Sand said.

She explained that a marketing channel is a set of practices or activities required to transfer the ownership of products, and/or to move the products, from the point of production, on the farm or ranch, to the point of consumption — restaurant, consumer, institution — this includes all of the marketing activities done during the marketing process.

Sand says there are several different ways to direct market products:

- Producers could sell their meat at a farmers market
- Create a Community Supported Agriculture (or CSA)
- Through the internet
- A roadside stand
- A U-pick style in which consumers come and pick the animal they want and they have it processed.

"In recent years, the consumer-driven movement to know where their food comes from has evolved. This movement is anecdotal evidence of greater demand for locally produced meats and direct marketing," Sand said. However, she added that

even with increased enthusiasm, direct to consumer sales only accounts for a very small percentage of total agricultural sales.

"Support for direct marketing of meat products is not surprising given the value animal agriculture can bring to communities, particularly in a state like South Dakota. By processing locally, farmers and ranchers can capture a greater portion of the revenue stream," Sand said.

According to a 2011 study, only 37 percent of gross annual sales of livestock and field crop producers came from local markets.

"This leads to the question why aren't more livestock producers selling directly to the consumer," Sand said. In order to market meat directly, Sand said it is necessary to have a stable supply to meet the demand of the market.

"If for example a producer is marketing directly to a restaurant then the producer needs to be able to supply that restaurant with the level of quality they desire, as well as the volume of product needed in order for the restaurant to meet their consumer demand year round," she said. "However, if a producer is unable to meet the volume needed for a restaurant they may be better off marketing directly to consumers at local farmers markets, word of mouth or online advertising."

Sand said it is also possible for a group of producers to market as a group to an entity in order to meet the demand.

"In the end producers have many options in direct marketing their products directly, whether to consumers or businesses. There is some initial cost and research required by the producer, in order to determine if direct marketing is profitable for their business. Producers who direct market have the potential ability to capture some extra revenue through the use of direct marketing their product," Sand said.

To learn more and view additional resources, visit iGrow.org.

Commentary | Rita Brhel

A Day In The Life Of A Farm Wife

BY RITA BRHEL
P&D Correspondent

I recently wrapped up a feature article on Angie Brodersen of Randolph, Neb., for the Her Voice magazine. Be sure to check out the next issue to read about a day in the life of this modern-day farm wife.

This article really got me thinking, reflecting on my own life as a farm wife as well of that of my mother and her mother. I come from a long line of family farmers, married into a farming family and have many friends who are farm wives themselves. Some have more hobby farms; some head up mega-farms with their husbands. All feel privileged to live in the country, on a farm, and raise their children there.

There aren't a lot of differences between the farm wives I know. All of them value staying at home with their children, with maybe a part time job to help make ends meet. Luckily, most of them live close enough to family for convenient child care. At home, nearly all of the farm wives tend to a garden, chickens and farm cats. When they're not doing housework or yard work or book work, they're available to help with daily farm work. And the kids are in tow, helping where they can and generally absorbing the atmosphere where family, faith and farm all come first, each carefully balanced with the other, and where hard work is valued and rewarded well.

That's not to say that other family structures aren't able to pass down these same values; just what I tend to see with well-run family farms.

In that spirit, I wanted to share a day in my life as farm wife.

My husband works full time in town as a forklift driver. I am primarily at home with our three children, ages 8, 6 and 2. We custom-graze in an intensive, rotational-grazing system. We also have a flock of chickens and sell eggs locally, and a vegetable garden for home use. To make ends meet, I work on-call as a breastfeeding educator for a local health clinic and then freelance-write from home. I am fortunate to live near my parents' ranch, and they can

watch the kids a morning a week when I attend a clinic meeting.

As Angie will share in Her Voice, every day is a little different. I have all of the typical stay-at-home mom and housewife tasks, like laundry and cleaning, caring for the kids and driving to softball practice and dentist appointments. And I do yard work and keep the financial book work and keep up on chicken chores. It's important to me that while my children get time to play, they are also involved in the chores. Each of the children has daily chores of their own, but for the most part, we do everything as a family.

The mornings, after breakfast, are spent working. For a couple hours in the morning, I write and the kids can then watch a movie, take a nap, read, draw a picture or do something else relatively quiet. My husband, Mike, comes home at 4:30 p.m., and while the mornings are busy with chores, the evenings are when the real work happens for me and Mike. After a snack, the kids play outside while Mike and I move the livestock on the pastures, do fencing and work on farm repairs and clean-up.

What is a little different in my situation than perhaps another farm wife's position is that I am the primary farm manager and my husband plays more the supportive role. Don't get me wrong: He's great help, and I ask for his input often, but our individual

strengths and life situations (remember he works full time off-farm) play out that I take the lead on the farm decisions.

By the end of the day, there is never enough time to get it all done and before long, its sundown and time for supper, baths and bedtime for the kids. It always feels good to pour a glass of wine, sit on the couch, up our feet up on the foot rest, turn on the TV and reflect on the day. It always feels good to be tired out at the end of the day because of all that was accomplished during the day.

And like Angie, we don't get many typical vacations. We'll take time to do something fun here and there, like a night at the county fair or an evening with friends or taking an afternoon to go fishing, but when I think about where my very favorite place is in the whole wide world, what comes to mind is me swinging in the porch swing looking out over the barnyard and the pasture, listening to the song birds and the kids playing. On the farm is exactly where I want to be.

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